



# LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR PEACE PROJECT

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## Case Study

### **Save the Children Federation (USA) in Lower Shabelle (Somalia)**

**1992-95**

*This case study is one of a series of case studies developed as part of the Local Capacities for Peace Project, directed by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.*

*The Project seeks to identify the ways in which international humanitarian and/or development assistance given in conflict settings may be provided so that, rather than exacerbating and worsening the conflict, it helps local people to disengage and to establish alternative systems for dealing with the problems which underlie the conflict.*

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September 1995

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*Introduction*

In normal times the Lower Shabelle valley is one of the most productive agricultural areas of Somalia, yielding both food (principally maize) and cash crops (bananas, other fruits and vegetables, and sesame). The local population is, broadly speaking, able to meet its subsistence needs in all but the worst years and to produce significant surpluses for the markets in Mogadishu and (particularly for commercially-produced bananas) abroad. While there are many land-poor farmers in the area, and while there has, for centuries, been a pattern of exploitation of many of them, most families are able to subsist on a combination of small fields of their own, of sharecropping, and of seasonal employment on the banana estates. Compared to much of the rest of the Horn of Africa, the Lower Shabelle is a region of relative prosperity.

Yet in January-April 1992 the people of this area were starving. The irrigation system on which most crop production in the Lower Shabelle depends had been decaying for some time and was now in collapse. Production on the large banana plantations had almost completely ceased, eliminating the wage labor opportunities that were a vital part of the yearly economic cycle for many. Several waves of warfare had swept through, bringing destruction and pillage and unleashing an epidemic of banditry that wiped out food reserves and such harvests as had, despite the odds, been produced. Much domestic livestock had been looted or had died off. Families were surviving on traditional famine foods (grasses and berries) and on unripe bananas. Death from starvation was a daily fact of life among both children and adults, in the towns and in the countryside, and dysentery and such preventable diseases as measles were raging out of control.

Save the Children Federation (U.S.A.)<sup>1</sup> had been present in Lower Shabelle since 1982, conducting a program of integrated community-development activities that had included agricultural extension, public health, and education, based in the important market town of Qorioley. From early 1991 the worsening security situation had led to the suspension of these programs; as security conditions began improving (relatively speaking) in mid-1992, Save the Children re-established contact with its former staff and with communities in Qorioley and Kurtunwaary districts. At these communities' request, it devised and implemented a program to assist them in rehabilitating irrigation infrastructure and in establishing a network of health posts and of community-based health activities. This program plan was soon extended to surrounding districts as well. Encouragement and financial support for these initiatives were provided by the USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, by United Nations Development Program, by UNICEF, by Save the Children Fund (Australia), and by the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB).

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<sup>1</sup> All references to "Save the Children" in this paper are to the Save the Children Federation (U.S.A.) unless otherwise qualified. The Federation is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, as are, for example, the Save the Children Fund (UK), Redd Barna (Norway) and Rädde Barnen (Sweden) and Save the Children Fund (Australia).

This program was broadly successful: reliance on relief commodities had ended with the *deyr* harvest of 1993, and by the time the program was closed in February 1995, agricultural production had returned to a semblance of normal. By then, long-overdue renovations of the irrigation infrastructure had been completed, and virtually every community in Qorioley and Kurtunwaary districts, as well as many in the districts of Shalambod, Merka and Jenaale had access to functioning irrigation canals, enabling them to produce both food and cash crops. In that period, opportunities for tens of thousands of mandays of paid labor had been made available, injecting significant cash resources into the communities. During the same period, a network of clinics and health posts was established, vaccination of under-5 children was exceeding pre-war levels, a major cholera outbreak had been controlled, clinics and health posts were functioning. Flood embankments were constructed in vulnerable areas, mitigating the worst effects of seasonal flooding along the Shabelle, which reached exceptional levels in 1993-94, and a series of reservoirs had been built to meet the dry-season needs of herds and thus to mitigate pastoralist pressures on cultivated lands.

These activities were undertaken during two years of almost constant tension and often of open conflict, albeit of variable intensity.<sup>2</sup> While, as an agricultural area, control of Lower Shabelle was perhaps not central to the broader strategic concerns of Somalia's powerful pastoralist clans and subclans, which remain locked in a chronic, multipolar civil war that continues unresolved as of this writing, it is of vital economic importance to the country as a whole, and its position, laying athwart the main Mogadishu-Kismaayo highway, guarantees that it will become a battlefield in any conflict. Thus, while most of the agricultural communities of Lower Shabelle have been only marginal stakeholders in the civil war, their homeland has been much fought over, and, alongside the organized struggle between the various subclan-based militias, banditry has been a constant plague, here as elsewhere, since 1991. Yet these communities succeeded in organizing themselves to manage a huge public-works project over a two-year period (and are continuing to manage it as of this writing), large amounts of cash for public-works wages were transported and distributed without mishap, and most project objectives were achieved on or before deadlines. It is the purpose of this paper to discuss how and why these community responses occurred, how the agricultural program was conceived and implemented, how the various actors -- the communities, Save the Children's staff, and local stakeholders, including the various "local authorities" (as well, for part of the time, as the international community's civilian and military representatives) -- interacted in this highly-charged environment, how and why certain key decisions were made and what effect they had (or seem in hindsight to have had...) on the overall well-being of the region.

While the agricultural revitalization and primary-health projects began with great enthusiasm in late 1992 and continued with only sporadic security-related interruptions into 1995, developments led Save the Children's staff to conclude in late 1994 that there were serious indications that the integrity of its efforts was likely to come under threat. It was a central assumption that

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<sup>2</sup> There have been a number of surveys of the origins of this prolonged crisis, of its various phases, and of the effectiveness or otherwise of the attempts at intervention by the international community. A useful broad overview is *Hope Restored? Humanitarian Aid in Somalia, 1990-94* (Washington: Refugee Policy Group, November 1994); a complementary perspective is provided by *Somalia Faces the Future: Human Rights in a Fragmented Society* (New York: Human Rights Watch/Africa, April 1995).

the agency, working through an extraordinarily committed and capable national staff, would “work smart” -- that it would work with and through communities in Lower Shabelle as long as it was clear that these communities were willing to make a major effort to put aside differences between themselves, protect the program from the kind of wholesale extortion that characterized many international efforts in Somalia at the time, and work in such a way that the project’s benefits were delivered with genuine equity to all groups in the area. That certain compromises and accommodations would have to be made along the way was a given that only the dangerously naïve would have disregarded; the important thing was that these had to be seen clearly for what they were, and had to be kept within manageable limits. It had always been understood within the core group managing the program that should it appear that the balances underlying these arrangements was unraveling, the program would be shut down, and this is what happened in November 1994 - February 1995.

This account is derived from internal program documents, discussions with concerned staff and outside players, and personal recollection. It will focus heavily on Save the Children’s agricultural rehabilitation activities: though it should be kept in mind that significant community-health activities were being conducted simultaneously, it was the agriculture activities that were the more visible, the more complex politically, the most subject to pressures from all sides, and therefore of the greatest interest for the purposes of this paper. The paper is written from the perspective of an “operational” NGO -- of an organization, in other words, committed to helping to alleviate suffering through the establishment of an active presence in the field, in this case working alongside communities to help with rapid and effective rehabilitation in the wake of a catastrophe.

This institutional commitment imposes a certain logic. One of the key international players in the Somali crisis has been quoted as saying, “Stopping NGOs from helping is like stopping Newton’s apple”<sup>3</sup>. There are always dilemmas in helping -- ways in which the help provided may in the long run make things worse, prolong a conflict, exacerbate inequities. These dilemmas have, rightly, been the object of much debate within the international humanitarian community and among outside critics in recent years. The practical, often wrenching, decisions that were made in order to set up and manage Save the Children’s rehabilitation activities in Lower Shabelle are laid out here as a real-world examples of those dilemmas in action. While there was much that was unique to Lower Shabelle (as an agricultural area in a pastoralist nation) and to Save the Children’s presence there (an extraordinary dedicated and knowledgeable national staff who had in many key cases worked for the agency in Lower Shabelle for over a decade), it is hoped that certain of the choices that had to be made will be familiar to practitioners in other settings and that some of the lessons learned may be of use to the ongoing debates over humanitarian action in “complex emergencies” and “collapsed states”.

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<sup>3</sup> Ambassador Robert Oakley, U.S. Special Representative to Somalia, in Refugee Policy Group, *Hope Restored?*, p. 86.

*Description of the Area: Patterns of Cultivation*

Lower Shabelle is here taken to mean the areas along the Indian Ocean coast and those that, immediately inland, follow the course of the Shabelle River in its final stretch, starting west of the main north-south highway from Mogadishu (at the Afgooy turnoff) and ending somewhat to the west of the port of Baraawe, in the interriverine area between the Shabelle<sup>4</sup> and the Juba . While some areas to the east of the north-south highway are included in Lower Shabelle in the political delineations of the previous Somali government, these areas are not, culturally or economically, readily includable in the “Lower Shabelle” discussed here and were not involved in Save the Children’s projects.

Lower Shabelle as thus defined includes two significant economic areas: a series of coastal towns of which the most important are Merka -- the regional administrative capital under the previous government -- and Baraawe; and a zone of intensive agricultural production running to a width of approximately 25 kilometres along either side of the Shabelle River itself. Culturally and economically, the coastal towns on the one hand and the agricultural region on the other are quite distinct, though the populations of the two obviously interact at many levels. The dividing line is the main coastal highway linking Mogadishu to Kismaayo and beyond; this runs, broadly speaking, from east to west; most agricultural production lies north of the highway, while the coast with its ports lies south of it.<sup>5</sup> A line of market towns has grown up along the river and the highway to serve these farming communities; these include Afgooye, Jenaale, Awdegle, Shalambod, Kurtunwaare, Bulo Mareer, Golweyn, and Qorioley. Most trade with the relatively prosperous farming communities takes place in these towns, and cash crops are sent directly along the highway to Mogadishu and beyond. Merka’s livelihood, on the other hand, derives primarily from its former status as the regional administrative center and from its port, which became an important alternative to Mogadishu’s during the time of troubles from 1991 onwards.

The composition of the area’s population is, as everywhere in Somalia, complex and shifting. To the extent that there are groups which can be spoken of as its “original” inhabitants, these are the settled agricultural communities of the hinterland. The ancestors of some of these groups established their presence well before the arrival of the Somali-speaking population after the XVIIth century<sup>6</sup>, though they have since been assimilated into the broader Somali-speaking polity, a recognizably Somali society having emerged in the area in the XVIIth and XIXth centuries. The main division recognized by these groups is between those who are physically if not linguistically similar to the Bantu groups of the Juba valley (these include the Tuni, settled around

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<sup>4</sup> The Shabelle, which rises in the Bale mountains of Ethiopia, is unusual in that it is prevented by a slight coastal rise from reaching the sea; it peters out in a series of marshes, though in periods of high flooding it does spill over into the Juba and flow through the latter’s estuary.

<sup>5</sup> Merka is further isolated from the hinterland by a line of dunes, increasing its psychological and economic distinctness.

<sup>6</sup> “[the Somalis] did not reach the Shabelle and Juba Regions before the XVIIth Century at the earliest..” . Jean Doresse, *Histoire sommaire de la Corne orientale de l’Afrique*; Paris, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1971.

Baraawe), and the Digil, or Rahenwayn, clans whose physical appearance is closer to that of other Somali groups. (These latter include the Jido, Garri, Shekhal, Begedi and Sherer.) Since then, effective political power in the area has held by pastoralist groups, or by groups of sedenterized pastoralists with strong ties to the broader pastoralist system -- a system which is defined by strategic relationships between and within clan families conducted over vast geographic expanses; the dominant subclan in Lower Shabelle was for generations the Biimal, of the Dir clan family, which had been sedentarized in the area and urbanized in Merka.

Unlike the similar groups in the Lower Juba valley, which were assimilated into broader Somali society only much later, these groups have lost their original languages and speak distinct dialects of Somali. (Some of the coastal populations, including that of Baraawe town, also speak a dialect of Swahili.) There was a natural division of labor: the “junior” settled agriculturalists cultivated large areas along the Shabelle river bed, trading grain for cash or livestock; while “senior” pastoralists held political power and maintained control over large (and often far-flung) herds that were the main source of their power and prestige, in theory protecting the Lower Shabelle from incursions by outsiders. Given their different economic interests, there was little potential for conflict between these groups, except for limited periods when areas along the riverbed were used for dry-season water and pasturage for pastoralists’ herds; even here relationships are governed by the broad strategic system that determines control of water and pasturage and that is still a major preoccupation of Somali society as a whole.

To oversimplify<sup>7</sup>, it can be said that inter-group relations in the region reflect Somali society’s assumption that there are “strong” and “weak” clans and sub-clans, and that the latter can survive only through clientships forged with the former. In another sense, the traditional pattern in Lower Shabelle can of course be seen as one of caste: “strong”, dominant pastoralist warriors; weak, dependent farmers (along with other smaller groups, such as the fishermen of the coastal villages, or the town-dwelling artisans of Merka, Baraawe and Jilib), though unusually for such a system, there is not really a distinct merchant caste, certain of the dominant clans such as the Biimal and, more recently, the Habr Gidr having assumed its functions for themselves, as an attribute and enhancer of “strength”.

While there is in good years considerable rainfed cultivation in the river bottom lands of the Lower Shabelle plain, rainfall is unpredictable and would not in itself have been able to serve

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<sup>7</sup> As with similar dynamics elsewhere in Africa, generalizations made by outsiders about clan, etc., relationships are invariably contested by those concerned (whose statements are in turn almost always disputed by others, equally concerned). The topic is raised here only with the greatest of trepidation and because, from 1991 onwards, it became an ineluctable part of outsiders’ dealings with Somalis, as it has always (but with varying degrees of urgency) been among them. For the errors, distortions and obtuseness that they are bound to detect here, I apologize profusely to my Somali friends and assure them that it’s all my fault. No account of this period is complete without mention of how grossly and ill-advisedly the international community found itself meddling in these endlessly subtle and elusive matters -- or of how much damage was probably done by those of us with little knowledge and imperfect roadmaps who had nonetheless to help steer resources and projects through the shoals, often having in the process to reconcile the several incompatible interpretations of a given set of facts proffered by different Somali colleagues at different times.

as the basis for the highly developed agricultural system that has evolved in the area. There is therefore considerable evidence that the practice of irrigated agriculture along the banks of the Shabelle goes back as far as the earliest settlements, and in any case probably predates the XIXth century. Cultivation occurs in two distinct seasons, the shorter (*deyr*), from October to December and the longer (*gu*), from late April to June. Only in the latter, and only in good years, is significant rainfed cultivation possible, and this is the time when food crops (maize above all) are principally produced, the *deyr* being, in normal times, reserved for cash crops, generally irrigated, of which sesame is the most significant among the traditional cultivators. Rainfall in the Shabelle's Ethiopian watershed is of course variable, but almost never sparse enough to prevent at least one season of irrigated crops during the *gu*. There are few regions in the lowlands of the Horn of Africa with a similar combination of potential abundance and long-established agricultural skill.<sup>8</sup>

This system was significantly expanded and modernized under the Italian colonial régime. Private European farmers were encouraged to settle in the region from the early years of the XXth century, putting in place an extensive infrastructure of "primary" irrigation canals to serve their plantations. This has led to a stratification of land tenure that persisted after Somali independence in 1962: much of the best land, especially land lying to the south of the river and having the most direct access to the major primary feeder canals running off the Shabelle, was taken up by large commercial farms producing cash crops (of which bananas were the most important) for export and controlled until independence by Europeans; other land was allocated to smaller farms (5-40 hectares), owned both by Europeans and by Somalis; while the remainder of the irrigable land, along with rainfed areas, was in the hands of traditional agriculturalists, either as share-cropped dependencies of large landholders or as fields held communally by villages and clans and allocated between individual families by councils of elders.

In recent times, management of the irrigation system was a government function, aspects of which were delegated locally to groups of farmers. The maintenance of the major irrigation infrastructure -- the clearing of the primary canals, which was done by bulldozers and backhoes, and the upkeep of the engineering works (principally the headgates diverting the flow of the river into the primary canals) was the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture's Land and Water Management Unit. "Secondary" canals (those actually delivering water to irrigated perimeters) were maintained by the landholders themselves -- plantation owners, middle-sized private farmers, or communities; these were maintained through community labor, coerced, salaried, or (on traditional peasant-held land) voluntary. Overall water use was planned and managed by the Ministry, in consultation with a complex network of irrigation committees; membership of these committees had become a specialized, often hereditary function assumed by individual elders selected for their skills from within each community. The management of such a complex system, involving such a variety of users (large plantation owners, small-scale commercial farmers, traditional communi-

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<sup>8</sup> The "best" years are also, not infrequently, years in which the river actually breaks its banks, often with catastrophic results, destroying both crops and homes. This was the case in 1994, for example, when there were a number of deaths and considerable damage to crops despite the communities' best efforts, supported with tools and, where feasible, heavy machinery from Save the Children, to build embankments.

ties) obviously required a large degree of voluntary cooperation, and despite the tensions resulting from land alienation, this tradition has been maintained through different régimes and times of strife and chaos. Despite tensions between the different strata of landholders, frequent exploitation and abuse, the degree to which the system is seen by all the area as a whole -- as a complex and delicate resource requiring collective care and concern -- is palpable. The speed and effectiveness with which the system was rehabilitated in 1992-94 would not have been possible without this collective realization.

Patterns of land tenure and exploitation, clientship, and the relationships between and among peasant farmers, plantation operators, and small-scale commercial farmers has always been

complex and shifting, and many of the basic patterns are of very long standing. According to one historian:

In [Merka] District, an eighteenth-century sultan of the Biimaal clan...is remembered as having encouraged his pastoral kinsmen to cultivate durra...[The Sultan's successor] witnessed the further sedentarization of his clansmen, a process which may have involved the subordination of existing groups of Negroid farmers. The actual pattern of Biimaal settlement that was observed in the early twentieth century suggests that the occupation of cultivable land by their ancestors was a systematic process...Individual occupation of farms became common, the Biimaal say, six to eight generations ago

[...] Other clans throughout the Lower Shabeelle region have their own settlement traditions; the distribution of arable land among component lineages appears as a dominant theme in most of them...[I]n most instances, the clan remained the ultimate guarantor of the land, defending it from external aggression. The various lineages comprising the clan had the responsibility of dividing the land and resolving disputes between individuals...As far as can be determined, *there was always an abundance of cultivable land along the Lower Shabelle River*. The major obstacles to increased agricultural productivity were...limited manpower and a pervasive pastoral ethic within the dominant stratum of Shabelle valley society. *It is not clear to what extent Biimaal, Geledi, and other Somali clans of pastoral origin actually took up farming and to what extent they simply exploited the labor of groups of client-cultivators previously settled in the area.*<sup>9</sup>

While these patterns underwent a series of disruptions under the Italians and the successor government of the now-defunct Somali state, the only lasting recent innovation to this been the creation of the (reasonably) modern, extensive fruit plantations, which increase demand for local labor while removing chunks of (but by no means all) prime irrigable land from the traditional peasant sector. This has introduced an additional layer of complexity (some of the consequence of which we shall examine presently) without altering the underlying pattern of these relationships, which have proven, as elsewhere in Somalia, remarkably durable.

Two developments in the 1970's and 1980's caused some shifting, significant though not necessarily fundamental, of the mix of groups in Lower Shebelle. First, in 1973, the government responded to drought and famine (in the pan-Sahelian drought of that year) by granting plots of land to groups of settlers from pastoralist areas in the central regions of Somalia. These included members of both the Darood (particularly Ogadeni) and Hawiyye clan families; among the latter were families from the Habr Gidr and Hawaadle subclans. Some of these settler families rose to economic prominence as merchants and commercial farmers, a presence that was to have great importance for the developments of 1992-95.

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<sup>9</sup> Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900*; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, pp.162-163. Emphasis added.

The second significant influx of newcomers occurred as a result of political upheavals in Ethiopia and of the Ethio-Somali war of 1977-78. Hundreds of thousands of refugees flooded across the border during these years, and Qorioley, in particular, became a major reception center, with a stable refugee caseload in 1989 of approximately 35,000. Most of these came from the Ethiopian provinces known before the *Derg*-decreed administrative changes of 1984 as Sidamo, Balé, and Arsi. Most were ethnically Somali, but a very significant minority (30% or more) were Oromo of various clans or (in small numbers and mostly from urban centers) from other ethnic groups (Sidama, Amhara...).<sup>10</sup> The population of these camps thus far exceeded the population of Qorioley town itself (in the early eighties probably not much greater than 15,000), and the refugees, many of whom brought skills and some capital, and all of whom were, through the UNHCR, the recipients of international humanitarian assistance, had a visible economic impact on the area: they opened businesses, began trading (in UNHCR largesse, if nothing else), re-established commercial links with their home areas in Ethiopia, and worked for wages or sharecropped on the commercial farms. Since it was assumed that, as elsewhere in Somalia, the rations, payroll and other benefits that the refugee “industry” brought in were also trickling into the local economy in one way or another (in many cases without the pretense of transiting through the hands of any refugees), this presence had at least a modestly stimulating effect overall, adding to the comparative prosperity of the region, at least in appearance and probably in (unmeasured) substance.

The arrival in the region of outsiders was not, in itself, however, remarkable, though the numbers perhaps were -- the Lower Shabelle has always been something of a melting pot, and it is a fundamental of Somali society that the clan/ethnic make-up of a region is never static for long -- that clans (at least the dominant pastoralist clans) have only a notional geographically-based core, “home” area and pursue their respective interests through far-flung presences, whether for pastoral or otherwise commercial reasons. (The degree to which a clan or sub-clan may be welcome in a given area is, of course, another matter: part of the dynamic is a process of establishing presences, often in small numbers, defending these through reference to the cumulative “strength” of your subclan, and realizing that there will be times when this will be unpersuasive and that you will be driven out..)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Among those identified as Somali or Oromo, many were in fact from clans that were bilingual, having ramifications within both national groups. This is true of the Gurra, for example, and, most significantly, of the Garri, who formed the largest single group in the Qorioley camps and who were the only group to remain in Qorioley following the collapse in 1991 of both the Somali and Ethiopian governments. (The Garri had traditional ties to the area and were to play a major role in the events of 1993-94. Again, it is important to understand that pastoralist groups in the Horn of Africa, particularly Somali and Oromo, frequently have implantations scattered over wide areas -- the Garri thus are present in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia.)

<sup>11</sup> The camp-based populations mostly fled in 1991, either back to Ethiopia, then itself in turmoil and un-equipped to deal with this sudden influx of “returnees”, or to other areas of Somalia. Many ended up starting on the streets of Mogadishu or in the starvation camps at Afgooy and elsewhere. The UNHCR, which had been their increasingly grudging benefactor, felt that, as it had in 1990 begun implementing a program of elective settlement in Somalia or of voluntary repatriation to Ethiopia, this “caseload”, whether among the masses of the displaced in Somalia or the returnees in Ethiopia, was no longer of its concern, even though actual implementation of this phase-down program had barely begun when things in Soma-

*The Situation in 1991*

Under the Siyaad Barre régime (1969-1990), the traditional underpinnings of society, in the Lower Shabelle as elsewhere, had been severely disrupted. In clan terms, the traditional system of Biimal political dominance was superseded by an élite of Darood (particularly Ogadeni) administrators. A new class of Somali landholders emerged alongside the remaining Italian plantation owners. A period of socialist economic restructuring and the concurrent emergence of an all-powerful domestic security apparatus had been a concomitant of Somalia's close security ties to the Soviet Union in the 1970's; these gave way, after Somalia's defeat in its 1978-79 war with Ethiopia and after the accompanying shift of Soviet support to Somalia's Ethiopian enemy, to security ties to the United States and to new, donor-driven economic priorities. The security apparatus was maintained, but donor pressures for greater emphasis on the private sector led to a system of régime-sanctioned, clientalist "privatizations", in which State assets were apportioned out to trusted individuals with close ties, by blood or marriage, to Siyaad Barre's Merihan subclan. Lower Shabelle, with its long-established cash-crop economy became a major source of wealth accumulation for those with the right political connections, and many close relatives of the President and his inner circle settled in the area or established business holdings there.

The 1980's were nonetheless a period of relative prosperity. Somalia held (and, significantly, still retains) a quota for banana exports to the European Community under the terms of the Lomé Convention, which grants certain trade preferences to former European colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Somalfruit, the major exporting consortium of Italian and Somali producers in Lower Shabelle, modernized its production and storage facilities, and grew as a major economic force in the region, providing seasonal cash employment opportunities. As mentioned, the presence of thousands of families displaced from Ethiopia also served as an economic stimulus. Trade into and out of the region was booming, and there was a visible increase in small-business creation in the market towns.

This relative prosperity was, however, short-lived. The government's prestige suffered irreparable harm in the débâcle that ensued from its 1978 invasion of Ethiopia, and throughout the 80's it found itself facing accelerating local insurgencies, especially in the former British protectorate in the northwest of the country. Other than a small number of agribusiness joint ventures (largely with Italian interests that had long-standing ties to the country), there was little foreign or domestic investment. The shift away from State control of the economy (unaccompanied by many of the usual package of reforms of such things as exchange controls) left a void in many areas, and as the government became increasingly preoccupied by what had become, by the late 80s,

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lia fell apart in 1990. As usual, many thousands of former refugees from Qorioley survived those months only through pastoralist solidarity among distant clan relations who were themselves suffering from conflict and drought. It was a terrible time. (The UNHCR in Ethiopia did in time recognize its responsibility toward the returnees and initiated support to "returnee-affected" communities. Save the Children implemented a number of these projects in the Borena Administrative Area, working in many cases with the same individuals it had previously attempted to assist in Qorioley.)

a full-scale civil war in the north, such government services as had existed fell off precipitously (except, of course, for the ever-present security apparatus).

In Lower Shabelle this decline was notable in all areas. While there was still a large government payroll, supplies to hospitals, supervision of schools, agricultural extension services all declined sharply (though less so in the UNHCR-supported refugee camps, a distinction that was much noted and resented). This process particularly affected the irrigation infrastructure, which depended on Ministry of Agriculture support for key aspects of maintenance. In 1989, a study by a consultant for Save the Children showed, for example, that basic repairs needed to be made soon: headgates and other basic infrastructure on the Libaan canal, the main primary canal at Qorioley, and that without such repairs, there would be progressive declines in production throughout the region. Routine basic maintenance -- desilting of the main feeder canals, for example -- also fell off sharply, except on those canals (the confusingly-named "primo secundario", which runs roughly from Jenaale to Shalambood, in particular) which directly served the largest number of commercial farms, whose owners took direct responsibility for their maintenance.<sup>12</sup> Thus, as the civil war spread to southern Somalia in 1990, the well-being of tens of thousands of small-scale farmers in Lower Shabelle was already compromised, and production was already in decline.

As the Hawiyye armies closed in on Mogadishu in the latter part of 1990, Lower Shabelle inevitably became a battleground. Several waves of Darood-Hawiyye combat swept across the region, causing considerable destruction and looting. During this phase, the coastal towns of Merka and Baraawe were particularly targeted, and Baraawane were repeatedly slaughtered and looted.<sup>13</sup> Crops were destroyed and livestock killed or looted by both sides. Hundreds of thousands of displaced persons swept into the area, fleeing the fighting in Mogadishu and elsewhere; many thousands of others (particularly among the Ogadenis, who had enjoyed particular favor under Siyaad Barre) fled from it. While looting and random destruction did not reach their later levels, they had already become commonplace. Darood-Hawiyye battles continued well into 1991 (after the fall of Siyaad Barre), as the Darood armies regathered in Kismaayo and attempted to launch counteroffensives against Mogadishu.

#### *Developments 1991-92: Famine in Lower Shabelle*

By June-July of 1991, however, things had settled down somewhat: the Darood forces had been crushed and consultations were being conducted in Mogadishu on the creation of a new, broad-based national government under a Hawiyye coalition. There was cautious optimism in Lower Shabelle: while the coastal towns had been devastated, there had been comparatively little destruction further inland, and while there was still massive displacement (and consequently a huge swelling of the population of all the market towns), there was a mood of optimism among

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<sup>12</sup> Save the Children (which was involved in establishing a large irrigated perimeter for the refugee community in Qorioley) approached the Ministry and donors at the time in an attempt to secure support for needed renovations; it met with indifference on all sides.

<sup>13</sup> It is estimated by some observers that as much as 45% of the previous population of Baraawe now live as refugees in Mombasa, where they have historical ties.

people in the area: there would be a new government in Mogadishu, things would eventually return to normal.<sup>14</sup>

This period of optimism did not last, however: the Hawiyye victory against the Darood forces was followed by the collapse of the Hawiyye coalition itself into quarrels over the sharing of power in the new government, and in particular over who should assume its presidency. This conflict, which degenerated into open warfare in Mogadishu in August-September 1992, led to a second phase of fighting and of looting that was far more destructive than that of 1991-92, and nowhere more so than in Lower Shabelle.

The conflict between the Habr Gidr subclan, led by Mohammed Farah Aïdid, the generalissimo of the forces which had overthrown Siyaad Barre in January 1991, and the Abgaal subclan, loyal to Ali Mahdi Mohammed (who had briefly been voted "President" of the SNA government and who, as of this writing, still claims that title) very quickly spilled over into Lower Shabelle. This conflict was far more murderous and destructive than its predecessor, and came to be characterized by frenetic looting. Nothing and no one was safe: livestock, of course, was seized and retaken, consistent with the traditions of pastoralist warfare; public edifices and private homes were ripped apart for their components (roofs, doors, bricks); anything that could be moved and sold was.<sup>15</sup> Most significantly, foodstocks and crops were looted from homes and directly from the fields -- at times, literally from the hands of the farmers who had grown them. Families food reserves were dug up at gunpoint and handed over, often to neighbors.

The result was that in early 1992, by the traditional hungry season of February, Lower Shabelle, along with much of the rest of southern Somalia, was facing famine. Very few farmers had planted in the previous season, those who did had been looted, much livestock had also been seized, and families which, even in good years, depended in part on cash employment on the plantations for their economic well-being, were destitute. The contrast with the same period in 1991 was stark: then, there had been hardship, not catastrophe, but by 1992, many families had lost everything, and there were, daily, corpses in the streets of Qorioley and the other towns of the area.<sup>16</sup> In 1991, a core group of Save the Children staff, completely cut off from the outside

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<sup>14</sup> These observations were made by the writer of this report on visits to Somalia in June and August of 1992. At that time, most public buildings in Qorioley and Shalambood were still standing, and the looting had been limited to their contents.

<sup>15</sup> "What could be moved" was interpreted expansively: the turbines of the power station at Shalambood, for example, which served both that town and Merka, were placed onto trucks, taken to Merka port, and shipped off to destinations unknown.

<sup>16</sup> Estimates of mortality are necessarily impressionistic, given the almost total absence of organized health services in Somalia during this period. One plausible estimate puts the proportion of the population of Lower Shabelle that died in 1992 at between 6% and 15% (of 450,000 in 1991), with total "excess" deaths that year of 18,000 to 59,000. (Steven Hansch et al., *Lives Lost, Lives Saved: Excess Mortality and the Impact of Health Interventions in the Somalia Emergency*. Washington: Refugee Policy Group, November 1994.) The latter figure is the more plausible, based on the accounts of those who were there at the time -- of the numbers buried in certain weeks in Qorioley alone, for example. It goes without saying that children and the elderly accounted for the enormous majority of these "surplus" deaths, though no age group was spared.

world (and any salaries) had worked with local merchants to organize a feeding center for children; nothing of the sort was remotely possible in 1992, when everyone's efforts focused on the survival of their own families.

At first, there was little in the way of relief assistance. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had begun a system of local kitchens, providing on-site feeding, in 1991; several of these reopened in Lower Shabelle in March of 1992, as the worst of intra-Hawiyye fighting receded. In April, Médecins Sans Frontières/France (MSF/F) opened two centers, providing on-site "wet" feeding to mothers and children in the region, that are given particular credit by local people for saving many lives. As levels of relief commodities reaching Somalia as a whole increased progressively in 1992, more food became available in Lower Shabelle, either as a result of direct relief distributions (principally through the ICRC kitchens) or in the form of grain looted from relief agencies in other areas and placed on the market by the looters themselves or, more often, by merchants with whom they dealt. (By 1992, both were likely to be Habr Gidr.) The worst of the starvation and related morbidity had begun to recede by April or May.

Though the worst of the organized, pitched-battle warfare had ended and the very worst of the dying had receded from Lower Shabelle by mid-1992, very severe problems obviously remained. Two, in particular, were of significance in the day-to-day lives of the people: the continued prevalence of looting, which meant that no assets were secure and no productive investment feasible except for those with close ties to one of the powerful militias (in Lower Shabelle, this meant in practice the Habr Gidr, who have been more or less in control of the area up to this writing, and, until 1994, the Hawaadle); and what was by then the complete collapse of the irrigation system, which meant that only rainfed crops could be produced in an area which, like most of Somalia, has very aleatory rainfall. Headgates were looted or destroyed, embankments collapsed, and all the canals, primary and secondary, were badly silted up, many being completely choked, as it had by then been nearly three years since any systematic clearance had taken place.

These two problems fed on each another: young men who would normally have been engaged in farm work were, in its absence, all the more easily drawn into one or another of the militias (or into freelance looting: the distinction between these two categories is important but often blurry). By 1992, looting of those weaker than oneself had thus become, in Lower Shabelle as elsewhere, just about the only survival strategy available.

### *The Save the Children Agricultural Revitalization Project*

Save the Children had been involved in Lower Shabelle from 1982 onwards, both with the population of Ethiopian refugees and with local communities. During that period, a strong cadre of Somali and Ethio-Somali staff members had emerged, and many of them had remained in Lower Shabelle throughout the crises 1990-92. Contact between these staff members and the

Area office, in Addis Abeba, had been lost in early 1990<sup>17</sup>, resumed in mid-1991 (when the Area Director was able to travel to Mogadishu and on the Lower Shabelle), lost again later in that year, and re-established in August 1992. (During the periods without direct contact, some communication was maintained by means of couriers who traveled overland between Qorioley and Addis Abeba, bringing news and transporting, at great peril, cash payments against back salaries).

The Save the Children staff members who had remained in Lower Shabelle (principally in Qorioley, which had always been the agency's base in the area) had stayed in loose contact with each other; some had gone to work for MSF/F or other agencies then bringing relief to the area in 1992. When the Area Director returned to Qorioley, he was told, as he had been in 1991, that the most urgent need throughout Lower Shabelle was not for relief food, but for help in re-establishing the irrigation system. Consultations with elders and other community groups throughout the area yielded the same message, with great consistency: the need for a revitalization of agricultural production was always, and by far, the top priority cited.

By October of 1992, an office (for logistics and liaison purposes) had been re-established in Mogadishu, with a small rotating staff of expats, and a core of the most capable of Save the Children's former Somali staff had been rehired. For experimental purposes, some heavy machinery was hired from a local contractor and a stretch of 5 km. of the key Libaan canal, a primary feeder canal running off the Shabelle near Qorioley, was dredged.

The response by the communities with land along this stretch of canal was electric: in a matter of a few days nearly 3,000 hectares of land (far more than could actually be irrigated from this one, experimental exercise) was cleared and planted to maize. Based on this response, a consultant with strong experience in food-security programs was brought in, and a project for revitalizing the irrigation system in the area was designed. The following are the planning elements of this project that are of greatest relevance here:

1. The project (initially covering Qorioley and Kurtunwaare Districts and later extended to Merka, Shalambood, Jenaale, Aw Degle and others) should focus on those canals (mainly but not exclusively north of the Shabelle) serving what had traditionally been small-holder and community fields; the areas with large plantations (even those where, as was often the case, there were communities of destitute squatters) should be left to the plantation owners, who had the resources to do their own canal clearance. (The large plantations, generally to the south of the river, were principally fed by the "primo secundario" primary canal, running off the river near Jenaale and on to a point past Shalambood. No clearing of this canal was done by the project -- it was, as expected, cleared by the plantation owners -- and only a few secondary canals running off it into clearly-delineated small-farmer fields were renovated.)

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<sup>17</sup> The Save the Children office in Mogadishu had been completely looted, of course, in the 1990 fighting, the last expatriate staff having been withdrawn, for security reasons, in October of that year.

2. There would need to be two distinct activities. Based on the established practice of the former Land and Water management Unit, it was assumed that the clearance of the primary feeder canals would need to be done with heavy machinery, given the great volumes of earth that would need to be moved. Secondary canals, on the other hand, had traditionally been cleared by hand. (By 1994, it was found that even some of the widest and deepest primary canals could be cleared using community labor, and the use of heavy machinery was gradually reduced.)
3. Given the degree to which the irrigation system had been allowed to decay in 1980's, canal gates and other hardware would need to be replaced. Local engineering talent (principally from the former Ministry of Agriculture) with long experience working on this system was identified and hired, and the necessary design work and specifications drawn up.
4. For the annual clearance of the secondary canals, the necessary work assignments had always been planned by a network of water committees that were a major focus for region-wide inter-clan cooperation. From 1990 onwards, these committees (whose members were highly skilled, with membership often passing from father to son) had ceased all activity. Reviving them would have to be a priority.
5. Community labor was required for secondary-canal clearance; yet, given the food shortages that, though subsiding a bit, were still prevalent in late 1992, it was not reasonable to expect communities to find the energy for such heavy labor. A mechanism for providing income needed to be found until a self-sustaining agricultural cycle could be recreated. Consideration was given to the use of food-for-work, a mechanism that has often been used by NGOs and governments in similar situations, but the dangers of this in the Somali context were obvious: relief commodities, even such "low-value" commodities as maize, were still being looted with great regularity.<sup>18</sup> A food-for-work program was impossible under these circumstances, and would in any case have been logistically nightmarish. As a substitute, it was decided to provide community laborers with cash payments for their work.
6. The management of the program would have to be broad-based, transparent, and highly participatory; there could be no hint of favoritism toward one or another of the many clans and shifting alliances present in the area. Save the

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<sup>18</sup> It has been estimated that ICRC, then the largest relief operator in the country, lost 40-60% of all relief commodities to extortion or looting or extortion of one sort to another, though most of these commodities eventually came onto local markets. Looting of relief supplies in Lower Shabelle continued with some regularity into 1993, until relief assistance by the international community had largely ended and agricultural production had resumed. Interestingly, while relief supplies had regularly and systematically looted, there were few if any lootings of the crops grown locally (even of such relatively high-value items as sesame) once the system began to be rehabilitated, in contrast to what had happened in 1992. (It goes without saying that the plantation owners maintained close ties to the militias of the "strong" clans and at no time had any fear that their banana or other fruit crops would be looted.)

Children's own staff would similarly need to be broadly reflective of the make-up of the area.

7. There would need to be maximum participation by women, including full opportunity for participation the cash-for-work activities (as the community labor scheme was inelegantly named).
8. Though there was still hunger in the area, particularly among the displaced who still swelled the population of the towns, it was decided that Save the Children would under no circumstances become involved in food relief activities, as this would inevitably confuse its role in the eyes of communities. The purpose of the project was to jump-start local production and to eliminate the need for relief; becoming a distributor of relief commodities would have made this harder and would have posed immediate security problems. Furthermore, Save the Children worked with WFP and the many NGOs then operating relief activities to ensure that relief distributions to Lower Shabelle were phased down as soon as production started to improve<sup>19</sup>; by mid-1993, following the increase in overall food deliveries to southern Somalia, maize prices in Lower Shabelle dropped precipitously, and there was a real danger that relief food, thought still needed in other parts of the country, would cause depress prices and act as a disincentive to further expansion of local production.<sup>20</sup>

Once these basic principles had been worked out, operational procedures were developed. With respect to the cash-for-work project, the core of Save the Children's agricultural activities, these included the following:

1. At no time would the project take direct custody of cash or of high-value commodities. There would be no direct distribution of benefits of any kind (seeds, tools, food-stuffs). Contractors were used for the canal-clearing activities requiring the use of heavy-equipment such as bulldozers and backhoes.
2. All cash transactions, including the all-important cash-for-work payments to community members, were to be handled by a "cash facilitator" -- in this case, a local businessman with substantial resources who would advance cash locally in Somali shillings in return for hard-currency payments made to a bank in Djibouti. The cash facilitator was in turn responsible for the safe delivery of the payments in question to those designated by Save the Children -- a banking arrangement in all but name, with many of

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<sup>19</sup> In December 1992 and January 1993, following the UNITAF intervention, Save the Children did work with the UN to help organize distributions to some of the more destitute communities among the displaced. But Save the Children at no time took physical possession of any convoys; the actual distributions were handled by UNITAF through community elders, with Save the Children staff providing information and back-up. These distributions went off without incident and the commodities verifiably reached their intended beneficiaries.

<sup>20</sup> In the event, however, farmers planted maize in 1993 with almost no regard to price considerations; the recent famine had obviously been deeply traumatizing, and most families' reserves had been completely consumed or looted. Maize was grown on irrigated plots even when normal patterns would have called for the production of higher-value cash crops.

the same kinds of procedures required before any payments could be made. These arrangements worked flawlessly throughout the period of this program: no payments were missed, no funds were looted, few disputes arose over amounts owed and those were resolved swiftly and amicably. The reliability of this arrangement (and, it should be clear by extension, the unimpeachable integrity of the cash facilitator) was fundamental: nothing else would have been possible without this.<sup>21</sup> (It also goes without saying that the cash facilitator's fees and exchange commissions were reflective of the risks he and his staff took. )

3. The project would operate with maximum transparency. Elders were involved in making all key decisions -- the choice of key staff, or the selection of suppliers of rental vehicles, for example. Whole communities were mobilized for discussion of matters affecting them (e.g., selection of canals to be cleared, timing of the operation) -- no community was brought into the cash-for-work project until such inclusive discussions had taken place with it.
4. Communities would be asked, in open meetings involving all community members, to select supervisors for their cash-for-work activities.
5. The potential for disputes between staff and communities was to be further reduced by transparency in the assessment of work accomplished and thus the determination of the payments to be made. Each task was defined in advance, again in a public meeting, and a contract drawn up between the community and the project. The basis of this calculation was a measurement of the likely number of mandays required to complete the project -- in the most common case, to clear a given stretch of canal. A length of canal was measured, with the community present, the depth to which it was to be dug agreed with advice from a project engineer, and a calculation of cubic metres of earth to be moved was made; a set formula then translated the cubic metres into mandays (taking into account the nature of the soil, rockiness, etc.), and this formula dictated the amounts to be paid to the community upon completion. Thus, there was no need for the project to maintain actual attendance records (this was up to the community-selected crew leaders), and, most importantly, no need to determine the number of mandays actually worked vs. those budgeted. It was made clear to the community that the payment would be the one agreed to in the contract: if the community was able to complete the task using fewer mandays, or if it required more to complete the task, this would not affect payment either way. Payment was made to the community by the cash facilitator (but, again, in the presence of SC staff) upon certification by the project engineers that the task had been accomplished as agreed. It is a significant in-

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<sup>21</sup> It had originally been thought that the cash-for-work activity would be funded through a commodities monetization project that was to be conducted by CARE International and the World Food Programme -- high-value commodities would be imported and sold to local merchants, with the proceeds going to fund rehabilitation activities, thus substituting cumbersome and dangerous relief projects with easier-to-manage import schemes. Early assumptions about how quickly such commodities could be imported in sufficient quantities to cover costs turned out, however, to have been overly optimistic, and USAID/OFDA, the primary funding source for the cash-for-work scheme elected in the end to cover its costs with dollars instead of with local-currency monetization proceeds.

dication of the effectiveness of these arrangements (and, indeed, of the project as a whole) that it became possible quite early in the project to make a significant upward adjustment of the number of cubic meters to be moved in a manday, with no dissent from the communities.

Consultations with communities throughout Lower Shabelle were undertaken on these bases, planning work was done by staff, consultants, and community leaders, and by January 1993, the project was in full operation; it continued, as has been mentioned, through February 1995.<sup>22</sup> Over 200 km. of primary and 2,000 km. of secondary canal were cleared (some were cleared a second time in 1994, as heavy siltation had occurred that year) and put to use for food and cash-crop production. Agricultural production in the area had returned to a semblance of normal, and all threat of a famine had been removed. The principal concern of farmers in the area was no longer food production (large quantities of maize had by then been produced over several seasons, and much of it stored as reserves against future food shortages) but the continued insecurity which made access to the key markets in Mogadishu problematic and therefore inhibited the expansion of cash-crop production. These direct benefits of the project were obvious and of great significance; enormous reserves human energy and dedication, from community leaders, from Save the Children's remarkable Somali staff, and from a small group of committed expatriates, went into achieving them. It is, however, our purpose here to focus on how the specific impediments posed to the project's success by the unique circumstances of that place and time were dealt with and to an extent overcome, and to determine what effect, if any, the project in turn may have had on those circumstances.

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In the interest of brevity, little mention is made in this paper of Save the Children's other major activity in Lower Shabelle during this period, a major primary-health project that established a region-wide network of health posts, mobile vaccination teams, and related services. This project considerably reduced morbidity and mortality among children in the region, and played a crucial role in containing a significant cholera outbreak in 1994. Also, the resources made available for agriculture revitalization activities were used for flood control and embankment construction, alleviating serious flooding and preventing severe destruction in 1993 and 1994.

*Developments in Lower Shabelle: 1993-94: International Military Intervention and Withdrawal*

When the dust had settled from the intra-Hawiyye conflict of 1992, it was clear that SNA faction, reflecting the interests of General Farah Aïdid's Habr Gidr subclan, had become the dominant force in Lower Shabelle, though its control was not universal or unchallengeable<sup>23</sup>. The port of Merka, a key economic prize and stronghold of the Bimaal subclan, remained ambiguous in its loyalties, retaining close ties to the Abgaal subclan of "President" Ali Mahdi; there also remained a strong armed presence on the part of the Hawaadle subclan, who are broadly considered part of the Hawiyye clan family but who have tended to act as free agents in many situations<sup>24</sup>. Pockets of Hawaadle strength were to be found throughout Lower Shabelle, as indeed they were in "Southern Mogadishu" itself, where they made particularistic claims to the areas surrounding the international airport that posed a direct challenge to the economic interest of both the Habr Gidr and the Abgaal. In the areas where Save the Children's projects were being conducted, however, the dominant influence was SNA, which had developed close, clientelist relations with many of the smaller agriculturalist clans in the area. Hawaadle influence was felt most strongly along the main Mogadishu highway, in road towns such as Seblale (controlling access to Baraawe, which was treated as something of a Hawaadle fief). Complicating matters somewhat, groups of Muslim fundamentalists thought to have ties to regional powers were posing a real threat to the dominance of the various clan-based militias and by early 1993 were making a serious bid to control all operations in Merka port, gaining for themselves lucrative stevedoring contracts. (Port activities in Merka are highly labor-intensive, as there are no berths and cargoes must be lightered from vessels anchored offshore to be landed on the beach on rafts.)

The SNA and local business interests attempted to maintain a minimum of security along the main coastal highway, but this by no means succeeded in deterring all looters, and both relief convoys and commercial traffic (buses traveling between Mogadishu and Kismaayo, especially, were favored targets) were frequently attacked, often with great violence. (One exception, never looted, was the trade in the narcotic *chat*. As the international airport in Mogadishu was out of commission for much of 1992 due to subclan conflict over its control, the various airstrips of Lower Shabelle -- particularly the one at the location known as "Km. 50" -- were the primary entry points for light aircraft generally, including, prior to the UNITAF intervention in December 1992, all UN and NGO traffic; *chat* was flown into these daily by means of an airlift from Wilson Field, Nairobi, and other strips in Kenya, and these cargoes were then driven at breakneck speed into Mogadishu. The economic importance of the trade to general well-being and the power and known ruthlessness of the of the traders themselves probably combined to confer this remarkable immunity.)

By the time of the UN-sponsored conference on humanitarian assistance to Somalia in December 1992, it was clear that some kind of international military intervention was going to be staged to end the massive looting of relief commodities and attempt to stabilize southern Somalia

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to recall that there had been a strong Habr Gidr presence in Lower Shabelle from at least the 1970's, where some had become major businessmen.

<sup>24</sup> Some Somalis refer to the Hawaadle as "honorary Hawiyye".

enough for the stalemated intra-Hawiyye political conflicts to be brought to an end. The multinational, U.S.-led UNITAF force landed in Mogadishu on 9 December and quickly spread out along the main highways. By late January 1993, UNITAF was running regular patrols along the Mogadishu-Kismaayo highway and providing armed convoy assistance to humanitarian organizations operating in the area. By February, the U.S. \*[10th Army Mountain Division]\* had established an base at the entrance to Merka town and was conducting an active policy of disarmament along the highway and in the adjacent hinterland, hunting out militias and freelance bandit gangs with helicopters and armed vehicles.<sup>25</sup>

As was also the case in Mogadishu, the initial phase of the UNITAF presence brought a measure of stability to the region as a whole. While the attempts by the UNITAF forces to disarm the population (a policy pursued far more aggressively in Lower Shabelle than it was in Mogadishu) was at times seen by local people as heavy-handed<sup>26</sup>, the fact was that agricultural and commercial activity expanded visibly during this phase. Militia conflicts almost ceased, the fundamentalist groups were driven out of the region, and banditry, though never entirely absent, was perceived as being under better control. While, especially in the light of later developments, the rationale for the UNITAF intervention has been sharply questioned by many observers, it is certainly true that the first half of 1993 was a period of relative calm (by the standards prevailing at this time in Somalia) and prosperity in Lower Shabelle. (The increase in prosperity was also greatly assisted by the road repairs done under contract to UNITAF; while intended primarily to improve troop movements, the ensuing reduction in travel time and wear and tear on vehicles greatly benefited travelers of all categories.)

In May 1993, the UNITAF (US-led) command in Mogadishu handed over to a revamped UN command structure baptized UNOSOM II. This had several immediate and dramatic effects: an attack in June by SNA supporters against UNOSOM units in Mogadishu led to a decision by UNOSOM to single out SNA as an enemy against whom open warfare was to be waged; simultaneously, the reasonably close cooperation which had existed between the military and political leadership of the international operation on the one hand and UN civilian agencies and NGOs on

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<sup>25</sup> There was some uncertainty as to which of the UNITAF component armies would invest the Lower Shabelle sector, and there was an assumption in December and January that the area would be placed under Italian military control; however, it seems that consideration was given the extensive private Italian business interests in the area and that the decision was made to use American forces instead. Following the transition from UNITAF to UNOSOM II in 1994, the US contingent at Merka was replaced by Moroccan forces, who continued to maintain a strong presence, actively engaging perceived threats to security; the Moroccans were in turn replaced by Pakistani forces, who were completely removed as part of the overall UNOSOM phase-down in late 1994.

<sup>26</sup> Many Somalis who considered themselves honest and who had no direct militia affiliation nonetheless armed themselves for self-protection; since it tended more often to be such persons, rather than hard-core militia members or bandits, who were caught in UNITAF roadblocks, they understandably resented the confiscation of their weapons, which they saw as leaving them defenseless against the real “bad guys”. In response to this sentiment, UNITAF modified its policy somewhat: Merka town, for example, was supposed to have been completely disarmed, and persons coming into the city were searched and their handguns and rifles were seized against a receipt at the UNITAF checkpoint, to be reclaimed when they left town. Belt-fed weapons, RPGs, and the like, were, however, definitively confiscated.

the other (principally channeled through the through the Civilian-Military Operations Center, or “C-MOC”, in Mogadishu) declined precipitously.<sup>27</sup>

The UNOSOM-SNA conflict, which lasted from June through November of 1993 brought an end to the relative tranquillity that had characterized the first half of the year. As much of Lower Shabelle was, as we have seen, under SNA militia and political control, there was good reason to believe that the area could become a battleground. Furthermore, the concentration of military assets on Mogadishu meant that UNOSOM was far less able to put energy into the maintenance of security in outlying areas, leading to an immediately, sharp resurgence of banditry. Elements hostile to the SNA also took advantage of the pressures that the latter was under in Mogadishu to seize the military initiative locally.

Furthermore, while UNOSOM did not in the event make a military move against the Habr Gidr in Lower Shabelle, it did, as far as local opinion is concerned, challenge them politically. UNOSOM’s main political endeavor during this period was the promotion of district councils that were to be broadly representative of all clans residing in a given area. The district councils were eventually to select regional councils, which would in turn complete the process by creating a national council that could stand as a proto-State and eventually be vested with internationally-recognized sovereignty, vastly facilitating the international community’s dealings with the country. It is generally agreed among non-UNOSOM observers, both Somali and foreign, that this process, however laudable in its overall aims, was conducted too hastily and clumsily to provide a viable way out of the extraordinarily knotty local conflicts and hostilities that had caused the collapse of the Somali State. The process of council formation was characterized at its best by well-meaning disingenuousness on the part of the UNOSOM officials whose task it was to “certify” the district councils; at its worst, it was, in the eyes of many, characterized by cynical manipulation of local and clan aspirations to serve narrow, short-term UNOSOM goals. Certainly, the efforts of UNOSOM officials to establish district councils was interpreted by the SNA itself (which had refused to participate directly in the process, which it saw as undermining its own claims to have constituted a legitimate government) as an attempt to challenge its political authority.

Regardless of whether UNOSOM actually was (as most Somali observers assumed and as UNOSOM denied) consciously attempting to chip away at SNA/Habr Gidr authority through the formation of anti-SNA district councils, there is no question that the Habr Gidr felt that their position in Lower Shabelle was under threat. Since 1992, when Habr Gidr dominance of “South” Mogadishu was challenged by the Hawaadle, there had been considerable tension between these two groups, and this broke into open conflict in late 1993. As has been mentioned, both “strong” subclans had been building clientship relations with local subclans throughout Lower Shabelle, with, for example, the Garri aligning closely with the Habr Gidr and the Jido, an important agriculturalist clan, with the Hawaadle.

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<sup>27</sup> Relations between Save the Children and the UNOSOM units in Lower Shabelle, however, remained cordial, though even here coordination declined.

On September 6, a UN delegation came to Qorioley to pursue the establishment of a District council there; the proposed council was to be dominated by Jido and other groups then seen as hostile to the SNA. A riot broke out, and Save the Children staff had to bring the delegation into its compound (protected by both mixed-clan security guards, including both Habr Gidr and Hawaadle) to prevent a catastrophe (the delegation was later rescued by UNOSOM helicopter).<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after this incident, in October 1993, a Hawaadle-led coalition of subclans felt itself to be in a strong enough position to challenge SNA/Habr Gidr dominance militarily, and a series of battles took place along the river, culminating in an attack on Qorioley town, involving some heavy weapons and “technical” battlewagons. UNOSOM forces stood by, feeling either incapable (given the concentration of assets on Mogadishu that has already been mentioned) of intervening or (as many SNA sympathizers see it) not displeased to see their antagonist under pressure. Either way, the *pax unosomia*, here as elsewhere, was definitively broken. The SNA withdrew briefly from Qorioley as the opposing coalition approached, but returned a few days later in force and inflicted a definitive defeat on the Hawaadle and their allies. The initiative thus retaken, the Habr Gidr (by then also emerging from its conflict with UNOSOM in Mogadishu) pressed its advantage throughout the region, and while Habr Gidr-Hawaadle skirmishing continued for some time, by 1994, the Habr Gidr had imposed ferocious ethnic cleansing on their enemy and consolidated what, by this writing, is unchallenged control of Lower Shabelle. (The SNA also took advantage of its initiative to reclaim political control of Merka town, which had been one of the last areas in which it faced any serious political challenge; here again, the district council promoted by UNOSOM had a distinct anti-SNA bias, and Somali observers feel that this represented a challenge that the Habr Gidr could not ignore. The Council was ruthlessly suppressed and many of the indigenous Bimaal inhabitants have fled.<sup>29</sup>)

A word should be said about SNA “control” of Lower Shabelle. While this group, which has, since its victory over the government army in 1991, repeatedly demonstrated its military prowess and the ruthlessness with which it is willing to crush its enemies, is greatly feared in Lower Shabelle, it has, through these feats, acquired a large measure of legitimate authority in the traditional Somali terms: by achieving decisive dominance, it is in a position to successfully defend its followers, including those “weaker” clans which accept its protection. In this sense, despite its failure to achieve any international recognition, the SNA’s claim to be the “local authority”, in Lower Shabelle and elsewhere, is not without merit in Somali eyes. There are certainly many groups which would challenge this authority if they felt strong enough to do so, but the fate of the Hawaadle (who had themselves been very bloody in the areas they had controlled and exploited before their expulsion) stands as a warning. Individuals in Lower Shabelle have repeatedly said that a measure of stability under the Habr Gidr is preferable to total chaos. The UNOSOM failure

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<sup>28</sup> The UN officials involved have on several occasions formally denied that this incident had ever occurred, but the accounts of Save the Children’s staff are consistent and categorical on this point: without access to the Save the Children compound, the delegation faced almost certain injury at the hands of the mob.

<sup>29</sup> See Human Rights Watch, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41 for an account of these developments and of the Habr Gidr war against the Hawaadle in other regions.

to crush the SNA and bring its leader, General Farah Aïdid, before a tribunal, has only strengthened this conviction.

In eliminating its military rivals in Lower Shabelle, the Habr Gidr have, of course, eliminated economic and commercial competition as well. The Habr Gidr commercial presence there has expanded rapidly as a result. As the Habr Gidr pursued their war against the Hawaadle, they have also consolidated their hold over key resources: the plantations, transportation fleets, and finally the port at Merka, all of which are now in Habr Gidr hands or in those of their close allies. By 1994, this had led to competition between Habr Gidr interests, as rival groups have sought to dominate the banana export trade, now again flourishing. The power of the original consortium, under the Somalfruit banner, in particular, has been challenged by interests claiming to represent the US-based Dole corporation, with senior Habr Gidr families on both sides of the rivalry.<sup>30</sup>

### *Project Security, 1992-94: Choices*

It is fair to say that security was the principal preoccupation of all international NGOs operating in Somalia during this period. Missteps could have immediate and fatal consequences, for NGO staffs and for the communities with which they worked. In the absence of a State, there was no reliable source of sanction in the event of an attack: NGOs were made acutely aware that their only means of responding to any attack was to threaten to withdraw support from populations whom they were there to assist and whose suffering could only be increased by a withdrawal, leaving the very assailants the NGO was seeking to “punish” by its withdrawal an even freer hand to increase their depredations. This dilemma was fundamental to all programmatic and administrative decisions made by all NGOs<sup>31</sup>; it is probably fair to say that no NGO was entirely comfortable with all the choices it ended up making.

While it was certainly true that to a greater extent than perhaps anywhere, all politics (and thus all security) in Somalia in 1992-95 *was* local, in that each region, district and village faced a slightly different (and ever-shifting) mix of power brokers and of challengers, some of the fundamental dynamics of working in Somalia remain consistent, at least throughout the southern and central regions -- and startlingly different from the ways in which NGOs work virtually anywhere else.

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<sup>30</sup> Dole has on several occasions denied having direct interests in Somalia, but the general assumption is that the Iranian businessman who has been dealing with the rivals to Somalfruit does have ties to Dole interests at some level.

<sup>31</sup> References to “NGOs” are to *international* NGOs unless otherwise specified. A number of Somali NGOs emerged during this period and have made substantial contributions to relief and reconstruction; the challenges these organizations faced within their own society were in many (though by no means all) respects substantially different from those faced by their international counterparts, if not less daunting.

An obvious example of this is the use of armed security guards. Except in Somaliland and in a few other, isolated instances<sup>32</sup>, the use of such personnel was almost universal -- to the point of being an unquestioned aspect of life for many agencies. Certainly, in Mogadishu in 1992, operations were almost unthinkable in the absence of such personnel: if you wanted to use a vehicle, the vehicle came with a complement of armed men; if you rented a compound, the landlord would insist that a contingent of his or her retainers remain to guard it -- the presence of these guards was not optional, though most vehicle owners or landlords were amenable to making changes when the client complained that a specific security guard seemed too tense or volatile. The assumption was that an unarmed vehicle or an unprotected compound was automatically going to be looted, especially if either was occupied by a foreigner (denoting the presence of attractive and eminently lootable resources), depriving the proprietor of a source of income. Under these circumstances, it was considered wise practice on the part of the contracting foreigners to make additional arrangements -- by hiring additional staff of their own and/or by making top-up arrangements with the personnel thus imposed on them -- providing a minimum of leverage in the hope that, if so feeding, one's hand would remain unbitten. There were certainly plenty of instances of individual guards or of whole cohorts turning against their employers (this was perhaps more frequent among UN agencies than among the NGOs) and causing ugly episodes -- killings, hostage-takings. But in most cases, NGO relations with their "security" staffs were peaceable. Many, Save the Children among them, saw their guards, who were usually quite young men, as having been forced to seek this work for want of other opportunities, and offered them remedial literacy or other training opportunities during off-duty hours and in low-alert times; the young people in question in turn usually bestowed on the agencies a limited but real measure of loyalty, and in some cases wound up having indeed to fight or to face off potential looters or assailants.

These practices have been criticized in various ways<sup>33</sup>: that if the use of armed guards is incompatible with humanitarian activity and if work in a given area was impossible without them, one ought not to work there; that using such personnel was dangerous and essentially corrupting, by helping to perpetuate the violent culture that was preventing any genuine normalization of the Somali political situation; that the use of guards (generally already members of one or another clan-based militia) was in fact a further subsidy (along with moneys paid for vehicle and office rent) to the militia leaderships, either by taking a given number of young men off their payroll or (as was widely assumed to happen) by providing a further lucrative source of taxation. These matters could not in good conscience be ignored, yet the use of such guards (or the acceptance of

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<sup>32</sup> The Irish-based NGO Tocáire has offered an interesting example from its experience in Gedo region in the context of the present series of papers. \*[Cite....]\*

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Human Rights Watch, which puts it rather well: "The recruitment of private security guards had been a necessity for the aid agencies operating in Somalia before UNOSOM was established and continued to be the norm...after UN troops arrived...The need for privately-recruited guards was never eliminated--not least because a major recruitment pool was the large body of armed men loyal to the dominant subclans and their warleaders, who in turn benefited from the payments made. The private guards provided security against random violence and the real threat of independent banditry. To the extent that they represented both armed force and the political/military authority of their subclans they provided a kind of policing service...[providing] protection from the very de facto authorities to which the guards were themselves affiliated -- rather like hiring guards from the police force as guarantees against police harassment." Human Rights Watch, op. cit., p. 45.

them, where imposed by landlords and vehicle owners) was nearly universal among NGOs in Southern Somalia: “choice” was hardly an issue -- or, rather, the choice was to accept the use of guards or to withdraw completely.

Save the Children, then, joined its colleague agencies in accepting the “inevitable”, and, like many, tried to go as far as it could in controlling the process. In its choice of rental vehicles, in the guards hired to guard its compound in Qorioley, Save the Children’s senior Somali staff spent hours agonizing over issues of clan balance and of personal character. The upheavals of the time had brought a large number of pastoralist “moryans” into the region -- young warriors from the bush with little sophistication and strong inclinations toward violence. Such elements were systematically weeded out, though a few remained on the staffs of the vehicle owners and went on to cause a series of irritations and problems in 1993-94.

The working principle of clan balance applied at every level of the Save the Children operation: in the choice of communities in which to work (no clan was to be bypassed or left out of opportunities to participate in the cash-for-work scheme), in the choice of technical and managerial staff (extensionists, construction supervisors, paymasters), in the choice of security guards (who, though in mixed groups, generally got along quite well, even in periods of tension between their respective clans). The senior management of the project included a Ethiopian of Somali-Oromo origins (from the bilingual Gurra clan) as acting director for most of the project’s existence, an Isaaq (from Hargeisa) who had been resident for over a decade in Qorioley as program manager, as well as Habr Gidr from “senior” families (providing indispensable contacts with the dominant group of the time), Hawaadle, and members of various indigenous agriculturalist groups. In ways that would be recognizable to anyone who has worked in Somalia, key decisions were always the subject a lengthy consultations and almost always represented broad consensus. All staff, at every level, were carefully screened for their integrity and their ability to work well within such a system; those who were too argumentative or power-hungry were weeded out.

In 1993, following the UNITAF intervention, decisions had to be made about cooperation with the international forces. Whether or not to take advantage of military escorts, whether to call in military assistance when there seemed to be a menace from bandits or militias represented further, excruciatingly complex choices. During the UNITAF phase, the international military presence was so overwhelming and its commitment to the support of relief and rehabilitation activities so insistent that very close linkages were forged: UNITAF forces provided convoys, protection, and at times even project materials (e.g., sandbags for use in building flood embankments). The problem with these arrangements was their unreliability -- the military would come through magnificently on some occasions and not at all on others. Convoy appointments would be missed (and, for example, vaccines thereby spoiled), promises to allow Save the Children vehicles to travel unmolested would be ignored and security guards’ weapons seized (leaving vehicles unprotected on the open road). Gradually, as UNITAF gave way to UNOSOM II, it became increasingly obvious to NGOs that they would be better off relying on their own resources, including security staffs, than depending on an ever more unpredictable UNOSOM.

If great energy and thought had to go into protecting the project and its resources, yet more had to go into devising responses to the tensions that arose between the various groups with whom the project worked. This implied that wherever possible, senior staff would have to anticipate problems before they arose. In this as in so many other ways, the fact that many members of the senior team had been working, as a team, in Lower Shabelle for most of the previous decade brought obvious benefits. For example, it was clear that cultivation of the much of the best land was likely to alienate dry-season pasturage for pastoralist groups -- a source of perennial friction in the area and likely to be made worse by the presence of large numbers of pastoralists displaced by clan conflict in adjacent regions. Negotiations had to be undertaken with elders from all sides, and a decision was taken to construct several large ponds, fed from the irrigation system, for watering herds away from cultivated areas, and by judicious decisions to leave certain river- and canal-bank areas open for grazing. That there were few, if any, open conflicts over land use or land tenure during the period of the project demonstrates the coherence of the traditional structures of cooperation in Lower Shabelle, but also the skill and experience of the project staff.

*Security in Lower Shabelle, 1992-95: Consequences for Save the Children*

To sum up: the choices made with respect to security were on the one hand quite conventional for NGOs in that time and place (use of armed guards, albeit well-screened and ethnically balanced, use, at least under UNITAF, of military resources where this seemed expedient) and on the other hand reflected the immense advantage conferred on the project by its cadre of smart, committed Somalis, many with long experience working in with Save the Children in Lower Shabelle. While expatriate staff provided technical and managerial support and back-up, the project was almost entirely Somali in its day-to-day management and problem-solving, with expatriate staff often completely absent for weeks at a time (especially during the repeated and prolonged evacuations caused by the UNOSOM-SNA conflict in Mogadishu in the second half of 1993). The decision to maintain mixed security staffs generally proved successful. In the battles for Qoroley in October 93, in which control of the town changed hands several times, elders from each coalition took immediate steps to ensure that our compound was protected. Staff members from the losing side were able to find safe haven in the Save the Children compound. Throughout 1993, security was under reasonably control.

The result was, once again, a program that, from late 1992 through early 1995 allowed the rehabilitation of a huge part of the irrigation system of the Lower Shabelle (basically, every farming community in most of the districts served has, as of this writing, access to at least one working secondary canal by the end of the project), that paid out over \$ 2 million in cash-for-work wages to over 35,000 individuals, and that by its conclusion had achieved its aim of restoring food and small-farmer cash-crop production to a semblance of its pre-war levels. (Indeed, given the decay of the irrigation system in the declining years of the former government, in many respects the small-farmer portion of the irrigation system is in better shape today than it has been in at least a decade.) Short of a return to the kinds of cataclysmic warfare of 1991-92, Lower Shabelle seems likely to have regained its former status of breadbasket for southern Somalia. The accomplishments of the hundreds of dedicated individuals, both Somali and expatriate, who participated in this project are thus very substantial.

But they were achieved at a price. Senior project staff were subjected to constant pressures to hire personnel, to do favors, to misuse resources in one way or another, and the psychological costs of these pressures were at times overwhelming. While, with one huge exception, there were no direct attacks on Save the Children<sup>34</sup> employees, very few incidents of looting<sup>35</sup>. There were few serious attacks along the road between Mogadishu and Qorioley, and none in Mogadishu itself. Business relations with senior Habr Gidr, while generally satisfactory, if costly, on their own terms and helpful (no one had any allusions about this) in providing a significant measure of protection to the project, made everyone involved increasingly uncomfortable as Habr Gidr control of all aspects of economic life in Lower Shabelle increased in 1993-93. While things seemed relatively secure on the surface, there was a sense of unease that increased throughout 1993.

In February 1994, an explosive device was detonated outside the Save the Children residential compound in Qorioley, destroying part of the sleeping quarters and coming terrifyingly close to killing three expatriate staff members who were staying there at the time (two of whom, a couple, suffered extensive bruising and some hearing loss). All project activity was immediately suspended, and an inquiry, with the support of the elders of all local clans, was undertaken to figure out *why* this had happened and thus, with at least reasonable probability, *who* had done it. This occurred during a wave of attacks on international NGO operations throughout southern Somalia, but most other attacks occurred in areas where violence against the international community had been occurring sporadically since 1990; Save the Children had faced nothing of the sort since its return to Lower Shabelle in late 1992. A decision had to be made as to whether to continue operations in view of the elders' unwillingness or inability to identify the motive, let alone apprehend the culprit. After several months of reduced activity, the assurances of the local elders that community security would be beefed up were accepted, a decision was made to no longer keep expatriate staff full-time in Lower Shabelle, and the residential compound was changed to something more secure. Project activity thereupon was resumed at normal levels.

This incident dealt a serious blow to morale, one from which the project, in a sense, never fully recovered. The last expatriate staff member assigned to the project left in September of 1994, and it proved virtually impossible to find the right kind of replacement. While the project, as mentioned, had operated very successfully in the hands of the Somali staff on their own, morale here was also declining. Long-term senior staff began to be threatened more consistently and convincingly, and asked to be transferred or replaced. Spirits sagged. Important agriculture rehabilitation work continued, the basic security mechanisms remained successfully in place, but

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<sup>34</sup> The only actual casualties in the course of the entire project were a driver killed in a gun battle with a rival while off duty, and one of the cash facilitator's employees, an old, partially lame man gunned down by UNOSOM troops at a roadblock in Mogadishu in a confused incident in which the troops felt that they had been threatened. Repeated attempts to secure compensation for the victim's family, or even recognition of responsibility, in the latter incident have been unavailing.

<sup>35</sup> In one incident in which some young hotheads broke into the Save the Children compound and looted fuel and some office supplies, local elders secured the return of the stolen goods within 24 hours.

there was, by late 1994, a real sense that the project, having largely achieved what it had set out to do and revitalized small-farmer agricultural production, had probably run its course.

*The Decision to Withdraw: September 1994-February 1995*

The decline in morale mentioned above was not, in itself, adequate justification for the cessation of the project: many primary canals were again becoming silted, and, though it had by then become clear that much of the primary-canal work could be done at least as well by community labor as by heavy machinery, there remained a need for some mechanized digging to keep the renovated system running and as yet no likely source of this other than Save the Children. Some of the basic hardware installations were still being renovated. Also, unlike the agriculture revitalization project, which was on its way to at least partial self-sufficiency, the health project, requiring as it did regular inputs of pharmaceuticals and management skills, had no such immediate prospect. Donor support and interest, particularly from USAID/OFDA, which had been consistently strong throughout the project, showed no sign of flagging, and plans were being made in August-September 1994 for a slimmed-down project in 1995-96.

But the overall environment in Lower Shabelle was degenerating in ways that posed fundamental threats to the integrity of the project:

1. *Ethnic cleansing.* Ethnic/clan balance, among the project staff and among the communities served by it, was a central operating principle. As mentioned, the victory of the Habr Gidr forces over their Hawaadle rivals had led to the murder or expulsion of virtually all Hawaadle (and some members of allied clans) from Lower Shabelle. Hawaadle members of Save the Children's staff had been able to secure sanctuary in our compound, where they were protected by security staffs that included a significant number of Habr Gidr, but they were unable to work, and most chose to leave the area. Given other recent resignations and staff changes, senior program staff was, by the end of 1994, heavily weighed toward the Habr Gidr and allied clans, a state of affairs that made even the individuals in question uncomfortable. The project's all-important clan balance was thus severely compromised.
2. *Intra-Habr Gidr tensions.* One of the comparative advantages enjoyed by the Habr Gidr in their ascension to subclan dominance in southern Somalia had been their ability to remain reasonably cohesive. It was known that there were various factions surrounding Gen. Aïdid, whose authority did not always run unquestioned, but these groups nonetheless maintained a level of internal discipline that elicited the admiration of other groups. In 1994, this cohesiveness began to unravel, largely, it seems, because of economic rivalries. These rivalries were directly reflected in the increasing tensions on the large commercial banana plantations, with competition between Somalfruit and "Dole" interests causing a number of armed skirmishes. Given the increasing relative importance of Habr Gidr personnel within its senior staff, there was the clear danger that Save the Children could somehow be dragged into these con-

flicts. The danger signs were certainly there, especially since our staff had family affiliations on both sides of the conflict.

Taken together, these two elements threatened a radical change in the ways in which the project had previously done business, and there seemed to be no obvious remedy for either. A further, confirming sign of acute danger was that those who controlled plantations, on both sides of the Somalfruit/Dole divide, appeared to be resorting to increasingly exploitative measures to increase production and cut costs. The increased presence on the plantations of undisciplined “moryans”, clearly in the area to make money for themselves, indicated that the local agriculturalists could be in for a hard time, with little that Save the Children could do to protect them.

In November, December and January, consultations were held in Addis Abeba, Mogadishu and Nairobi, and options were discussed. It is a credit to the excellence and integrity of the projects senior staff that, regardless of their individual clan affiliations, the recommendation to close the program was in the end unanimous. Canal clearing activities (as well as health outreach) continued on full scale through February 1995, certain last-minute hardware improvements and flood-control structures were made. The Mogadishu office was closed in January, and the last Save the Children/Somalia staff were paid off at the end of February. The reasons for this action were clearly explained, to the elders of all local clans and to all other key counterparts, and Save the Children has clearly expressed its willingness to return to Lower Shabelle if, at some future time and under an internationally-recognized government, circumstances permit.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In the ensuing months, there have been accounts from within Somalia, as well as on the widely-followed BBC Somali service, that exploitation in Lower Shabelle has reached previously unimagined levels: that small farmers have been thrown off their land, others have been forced into slave labor on the plantations, that plantation laborers who, under long-standing custom, were normally allowed individual plots to farm on the fringes of the plantations, have been denied this privilege. These reports also suggest that Save the Children had in fact been taken for a ride in its cash-for-work activities: that farmers in Lower Shabelle were coerced by the warlords into participating in the program and that their wages were lifted as soon as the staff's back was turned. None of these accounts, however, has come from reliable observers who have actually been to Lower Shabelle, so it is fair to assume that they contain doses of the hyperbole characteristic of many such stories in Somalia. Nothing is impossible in Somalia, and it would thus be absurd to suggest that it is impossible that some such incidents took place. But the system was very carefully designed to ensure maximum transparency and multi-clan supervision. Communities were told as a group what their individual entitlements would be, payments were made publicly, with representatives of the community, our staff, and the cash facilitator present. The suggestion that all this was a sham would seem to be belied by the tremendous enthusiasm with which communities participated, the wide range of this participation (by young and old, men and women), and the fact that work goals were consistently exceeded and projects regularly completed ahead of schedule.

*Effects of the Project on Banditry and on Local Conflict*

When the Save the Children agriculture revitalization project was initiated in Lower Shabelle in late 1992, certain assumptions were made about the influence such a large-scale activity would have on security. While there was a healthy respect for inherent complexity of the situation, there was also a fundamental optimism (explicitly shared by community leaders) that so far-reaching a project would focus energies away from conflict, provide a viable alternative to looting, and thereby increase security overall.

In retrospect, it is easy to dismiss such assumptions as naïve. Yet they did not, in the event, prove to have been entirely unfounded. This was a complex rehabilitation initiative undertaken in the context of a “complex emergency”, and its interaction with the broader context was, appropriately, complex. In assessing these effects, it is hard to be sure -- of anything, which is a general condition that students of the crisis in Somalia will readily recognize. Nonetheless, the following comments represent the informed, consensus opinion of the senior staff members closest to the project for the longest time. Nothing said here can definitively be proven, but much of it is compellingly believable to this small group.

The shared conviction of the project’s senior staff is that the project contributed to a significant acceleration of a certain process of normalization in Lower Shabelle in 1993-94 and that *the project contributed to a net and sustainable reduction in random violence.*

Again, many of the peoples indigenous to Lower Shabelle are not by nature warlike -- they are more likely to be dragged into a conflict in which their land is being fought over by others than to cause wars themselves. But in 1991-92, recourse to violence became one of the only means of survival for many; as local and outside militias proliferated in Lower Shabelle. The area was of course awash in weapons, the prestige of the militias increased among young men, and many who were incorporated into militias also followed the example set by their “moryan” colleagues by taking up arms to feed themselves or to indulge acquisitive fancies. This process was palpably reversed during the agriculture revitalization project: thousands of young men who were known to have been active militia members or potential looters came forward and joined the cash-for-work project; many actually boasted of laying down their weapons and taking up their hoes. Community leaders and ordinary people again and again praised the project for this redirection of energy, and while there is no way to predict whether these young men will remain true to their rediscovered agricultural vocations in the coming year or so, it is at least conceivable that the attractions of a normal life (given the Lower Shabelle’s potential for abundance) will ultimately outweigh the glamour and excitement of banditry.

Similarly, *the project had a mixed but on the whole positive effect on local clan conflict.* Because they have a history of sharing a common, fragile resource -- the irrigation system -- the agriculturalist clans of Lower Shabelle are far more inclined to patterns of cooperation than many of the neighboring pastoralist groups, for whom survival is often construed as a zero-sum game. It is the feeling of those closest to the project that it arrived at the right time -- after the worst of the famine, as communities were starting to pick themselves up and wondering how to put their

lives back together. The extraordinary enthusiasm that greeted the first, tentative clearing of the Libaan canal was an indication of this predisposition.

As we have seen, it was a basic operating principle of Save the Children's program in Lower Shabelle that it would be built on these patterns of cooperation and would work through elders and the communities at large to predict and defuse conflicts before they occurred; The existing irrigation committees were of course central to this process, but committees of the whole, groups of women, groups of youth, or other configurations were formed ad hoc wherever it was clear that there was potential conflict between the interests or rights of two or more groups, a situation which obviously obtained for virtually every tactical project decision. It goes without saying that this was a demanding and exhausting process, but it clearly worked, in that no project activity resulted directly in conflict.

. By allowing all interested communities to participate, the basic commitment to the system was revitalized along with its physical aspect, and it is felt that the temptation for one small, weak group to prey on its neighbors was thereby reduced. But this was not true for all such groups: those, like the Garri and the Jido, which aligned themselves with the different sides of the Habr Gidr-Hawaadle conflict clearly did so in the expectation that they would be able to expand the respective holdings of their group in the traditional-farmer areas of Lower Shebelle.

An interesting example here is the chronic tension that exists whenever pastoralists drive large herds through cultivated fields to reach the Shebelle in search of dry-season watering and pasturage. Even in "normal" times (however these are defined in Somalia...), such conflicts are a regular feature of the annual cycle, as herds trample or consume crops in their drive to the river banks. Project staff were made aware, by the communities, that this issue would inevitably arise as soon as enough fields had been planted and the 1993 *deyr* rains ended. Comprehensive consultations took place both with pastoralists and with agriculturalists, and the sites for several large ponds, to be fed off the irrigation system, were identified. Procedures for exercising traditional pastoralist rights in certain areas were rethought and renegotiated, and throughout 1993 and for most of 1994, were respected. Inevitably, there were some tensions, but it proved possible to contain these and to meet the needs of both groups without recourse to violence.

It is obviously not the claim here that traditional patterns for such negotiations did not exist, but rather that the project helped create a dynamic in which such cooperation and negotiation again became a norm, where in so many other areas of Somalia at that time, they had frayed, with negotiations following the shoot-outs rather than being used to head them off. It was important to this process that the project staff saw it as integral to their role to provide good offices where local tensions threatened became apparent and violence became a threat -- good offices that were deployed almost daily, in varying measures of urgency. Had the staff seen itself as providing purely technocratic support, the project would almost certainly have collapsed early on; too expansive and officious a proffering would, on the other hand, have made the staff a target -- part of the problem, rather than the solution. But by deploying their collective skills and experience, acquired over a long period of work in the area, the staff served in many instances to calm tensions and avert violence in ways no outsiders could presume to do.

This did not, however, mean that all potential for conflict between local pastoralist or agropastoralist groups was defused or eliminated by one agricultural project, no matter how inclu-

sive its scope or how attuned its staff sought to be to local currents. The events of 1993-94, described above, are indicative of the opposite: that the revitalization of the irrigation system and the return to productivity of thousands of valuable parcels of irrigable land inevitably turned some groups' (or at least some influential individuals') minds to thoughts of domination and expansion. The fact that groups like the Jido came to be caught up in the Hawaadle-Habr Gidr warfare of 1993-94 shows that such inclinations were overwhelming at this time in Somalia, and it would be blindness to pretend that the project, for all the normalizing and calming influence that it had on the vast majority of the communities with which it worked, did not also play some role in exciting such covetousness.

### *Effects of the Project on Broader Conflicts*

It is the consensus of the senior project staff that *the project had little effect on large-scale, organized conflict, and that what effect it had was probably negative.*

There can be no understanding of what has happened in Somalia since 1990 without an understanding of how looting, rape and killing occurred at several levels, the distinctions between which are admittedly blurry. At one level, there was free-lance banditry, at times frenzied and seemingly nihilistic; at another, strictly local struggles for control of vital resources; at yet a third (one hesitates to say "higher") level there are large, organized groups pursuing strategic objectives over wide areas. It is characteristic of the present crisis that there are a bewildering number of such groups, all having substantial armed force and military skill, and that all are in locked into a constantly shifting system of alliances and enmities with each other and with smaller groups seeking to strengthen their hand in the purely local rivalries. (Since January 1993, the Habr Gidr have episodically been dominant in this process in southern Somalia and have regularly shown the greatest cunning and sense of military opportunity, but their very dominance makes them a target for all the others.)

While, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Lower Shabelle is to some extent peripheral to the core strategic concerns of these big-picture players, which are pastoral (access to pasture, to water, control of the herds that are still the main single source of wealth in Somalia), it is a vital transitional area, and a potential source of great wealth to whatever group controls it. (Also, dry-season access to the Shabelle is central to the traditional pastoral strategies of a certain number of Central-Region groups.) The revival of the plantation economy, which occurred independently of the Save the Children project, and the flourishing of the banana trade, has whetted appetites and drawn the attention of players whose ties to the region are normally tenuous. These are not forces with which groups of weak clans, even in alliance with the staff of an NGO, however "smart" or well motivated, can effectively cope.

The agriculture revitalization project's effect at this level was in all probability marginal, but many of our senior staff feel that the net improvement in the overall value of land in the area and thus of the wealth to be extracted by means of taxation, control of trade, etc., may actually have made the Habr Gidr-Hawaadle warfare of late 1994 more likely.<sup>37</sup> (To sustain their strategic

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<sup>37</sup> Some of the reports mentioned in the preceding footnote speak of large numbers of farmers on the land improved by the revitalization project being dispossessed to make way for new plantations. Again, further

goals, these organized groups had also practiced wholesale looting, of national infrastructure, of private assets belonging to anyone outside their group, and of international relief assistance. Since the Save the Children project, by deliberate choice, had little to loot, it had little effect on this process one way or the other. It did, however, provide a useful revenue stream to dominant-clan members with goods or services to provide.<sup>38</sup>) The extent to which groups such as the Jido and the Garri (though the latter are more pastoralist and warlike) aligned themselves with the Habr Gidr or the Hawaadle shows that they saw potential gain to be had by bypassing the framework of inter-clan cooperation in the area, and it was because of the imbalances that resulted from this polarization of smaller groups into larger blocs and of the ensuing defeat of one of the latter that the senior staff came to the conclusion that the project would no longer be viable. What this portends for the coming months and years in Lower Shabelle is not yet clear, but there are preliminary and disturbing signs of some of these balances having indeed been tipped and some of the careful arrangements around which the project had been built undone.

### *Conclusion*

It had always been the commitment of the designers and managers of this project to “work smart”; part of this commitment required that the project be wound down if it appeared that the balance between a benign effect and making matters worse was shifting toward the latter. It could be argued that the project should have been folded following the bombing incident in 1994, but it was the distinct feeling of the staff at the time that the project participants would have seen that as betrayal -- allowing the project to be torpedoed by some of the very forces that had so overwhelmed them in 1992. The clear tendency toward worsening that was detected later in 1994 made the case for closure, however, overwhelming, and the project was thus wound down. Only a later on-the-scene assessment will be able to determine whether some of the project’s perceived achievements in helping to reduce banditry and local inter-group conflict have been undone by the changes that occurred in 1993-94 -- but it can certainly be said that the tensions of 1994 diminished what had been the relatively unqualified successes achieved in 1993 and revealed the limitations of these latter as long as the broader civil conflicts persist.

Nonetheless, agricultural production in the small-holder areas of Lower Shabelle had almost completely recovered from its collapse of 1992, and the project was unquestionably helpful

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investigation needs to be made into these allegations, but in this case they are pretty implausible: it was a basic principle of the project that it operated almost exclusively in small-farmer areas (north of the main line of plantations that, being the farthest toward the bottom of the alluvial plain, have the best soil and are the easiest to irrigate) that had never been plantations because they are fundamentally unsuited to this purpose.

<sup>38</sup> An anecdote may usefully illustrate attitudes toward this question. In keeping with its policy of transparency, Save the Children staff, early in the project, asked elders of all groups to participate in selection of the suppliers of the vehicles to be rented. It was, of course, widely understood that virtually all such vehicles had been looted from someone else. When Habr Gidr vehicle owners were questioned by members of other groups as to why they owned so many vehicles and thus seemed poised to corner a substantial share of the rental market, they responded that the Habr Gidr had made the greatest sacrifices of blood and treasure to bring down Siyaad Barre, and that they were thus entitled as of right to such preferment.

in significantly accelerating this recovery. This has brought reasonable self-sufficiency to most communities in the area, and this benefit stands on its own as justification for the energies and funds expended. It is not likely that the civil conflicts will again reach the levels of virulent destructiveness of 1991-92, and, barring this, the gains made in Lower Shabelle's small-farmer output are likely to endure. Whether the irrigation system can now be maintained in the absence of an outside partner (whether governmental or non-governmental) is of course a major issue that will determine much of the project's longer-term effect; it is likely that this outcome, too, will be conditioned to a large extent by whether the broader civil wars persist. The Lower Shabelle agriculture rehabilitation project showed that even in remarkably adverse circumstances, the creative energies of communities can be brought to bear on reconstruction, and that much latent conflict can be set aside in the process; it also demonstrates that, until larger-scale rivalries come to be managed more constructively, there will always be limits to what individual communities or regions can accomplish in their efforts to rebuild their livelihood and their children's future.