

The absence of Digital Peacebuilding Component in Somalia's Peacebuilding Efforts

Background

Somalia experienced a prolonged period of conflict following the collapse of its central government in early 1991. In 2000, the Transitional National Government (TNG) was established. In 2012, Somalia ended its transitional period, marking an important step in rebuilding its government and working towards development, peace and reconciliation. Somalia is still a post-conflict nation, where peacebuilding is a key pillar for state and nation-building. In this digital age, technology plays a critical role in transforming social interactions, enhancing governance, and driving inclusive economic development. Moreover, ICT is increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for peacebuilding and strengthening social cohesion. In 2019, the National ICT Policy and Strategy 2029-2024 was developed. The policy didn't explicitly mention the use of ICTs for peace and peacebuilding. The policy stipulation is fundamental to leveraging country's digital landscape for peacebuilding.

The local population's growing culture of digital adoption

Somalis culture of digital adoption has been increasingly growing. The mobile ownership among people aged 15 and above indicates that more than 85% own mobile phones while 81% of mobile owners conduct their businesses transactions via digital solutions¹. Moreover, Somalia is a cash-depleted country and business across various sectors rely heavily on digital payment solutions for salary payments, utility bill payments and conducting almost every transaction². This symbolize the local population's growing culture of digital adoption. Digital payments coupled with people's growing adoption to digital technologies is reshaping the economic landscape.

The Negative Impact of Digital Technologies on Society

Digital technologies have been increasingly misused in Somalia, where everyone exercises extensive freedom to share their unfiltered thoughts, sometimes in an unscrupulous way. Somalia has experienced waves of social

media negative narratives, which sometimes ignite polarization and unfounded animosities among the communities. The polarizations can sometimes escalate into wars. Somalis growing usage of digital technologies provides enormous opportunities for these narratives to spread immediately. Misinformation is spread through these platforms, which sometimes leads to conflict and mistrust among communities. These platforms are also exploited to advance sinister agendas aimed at weakening peace, escalating conflicts from a latent stage to a fully grown stage, and utilizing people's power and influence in the wrong ways. In the recent conflict between two communities in the Mudug region, central Somalia, digital technologies were used to exacerbate the conflict by circulating false news and misinformation, causing the conflict to worsen day after day. There are other incidents where digital technologies were used as tools to fuel conflict³.

Telecom Infrastructure

The telecommunications sector has seen rapid growth over recent years. The sector plays a vital role in shaping the country's economy. The sector's growth has helped improve connectivity for urban and rural communities, and this has increased internet penetration and

mobile subscriptions, making local communities digitally active. The growth of telecommunications infrastructure has enabled the majority of local communities to participate in online activities, in both positive and negative ways⁴. The national reconciliation framework doesn't consider utilizing digital technologies as a peacebuilding tool, due to this, the national ICT policy and strategy's lack of provisions stipulating the use of ICTs for peacebuilding⁵.

Recommendations

- Governmental and non-governmental organizations should leverage the country's digital landscape as a tool for peacebuilding and the promotion of social cohesion. Using digital technologies as a tool will add significant strength to peacebuilding efforts.
- Integrate a digital peacebuilding component into the national ICT policy, this should include provisions that explicitly mention using ICTs for peacebuilding. The policy provisions will influence the use of ICTs for promoting peace and peacebuilding.. The lack of such provisions represents a significant policy gap, keeping the country's

digital landscape out of
peacebuilding practices.

- The government and local organizations working on peace-related work should consider digital technologies as an effective tool for peacebuilding. With the relatively robust telecommunications infrastructure, improved connectivity, and increased digital activity, stakeholders should see the digital landscape as a tool that can boost digital peacebuilding.

Endnote

1. Somalia Integrated Household Budget Survey (SIHBS) 2023 (nbs.gov.so)
2. State of the Economy Report 2024 (nec.gov.so)
3. Tribal fighting returns to Mudug 2024 (somalidispach.com)
4. Information communication and technology, 2024 (trade.gov)
5. National reconciliation framework (moifar.gov.so)

About the Author

Said Ahmed Mumin is a researcher, policy analyst, digital transformation enthusiast, and peacebuilder. He works for the Somali government. He studied at universities in Somalia and Uganda, and holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration and a Diploma in Business Administration from universities in Somalia. Mumin also holds a Post-Graduate Diploma in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation from Makerere University in Uganda. Additionally, he was trained and certified in leadership by the Julius Nyerere Leadership Centre in Uganda, obtained a certificate in mediation and conflict transformation from Amani Communities in Kenya, and received training in positive peace at the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP).