Maskax-wadaag Youth Campaign "Think and Share"
Axmed, Georgetown University 2021
Summer 2019 Somaliland
Note: Besides Qabyaalad-diid, my community partner, I will also work with 3 other college students as part of the implementation team. They are Abdirahman Liiban, junior at American University in Beirut, Saeed Abokor, current freshman at Tufts University, and Mohamed Suggulle, a third year student at Earth University in Costa-rica. They will be part of the 8 people volunteers.

Background: Since the central government of Somalia collapsed in 1991, the country was in a mayhem situation of shifting tales- civil war, famine, terrorism, piracy, destruction and despair. What ultimately led to the collapse of the central authority was a political exploitation of deadly tribal identities that form the very fabric of the Somali social structure. And since then, it is exactly these tribal identities, whose exclusive nature puts all the Somali communities at odds, that prevented and blocked every attempt to restore peace. Today, the competing forces of tribal identities are prepared to uproot and undermine the hard achieved stability of Somaliland—an autonomous state in northern Somalia since 1991 and one of the few, if not the only, remaining "oasis of stability" in the region.

Not long ago, a tribal contention over a grazing land translated into a conflict that is still simmering today. In September 2018, another armed tribal conflict within the same proximity has left dozens dead and many displaced. Politics exacerbates the situation as the political leaders often instrumentalize these tribal identities for their own agendas, specially during the election times. Somaliland's last presidential election in 2017 was particularly worrying, as tribal politics became the main driving force in the election results. Somaliland could easily take the doomed path of inter-clan conflicts if inclusive measures are not taken quickly.

Our Idea: Maskax-wadaag project, Somali for " *Think and Share*", will aim to address the contemporary pervasive destructive nature of clan identities through two steps in Somaliland: 1. The first step of the project consists of digital storytelling, where people will

share their experiences with tribal conflicts. Sharing experiences will help others to learn, and reflect upon their narratives about tribal identities. Digital storytelling creates an opportunity for many people to share their first hand stories, grievances and can plant a seed of empathy in hearts of their community. Digital storytelling can, therefore, contribute to re-sewing the social fabric that the clan conflicts unraveled. 2. The project will culminate in multiple two-day youth discussion panels that would create a dialogue that would better inform the youth on strategies to confront the deadly tribal division and find a common ground. These two-day panel discussions will be held in two cities in Somaliland—Hargeisa, the capital city, and Burco. It will consist of youth-led discussions, debates, talks and workshops to address the issues of tribalism and clan identities. Prominent societal leaders, poets, social and peace activists will be invited to these panels to contribute to the discussion. Students from universities in Hargeisa and Burco will participate in these discussions and workshops with the aim of taking what they have learnt from the panels back to their respective universities.

The long term goal of our project, therefore, is to first create a medium for discussing the recent clan conflicts and the role of the politicized tribal identities in these conflicts. The digital storytelling twinned with youth discussion panels won't eliminate the problem overnight. However, it will inform, educate, connect society, seed new ideas, and, we hope, ultimately lead to constructive and collective actions. To ensure the long term success and the sustainability of the project, we will train and equip some diligent members of Qabyaalad-diid (our community partner organization) to continue the digital storytelling and we will continue to coordinate that work remotely. By continuously recording and sharing stories and ideas that denounce any form of destructive social divide through social media, our message will occupy the public sphere and hopefully, will make our Somaliland community realize its vast commonality and the need for harmonious coexistence regardless of its minor genealogical differences.