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Building a Piece of Peace
Finn Church Aid's Outreach and
Reconciliation Project in Somalia

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACRL	African Council of Religious Leaders
ARS-A	Alliance for Re-liberation for Somalia
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Aid Office
EU	European Union
FCA	Finn Church Aid
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIP	Somali Traditional and Religious Leaders Peace Initiative Programme
RBA	Rights-based approach
SOR	Somalia Outreach and Reconciliation Initiative
SRSG	UN Special Representative for Secretary-General
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDPA	United Nations Department of Political Affairs
UNPOS	United Nations Political Office for Somalia

Summary

In 2010 Finn Church Aid (FCA) initiated a Somalia Outreach and Reconciliation Project in cooperation with United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS). The project, which was initially perceived to be a project which would increase UNPOS' outreach towards Somali society by bringing the UNPOS closer to the Somali traditional and religious leaders (the Elders), grew out from its initial objectives substantially. Rather than supporting a stabilising element working somewhere at the grass root level, the project gave the Elders the tools to become a genuine actor in the Somali peace dialogue, giving them a chance to offer their peace mediation expertise for the Somali people at the national level. This article tells a narrative from this project. By this the article wants to relay a telling case study how a relatively small non-governmental organisation can give an ample contribution on peace efforts on larger context. While presenting the narrative, the article also presents some of the challenges that FCA faced during the project. The article also illustrates some of strengths that FCA had available during the project. It also aims to shed light to the approach that FCA used in this work, which may be of good use for peace professionals elsewhere.

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Introduction

In May 23 2012, Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Erkki Tuomioja gave a statement in the United Nations (UN) informal high-level meeting on mediation in New York. In his statement he gave a special reference to Finn Church Aid's (FCA) work in Somalia by stating:

In Somalia, Finland has since 2008 been supporting the positive role of Somali religious and traditional leaders in mediation. This work has been carried out by civil society actors who have been working in the country for years and thus have the needed trust, access and skills to work jointly with local actors. Through this work several local conflicts in Somalia have been identified and Somali elders have been successfully empowered to carry out their traditional role as mediators.

Achieving sustainable peace in Somalia requires not only grass-roots engagement but also a functional dialogue on all aspects of peace between local and international actors, Finland has since 2010 supported the efforts of UNPOS (UN Political Office for Somalia) to reach out and benefit from the views and grass-root legitimacy that Somali elders have in peace- and state building. The role of non-state actors in implementing the activities and fostering effective dialogue between the elders, UNPOS and the Transitional Federal Government has been essential.¹

This article tells the narrative that led to the circumstances that Minister Tuomioja described in his statement, by presenting a project that was to be known as Somalia Outreach and Reconciliation Initiative (SOR). The article presents how the idea of bringing religious and traditional leaders more strongly into the Somalia's peace process came into existence, and how it achieved the prominence that it has today in Somalia. The article also highlights some of the findings that were discovered during the research phase. These findings discuss the challenges that FCA experienced during the project, the methods that FCA used in its mediation work, FCA's particular strengths in the project and furthermore about the nuances that its background as a faith-based organisation brought into the project. The objective is to give a better picture as to what the work included and how it was carried out in practice.

Methodologically the paper relies mainly on a series of interviews that took place between October and November 2012 in Helsinki, Finland and in Nairobi, Kenya. The author had a chance to interview people who followed the project closely in its different stages. The author was also given access to some of the e-mail correspondence that took place during the project; furthermore, access was provided to the official minutes and to the documentation that was produced throughout the project.

¹ The entire statement can be found at <http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=249818>.

The first chapter sheds light on the background on how FCA got involved into the project, picturing how the idea to include the Elders to the peace process was born, and how it was then taken forward. The second chapter explains FCA's exact role in the SOR project, by going through the Djibouti meetings, the meetings which were the cornerstones of the project. Furthermore, a more detailed look is given for FCA's advocacy work elsewhere regarding the SOR project. Chapter three discusses the challenges that FCA faced along the project, which ranged from contractual challenges to the challenges at the substance level of the project. Moving on from the challenges, chapter four gives an overview about the methods that were used by FCA during the project, and about the strengths it had as an organization. Prior to concluding words the fifth chapter the article discusses FCA's faith-based background and what kind of additional, positive or negative, elements it may have brought to the project. Essentially, the article wants to contribute to an understudied and under documented respect of peace work, by presenting a case study, which illustrates how an NGO (non-governmental organisation) can contribute to wider peace efforts by giving support to the building a piece of peace.

Information Box 1: Finn Church Aid

Finn Church Aid (FCA) is a Finnish, faith-based INGO which carries out development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and advocacy work on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. FCA specialises in supporting local communities in three priority areas: the right to peace, livelihood and education. Although having existing links to Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland, FCA is an independent non-profit organisation whose activities are financed by private donations from the public, funds from Evangelical Lutheran parishes, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, UN, EU, ECHO and other bilateral donors. In the core of its work is FCA's commitment to a rights-based approach (RBA), meaning that the promotion of equal human rights for all is the main objective of its work. FCA's peace work is primarily carried on by its advocacy section. FCA does not only support rights-holders but works also towards duty-bearers. The aim is to advocate towards duty bearers and build their capacities so that they meet their obligations in realization of human rights. Additionally, the objective is to promote dialogue and accountability between rights holders and duty bearers.

1 Background of the Project

In 2007 FCA executed a baseline study about the role of Somali religious leaders in conflict engagement in Somalia. As an outcome from the study, FCA understood that Somalia had witnessed not only the collapse of state, but also a weakening of important social institutions. These institutions had been traditionally ensuring cohesiveness among Somalis and peaceful co-existence. However, FCA also learned that in spite of the fact that the social institutions in Somalia had been weakened dramatically by the continuing conflict, these institutions had not altogether vanished and were still holding a great deal of respect amongst the population and that their importance should not be underestimated. FCA came to learn that the institution of clan elders and religious leaders enjoyed considerable respect and wielded significant moral authority in Somali society prior to the war. However, the role of religious and traditional leaders in peacebuilding and development were interrupted and weakened during the 21 year socialist rule of the dictator, Siad Barre and his centralised government, which marginalised the role of religious and traditional leaders. The role of religious and traditional leaders deteriorated further during the civil war and subsequent collapse of the Somali state.² The baseline study also revealed that in the absence of more commonly used mediation mechanisms; religious leaders were still holding an important role in the Somali conflict resolution. A more commonly used method in Somalia has been to use a third party, for example a community leader, who would not have personal interest in the outcome of the dispute. If such a peace broker could not be found, or the parties were not willing to engage into peace negotiations, the religious leaders used their authority as spiritual leaders of the communities and reminded the people about their religious and moral obligation to make peace, often using Friday prayers to convey their message.³

The findings of the study convinced FCA to launch a *Somali Traditional and Religious Leaders Peace Initiative Program* (PIP), which essentially aimed to strengthen the role of the traditional and religious leaders (henceforth called *the Elders*) in Somalia. The PIP program focused on Somaliland and Puntland, areas which have enjoyed fairly calm conditions for several years now, when comparing to South-Central Somalia. Under the

² FCA 2011: pp. 1-6.

³ Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012. The current executive director of FCA. At the time when the majority of events of the SOR project took place, Pentikäinen did not work for FCA directly. His main role regarding the project was to lead its advocacy in New York. At the time he worked for *Religions for Peace*, where he was the director of Conflict Transformation Program. In this position he had also other responsibilities on a global scale, but his close connections to FCA and to the beneficiaries kept him close to the SOR project.

program's support the Elders managed to mediate numerous local conflicts, which had sparked in flames through such issues as land disputes or murders that had led to a spiral of revenge killings. The results were encouraging, and the experiences that FCA received through the PIP program, casted FCA's faith towards the approach they were using to support peace in Somalia.

Information Box 2: Sheikh Suldan Abdisalaam

In a way, the story already begins 1988 when Sheikh Suldan Abdisalaam started his career as a peace negotiator in Somalia. Since then Sheikh Abdisalaam has been quietly working for negotiating local peace efforts in Somalia. In addition he has had a role assisting in negotiations in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. When the PIP programme was launched, Sheikh Abdisalaam was recruited to FCA. The recruitment was perhaps more significant than thought at the time. The relationship between FCA and Sheikh Abdisalaam gave FCA nearly two decades of peace negotiating experience and local knowledge and expertise about Somalia. Perhaps most importantly Sheikh Abdisalaam brought along his personal prestige that he had acquired through his successes in peace negotiations and his highly regarded role as a traditional leader in Somalia. His experience and the appreciation that he enjoyed amongst Somalis was one of the key factors that marked the early success of FCA PIP program.

The PIP program should not, however, be considered as a linear prelude to the SOR project. Rather it created the circumstances where two parties realised each other's potential to work for a mutual objective. FCA realised the potential of the approach, and for the Elders it was a channel to express their willingness to contribute to the building of Somali peace at the national level. This was not a new realisation from behalf of the Elders, but the PIP program marked an opportunity to communicate this to someone who was able to relay that message forward. FCA took the role of a messenger, which from its own behalf eventually led to the initiation of the SOR project. Prior the SOR the Elders had not properly organised themselves and furthermore they had not clearly identified the appropriate authority that they should approach in their objective to make their voice heard at the national level. FCA understood that the idea should be taken to a forum where it could be taken forward, and that was the UN. Transitional Federal Government (TFG) could have been another natural turning point for the Elders at the time, but effectively it did not have real authority over Somalia due to al Shabaab's still very strong position of authority over most parts of South-Central Somalia. At the time, strong resistance against al Shabaab was only just starting to emerge. Furthermore, there was some resistance to get the Elders involved, on behalf of some Somali politicians. They would rather keep the

Elders on the sidelines, not wanting to introduce an element to the Somali politics which could hinder their political aspirations.⁴

Behind the early successes of the PIP program was a strong trust towards Somali originated and led initiatives, which often demanded a leap of faith when considering these initiatives from the prevailing Western mind-set. For example, when the Somali Elders requested support from FCA for the Elders to give themselves Sharia training, it was during a time when extreme Islamism was showing its violent side virtually on daily basis inside the conflicts of Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world in the form of terrorism. Sharia was not a popular word in the West at that time. Under these tenets, the idea did not initially sound appealing or worth taking the risk. However, FCA decided to respond positively to this request and as an immediate result from this leap of faith, it gained further and deeper trust of Somali elders by showing its commitment towards them even in front of controversial issues. This element of trust turned out to be the most useful capital when the SOR project was facing obstacles, an issue that this article will later return to.

The gained success of the PIP program and the consequent increased interest of the Elders to contribute to the Somali peace process, were factors that encouraged FCA to start to look for further opportunities where it could talk about the Elders' potential to make a genuine impact for peace in Somalia. An opportunity arose in July 2010 in Nairobi when Mr. Antti Pentikäinen, FCA's current executive director⁵, was given an audience with Margaret Vogt, who at the time was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) at the UNPOS. In this meeting Pentikäinen was able to present an invitation for Vogt to participate into a Somali Diaspora seminar which was to be held in Helsinki, Finland in the coming August. In the meeting Pentikäinen also expressed that it would be perhaps possible to get Hizbul Islam⁶ to take part to the seminar. This made the seminar more appealing for Vogt, as UNPOS at the time was seeking opportunities to have a dialogue with some of the key actors in Somalia, and Hizbul Islam had been identified earlier as being one of them. As a result she agreed to come to the seminar.⁷

⁴ E-mail exchange with Jussi Ojala, 17 December 2012. Mr. Ojala was the Desk Officer for the Project at FCA.

⁵ See reference 3 for further details.

⁶ Hizbul Islam is an insurgent group in Somalia. Essentially it is an alliance between four insurgent groups which were ARS-A (Alliance for Re-liberation for Somalia), Jabhatu Islamiya (Islamic front), Ras Kamboni, Muaskar Anole (Harti clan's militia). The groups share a history of resistance against Ethiopian 2006 occupation of Somalia. In 2009 they united to fight against Transitional Federal Government of Somalia.

⁷ Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012.

The initiative to hold a Diaspora seminar came from the Finnish Somali Diaspora community leader *Arshe Said*, Minister of Migration and European Affairs *Astrid Thors*, well-known Finnish politician and African affairs expert *Pekka Haavisto* and *UNDP Finland* (United Nations Development Programme). Initially FCA was not considered to have any role in organising the Diaspora seminar. It only had a consultative role regarding who would be the appropriate partner for Thors, Haavisto and UNDP Finland in making the event to take place. Other Finnish organisations, such as *Finnish Institute of International Affairs* and *Crisis Management Initiative* were initially considered to have better preparedness to organise the seminar, but after a series of considerations FCA was eventually asked to take charge of the arrangements of the seminar. The seminar turned out to have a good appeal. This encouraged FCA to make a decision that instead of only having an event where academics would meet and discuss about the challenges regarding peace initiatives in Somalia, it would use the opportunity to also promote some political dialogue.

The majority of contacts for the Diaspora seminar came from elsewhere, but FCA had an active role in obtaining two important participants to the seminar, UNPOS and Hizbul Islam. As described, the DSRSG Vogt, was invited through regular channels but having Hizbul Islam to participate in the seminar was more complicated. FCA managed to contact Hizbul Islam through its connections in Somalia, and invite them to take part in the Diaspora seminar. The participation of Hizbul Islam was not however business as usual. The fact that its ideological foundation originates from a rather radical view of Islam meant that many from its members were effectively banned to enter Kenya and Ethiopia. At the time, these were the exit points from Somalia to elsewhere in the World, which consequently meant that the Hizbul Islam representatives could not travel to the seminar. Hizbul Islam however found a way around the obstacles and it sent its representative from London to the event. The presence of Hizbul Islam together with UNPOS enriched the Diaspora seminar's content and political significance, opening up new opportunities for fresh peace initiatives for Somalia.

Organising the seminar and obtaining widespread participation, marked the first success for FCA in the process, as it increased the credibility of FCA in the eyes of UNPOS. As it turned out, in terms of the SOR project, FCA's credibility was a significant factor behind the UNPOS' willingness to work with FCA. In connection to her trip to Helsinki, Vogt paid a personal visit to FCA premises which allowed FCA to present itself and its objectives for UNPOS. Its level of professionalism regarding Somalia and in humanitarian and development work in general, assured Vogt that FCA would be a partner that UNPOS could work with. While in Helsinki, Vogt also met representatives

from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA), who signalled to her that Finland could be willing to finance a Somalia peace initiative if UNPOS would find a suitable partner.⁸

The Diaspora seminar produced two different peacebuilding tracks.⁹ The first track, resembled a bottom-down approach, where the aim was to create a political dialogue between Hizbul Islam and UNPOS, which was thought to be the first step of bringing other warring parties in Somalia to the negotiation table.¹⁰ The second track aimed to introduce civil society representatives to the peace processes, resembling a bottom-up approach intended to consolidate the results that would be achieved through higher level diplomacy. The seminar did not clarify which part from the civil society would have the best role in promoting peace in Somalia. All civil society actors such as youth, women, business and traditional religious leaders were subjects of conversation, but any decisions were not made in connection to the event. These came later in September 2010, when Vogt returned to Finland to have negotiations with Finnish government officials about concrete mediation assistance and funding. Track one remained by and large the same as it had been pictured during the Diaspora seminar and initially it also received perhaps more attention. FCA decided to focus on the civil society approach and not to actively engage in the negotiations with Hizbul Islam, limiting its role to only be a technical facilitator from the Finnish end, if asked to do so. When FCA took the responsibility for track two, it was clear for FCA that it would work through the Elders, from which it had gained good results before and which it also saw that it did not have the role that it should have in South-Central Somalia. The negotiations with Hizbul Islam never took place as it decided to withdraw from the process due to delays in the initiation of the negotiations. With Hizbul Islam's withdrawal¹¹ the political approach lost its momentum.

One of UNPOS' key dilemmas had been that it did not have the appropriate grassroots level connections in Somalia. Therefore UNPOS considered that the Elders were a valuable link to Somali society, which they should not lose in spite of the setback experienced in the track one approach. Consequently UNPOS wanted FCA to stay involved in the Somali peace building efforts, and track two went forward regardless of the halting of the political approach. Even though from these two tracks

⁸ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

⁹ In peace mediation terminology, tracks are used to describe the level of the negotiations. *Track one* is used to describe negotiations with official representatives of the main conflict parties, as *track two* describes a situation where influential and often non-official actors are engaged with the aim of strengthening constituencies in the society where there is a conflict.

¹⁰ This was not the only track one approach that UNPOS was carrying on at the moment. For example, at the same time UNPOS was formulating the roadmap, which aimed to bring the transition to its end peacefully.

¹¹ Hizbul Islam merged into al Shabaab soon afterwards in December 2010. These two groups re-separated in September 2012.

only the civil society approach was eventually carried on, FCA openly recognises that this approach could have also lost its initial momentum. An indirect helping hand came especially from Mr. Haavisto, whose reputation as a highly regarded peace broker and an expert of African conflicts, gave the project wide political support from the Finnish foreign policy decision makers.¹² To some degree, both of the two tracks lived in a close symbiosis at the very early stages of the project, serving each other well, until Hizbul Islam's withdrawal from the political track effectively made track one approach unviable.

2 FCA's role in the Outreach and Reconciliation Project

Officially the project was launched in December 2010. When launched, it was considered imperative to initiate the implementation of the project in a fast manner, which in practice meant that a meeting between the parties was to be arranged as soon as possible. By using its existing contacts, FCA was able to organise the first meeting fairly quickly, and it was held already later in that same month. Due to security concerns, Djibouti was chosen as the location for the first meeting. When the concept of having a series of altogether five meetings was created, these were named after the location of the first meeting, Djibouti. From the initial five planned meetings, three were held and one meeting was transformed to be a fact finding mission. Djibouti 5 never took place as the developments in Somali peace process went in a direction where it was deemed no longer necessary.

2.1 Djibouti 1

The first meeting, called Djibouti 1, was held in Djibouti between 30 November and 3 December 2010. In this meeting the primary objective was to get the parties involved together, to enable them to meet for the first time and discuss the future prospects of the process.

The meeting brought the Elders and UNPOS together to the same table for the first time in several years. Most importantly the UN Special Representative for Secretary-General (SRSG), Augustine Mahiga was also present. His presence added prestige to the meeting and it served as a signal towards the Elders that UNPOS was taking the process seriously.¹³ The agenda for the first meeting was fairly flexible and the main objective that was set beforehand, was to draft together the number and categories¹⁴ of the Elders participating to the project, and furthermore to form a broad plan forward, to which the

¹² Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012.

¹³ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

¹⁴ In Somali culture, the Elders have different levels of appreciation and prestige, depending on their experience, religious contribution and societal position in their clans.

stakeholders who were then present would be committed. In the meeting, the time and the place of the second meeting was agreed upon. The main result from Djibouti 1 one was to mitigate some of the mistrust that the elders had towards UNPOS.

In connection with Djibouti 1, FCA was responsible for the preparations of the meeting and for facilitating it. This was a role which they maintained in connection with the future Djibouti 2 and 3 meetings. FCA invested a great deal of its time and efforts in identifying the traditional and religious leaders who should be invited to the meeting. Once a proper level of identification was attained, the focus was put on reaching out towards the Elders who they had learned to have further influence on other Elders and also over clan barriers. In this process FCA field staff put their emphasis on building a personal relationship with the Elders. Not only by having a formal relationship, but to genuinely get to know the people who they were dealing with. They also wanted to introduce themselves as individuals, going beyond a purely professional relationship. The general aim was to build the Elders' trust towards the project and FCA. Initially the Elders were suspicious towards the initiative. The project itself was not the cause of their suspicion but rather UNPOS, which in the past had not been successful in building trust with the Elders. Trust building was not an easy task. It had been the experience of some religious and traditional leaders that some international NGOs had initiated projects in Somalia for the sake of having projects, and the Somali concerns had actually become a secondary issue.¹⁵

FCA wanted to show that it was sincere in its willingness to support peace efforts in Somalia. It aimed to convince the Elders that it did not have hidden agendas or that it would aim to benefit from the program. FCA also had a role in drafting the agenda of the meeting. However this turned out be a less significant task, as in the actual negotiations the Elders themselves took charge of the agenda.¹⁶ During the meeting FCA's participation in the negotiation was however important, as it had an important task to ease the tension between two very different parties and prevent potential misunderstandings. Accordingly, a purely bilateral meeting between UNPOS and the Elders would not have been successful between these two very new parties, because they had not yet built adequate level of a mutual trust.¹⁷

¹⁵ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012. Mr. Abdile worked as the Lead Consultant in the Project. He had the overall responsibility of the substantial content and coordination of the Project.

¹⁶ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

¹⁷ E-mail exchange with Jussi Ojala, 17 December 2012.

2.2 Djibouti 2

Djibouti 2 was also held in Djibouti, taking place between the 16th and 18th of February 2011, after a one month delay from the original plan. In this meeting the number of participants grew noticeably and it managed to have greater representation of religious and traditional leaders, managing to receive representation from Somaliland, Puntland and South-Central Somalia. The UN sent a larger delegation to the meeting than they did in Djibouti 1, and in addition to UNPOS, UN Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) was also represented. Djibouti 2 aimed to build further confidence between UNPOS and the Elders and give an opportunity for the participants to share information between each others. Several side meetings were also held and in these meetings it was agreed that the project should build further capacity. A position of rapporteur/facilitator was created. This person held the responsibility of making sure that the proceedings of the meetings would be reported and that the process would be documented. However, the main output from the meeting was a *Plan for Action*, which was a plan on how the Elders would implement the agreed results in their communities at the grassroots level. The produced plan marked further commitment to the SOR project and the project became more elaborate and professional. The meeting also agreed upon the schedule for the next meeting, which was set to be at the end of March or at the beginning of April in 2011. It nonetheless turned out, that this fairly technical agreement could not be held, which put the entire project under a severe test in the prelude of the next meeting, Djibouti 3.

As in Djibouti 1, FCA's primary role was to be the facilitator of the meeting. The facilitation did not only include technical arrangements, but also careful nurturing of the achieved trust between the Elders and UNPOS. For this meeting the technical arrangements had nonetheless changed. The lead consultant, who had been previously hired by FCA, had now been transferred to work under the *African Council of Religious Leaders* (ACRL). From then on, ACRL was the official employer of the consultants (the created rapporteur/facilitator position was also staffed by an ACRL consultant) who were doing the work on the ground in Somalia and Kenya. The work relationship of the consultants was nonetheless somewhat ambivalent, as all but one consultant had a close connection to FCA either as a staff being on a temporary leave of absence from FCA, or as a former FCA consultant or a close partner. The consultants also sent their reports directly to FCA as well as to ACRL.¹⁸ In preparation of the meeting FCA continued to invest its time and efforts, aiming to build trust with the Elders.

¹⁸ This ambivalence remained throughout the project. For this reason the article uses the term FCA/ACRL consultants from time to time throughout the paper.

2.3 Djibouti 3

Djibouti 3 was held in Uganda, Entebbe between the 23rd and 27th of June 2011 in the aftermath of the *Kampala Accord*.¹⁹ The organising of Djibouti 3 turned out to be one of the most critical points of the whole process. There were serious delays and the meeting was postponed several times. At one point the meeting was already agreed upon, but it was cancelled at the last moment. These delays caused serious mistrust towards the UNPOS on behalf of the Elders, and when the meeting finally took place, the Elders expressed their dissatisfaction towards the postponements and the last minute cancellation, which made them feel disrespected. The feeling of not being properly respected intensified when the meeting finally was set to take place with only eight days advance notice.²⁰

Due to heightened political tensions in Somaliland, the Somaliland elders had excused themselves from the project. Furthermore, there was a failure to communicate properly about the meeting to the Puntland administration. The Puntland administration felt that the meeting was an attempt to divide its own elders' structure which, for years, had been one of the key components that had held Puntland fairly calm.²¹ This caused that the airplane that was supposed to transport Elders from Puntland to Entebbe, was denied from departing which consequently prevented the four expected elders from Puntland participating in the meeting. Even against these obstacles the Djibouti 3 marked watershed in the process.

The Elders expressed their willingness to establish a *Guurti* (Council of Elders)²² in South-Central Somalia, so that they could have a genuine impact on peace efforts on a national level. The Elders envisioned that the *Guurti* would have a role in facilitating the process of reconciliation and mediation between communities, and furthermore that it would be an instrument that could bring the Somali society together by addressing the societal concerns that could be religious or cultural from their nature.²³

¹⁹ The Kampala Accord had an important side role regarding the SOR project. The Accord was an agreement which settled some of the internal power struggles in Somalia and paved way for the continuation of the transition period in Somalia with another year. This was needed as the political process was not still at the stage where the transition period could have been finished without having potentially sowed seeds for future conflicts to take place in Somalia. As such it did not have any direct relationship with the SOR project. However it served the SOR project in two different ways. SRSG Mahiga's briefing about the Accord was well received amongst the Elders, which restored some of the lost trust of the Elders towards UNPOS and consequently the SOR project. Additionally it gave the SOR more time to proceed in its objectives.

²⁰ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

²¹ Interview with Christian Manahl, 7 November 2012. Dr. Manahl was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General to Somalia from Jan 2011 to Feb 2012.

²² In the Western political paradigm, the closest thing of the pictured Council of Elders would be an upper chamber of parliament.

²³ FCA 2012a: pp. 1-2.

In the process the Elders surprised even the close observers of the process by stating that 25% of the Guurti representation should be women.²⁴ Djibouti 3 also marked an event which brought the SOR project more into daylight, as the Elders communicated their vision and desire to a wider audience by publishing an official communiqué.²⁵

Compared to Djibouti 1 and 2, FCA's role was greater in the preparations of Djibouti 3. As the continuous delays caused mistrust amongst the elders towards UNPOS, FCA had to truly capitalise on the trust that it had acquired through its past activities. FCA and its partner ACRL focused their efforts on keeping the momentum and the morale of the process high by constantly communicating and discussing with the Elders. These discussions aimed to maintain the Elders' belief towards the project and tremendous amount of genuine field diplomacy was required in this task. Regarding the position of women, FCA had a role that it had acquired through its actions in the past. Earlier, the article described how FCA took a risk by supporting the Elders to give Sharia training for themselves in connection of the FCA's PIP program. It turned out that it was in connection of this training when the Elders had not found any theological obstacles that would require the exclusion of women from political decision making. This then manifested at the Djibouti 3.²⁶

2.4 Djibouti 4

Unlike the other Djibouti series meetings, Djibouti 4 was not a meeting as such. In practice it was a fact finding mission undertaken by the SOR project's lead consultant and the facilitator/rapporteur to Mogadishu. Prior the Djibouti 4 mission, the parties involved in the SOR project held a brainstorming meeting at UNPOS. As a result of the brainstorming it was decided that the Guurti issue should be taken forward in a fast manner so that the achieved momentum could be utilised effectively. Furthermore the brainstorming produced an initiative to organise a convention, where the Guurti initiative would be discussed thoroughly amongst all the relevant Elders that could be reached and invited to the convention. Although the number of Elders participating to the SOR project had increased at every meeting, the number of the Elders working in cooperation with the SOR project was still believed to be too small for them to be considered representing the Elder from the entire South-Central Somalia. In order to achieve these objectives it was then decided that a fact finding mission should take place, which would facilitate the hosting of the convention.

²⁴ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

²⁵ Communiqué available online from: ebookbrowse.com//110626-communiqué-elders-meeting-entebbe-somali-pdf-d367923883.

²⁶ Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012 .

The fact finding mission had several objectives. It aimed to find out who must participate in the proposed convention to consider the establishment of the Guurti. Another objective was to find out how these individuals can be contacted and invited. Relating closely to this dilemma was the actual number of delegates who should be present and the clan representation that should be used in order to guarantee an appropriate level of legitimacy. Other questions that had to be answered were: who would be a proper organising body of the convention and where it ought to be held. The mission also hoped to find answers to other practicalities such as the proper duration of the convention and what resources were required to hold the convention.²⁷

During the mission the FCA/ACRL consultants interviewed more than a 100 Somali stakeholders from various parts of society. While aiming to find out the answers to the questions mentioned above, the consultants also asked how the Elders would be perceived in Somalia should a permanent Guurti be established in South Central Somalia. The results from Djibouti 4 were encouraging as they showed overwhelming support from all levels of society for the Elders' initiative to establish a Guurti, which was regarded as an important structure of governance for the reform of the Somali democratic practices.²⁸ For UNPOS this was a very important discovery, as it wanted to be sure about the perceptions of the Somali society regarding the Guurti, before it would start to actively push the initiative forward.²⁹

Regarding Djibouti 4, FCA's role was essential. Prior to the mission, FCA was strongly involved in the brainstorming regarding the need for, and the objectives of, the mission. The mission itself was executed by the main consultant and rapporteur/facilitator together, who worked under ACRL but in close cooperation with FCA. In practice this meant risky stay in Mogadishu and reaching out to the Somali stakeholders. Consequently the mission allowed FCA to reach more elders in the volatile South-Central Somalia and marked a further opportunity to make the objectives of the SOR better known in the Somali society. For FCA, these were important aspects of the mission, as the project timeline was gradually coming to its end. The increased awareness regarding FCA's work was considered important when anticipating FCA's future activities in Somalia.³⁰

²⁷Wandati & Abdile 2012: pp. 5-6.

²⁸Ibid: pp. 8-9.

²⁹E-mail exchange with Jussi Ojala, 21 December 2012.

³⁰FCA2012b: p. 4.

2.5 Djibouti 5

Initially Djibouti 5 was planned to take place in Mogadishu. The main focus was thought to be on the creation of steps eventually leading to the formation of the Guurti. The meeting however never took place. The events in the political process dictated that the meeting would not receive the mandate that it would have required. The signatories of the roadmap, which was the key document to guide Somalia's political structures through the transition period, decided that instead of the Elders, the regional leaders should be accommodated to the upper house of parliament. The objective to establish a Guurti in South-Central Somalia as part of the process ending the transition was then abandoned. However the Elders were given significant responsibility as they were tasked to select the members of the Constituent Assembly and to nominate the Members of the Federal Parliament. The SOR project adapted itself to these new parameters and the remaining resources were used to enhance the capacity of the Elders in their newly given task.³¹

2.6 Advocacy at Work Elsewhere

Although FCA has felt comfortable working on the ground in Somalia, FCA's advocacy strategy has also had another dimension, which emphasises on engaging relevant actors at the political level. This work has meant lobbying and aiming to meet influential politicians and international civil servants who have been in a position of importance regarding the Somali context. In the core of its lobbying and FCA's approach to peace work in general, has been a strong belief in Rights Based Approach (RBA), which means "...that all FCA's development cooperation, advocacy and humanitarian aid work aims at supporting the realization of human rights. In practice, this means empowering the people with rights – *rights holders* – to claim their human rights such as right to food, right to education and right to security. People must be aware of rights that they have and also of the international commitments that their states have made. If there are rights holders, it means that there are always actors who are responsible for the realisation of these rights or *the duty bearers*."³²

The RBA called for advocacy efforts to support a true accountability of the *duty bearer* vis-à-vis the *rights holders*. Through its active engagement in Somalia, the UN inevitably is the key external duty bearer in the Somali context, which made the UN the most natural target for FCA's advocacy attempts. In addition to the UN, FCA has

³¹ UN 2012: p. 7.

³² FCA 2012b: p. 4.

not been shy in its attempts to advocate its cause elsewhere. It has aimed to explain its objectives to a wide audience which has released pressure from its field work when for instance the on-going political dynamics have dictated otherwise. Through its lobbying efforts it has managed to make its voice heard in such places as the White House and in the corridors of the Kenyan administration.³³

When the objectives of the SOR project have been under a threat of getting sidelined, FCA has stood firmly in defence of position of the Elders. For instance, in the early stages of the process the UNPOS had a very different idea about the role of the Elders than they themselves had. UNPOS wanted rather that the Elders assist in the easement of the national level political process, but did not really see that they would have a role at the national level once that objective would have been reached. The UNPOS was leaning towards the option that the Elders could return to their communities to work with local peace projects, rather than having a national or more sustained role in Somali national decision making. FCA, well aware of the position of the Elders, rejected this view. It expressed the Elders will to have a more genuine and permanent role in Somalia's development at the national level, instead of being sent back home to their communities once the job was perceived to be done.³⁴ The example illustrates FCA's role as a facilitator between two very different kinds of parties who do not communicate well with each other. This ability to facilitate between these two parties has been particularly highlighted in situations when the Elders' lack of trust towards UNPOS has become a genuine issue. Cooperation with ACRL has been of tremendous value in this work. FCA/ACRL consultants have also used their energy to explain UNPOS' position to the Elders, and in the process it has communicated to them what is going on in the bigger picture. In here lies the value of the trust that FCA (and ACRL through its own work) has acquired in Somalia, as the trust of the Elders towards UNPOS has at times been almost non-existent. In such times FCA/ACRL consultants, with their field diplomacy, have been virtually the glue that has kept the Elders in the process.

Building up FCA's own credibility has also been an important component of their work. FCA has built its credibility mainly by delivering what it has promised. It has also built up reputation as a credible partner through other means. For instance it has used its connections to invite high level guests to Finland, using the opportunity to brief these guests about FCA's work and vision in the long run. Successful arrangement of these visits has served FCA well, as the potential partner organisations have been personally able to make solid conclusions about the quality of FCA as an organisation

³³ Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012.

³⁴ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

and as a working partner. A significant part of FCA's credibility comes from its genuine understanding of the Somali context. This expertise has, at times, been challenged by other observers and some very heated discussions consequently followed. In such instances FCA has made sound arguments about the logic behind its thinking which has often led to a later endorsement by some of these parties that have been critical at first.³⁵ One significant opportunity in the process was opened through such a debate at a Civil Society Conference in Entebbe in March 2012, when FCA's and Somali administration's views collided. Consequently, the Somali Ministry of Constitution and Reconciliation approached FCA few weeks later, and asked that particular FCA staff member to be seconded for the Somali administration in order to assist them in the reconciliation process and later on in the election process. This was one of the most visible, and very much likely, most influential advocacy opportunities that FCA acquired along the process.³⁶

3 Obstacles

Having described the background to the SOR project and FCA's role in it, the article moves on to discuss some of the issues that caused challenges during the SOR project. Not surprisingly, security was a constant concern throughout the process, starting from Djibouti 1 when the location was selected mostly due to security reasons. Although FCA was forced to take security concerns into consideration regarding the arrangements of the meetings and its staff's safety, it were the Elders that carried the biggest risk during the project. For example after Djibouti 3, the Elders who participated in the meeting received a SMS from al Shabaab, which stated that al Shabaab is well aware that they are cooperating with FCA and UNPOS and that the penalty for this is death. Fear had an impact on the work of the Elders. As one commentator expressed, "If a person is living in fear, he cannot think straight. He may be physically at the meeting table, but his mind is elsewhere thinking about his family and his own fate when he returns home."³⁷ The security concerns were such that FCA was not able to address them properly, mainly because of the limited resources it had available. These security concerns reflected themselves also elsewhere, which put the project under stress. Not being able to respond to these concerns became especially an issue when delays occurred. It led to a situation when some of the Elders started to think that FCA does not seem to understand the Somali context as well as it is perceived. For the Elders, waiting for

³⁵ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Interview with Abdullahi Farah, 22 November 2012. Mr. Farah worked as ACRL Regional Coordinator for the South-Central Somalia. He had a crucial role in the dialogue with the elders during and between the meetings.

several months for something to happen seemed almost ludicrous, as they were not sure whether they would be alive tomorrow, not to mention after a few months. This was a factor that could have put some of the trust and credibility FCA had acquired in the past, in jeopardy.³⁸

The complicated contractual matters added further pressure to the SOR project. The SOR project had been on-going for almost a year before the contract between FCA and UNPOS was finally signed. The lack of signatures caused regular hindrances to the project. This reflected itself especially in financial matters and the main burden was carried by the ACRL consultants working in the field. Accordingly; "The fact that there was no signed contract between FCA and UNPOS meant that the project consultants were working without salary from December 2010 until July 2011 when FCA provided funding from its own resources that partially covered the expenses."³⁹ Arguably this was not a viable safety net in financial terms. Implementing the project without the contract could have also become a major source of friction, if FCA's and UNPOS' views would have collided and a consequent litigation ensued. Perhaps luckily, this was not tested.

Closely linked to the contractual matters was the limited timeframe. The project received certain funding which tied the project also to a certain time period. In this case it was initially 12 months (from December 2010 to December 2011) and then continued with another six months. These kinds of time limits in a project with such complexity and changing dynamics can be considered a limiting factor. It prevented the project from becoming a genuine long term process, limiting its practical execution to only a series of meetings and consultations on the ground.⁴⁰

FCA's own administrative capacity also faced tremendous pressure when managing the project, because the nature of the project did not always allow full transparency within the organisation. The people working with the process were mainly experts who understood the substance, but were not experts in administration. When they would have required some administrative support they could not always ask for assistance, not even from their own organisation. Consequently, this also meant that the staff with

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Quote from e-mail exchange with Jussi Ojala, 21 December 2012.

⁴⁰ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

the proper administrative skills could not have helped even if they would have had the capacity, as they were not informed about the project to a degree that would have been required. This became an issue especially during times when the dynamics of the project required immediate action. The information gaps caused some internal friction within FCA, as the speed of the process went occasionally beyond FCA's capacity to keep track administratively. The pressure to inform others about the project only on a need-to-know basis, came from UNPOS and the main donor, MFA, who both treated the project as classified. FCA took this seriously and it decided to keep the full details of the project only within a small core group of people working with the project and some essential people from FCA management. The confidential nature of the SOR project also caused other problems, some being potentially very serious. At a practical level, it prevented FCA from acquiring publicity for its work through media. It also contributed to internal friction at times when the other key components of FCA's work (humanitarian and development work) in general were not kept up to date regarding the project. Internal friction became an issue especially at times when events took place without a chance for the humanitarian experts to express their concerns regarding the possible implications that the project could introduce to their work. These concerns were eventually addressed when an external consultant was hired to make a security assessment, regarding how the project would affect to FCA's work in general. The report discovered that indeed the project had become such that FCA was not unanimously behind the project and was in danger of splitting in two camps with very differing views about FCA's involvement in Somalia. Furthermore the assessment discovered that the project would potentially harm FCA's reputation in Somalia if the organisation would be perceived to be too close to Somali politics.⁴¹ The secrecy was also not always well received in an organisation which often prides itself from being transparent and open.

Concerning the challenges faced at the substance level, they were threefold. Firstly, there was the issue of trust. How this trust would be built and maintained, was an issue that was present throughout the entire process. As mentioned, FCA worked hard to build and maintain the trust between the Elders and UNPOS, but it had to also consider carefully the Elders' trust towards FCA. This was crucial for FCA as the SOR was not the only project that FCA was conducting in Somalia at the time, and it was not going to be the last. FCA's commitment towards Somalia has been, and still continues to be, a strategic focus for it. FCA knew that its work in Somalia could be put in danger if FCA would in the process sacrifice the trust that it had achieved. The long term commitment

⁴¹ FCA security assessment (confidential). The author was given a chance only to read the assessment. Thus not added to the reference list.

worked for the project, as it made FCA more accountable regarding its work in Somalia by giving a signal that FCA would not abandon Somalis even if the SOR project would not be successful. In this context it ought to be mentioned that FCA also experienced something that took some of its staff by surprise. The Somali ability to forgive was for the Finnish FCA staff something they had not experienced before. It was something that overwhelmed them when they thought that the trust between FCA and the Elders was put under a test.⁴²

Another issue from which the project struggled from the very beginning was the matter of inclusiveness. The questions that had to be constantly reassessed were: who were the real Elders, and who were the people that should be rightly included in the process? Furthermore, there was the question of how to keep the delicate clan balance in order? Initially there was optimism towards finding an answer to this question. It was thought that every Somali can tell the name of his or her clan elder, so consequently one should only ask and the list of Elders would write itself.⁴³ However, this was not the case and FCA never found a satisfactory answer to this. In fact, the cancelled Djibouti 5 was meant to find answers to these questions, but the political process proceeded so rapidly that there was not enough time for the search of names to take place properly. The reasons for this shortcoming were straightforward. The biggest obstacle was security and the consequent lack of access. The FCA/ACRL consultants were not able to travel into areas which were essentially theatres of war. Even if access was granted, the method of finding the Elders turned out to be more complicated than thought. Partially this was because the project became tied to the political process in its latter stages. The political process was on the other hand tied to the 4.5 formula⁴⁴, which in its essence is a political compromise and does not present the exact composition of the Somali society. Furthermore, the issue of Puntland's *de facto* autonomous status complicated the search of elders, especially when the idea of establishing a Guurti became topical. The question was whether to aim for the establishment of a national Guurti or for a one which would only include South-Central Somalia? The objective was set to have a South-Central Guurti, which was perceived to be a more realistic option to succeed. It was acknowledged, that in a long run this could create problems if there would be an aim to one day unify Somalia, and include Puntland and Somaliland under one united country.⁴⁵

⁴² Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

⁴³ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

⁴⁴ The 4.5 formula is political compromise which aims to deal with the issue of political representation in Somalia's complicated clan structure. The four main clans Darood, Hawyie, Dir and Digle-Mirifle, each have a representation of one as the other smaller clans share the representation of the 0.5.

⁴⁵ Interview with Christian Manahl, 7 November 2012.

Thirdly, there has been an issue on how to keep the project's integrity untouched while simultaneously pursuing its objectives forwards. It was acknowledged that inevitably the attention and the generated success would make the project a tempting objective for political manipulation. This issue rose at latest after Djibouti 3, when the Elders presented a public communiqué that they would seek to establish a Guurti. At this stage, UNPOS started to see that the Elders really could offer something more in terms of building peace in Somalia than it had initially considered. From UNPOS' standpoint this meant that the Elders should be pulled into mainstream politics, which would put them in a position where they would be taken more seriously amongst more established actors in Somali politics and also amongst Somali populace.⁴⁶ In practice this meant that the Elders issue would be drawn into the political process. This became concrete after the Galkayo meeting in March 2012,⁴⁷ where the signatories of the roadmap and Garowe Principles met to amend the principles agreed in connection with Garowe 1 and 2.⁴⁸ At Galkayo it was agreed that the Elders would be given the responsibility to select the 825 member Constitutional Assembly, which would have the responsibility of ratifying the new provisional constitution.⁴⁹ Furthermore the Elders were given a role to put forward those names who could be considered to become Members of Parliament (MP) when a new 275 member parliament was selected. While the SOR project cannot be considered to be directly behind the Elders' newly achieved responsibility, it had nonetheless been a catalyst towards the direction of UNPOS that the Elders should be taken seriously. The Galkayo meeting also marked a point where the SOR project started to see its end. The planned Djibouti 5 meeting became somewhat unnecessary and the funds reserved for it were redirected through TFG to serve the Elders in their newly given task.

Regarding the SOR project, the Galkayo meeting represented a turning point where the Elders achieved genuine success, but at the same time this happened outside of the project. For FCA the developments in Galkayo came as a small surprise. FCA felt that the developments introduced after the Galkayo were perhaps going forward too fast in a sense that there was no effort to gather proper grassroots feedback regarding the Elders' newly given position.⁵⁰ There was a concern that the reconciliation potential that

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Galkayo meeting was not a part of the SOR project. Only the key Somali principals and signatories were present at Galkayo. In addition to TFG, the regional states of Galmudug and Puntland were present and also Ahlu Sunas Waal Jamaah, a faction in alliance with TFG.

⁴⁸ The Garowe Somali National Consultative Constitutional Conferences (Garowe 1 and 2) were not part of the SOR project. They were part of the wider political transition process, which aimed to fulfill the objectives agreed earlier in connection with the Kampala Accords and in National Reconciliation Conference held in Mogadishu in September 2011. In comparison to the Galkayo meeting the Garowe meetings also hosted a much larger participation, aiming to engage Somali stakeholders from all the relevant parts of the society as well as the international community, excluding the parties that were effectively in war against TFG.

⁴⁹ The constitution was ratified in 1 August 2012.

⁵⁰ Mahdi Abdile's e-mail to Jussi Ojala, 28 March 2012.

the Elders possessed, would be lost if they got deep into Somali politics too fast. However, in principle, FCA's position regarding the Elders newly gained responsibility was not a negative one. FCA's intention had been from the very beginning to empower the Elders more than the objectives of the SOR project suggested. From FCA's point of view this was a welcomed development, albeit perhaps coming too fast and with too little grassroots consultation. Furthermore the Galkayo meeting marked the moment when the Elders became officially linked to the wider peace process, which FCA saw as a positive development⁵¹, and not hindering the objectives of the SOR project. After all, the willingness to establish such a link was communicated after Djibouti 3, when the Elders expressed their interest in creating a Guurti in South-Central Somalia.

Such a large scale shift in the Elders' status had potentially other negative consequences. The integrity of the Elders may have suffered as a number of Elders were put into positions of power and consequently became natural targets for attempts of political manipulation. To judge whether this would resemble some kind of shortfall on behalf of FCA would nonetheless be unfair. It would assume that the Elders would live in some kind of vacuum, patronised by FCA and UNPOS, which was not the case. FCA's role was never to control the SOR process. On the contrary, its objective was to give the Elders an opportunity to rise to represent themselves and contribute to peace in Somalia. When initiating the SOR project, the Elders did not have the proper tools or status to work for peace as they had in Somaliland and in Puntland. At this stage the SOR project had achieved something that no one had even imagined when the project was initiated. In less than a year, a group of peers had risen from being respected individuals in their communities, to an organised group that is presently taken seriously on a national level, and of which main focus is reconciliation and peacebuilding in Somalia. Whether there has been political manipulation when the Elders gained prominence in Somali politics, is an issue that has not really been in FCA's hands.

4 Methods and Strengths

Strictly speaking FCA's role in the project has been that of an enabler and facilitator. As the article has touched upon, there were however several smaller roles that FCA carried throughout the project. These roles required particular approaches and techniques. The paper has already referred to some of these methods, but it is, however, appropriate to elaborate more on these procedures.

⁵¹ E-mail exchange with Jussi Ojala, 20 December 2012.

As highlighted several times, trust has been perhaps the key component in the project. How this trust was then achieved? FCA's work in Somalia since 2007 certainly had a great role in building trust. Through this work it managed to give actual evidence that its commitment is real and that its intentions are sincere. It proved its commitment by not backing out even in the face of controversial issues, such as the Sharia training, described previously in this paper. Its commitment has been genuine and it has continuously given support to its partners, sometimes even if the formal partnership was over. A telling example from this is a case outside the SOR project, but still an important one when illustrating FCA's commitment in Somalia. FCA's former partner organisation's director, operating in Galkayo, became an al Shabaab target during the course of his local peace initiatives. His peace efforts hampered al Shabaab's recruitment and ate away its local support. In addition to the death threats, the director faced a car bomb assassination attempt. Knowing the contribution that this man and his organisation was doing for Somali peace, FCA arranged an *ad hoc* funding for upgrading its former partner organisation's security. The example also illustrates how FCA is committed to Somalia, which solidified its accountability from the Somali point of view.

Gaining trust at an organisational level has not been enough for FCA, and in the process it invested time in getting to know the Elders. In this process they built lasting relationships on a personal level. This did not mean casual socialising in cafes, but a real engagement with the Elders, by praying together and showing genuine sympathy and empathy when confronting their communities suffering and hardship.

FCA has also emphasised supporting and trusting their staff in Somalia, who often work alone in a dangerous environment. This has inevitably made it easier to speak good things about the organisation that one represents, if the individual feels that the organisation is genuinely standing behind them. Indeed one of the keys for FCA's success in this project has been its staff. FCA has successfully recruited staff with Somali origin, who have an ideal background to work in the field, where as its staff working in its headquarters in Helsinki has been mostly responsible for the lobbying efforts.⁵² With these individuals FCA has acquired vision, genuine understanding about Somalia, prestige and commitment towards its work for Somali peace.

Closely related to FCA's treatment of its own personnel, is the nourishment of good relations with its partners. FCA's main partner organization in the project has been ACRL. These two have been cooperating since 2007 and without ACRL efforts, FCA could not have been able to do the footwork in Somalia. In real terms their cooperation has

⁵² These roles have not been carved in stone and roles have been altered when necessary.

meant that the ACRL has been an implementing partner for FCA, and as mentioned the employer of the consultants working in Somalia. In short, ACRL has been in contractual relationship with FCA, while FCA has been in contractual relationship with UNPOS. In addition to the footwork, ACRL has been in charge of reporting and documenting the process. The good relationship between the two organisations originates from their shared vision on how to approach conflicts, both aiming to build a bridge between religious leaders and political life.⁵³ The SOR project has not been the only project where they cooperate. In addition, they work to engage with African leaders through the African Union, aiming to communicate the potential that religious and traditional leaders have in peace mediation and reconciliation.

FCA's connections with the Elders, the expertise of its staff and the professional relationship with its partners has given FCA an excellent understanding about the Somali context and culture. The expertise was indeed highly regarded by the UNPOS throughout the process, which the following quote from the UN final narrative report reveals "...FCA's immense wealth of experience in working with Elders and employment of traditional dispute resolution mechanisms positions them at a great comparative advantage to win the confidence of project beneficiaries."⁵⁴

In FCA's approach, the Somali ownership has also been an essential factor. FCA had learned that trust towards many other NGOs working in Somalia was low, because they were often perceived of as having their own agenda alongside their projects. Even those who were working with Somali peace initiatives, had been considered something as *gatekeepers*, where they take the role of the messenger between negotiating parties, adding something from their own agenda into these messages, or leaving something out, if it does not fit into their thinking.⁵⁵ In FCA's approach the role of a messenger in such connections was minimised. At times it had to be a messenger when arranging the meetings, but in the meetings itself it gave the floor to the negotiating parties. Concerning the agendas, FCA has aimed not to give a set agenda, limiting its role only to assure that the meetings do not repeat themselves over and over again, aiming to serve the practicalities of the meetings. As one FCA staff member had observed, the agenda never really mattered that much, because the most important Elders' ideas and initiatives rose after break times, when the Elders had engaged each other in the form of casual conversations.⁵⁶ In short, FCA has managed to show that the project is a Somali

⁵³ Interview with Dr Mustafa Ali, 16 November 2012. Dr. Ali was, and still is, the executive director of ACRL.

⁵⁴ UN 2012: p. 8.

⁵⁵ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

initiative, and not something that would be dictated to them or manipulated somehow by foreigners. FCA has nonetheless not hesitated to take the role of bridge-builder between different parties involved in the SOR project.

In terms of lobbying it could be said that FCA lobbyists have had an open mind when they have sought opportunities where they could approach the duty bearers and make the voice of the rights holders heard. When such an opportunity was recognised, it was at times seized whether a formal audience was agreed on beforehand or not. For example, when London hosted a major Somali peace conference in the spring of 2012, FCA representative flew to London to seek opportunities to speak with influential Somali politicians. An opportunity rose late at night when an FCA lobbyist saw the TFG Minister of Interior Affairs returning to his hotel. Without hesitation he approached the Minister and managed to get an audience at that very moment. This led to another meeting the next day with the Prime Minister of the TFG. This kind of an approach is of course an exception, but it is a good example of the certain kind of flexibility and risk taking capability that FCA possesses. These qualities have turned out to be useful throughout the project but as the paper already referred in the previous chapter, FCA administration has been occasionally put to the test during the project, partially because of the occasional high tempo of the project.

Good donor relationships were also a contributing factor to the success of the SOR project. Although the Finnish MFA was in contractual relationship with UNPOS and not FCA, information nonetheless flowed naturally between FCA and the MFA. The physical proximity and shared language made communication between the two easy. It should be nonetheless highlighted that this relationship was about information sharing and the MFA did not take any stance when decisions were made about the actual execution of the project. For the MFA, supporting FCA has been a logical choice. Not only because FCA is a Finnish organisation, but also because of FCA's aims to mediate peace in Somalia have fit well into Finland's foreign policy objectives, where supporting global peace efforts is one of its focus areas. It has also suited Finland well that FCA works in partnership with UNPOS, as Finnish foreign policy has traditionally emphasised the role of the UN in global conflict resolution efforts. The MFA had also been financing the PIP program, which meant that it already had a good understanding about the role and the potential of the Elders prior to the initiation of the project.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Interview with Ilkka Nordberg, 19 November 2012. Mr. Nordberg was the team leader of MFA Finland (HQ) in the Unit responsible for Somalia. He was the main focal point for FCA at the MFA in the latter part of the Project.

5 Faith-Based Background

Although FCA's work is not guided by its faith-based background⁵⁸, it is something that the article wants to elaborate more on, as it has added an interesting nuance to the project. Regarding its faith-based background, FCA's own stance was careful. There was a concern that the word *church* in its title had a potential to deter the Elders from the project. This concern originated from the fact that Somalia is a conservative Islamic society, which made FCA conscious that some may wrongly consider it as an organisation with missionary objectives because of its name. Regardless from the fact that missionary work is not in FCA's mandate, the potential misconception caused some apprehension. These concerns were however nothing new for FCA and since 2008 there had been many discussions with Somali stakeholders and partners about FCA's identity and way of working. In the SOR project FCA preferred to use the acronym FCA when dealing with the Elders. Furthermore FCA requested that its name would be left out from the public communiqués that were produced along the process. During the process the issue caused some suspicion amongst those Elders who had not previously dealt with FCA, but once FCA's genuine willingness to work for peace was communicated to these Elders, the issue did not create any further obstacles for cooperation.⁵⁹ Furthermore, FCA came to learn that the Elders involved in the SOR project had known exactly with whom they were dealing with.⁶⁰ On the other hand there are also views which consider that it has not made any difference at all whether FCA is secular or faith-based organization. These views consider FCA's concrete actions far more important than its Christian background, and also point out that FCA rather happened to be in the right place at the right time. Accordingly, the same job could have been done by any other organisation with the same set of tools that FCA had available, whether faith-based or secular.⁶¹

Regarding the possible advantages, the observers have nonetheless found some issues that the faith-based background has brought to the process. One interviewed considered that the faith-based background has put FCA in a position where it has been able to build a bridge between peace building and humanitarian work, which often work independently from each other and to a certain degree from the political life of Somalia. This is the case particularly with humanitarian work, where neutrality from political

⁵⁸ FCA's advocacy works is guided by rights-based approach. See the Information Box in p. 3.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

⁶⁰ Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

⁶¹ Interview with Christian Manahl, 7 November; Interview with Jussi Ojala, 31 October 2012.

objectives is for many organisations the cornerstone of their work. The faith-based background has made it possible to engage with the Somalis in their everyday lives and go beyond the surface, where religion has a significant role. This has made it impossible not to hear about the wishes of Somalis to achieve peace, and neglecting such wishes would go against Christian ethics.⁶² Consequently adopting peace in Somalia has been almost natural objective for FCA to take, as for some secular humanitarian organisations this would have been perhaps against their principles.⁶³

Another very important aspect that the faith-based background brought into the process was to give tools to produce a conflict analysis which was able to explain the Somali conflict in a different context. FCA and ACRL were not satisfied with the analysis that focused mainly on knowing who the political actors of the conflict were and what their objectives were. Their analysis also included other elements of the Somali context to the analysis, which revealed that in addition to the political power struggles, another kind of struggle was on-going in Somalia, and that this aspect had been neglected. This in essence was the realisation that in the contemporary Somali conflict, religion had become a major component of the conflict, and that religion was wrongfully used to obtain political objectives. This led to a conclusion that in preventing the misuse of religion in Somalia it would be necessary to empower those people who have the capability to argue against such misuse. This understanding about the conflict dynamics was something that was not easily transferred elsewhere. The UN civil servants for instance were at times seen reluctant to accept this analysis because it highlighted the role of non-state and non-political actors. Furthermore, it brought religion too close to politics for some UN civil servants' comfort, who had been accustomed to the idea that state and religion should be separated.⁶⁴ During Djibouti 3, FCA found a mind that was thinking along the same lines. The Deputy SRSG at the time, Christian Manahl, had also observed the conflict of religious movements inside Somalia. He concluded that a political solution alone to the Somali conflict was not going to be enough to remedy it. Rather something else, some kind of social component was required. This element would work for reconciliation, not only at the clan level but also mitigating the religious grievances that the two-decade-long conflict had produced.⁶⁵ This shared understanding of the conflict dynamics brought the UNPOS much closer to the project, which had perhaps earlier been more interested in gaining support from the civil society for the political peace process.

⁶² Interview with Antti Pentikäinen, 6 November 2012.

⁶³ Humanitarian organizations often emphasise their apolitical nature and neutrality, which makes them reluctant to get involved in any political questions, such as peace.

⁶⁴ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

⁶⁵ Interview with Christian Manahl, 7 November 2012.

FCA's faith-based background was thought to give additional strength to the project the closer to the field the perspective was taken. FCA staff member in Somalia, who has been working very closely with the Elders, acknowledged that the faith-based background worked as an advantage for the SOR project because of Somalia's conservative nature. Secular organisations were treated with suspicion and even though there was some suspicion regarding FCA's Christian background, it was also its faith-based background that mitigated this suspicion. In principle there was no obstacle to work with a Christian faith based organisation as the theological defence was found from the principle of Muslims tolerating the so called *People of the Book*.⁶⁶ One Elder that the author had a chance to interview made it clear that the question about the faith-based background was a very important one. Accordingly FCA's faith-based background gave it a significant advantage in the process when trust was being built. He said, "Faith-based work has spirit, quality, power from Allah, the God. A sense of humanity, a sense of spirituality, a sense of truth."⁶⁷

6 Concluding Words

The transition period in Somalia is now finalised. For the first time in two decades Somalia has a genuinely Somali selected political institution. The country is still far from recovery, but there appears to be a breath of fresh air, that gives hope for this country which has gone through unimaginable hardship. Years of war and devastation have nonetheless created interests that would like to see Somalia returning back to violence. In large parts of Somalia war is far from over, but piece by piece, peace appears to be gaining prominence at the moment. The Elders have proven that they can have a great role in the building and strengthening of peace. They are the Somali experts in conflict resolution and perhaps most importantly in reconciliation.

When the project was initiated in December 2010, no-one had the vision to see what would lie at the end of the road. The expectations were rather modest. The project title, Somalia Outreach and Reconciliation Project, is rather revealing when considering the initial objectives. The word outreach describes the initial expectations given for this project. From UNPOS' behalf it was thought to be a project that would give the UNPOS

⁶⁶ Interview with Mahdi Abdile, 14 November 2012.

⁶⁷ Interview with Sheikh Yareed, 16 November 2012. Sheikh Yareed was one of the three spokespersons of the Somali Elders, which were appointed by the Elders during the Djibouti 3 (Entebbe meeting).

further outreach in the part of the Somali society that it had only little knowledge beforehand, and from which it hoped to receive additional support for the wider political process through a creation of constituencies for peace led by the Elders. As UNPOS' mandate was to support TFG, the acquired outreach was also thought to benefit TFG's reach towards the Somali people and make it more accountable in the eyes of the Somalis. When reflecting the project against this objective, the achieved outcome has been rather substantial. The Elders, who were at the beginning of the project far from being a united group that would weigh influence at the national level, have now reached acknowledgement inside Somalia to a degree where they enjoy respect at the highest level of Somali politics. This was highlighted in their role of having a role in selecting the Members of the Constitutional Assembly and the Parliament.

Years of fighting have created masses of people who have never even experienced peace and now they will have to come in terms with it, assuming that there will finally be peace. The Elders have not been idle, and currently they are actively trying to engage with combatants who are still on a war path. These are mostly young men who know nothing else but fighting. Rather than letting them continue fighting to the bitter end, the Elders now aim to engage with these combatants and make them drop their weapons. At the same time the Elders work towards the rest of the Somali society, aiming to convince society to take these young men back into it, and give them a new meaning for their lives.⁶⁸ With their newly gained status, the Elders are perhaps better equipped than ever before to perform this task. However, as history has so often showed in the case of conflict and post-conflict societies, corruption and spoilers may ruin everything that has been achieved. Although the Elders have not yet received a permanent status in Somali politics they for a brief period held a crucial role regarding the end of transitional period in Somalia. By becoming an institution with power (albeit temporarily), the Elders may have lost some of the traditional prestige that they enjoyed prior to getting involved in decision making at national level in Somalia. With decision making power they are subjects of same kind of political realities that any other decision maker in Somalia is. This will put them under public scrutiny and judgment if their decisions and the consequences from those decisions are seen unpopular. This is not presently the case, but the risk is an existing one.

For FCA, the SOR project was a process where it managed to successfully follow through with its vision. It marked a project where it was able to show that a relatively small NGO can make a difference if there is will and commitment. FCA's role was duly

⁶⁸ Interview with Sheikh Yareed, 16 November 2012.

noted and publicly acknowledged by the Elders themselves. As one highly regarded Elder said in a television interview, “The clan elders have for a long time worked to promote peace [in Somalia], but the idea that they would be heard in Somali politics came from the Finns”.⁶⁹ The gained success has opened new opportunities for FCA to promote this approach further. Presently FCA works in cooperation with *UN Department of Political Affairs Mediation Support Unit*, *Organization of Islamic Cooperation* and *Religions for Peace*, to enhance the role of religious and traditional leaders in peace mediation processes. At the core of this cooperation is a well-informed conviction that such as the Elders managed to do in Somalia, other traditional and religious leaders, can become more essential players in conflict resolution and mediation both in their national and local contexts and as part of UN-led mediation efforts.

⁶⁹ A quote from a Finnish current affairs program, *Ajankohtainen Kakkonen*, which interviewed Sheikh Hassan Haad 21 August 2012. Sheik Hassan Haad is chairman of the council of Hawyie clan elders. Author’s translation from Finnish to English.

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