

**Maskax-wadaag Youth Campaign “Think and Share”**  
**Axmed, Georgetown University 2021**  
**Summer 2019 Somaliland**

Our project aims to build a medium of discussion around the inter-tribal violence and its consequences on the stability and the coexistence of the Somali society. Through digital storytelling, panel discussions, and publishing the experiences of prominent Somali leaders with tribal violence on our Facebook page, we were able to connect, inspire, and educate the public about how the political exploitation of tribal identities could threaten the hard achieved stability of Somaliland—an oasis of peace in a volatile region.

We did not obtain any additional funds; however, we were able to convince some of the contractors like the car renters and the discussion hall owners that this was a nonprofit voluntary initiative. Some responded to our appeal while others declined. Our community partners also cooperated to connect us to some people who could guide us or offer in-kind support.

The project leaders were four Somali students who grew up in Somaliland but attained a rare opportunity to study abroad. By studying at world class universities in Qatar, Lebanon, the USA, and Costa Rica, we were reminded of what like-minded communities can achieve. At the same time, we were able to reflect on the calamities at home (in both Somalia and Somaliland), whether civil war, tribal conflict, famine, and lack of central government, and on what we can do in the meantime. Originally, we would use Skype to discuss these issues biweekly, debating what kind of contribution we can make. When the Davis project opportunity presented itself in my first year at Georgetown, we decided, after many hours of consideration, to use this opportunity to create a medium of about tribal violence by convincing people to share publicly about their experiences with tribal violence. We also sought help from my academic advisor, Dean Schiwietz, and Amanda Munroe, CSJ’s Associate Director. It was the desire and the ambition of making a small difference in our community that nurtured and produced the building blocks of our project.

Tribal politics, we came to understand, are rooted in how Somali people in general identify themselves. Everyone traces their family name to a certain tribe. Using tribe as an identity is not the problem. The problem arises when the community groups and divides itself based on tribal identity to fight for political, economic or social gain, especially in a zero-sum game context. The scarcity of resources and the lack of equitable social mechanisms that ensure equal share of the pie also exacerbate these volatile identities.

We chose Hargeisa, the capital city, and Buroa, the second most populated city, to execute our project because almost half of the population of Somaliland lives in these two cities. Whatever happens in Hargeisa and Buroa has direct spillover to the whole country. We wanted to reach as many people as we could, and hope that initiating the project there will help us to reach many people.

I lived in Hargeisa for 15 years and working in a familiar setting made things easier. However, it was my first time undertaking such a project and that had its own experience. The Project was more challenging than the setting.

Due to the volatile nature of Somalia, the Georgetown Travel Committee did not grant us travel approval -- required to receive the funding, even though my friends and I were technically executing the project from our homes, and not “traveling.” After receiving two rejections from the travel committee, we thought that our project was not going to work out. We tried our best to explain that Somaliland is relatively safe and that conducting this project would pose minimal risks to the project participants (Somali natives). Finally, after some degree of advocacy, Georgetown’s Provost approved the project, so that we could receive funding and execute the project. However, the time spent waiting on approvals

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delayed our project. Then, the necessity of an international fund transfer meant that our project was shortened from an intended length of two months to about a month.

Our biggest challenge on site was explaining and convincing the digital recording participants to share their stories without accusing or pointing fingers at anyone. Tribal politics is a very sensitive topic and sometimes, if personal stories are not composed in a specific way, it could have detrimental consequences to our project. What is more is that those exact stories could be used to divide the society that we are trying to bridge.

Another challenge was inviting those who have been affected by the conflicts to participate. A lot of people are very skeptical about sharing their stories. Understandably, they always asked about what we going to do with their stories and who we going to share them with. Due to the nature of conflict, a lot of people prefer to be silent about their daily struggle.

It is contrary to common sense when you hear that one of the most homogeneous people on earth, namely the Somalis, have a hard time coexisting with each other peacefully. And the main reason for this is, despite all of our commonalities and shared history, there is not a single thing that we all cherish to or commit to protect. The lack of common goals and ideas is what perpetuates the civil wars and the tribal conflict that have come to characterize the Somalis. In this vein, peace for us is having a shared idea, goal, or spirit that everyone cares to protect no matter what. When all members of the community are committed to one thing as a whole, then peace will prevail. As long as that common tread is missing, and everyone is thinking in terms of a zero-sum game, the community will surely disintegrate.

Our aim was to create a large awareness about the effects that tribalism has on the stability and the peace of the country. Through our discussions and forums, we have focused on improving Somali youth's understanding of different angles that tribalism can affect and how it creates turmoil in the country. This short summer project did not eliminate the problem. Rather, it significantly contributed to the peacebuilding efforts that have been made, and strengthened people's understanding of peace. Through digital storytelling and panel discussions, we highlighted the importance of embracing our minor differences and working towards a common goal. Our project established a safe and comfortable environment for the youth to discuss, debate and engage in sensitive dialogues that they were not comfortable discussing prior to this project. In the long run, our project will contribute to changing people's perspective in tribal issues. With continued efforts and awareness campaigns, we are expecting to create a new narrative among the Somali youth, one that is based on engaging in debates and conversations in pursuit of building a cohesive community. This will open opportunities for the youth to engage in leadership and to become societal leaders. In regions where tribal conflicts occur, most of the people fighting are youth. Enhancing the youth's understanding of peace and showcasing the long lasting results of tribal conflicts will greatly help the youth to change their perspective on the issue. In the future, through our efforts combined with all of the peacebuilding efforts in the country, youth will understand the importance of peace. This will mean less opportunity tribal leaders to exploit young people in creating conflicts and disturbing the peace in the country.

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