

Wajir Community Based Conflict Management

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7 December 1996

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During the period between 1992 and 1995, Wajir District in Northeastern Kenya was overwhelmed by clan-based violence with devastating effects on the local population. The violence in Wajir occurred during the same period as the ethnic clashes in the Rift Valley, Nyanza, and Western Provinces of Kenya. Although the violence and impact on the people of Northeastern Province were at least as severe as that occurring in the more populated regions of Kenya, this war has been almost unreported and unnoticed.

The violence has now ceased, thanks largely to combined government and community group efforts to restore peace and security. This paper will trace the background to the conflict, detail the violence that occurred and its results, and outline the work of peace groups to halt the escalating cycle of violence. It will also look at the values and assumptions underlying the peace work, analyse the current situation in Wajir, and look towards future opportunities and challenges in solidifying the peace in Wajir District.

## INTRODUCTION/CONTEXT

Wajir is one of three districts in Kenya's Northeastern Province. It borders Ethiopia and Somalia, as well as Mandera, Garissa, Moyale, Marsabit, and Isiolo

Districts in Kenya. It is the second largest and one of the most sparsely populated Districts in Kenya. The population, based on famine relief figures of 1992-1992, is estimated to be around 250,000 - 275,000 people, almost entirely ethnic Somali. Three major Somali clans dominate, the Ogaden, Ajuran, and Degodia. In addition, there are several smaller clans, as well as a small population of non-Somalis, almost entirely civil servants and security forces. Wajir town is the only town of any size in Wajir District. Prior to the 1992, Wajir town had a population of 18,000; today, as a result of the population displacements caused by the drought and the conflict, the population has increased to approximately 55,000 people.

Wajir District is a very arid region of 56,600 square kilometres, with an average rainfall of less than 200 mm per year. The rainfall is erratic, making the entire district vulnerable to drought. The district is generally flat and featureless, except for a hilly section near the Ethiopian border. Vegetation is in most places scrub bush, dotted with acacia trees. No agricultural activity is possible in the district.

As a result of these environmental conditions, more than 80 percent of the population are nomadic pastoralists, with herds of camels, cattle, sheep and goats. Because of the scarcity and unreliability of the rainfall, these pastoralists require extensive areas in which to move in search of pasture and water. This necessity for unrestricted movement and the scarcity of resources, including water, pasture, and minerals, naturally leads to conflicts over the control and use of these resources.

Traditionally, the Somali clan system was the basic organisational structure of Somali society. The clan-based relationships assured the survival of pastoralists, and



provided for the restocking of families who lost their animals through drought, disease, or theft. The traditional system regulated the use of resources and provided a vehicle for conflict resolution. Today, the collision between the modern nation state and traditional pastoralist systems has made the use of traditional Somali conflict resolution systems more difficult.

Wajir District is underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of Kenya. Wajir lags significantly in infrastructure, health, education, and economic development. An August 1992 UNICEF/GOK survey found that 60-70% of pastoralist families have little or no access to essential services. Childhood immunization was 23% compared to 71% nationally. Less than 13% of rural households are within six kilometres of a health facility, compared to 76% nationally. Over 65% of rural families are more than one day's walk from a health facility. The under-five mortality rate is 339 per 1000, nearly seven times the national average. Livestock immunization is 7.4%. During dry season, 61% of the population have more than one day's walk to water. While insecurity and conflict have caused their share of poverty in the District, poverty and underdevelopment are themselves causes in which insecurity is easily bred.

## BACKGROUND OF CONFLICT

While the roots of the conflict in Wajir are tangled and sometimes quite unclear, several factors that contributed to the conflict of 1992-1995 can be discussed.

In pre-colonial times, Somali society was self-administered through informal systems based on clan and sub-clan. Under British colonial administration, elements of



traditional systems were formalized and structured, and rigid, sometimes arbitrary restraints were imposed.

During colonial rule, Wajir was part of the Northern Frontier District, and was therefore a closed area, isolated from the rest of Kenya. Little or no attempt was made to integrate the Somali population with the rest of Kenya, or to provide education, health, or other services to the Somali people. In fact, Somalis were not permitted to cross certain boundaries into down-country Kenya.

The colonial government, ignoring the pastoralists' need for very wide movement in search of water and pasture, initiated clan boundaries and grazing blocks. Clans were not permitted to cross into the areas set aside for other clans. These unrealistic boundaries, while greatly resented by the Somali people, have also been used by the various clans when it suits their purposes. The colonial clan boundaries exist today as the parliamentary electoral boundaries, and continue to cause conflict over access to natural resources.

During both the First and Second World Wars, ethnic Somalis fought on both sides, for the British and the Italians. For the first time, Somalis were involved in battles with modern weapons, and for reasons not under their control. The aftermath of these wars has lingered on, with bitterness still remaining between clans fighting for the different sides in a conflict not at all of their own making.

Towards the end of the colonial period, ethnic Somalis were told that Northeast Kenya would become part of Somalia. This did not happen, and Northeast Kenya remained a part of independent Kenya. An unsuccessful war for secession followed,

from 1963-1969. This so-called "Shifta War" served to further isolate the people of Northeastern Province, including Wajir District, from the rest of the people of Kenya.

As an aside, in Northeastern Kenya today, "shifta" are elders who are held in high esteem by the Somali people as freedom fighters. To call a Somali thug a "shifta" is as offensive to the people of Northeastern Province as it would be to call a car thief in Central Province a "Mau Mau."

From independence onward, a series of inter-clan conflicts occurred, some based on clan boundary disputes, some on political leadership issues, some simply over the scarcity of resources. The worst of these conflicts ended in the Wagalla massacre of 1984, in which 400 Degodia men and youth died of exposure and thirst after being rounded up by the Kenyan military and left in the sun for three days with no food, water, or shelter. Most of the clan fighting since Independence has pitted the Degodia camel-keeping pastoralists against the cattle-keeping Ajuran and Ogaden.

Much of the clan fighting has centred around electoral politics. Unlike pre-colonial traditional consensus-based decision making, electoral politics have been much more clan-based, "winner take all." In Wajir West constituency, which coincides with the colonial Ajuran area, violent conflict has flared up each time a Degodia MP has been elected (in 1979, 1984 and 1992).

The independent Kenyan government continued the process of marginalizing and discriminating against its Somali citizens. Northeast Province, including Wajir Province, remained under a State of Emergency from independence until 1992.



This gave the administration very wide powers, including the right to kill on sight any person deemed "suspicious."

In 1991, all Kenyan citizens of Somali ethnicity were required to obtain a second identity card, in addition to the ID card carried by all Kenyan citizens. This second identity card was difficult to obtain and required travel to the place of birth of the Somali citizen and his/her parents. It has been greatly resented by Kenyan Somalis, and has underlined for them their perceived second-class status in the eyes of the Kenyan government.

In addition, conflicts in neighbouring countries have had an effect on Wajir District. The Ogaden War between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-78 led to an influx of refugees and arms into Wajir District. The turmoil in Ethiopia leading to the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991, and the 1991 civil war in Somalia and the subsequent chaos there both had significant impacts on Wajir, chiefly in the flow of refugees, weapons, and mercenary soldiers into the District. These disturbances in neighbouring countries have also resulted in the re-alignment of clan alliances within Wajir and have served to further erode clan stability.

The chronic underdevelopment and lack of economic opportunities led to a large group of unemployed youth who felt alienated from Kenya and opportunities for self-improvement. These youth were easy to exploit as fighters when the violence began.

In addition, a series of severe droughts overwhelmed the District and its population. The devastating drought of 1984-1985 resulted in massive livestock deaths



and impoverishment and displacement of large numbers of people. The even worse drought of 1991-1992, which coincided with the influx of refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia, led to more livestock loss, displaced even more people, and left thousands without any source of livelihood or access to food. The UNICEF/GOK survey of August 1992 found that pastoralists had lost as much as 80% of their small stock, 70% of their cattle, and 30% of their camels. This heavy loss of basic capital makes the community vulnerable, desperate, and easily manipulated into violence.

Because of the history of isolation from the rest of Kenya, the people of Wajir tended to view the government administration as either uninterested or actually hostile to their interests. Most top district officials, as well as the security forces were down-country Kenyans, of quite different culture, religion, and world-view, and with very prejudiced and derogatory stereotypes of the Somali people. The administration and the population tended to view each other with a great deal of distrust and suspicion.

A huge gap in understanding exists between the Somali people of Northeastern Province and down-country Kenyans. Negative stereotypes persist on both sides. At a national peace workshop held in Limuru in 1995, down-country participants were asked to list words they associated with Northeastern Province. The list included: shifta, hunger, hostile people, war, no water, hot, no development, backward people, Somalia, Aideed, miraa, no food, dry place, no farms, camels, arrogant people, famine, guns, magendo (smuggling). This list is probably quite representative of views held by very many down-country Kenyans. It is probably also fair to say that an average Somali's list of words he associates with down-country Kenyans would also be very negative.

Given that most civil servants and security forces in Wajir District are down-country Kenyans, it is not hard to understand the distrust and suspicion that can exist between government administration and the civilian population.

During this time also, Kenya was heading for its first multi-party elections, held in December 1992. This election, with parliamentary districts based on the old colonial boundaries, led to the Ajuran clan "without a voice" in Parliament. This imbalance in perceived political power exacerbated problems already existing among the three major clans in Wajir District.

Thus, because of all the above-mentioned items, the situation in Wajir by 1992 could be described as quite unstable, with large populations of people destitute and on famine relief, a buildup of tension between the various clans, distrust between the government administration and the local population, and a huge influx of refugees and weapons from Ethiopia and Somalia.

#### DESCRIPTION OF CONFLICT IN WAJIR, 1992-1995

The conflict in Wajir during 1992-1995 included both inter-clan conflict and general lawlessness and banditry. While there is no doubt that some of the general lawlessness was caused by the large numbers of refugees, the major impetus to the violence was the local inter-clan conflict. Elders and chiefs of the three major clans directed their own local militias, consisting of youth from their own clans as well as hired mercenaries from Somalia and Ethiopia. At the height of the fighting in 1993-



1994, elders and chiefs were openly recruiting, arming, and transporting fighters in the trading centres and even within Wajir town.

The fighting actually began with incidents between the Ogaden and Degodia as the Ogaden perceived the Degodia to be encroaching on their land and political base. Violence erupted with clashes and livestock raids in Wajir West. The incidents continued without any intervention from the District Administration to stop them.

This was the period of great instability in both Ethiopia and Somalia, and the influx of refugees and weapons caused the situation to deteriorate further. The Degodia forged an alliance with the Borana people of Marsabit (now Moyale) District, ending a long-standing Ajuran-Boran alliance. This prevented the Ajuran from migrating west into Boran territory to escape the worst effects of the drought.

Following the election of a Degodia MP in Wajir West constituency in December 1992, the Ajuran and Ogaden allied themselves against the Degodia. Fierce fighting erupted in several areas around Wajir. Again, there was no government intervention to halt the violence. From June 1993, the situation worsened, with clashes in Wajir town and surrounding areas continuing through the next several months well into 1994.

The violence included stock theft, highway robbery and hijacking of vehicles, looting and arson of homesteads, looting and destruction of businesses, rape, injury, and murder. By late 1993, almost no part of Wajir District was safe, and insecurity brought the normal activities of the district to a halt. Most trading centres and Wajir town were greatly affected.



The results of the conflict were numerous. The loss of animals greatly worsened an economic and food situation already very bad because of the drought and refugees. During "normal" livestock raids, livestock are often simply redistributed among populations within a given area, without a great loss of animals in the area as a whole. However, in this case, huge numbers of animals left the district. The Ogaden and Ajuran formed alliances with clans in Somalia, and the animals they stole went directly into Somalia; the Degodia formed an alliance with the Borana, and the animals they raided went west and north into Ethiopia.

With roads unsafe, transport was severely affected. Busses stopped running, and the only road transport to and from the district was on lorries. Lorries were frequently attacked, robbed and hijacked, causing great increases in both the risk and the cost of transporting people and goods, including relief food, around the district.

Schools in many areas closed, and numerous down-country teachers, other civil servants and businesspeople left the district. After an attack on the UNICEF compound and the murder of a UN pilot in 1994 in Wajir town, UNICEF and other NGOs pulled out of the District, greatly affecting the drought relief work. Business and economic activity were brought to a near halt, and feelings of mistrust and fear pervaded all levels of society. People refused to buy or sell to anyone who was not of the same clan, and it became unsafe to venture into other clans' areas, whether in Wajir town, the trading centres or the pastoralist areas. The government was seen as unconcerned and unable to enforce security; therefore, traditional systems of clan-based justice resulted in escalating violence.

Because of the remoteness and the nature of the conflict, exact figures of the destruction caused by the violence are difficult to obtain, however, the best estimates available are as follows:

1. Approximately 1213 people were killed.
2. An estimated 2000 people were injured and/or raped.
3. The number of livestock stolen is estimated to be 1000 camels, 2500 cattle, 15,000 sheep and goats. The economic loss of these thefts is 45,000,000Ksh (US\$900,000). Again, most of these stolen animals were taken from the District, and were not simply redistributed among the District's population.
4. The number of homesteads that were raided, looted and burned is estimated to be around 1500, both in pastoralist areas and in trading centres and Wajir town.
5. Approximately 500 businesses were looted and/or destroyed.
6. Approximately 30 vehicles (including busses, lorries, and smaller vehicles) were robbed and/or hijacked. Five vehicles (two landrovers, two lorries and a trailer) were stolen and never recovered..
7. Forty-five primary schools and five secondary schools with 15,000 students were affected by the violence. Ten primary schools were closed completely, disrupting education for 2500 students. It is estimated that 50,000 children were traumatized by violence and/or displacement during that time.
8. Approximately 165 civil servants, including teachers, either left the district or refused to accept their posting there, severely affecting the provision of government services.



9. Approximately 1000 guns have been turned over to the government. It is estimated that 1000-1500 guns remain in the hands of the people of Wajir. With each gun costing approximately 10,000 - 15,000Ksh the amount of money that was used to purchase guns, and thus not available to the people for other purposes was 25 - 30 million Ksh (US\$500,000 - 600,000). This figure does not include either the cost of ammunition (30-70Ksh per bullet) or the cost of hiring the mercenary fighters from outside the District.

It must be remembered that these losses occurred among a population of 275,000 already impoverished people. Roughly one percent of the population of Kenya resides in Wajir District. Increasing the figures 100 fold would give a rough idea of the losses Kenya would have incurred had this scale of violence occurred nationwide. Kenya has roughly one tenth the population of the United States. Multiplying the effects of the violence in Wajir by 1000 would give an estimate of the disruption caused by violence if similar fighting had occurred within the US.

#### Community Efforts Towards Peacemaking

Throughout 1992 and 1993, the violence throughout Wajir District continued to escalate. People within Wajir now say "We were living in hell during that time. Wajir was like a mini-Mogadishu." Violence and insecurity were prevalent throughout the district, and shooting occurred even during the day. In the trading centres and Wajir town, it was unsafe for people to be outside after dark, or to visit areas not controlled by their own clan.



In June of 1993, fighting broke out between women traders at the Wajir market. The market stall owners refused to sell to members of other clans, saying that these products would be used by the other clans to kill their relatives. Since Somali women retain their own clans after marriage, this sometimes resulted in the refusal to sell to their husband's relatives. An appeal by local women to the district administration to intervene and restore security to the market was dismissed because the fighting was "a woman's problem."

Also in June 1993, a wedding was held in Wajir town which was attended by many of the educated, elite Somalis of all clans. A discussion ensued at the wedding about the fact that they could all attend this celebration together, but could not visit each other's homes because of clan problems. Two educated Somali women attending the wedding decided it was necessary to get involved with solving the problems of violence in Wajir themselves. The next day, they began meeting with the women of the market and discussing what was happening, what were the causes, and what were the results of the fighting. The two women were soon joined by an older, traditional woman leader, and the three of them met every afternoon with the market women throughout June and July. Slowly, they convinced the market women that the fighting at the market was not helping anyone, it was certainly not restoring peace to the area, and it was simply continuing the cycle of violence. The market women began to express the opinion that although it was the men who had started, and were continuing the violence, it was the women and children who suffered the most. It was out of this

group of market women that "Wajir Women for Peace" was born. The group gradually expanded to include other women in Wajir town and also women from the rural areas.

Women are extremely important in the process of peace and conflict in Somali society. When fighting is occurring, they sing "songs of war," taunting their men to continue the conflict. Likewise, their singing "songs of peace" can shame the men into stopping the fighting. The efforts of the "Women for Peace" group throughout Wajir District in bringing the violence to an end has been extremely important and should not be underestimated.

In August, the women approached other educated Somalis in Wajir town, both men and women, and convened a meeting to discuss the situation in Wajir and what could be done to restore peace. These educated professionals met and decided to form what came to be known as the "Wajir Peace Group" (WPG). As one of them later said, "it was the first time ever that we elite entered into the situation at all."

Representing all clans in the District, these professionals put severe guidelines on the group and on each of them individually. There was early discussion that if people wanted to be part of the group, they would have to commit themselves to continuing the peace work, "no matter what happens." "If my clan were to kill your relatives, would you still work with me for peace? If you can't say yes, don't join the group now." Some people left, but the core group that remained was -- and is -- extremely strongly committed to peace in Wajir District.

The first task the Wajir Peace Group (WPG) took upon itself was talking with the major clan elders, whom they saw as responsible for the violence, and who would also



be responsible for bringing peace. The members of the WPG each went to elders of their own clans and talked about their desire for the restoration of peace and security within the area. These talks met with limited success, but it did begin the process of debate between the traditional elders and the educated younger people.

The WPG then approached elders of the minority clans (the "corner tribes") who were not directly involved in the conflicts in Wajir. These elders were asked to act as mediators between the warring elders. After lengthy discussion, they agreed to do this, and convened a meeting of elders representing all the clans.

The first meetings were stormy and very difficult. Some elders resented "these children" (as they called the members of the WPG) questioning their actions and usurping their roles. A breakthrough finally came when a very old elder gave a lengthy speech saying "All these children want is peace. We have failed as elders because we have not protected our people. Our children want peace. Will we give them war?"

A series of meetings between the clan elders finally led to a several day meeting of elders in late 1993. The "Al Fatah Declaration," which declared guidelines for the return of peace to the District, was agreed to during this meeting. This meeting also led to the formation of an "Elders for Peace" group.

The WPG also began working with other groups within Wajir. The youth were seen as a major target, and a "Youth for Peace" group was soon started. The youth began to realize that although it was the old men that controlled the violence, it was the young men who did the fighting and died. The Youth for Peace group, which started in



Wajir town, soon began sending delegations throughout the district, talking to the youth about their roles in either promoting or stopping the violence.

Similarly, work was done with the business community in Wajir. Approached with the idea that "Peace is good for business," many business people joined the peace work, and from the beginning supported the work of the groups financially.

The work of the religious leaders was also very important. Sheiks interested in restoring peace to the District called upon sheiks from throughout Kenya to assist them, and several preaching tours of the entire district were undertaken to call the people back to the Koran's message of peace. These sheiks travelled to all the outlying parts of the district, sometimes in very dangerous conditions, to call their people back to peace and the rejection of violence.

Many members of the WPG were civil servants, and thus from the beginning there was concern to integrate the civilian groups and government to work together to restore peace and security. However, until April 1994, the district administration was weak and/or uninterested, and cooperation was difficult.

In April 1994, a new District Commissioner, a down-country Kenyan, was appointed to Wajir District. This DC has been extremely important in the work of restoring peace to Wajir. He has been actively involved in the entire peace process, and has made government resources available to restore security to the district. It is clear that without a strong, committed, interested administration, the peace process in Wajir would not have been possible. In addition, the DC clamped down hard on

corruption and bribery, and worked to ensure that the administration was responsive to the needs of the people.

One of the major problems during the war was the hijacking of vehicles. Lack of government response had led to clan-based response and escalating violence. Within a few weeks of the arrival of the new DC, a lorry was hijacked on the Ganyure road, and thirty-five people riding in the lorry were murdered. Immediately upon hearing about this, the DC personally went to the scene of the hijacking along with army and other security personnel. The security forces were able to track and arrest the perpetrators. These thugs were dealt with promptly under Kenyan law, and the elders from the various tribes agreed that no traditional revenge was necessary, since the perpetrators had been arrested and jailed. This was the first major indication that the government was taking its responsibility for security seriously, and that a return to security and a breaking of the cycle of escalating violence was possible.

A Rapid Response Team was set up to deal with problems occurring around the District. This Team consisted of members of the District Security Committee, elders, women, and youth. When problems started in a certain area, the Rapid Response Team would travel to the area, meet with various people involved, and usually convene a meeting of elders and others to work on resolving the problem.

One example of the success of the Rapid Response Team occurred in Batalu. In this case, two young men of different clans were fighting over a gun, and one killed the other. The murdered man's clan took revenge by killing some people of the murderer's clan, and the cycle of revenge continued. By the time the Rapid Response



Team arrived, seventeen people from both clans had been killed and the situation was escalating. A series of meetings with elders and others led to the conclusion that the first death was a murder, and the perpetrator should be dealt with by Kenyan law. However, the other deaths were attributable to traditional Somali practices, and would be dealt with by traditional Somali justice, which would involve the payments of large fines of camels. The District Administration agreed to this, the first murderer was arrested, and the other deaths were dealt with by traditional methods. The cycle of violence was stopped.

Workshops on peace were held for many groups within the district, including elders, women, youth, chiefs, administration, security forces, and religious leaders. There were also "Training of Trainers" workshops so that the workshops could spread to more areas of the district.

All the workshops focused on ways of restoring peace and security to the District. The chiefs were seen as vital to the process of continuing the violence or of restoring peace. Chiefs in Kenya have very great powers, and often receive little training of their roles and responsibilities. The workshops on chiefs focused on training on these roles as defined by the Chiefs' Act, and introduced to the chiefs their important role in providing security for their people.

Also vital were the training sessions held for the District Security Forces, especially the Army and the Police. Most members of the security forces are down-country Kenyans, with deep prejudices and suspicions about Somali people. Training sessions were held which explained Somali culture and ways of interacting with Somali



people. Members of the security forces were then asked to provide training to Somali people on "how to interact with the police and the army." The training sessions for the security forces, as well as for the civilian population, were extremely important in building trust between the people and the government.

One important part of this trust building was the Army Commander's commitment to stop the looting, rape, and other abuses by army personnel when they were out on missions. His success at stopping these actions, as well as curtailing public intoxication by his soldiers, was extremely helpful in improving relations between the people and the army.

A program for the return of guns was initiated. Chiefs were given the responsibility of collecting weapons from their locations. An amnesty was granted to those people returning weapons to the government. As peace and security slowly returned to various parts of the district, guns and other weapons were turned in to the government. To date, over 1000 guns have been turned in to the government; it is estimated that 1,000-1500 guns remain in the district, "but most are buried in the sand."

A number of extremely innovative methods were used to cement steps taken to ensure peace. For example, in October 1993, the Degodia and the Ogaden reached an important agreement over the return of stolen livestock. This agreement was one of the first activities of the Elders for Peace group. A ceremony was held in which stolen camels were returned to the Ogaden and stolen cattle to the Degodia. An attempt to get this agreement reported in the Kenya media was unsuccessful. The WPG called

the BBC Somali Service in London. The BBC interviewed the chairman and secretary of the Elders for Peace group who had negotiated the agreement. This interview was broadcast by the Somali Service. The BBC Somali Service is very widely listened to all over Northeastern Kenya, and hearing their own elders talk of the peace agreement was very important in convincing the people to respect this agreement.

By late 1994 it became evident to the members of the Wajir Peace Group that some formalization and integration of the various types of peace work going on in the District was necessary. There was concern that the individual peace groups would be unable to continue effectively without some coordination of efforts. In addition, leaders of the peace groups wanted to assure that the peace efforts had some formalized organisation within the District, so that peace work could continue even if the Administration changed to one that was indifferent or even hostile to the work of the peace groups.

A number of options were explored for this formalization. One option that was seriously considered was registering as an NGO. This option was eventually rejected because of concerns that it might become difficult for government departments to be work within an NGO structure. Similarly, the option of formalizing the peace groups as a direct structure in one of the government departments was rejected because of the difficulty NGOs and citizen's groups would have being a full part of the process.

The one structure within District administration in Kenya that brings together government, NGOs and citizen groups is the District Development Committee, which coordinates development activities within each District. It had become evident to the



leaders of the peace groups that peace is a vital and necessary part of development, and the decision was eventually made to unite the peace groups as a subcommittee of the District Development Committee. This was done in May 1995, with all peace groups represented under a united group now known as the "Wajir Peace and Development Committee" (WP&DC). The chair of the WP&DC is the District Commissioner; members include the heads of all government departments, representatives of the various peace groups, religious leaders (both Muslim and Christian), NGO representatives, and District Officers and Chiefs. The meetings of the WP&DC were closed at first, but are now open for any citizen of the District to attend.

An important activity of the WP&DC has been the sponsorship of two district-wide peace festivals, the first in July 1995; the second in June, 1996. The first peace festival was a one-day event in Wajir town, with the theme "Peace is a Collective Responsibility." It included presentations by schools, community groups, and peace groups. These presentations consisted of songs, dramas, poems, etc. about peace and peacemaking. There were of course speeches by local dignitaries. In addition, a Peace Prize was given to the chief who had done the most to promote peace in his location. The prize consisted of a large trophy and 10,000/= for use by the locational peace committee to continue their efforts towards restoring peace. The winning chief was chosen by a committee of elders representing all clans in the District. The peace prize was such an honour that it was necessary to hold an unplanned workshop for



chiefs the following day to instruct them in what they needed to do during the following year in order to win the prize at a subsequent peace festival.

The second peace festival was expanded to an entire week of activities in each of the twelve divisions of Wajir District. Local activities and presentations were done in each division. Members of the WP&DC spent the week in each of the divisions to provide assistance and support to the division festivals. The theme of the 1996 Peace Festival was "Amani ni maziwa; amani ni maendeleo; amani ni maisha" (peace is milk; peace is development; peace is life).

Following the Divisional Peace Week, a one day festival was held in Wajir town. The winners from each division came to the town to perform their winning presentations. Many presentations focused on the relationship between peace, food, development, and life, with school children giving quite dramatic renditions of the suffering caused by war, and the happiness that comes from peace.

Certificates were presented to the performing groups. Certificates were also presented to the chief or sub-chief in each division who had done the most to promote peace, and again, a trophy and cash prize was presented to the best chief in the district. Again, the choices were made by a committee of elders. The criteria for selecting the chiefs for the peace prizes were that the chief needed to have stopped livestock theft in his location; the chief needed to resolve problems quickly when they occurred; and the chief needed to have had guns turned in to him by the people of the location.

One very important factor in the peace festivals is that all money for the festivals was raised locally. In 1996, this amount was around 250,000Ksh (\$4600US). It is the belief of the WP&DC that if peace is to be sustained in Wajir District, it must be owned by the people of Wajir; a too-heavy reliance on outside money will doom the peace efforts of the community groups.

Local contributions to the peace effort have been extremely important from the very beginning of the peace effort. The activities mentioned above have occurred with remarkably small amounts of money, and again underline the unique cooperation between the community and the government in working at the restoration of peace and security. Government departments, in the face of inadequate funding, supplies, and personnel, have contributed fuel, personnel, vehicles, and other items for the work of the peace groups. The army and police have often supplied fuel, logistical assistance, vehicles and personnel to help with the work of the groups. Business people have contributed both cash and materials for assistance, and individuals within the community have also contributed. In the early days of the Wajir Peace Group, each member gave an individual contribution of 1000/=, and contributed 200/= monthly to keep the group going. In addition, the WPG rented and furnished an office for the use of the Elders for Peace group. This commitment by the local community to the work or peace seems one of the most hopeful signs of the continuing success of the peace efforts.

However, the role of NGOs and donors has also been important in the work of the peace groups in Wajir District. Special mention should be made of Oxfam (UK and



Ireland), which from the beginning has been intimately involved in the work of the peace groups. In addition to providing funding for various activities, Oxfam has been very generous in the use of their vehicles, personnel, and logistics (fax, photocopying, etc.) for the work of the peace groups. Other funding has been provided by Quaker Peace and Service and Mennonite Central Committee. Donors have provided approximately 50% of the funds used by the peace groups, with the other 50% coming from local sources.

The international community has also had some involvement. UNICEF provided assistance before its pull-out from the District in mid-1994. Currently World Bank funded projects are provided badly needed infrastructure to the district with the construction of roads and a commercial airport to assist in the export of livestock and other products (the current Wajir airport is a military base, and its commercial use is very limited).

## THE FRUITS OF PEACE

The people of Wajir are now enjoying some of positive effects of the cessation of violence and the restoration of peace and security within the District. Individual investment is increasing, and many new shops and services are opening within the District. A very large new commercial building is currently under construction in Wajir town.

Local fundraising is now possible with the return of peace. Since 1994, local citizens have contributed 12,000,000KSH (US\$225,000) to development within Wajir,



including the construction of three secondary schools, bursaries for students going to higher education, the support of sports clubs, and the construction of mosques.

In June 1996, elders and chiefs working for peace in the Rift Valley Province visited Wajir to attend a workshop led by Wajir's elders and chiefs on the peace process in Wajir. The visitors were very surprised and impressed by the work that had been done by the Wajir groups, and the sharing of information was very valuable for both groups.

In August 1996, a group of 19 American university students visited Wajir District for two weeks as part of a semester foreign study programme in Kenya. The students travelled through several areas of the District, stayed with nomadic families, viewed development work, learned from sheiks about Islam and generally experienced life in Wajir. They travelled to and from Wajir by road. This was only possible because of the return of peace and security to the District. Two years ago, neither the District Commissioner, the peace groups, nor the American university would have approved such a visit because of the insecurity within the District at that time.

Busses are now operating within Wajir, making travel possible again for Wajir's citizens. Scheduled bus service is now available from Wajir to Mandera, Moyale, and Garissa.

The confidence of NGOs and donors to invest in Wajir District is returning. Oxfam (UK and Ireland) has committed 80,000,000KSH (US\$1,500,000) to development assistance in the District for the period 1994-1997. This does not include relief assistance also being provided by Oxfam. Mennonite Central Comittee and

Quaker Peace and Service are continuing their assistance to the WP&DC. The World Bank Arid Lands Programme is working in pastoralist development and in providing infrastructure, including a new road. The new commercial airport is being funded by the Government of Kenya.

#### ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN WAJIR

The peacemaking efforts of the community and government groups in Wajir grew out of desperation at a situation that was causing untold hardships to the local people. There was not beforehand an articulation of theories of conflict. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the work of the various peace groups in Wajir based on current conflict and conflict resolution theory. However, some values and assumptions with which the peace groups operated can be identified.

The Peace Groups have operated with the assumptions that the conflict in Wajir District is multi-faceted. The conflict stemmed from historical contexts, including the colonial legacy, previous inter-clan conflicts, the conflict between traditions and the modern state, conflicts in neighbouring countries, chronic underdevelopment and marginalization, national and local leadership crises, and environmental factors.

The Peace groups have also operated on the assumption that although there are significant national and international components to the violence in Wajir, the primary cause of the conflict was locally-generated, as inter-clan problems within the District.

Another assumption has been that there were many players/interest groups within the District who were responsible for starting, escalating, and generating the



violence for their own ends. Traditional Somali systems of justice, while able under the best of circumstances to control and regulate disputes, can also be used to escalate individual disputes to clan levels very quickly.

A final assumption made by the peace groups is that the access to modern weapons greatly exacerbates problems of violence within a traditional society like Northeastern Kenya.

Similarly, there has never been a clear articulation of the peacemaking process. Most of what has been accomplished has been done by people with "a heart for peace," rather than training in conflict resolution. Only one person has received extensive training in peacemaking, at a three-month program at Selly Oaks College in the UK on "Responding to Conflict." Therefore, as with the theories of the conflict itself, the values and assumptions on which the peacemaking efforts were carried out can only be seen in hindsight.

The various peace groups in Wajir have operated on the assumption that everyone has a stake in peace; therefore, all groups must be included in working towards peace. Peace cannot be restored without involvement from all significant sectors of society, both civil and government. All clans must be involved in the bringing about of peace, as well as all sections of the society, including elders, women, youth, business people, religious leaders, civil servants and security personnel.

The peace efforts in Wajir District have recognized that Kenyan Constitutional Law and traditional Somali systems of justice are both legitimate ways of solving conflicts within the Somali community. It is possible to either use the systems against



each other or in support of each other. The peace groups, together with the District Administration, have struggled to find the proper balance between the two quite different systems of administering justice and restoring peace and security.

The peace groups recognized that peace efforts must be legitimized within existing community and government structures. Peace groups could not remain free-floating entities, but needed to be attached to something which afforded them legitimacy. Thus, the peace groups formalized themselves under the District Development Committee.

The peace groups have operated under the assumption that peace is the responsibility of local communities. It is the leaders (chiefs and elders) and the citizens of each location which will bring peace or war to their location. Going along with this is the assumption that outside organizations can assist, but not direct, the peace process. The main efforts must come from the local population.

The peace groups have assumed that when people feel secure, they will turn in their illegal weapons to the government. In Wajir, guns were often not owned by individuals, but by clans. As peace returned to various areas, people came to feel that the dangers of retaining the guns outweighed their worth, and weapons were turned in in great numbers.

The peace groups have assumed that peace is important enough to pay for locally. While there has been some assistance with outside funds, the leaders of the peace movement in Wajir have been very strong in their belief that major funding must

for peace work must come from the local community. Too strong a reliance on outside funds will lead to the collapse of the peace efforts by the local people.

The Wajir Peace and Development Committee have made the celebration of peace an important part of their work. They have operated on the principle that peace festivals, songs, dramas, and other ways of celebrating their success are vital parts of maintaining the peace.

Similarly, the Peace Groups have realized that recognizing peace workers is important. This is seen in the awarding of chiefs' prizes at the Festivals, as well as communication to the National Government about government employees who have done significant work for peace (one Kenya Army major was promoted because of letters of commendation from the Wajir community for his work on peace during his time in Wajir).

The peace groups have come to recognize that development cannot occur without peace, and that peace cannot be sustained without development. Now that there is a cessation of violence within Wajir District, there is greater effort being placed on development that will allow the peace.

Finally, the Peace groups have assumed that the fruits of peace should be recognized. Some of these, as discussed above, include the revitalization of economic activity within the District, the hosting of a workshop for chiefs and elders from the Rift Valley, the two-week visit by American university students in late 1996, and the return of public transport to the District.



## CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Are the institutions in Wajir District capable of continuing the peace process that has accomplished so much in the last three years? What is the institutional capacity in Wajir at this point? These questions are not easy to answer, but again, trends and insights can be offered.

The District government has shown that it is capable of maintaining peace and enforcing security within the District. However, the capacity to continue this depends, in very large part, on a strong, committed District Commissioner. A change of District Administration at this time could potentially harm peace efforts.

Intersectoral government bodies have now been set up, which provides stability for both peace and development work. One of these intersectoral bodies is the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, operating under the District Development Committee. Another very important intersectoral committee is the Pastoralist Steering Committee, which directs development activities throughout the District. Like the WP&DC, the Pastoralist Steering Committee consists of representatives from various government departments and NGOs.

The capacity of the community groups seems more than sufficient for the tasks ahead. The community groups have been blessed with several strong, committed, charismatic leaders who provide vital focus, energy, and impetus to the peace groups. The groups have a high level of analytical skills, resourcefulness, and innovation. There is also a sense of optimism within the peace groups and justifiable pride in what they have been able to accomplish thus far.

Wajir seems to be developing a "critical mass" of peacemakers that increases the probability of peace being maintained. The commitment of many local people to the peace process, including the willingness to pay for peace, are very positive signs. At the same time, the groups are hampered by a lack of funds, and a lack of sophistication in knowing how to obtain necessary funds while also maintaining their independence and avoiding being overwhelmed by donors.

NGOs and donors have the capacity to either assist the process, or to destroy the process by overpowering the local efforts. NGOs and donors can assist by supporting the process, not directing it. Helpful assistance by NGOs/donors will require great understanding and restraint.

## EVALUATION AND TRENDS

"The fire is out but the fuel is still there." Leaders of the peace groups have come to understand that while the violence has been stopped, the root causes of the war of 1992-1995 have not been adequately addressed. The misuse of the clan structure, leadership questions, environmental/drought/resource issues, underdevelopment, lack of economic opportunities especially for the youth, national and international issues all continue to influence Wajir's future. Until these problems are sufficiently understood and dealt with, the spectre of future violence remains hanging over Wajir District.

The Wajir Peace and Development Committee is currently focusing on ways to deal with these issues. Work is being done on instituting research to pinpoint entry



points to work on resolving some of these root causes of the conflict of Wajir District. How can the positive aspects of the clan system be strengthened and celebrated while the volatility of the negative aspects can be reduced? What kind of economic activities can bring employment to the youth?

The WP&DC is concerned also not to re-ignite the fires while searching for answers. There is a commitment to go very slowly and carefully in the process of this research. At this point, the WP&DC is exploring the possibility of a combination of local and outside research assistance to help guide the future work of the peace groups.

In addition, the WP&DC is searching for an institutional base to link their grassroots efforts to the national level. They feel their strong grassroots base now needs support at higher levels to continue and expand their efforts. They are also forging links regionally, with elders in both Somalia and Ethiopia. Already, negotiations between Wajir elders and elders within Somalia have led to the successful return of stolen livestock and vehicles.

As one aspect of their commitment to development, and their realization that peace is not sustainable without development, the WP&DC is working on rehabilitating several youth polytechnics in the District to address the issues of unemployment. The Catholic Church is taking the lead in this effort. Other efforts focusing on development and peace are also being initiated by the WP&DC.

As of this writing, Wajir District is again facing a severe drought, with relief food again being provided to many thousands of people, particularly in the south of the District. With drought, stresses increase, along with the possibility of violence. That

the district has remained peaceful thus far can be in large part attributed to the hard and diligent effort of many of Wajir's citizens.

## SUMMARY

There are far too few success stories in Africa's search for peace. The Wajir experience should serve as an example to other community groups within Kenya and around Africa that peace is possible, and that citizens' groups, working together with the local government, can bring about peace instead of violence. It is our hope that the Wajir peace story can be shared, discussed, and replicated in many communities throughout the world.



## THE AUTHORS

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