

**War-Torn Societies Project International
The Academy for Peace and Development
Somaliland**

Project Evaluation

September 2002

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

I. Introduction

II. The Somaliland Context

III. Project Design and Execution

IV. Project Impact

V. Broader Impact of the Academy

VI. Assessment of Written Products and Films

VII. Project Administration

VIII. Transition Issues and Challenges

IX. Conclusion: Lessons Learned, Policy Considerations

Appendix: Terms of Reference

References

Foreword

Tragically, one of the key team members of the WSP-Somali programme, Dr. Ahmed Yusuf Farah, passed away in August 2002, during the course of this evaluation. Dr. Ahmed served as principal researcher in WSP-Somalia since the inception of the project. One of the leading anthropologists on Somalia, Dr. Ahmed produced numerous articles and reports on aspects of peacebuilding, traditional Somali mechanisms of reconciliation, and contemporary political trends. He provided training in the participatory action research method to WSP affiliates and played a valuable role as editor of the project entry point papers. His death is a loss both for WSP and for the Somali intellectual community. Due to his illness, Dr. Ahmed could not be interviewed as part of this evaluation. But it is hoped that his spirit of reflection, rigor, honesty, and commitment to learning is honored in this report.

Executive Summary

The War-Torn Societies Project in Somaliland, embodied in the WSP affiliate “The Somaliland Academy for Peace and Development (APD),” is one of three zonal projects within the WSP-Somali programme. As with the WSP projects in Puntland and South-Central Somalia, the WSP-Somaliland project has several objectives, including:

- to provide local and national actors in Somali society with a new tool – the WSP participatory action research method – to set priorities, build consensus and formulate policy responses through an inclusive, locally-driven process;
- to provide the international community with a partner organization to assist them in the field and in reforming policies and practices by contributing to their understanding of local actors and post-conflict realities and by providing space for regular informal consultation with local and national actors;
- to promote a better understanding of the challenges faced by Somali society;
- to contribute to global networks linking the many actors involved in rebuilding war-torn societies, improving their capacity and expertise.

These objectives are pursued through a project which “brings together actors from local and national administrations, civil society groups, the private sector, community leaders, local and international NGOs, and external assistance partners in a consensus-based process for the identification and prioritisation of reconstruction and development needs, action-based research and problem solving, and development of recommendations for improved policy and practice.”¹

This external evaluation was carried out in July-August 2002, at a time when the Academy was just completing the WSP project and entering a period of transition from a fully-funded WSP affiliate to an independent entity. Another three to five years must pass before the longer-term impact of the project can be fully assessed. But the more immediate impact of the project can now be evaluated, and at least some indicators are currently available to suggest, however tentatively, the likely longer-term legacy of the project.

By even the most rigorous yardsticks, the WSP-Somaliland project has met or exceeded most of its stated objectives. In the process, it has also achieved a number of additional accomplishments which were not explicit goals of the project but which constitute “value-added” of considerable significance both to the Somaliland political process and to external donors.

Among the most notable accomplishments of the project include the following:

- *Viable successor body.* The Academy for Peace and Development has quickly established itself as the preeminent national think-tank and forum for political,

¹ Annex 1, “Description: Participatory Action Research in Support of Peace Building, the Prevention of Renewed Conflict and the Building of a Democratic Culture.” WSP Project Proposal to the European Union, B7-703/2001/3190, p.1.

- social, and economic issues in Somaliland. It has a very strong reputation for quality, independence, and neutrality, possesses a talented and committed core staff, and enjoys an exceptionally strong sense of local ownership. It appears to have the capacity to survive as a sustainable national institution after financial support from WSP is terminated. As a successor body to a WSP project, the Academy may well be the most promising WSP affiliate yet created.
- *Promotion of national dialogue on post-war development priorities.* The project workshops succeeded in bringing together a wide range of opinion-shapers across clan, regional, gender, and political fault-lines to consider development priorities in post-war Somaliland. Civil society and government officials were enthusiastic about participating in the workshops and expressed broad satisfaction with the workshop proceedings. All in all, the Academy workshops matched up extremely well both to Somali political culture in general and to the specific needs of Somaliland at an important moment in its history.
 - *Production of quality written products.* The initial written report of the project, the *Somaliland Self-Portrait*, was widely acclaimed and circulated among external donors, aid agencies, journalists, and the diaspora. It has served as a standard English-language reference on Somaliland for several years. The four draft entry point papers on the livestock economy, impact of the war on the family, the media, and political decentralization (based on the 12 workshops, and also in English) were all well-conceived and well-written, ranging in quality from acceptable to exceptional.
 - *Successful video component.* The video component was a resounding success, yielding four high-quality and powerful videos in the Somali language capturing the main themes and debates of the entry papers. The initial screening of the videos produced a universal conviction that they need to be widely distributed inside Somaliland and to the diaspora. The videos will likely have more impact on the general public than any other component of the WSP project.
 - *Research capacity-building.* The project succeeded in developing the research skills of the Academy team members, and in introducing to hundreds of workshop participants and working group members the basic methodology of participatory action research. Most observers expect that the Academy will continue to serve as a “think-tank” for training, research, and reflection, grooming future public leaders with close knowledge of the participatory action research method.
 - *Community service work.* The Academy leadership did not confine the work of the Academy strictly to the WSP project, but also actively pursued opportunities to contribute to the public good in other ways. The “Forum,” a series of public evening discussions and debates on political issues held on the Academy compound, provided a vital public space for opinion-shapers to discuss important public policy topics. This role of mediator, neutral space for political discussion, and catalyst for informed, reasoned public debate has catapulted the Academy onto center stage of Somaliland’s political life, filled a critical need at a delicate period in Somaliland, and earned the Academy a very high level of respect in the Somaliland community. The Academy has also provided assistance and advice upon request to the electoral commission, the Parliament, and ministries.

- *Maintenance of neutrality and working relations with government and opposition.* Given the often sensitive topics treated in the project workshops, the fact that the Academy has not run afoul of either the government or opposition is a remarkable achievement. Its entry workshops, point papers, and videos often produced frank and critical assessments, but careful cultivation of influential public officials and civil leaders in an informal “friends of the Academy” circle helped to pre-empt problems and shielded the project from those who felt threatened by the process.
- *Wider impact.* The project profited from and actively developed a range of “amplifiers” to extend the impact of the Academy far beyond the immediate participants in the workshops. Media coverage of the Academy’s workshops and Forum – both in the local press and radio and on the BBC Somali service -- was extensive and almost always positive, reaching Somalilanders and Somalis around the world.
- *Support service to donors and other external actors.* The Academy and the WSP-Somalia unit are widely sought after by external actors – diplomats, journalists, donor agencies, and academics – as a leading source of expertise on Somaliland. The Academy has also served as facilitator for external field trips to Somaliland. The Academy and the WSP-Somalia staff have devoted substantial time to this service, on which external donors place considerable value.

How the Academy achieved these successes, despite numerous financial, organizational, and political challenges, is a topic explored in detail in the body of this evaluation. A few of the most important factors include the following:

- *Advance preparation.* WSP was able to navigate a number of potentially dangerous political shoals in Somaliland by devoting extensive time and energy to preparatory work before establishing the project. This project could not have succeeded had it been subjected to the rushed time-frames typical of conventional development projects.
- *Recruitment.* As with its other projects in Somalia, WSP successfully recruited a respected, skilled, and representative national team, giving the project instant credibility both locally and in international circles. It also benefited from the strong personal reputations of the programme coordinator and Academy director.
- *Team-building and motivation.* The Academy devoted considerable time and effort into building a sense of trust and commitment within the research team. Problems and approaches were discussed at length in afternoon gatherings, and decisions taken as a result of group consensus. This produced a team which was highly motivated and dedicated both to the Academy and to one another, and helped the team weather difficult challenges.
- *Commitment.* A strong level of personal commitment to WSPI’s work and principals was vital in pulling the project through the financial crisis it encountered in parts of 2001-2002. Individual team members made considerable personal sacrifices to keep the project operational. Field staff in Hargeisa worked without pay for months; a Geneva WSPI team member sent personal funds to help cover outstanding salaries to Academy researchers; a Nairobi team member used

- her personal residence, vehicle and phone to keep that office operational when a lack of funds forced WSP to go temporarily without an office there.
- *Political acumen and social capital.* WSP and the Academy cultivated a valuable circle of “friends of the Academy” which helped them anticipate, preempt, and manage the many political challenges which typically arise in the complex operating environment of Somalia and Somaliland. As a result the Academy was in a much stronger position to trouble-shoot than most other NGOs, and made fewer costly mistakes over the course of the project. The WSP-Somaliland project demonstrates the extent to which a project’s “social capital” in the community can constitute as valuable an asset as funding.
 - *Learning capacity.* The WSP-Somaliland project benefited from lessons learned from the WSP-Puntland project, appropriating successful techniques and taking steps to avoid problems which arose there.
 - *Ownership.* A critical ingredient in the success of the Academy, the project workshops, and the Forum is the strong sense of national ownership of the project. The Academy is viewed locally as an indigenous organization, not an international aid project. This earned the Academy greater local legitimacy and allowed it to focus attention on a national debate and discussion without the distraction external aid agencies or international personnel often inadvertently produce.
 - *Timing.* WSP stepped into Somaliland at the optimal moment, when the political process was most in need of the kind of catalyst and mediator for dialogue which the Academy provided, and when civil society and political authorities were most receptive to that dialogue. This created an enabling environment which expanded the project’s possibilities well beyond what was originally anticipated. Whether it was the product of good judgement or happy coincidence, WSP and the Academy were at the right place at the right time in Somaliland.

Despite the successful results of the WSP-Somaliland project, a number of shortcomings were also in evidence, especially in project management, administration, and personnel matters. Financial and administrative constraints were serious enough to warrant the conclusion that at certain points in the project life-cycle the Academy succeeded in spite of, not because of, administration which was supposed to support and facilitate the project. In many cases, steps have already been taken by WSPI to correct these problems. They include:

- *Financial planning and management.* The WSP-Somaliland project faced severe financial crises during portions of the project. Salaries and bills went unpaid for several months in Somaliland. This delayed completion of the project, eroded morale, and nearly derailed the entire WSP-Somalia programme. Most of this crisis was beyond the control of WSPI. But shortcomings were evident in financial planning and reporting, including monitoring and follow-up of donor pledges, adequate knowledge of complex UN executing agency procedures, and adequate training of financial officers.

- *Communication.* Communication between the different WSP offices (Somaliland, Nairobi, and Geneva) was uneven and generally unsatisfactory, leading to mixed signals and misunderstandings.
- *Organizational division of labor.* Responsibilities for and authority over different administrative tasks within WSP-Somalia, the Somaliland project, and WSPI-Geneva were not always clearly delineated, leading to gaps in administrative work, redundancies, and unnecessary disputes over decision-making.
- *Problems related to WSPI's dual identity.* WSPI's dual status as both an international NGO and a UN-affiliated organization produced considerable administrative complications related to donor funding and the already complex modalities of UN executing agencies. The perceived advantages of this dual identity need to be weighed carefully against the costs it entails.
- *Personnel problems.* A number of disputes and tensions within the WSP team were in evidence both within and between the Hargeisa, Nairobi, and Geneva offices. In a small organization, such individual disputes can hamper institutional effectiveness and require more intervention by management. Guidelines related to the proper amount of time staff members may devote to non-WSP related work or business also required clarification. Portions of the Geneva administration lacked the "service culture" required to provide timely, flexible assistance to the field.
- *UN administrative issues.* The Somaliland project was frustrated by administrative problems despite the fact it sported a relatively large number of administrators. The receiving and executing UN agencies (UNDP and UNOPS) were unable to properly administer the project and account for funds in a timely and accurate manner, forcing WSP to create shadow administrators in Nairobi and Geneva to do much of the administrative work it was paying the UN to do. This made the project somewhat "top-heavy" with administrators relative to the number of staff in the field. Incidents relating to the accountability of the UN receiving and executing agencies were serious in nature and raise questions about the appropriateness of reliance on UN agencies as executing agents for WSPI projects.
- *Field-headquarters relations.* Tensions linked to the financial crisis WSP-Somalia faced, and WSPI's response to that crisis, had a negative impact on relations between the Academy, the WSP-Nairobi office, and the WSPI-Geneva headquarters. While friction between headquarters and the field is common, in this case tensions deteriorated to unhealthy levels. Alarming differences in perceptions of problems existed between some of the field staff and some WSP headquarters staff.

In addition, not all stated objectives were met by the project. This was due to several inter-related factors:

- *Stakeholders in the multiple objectives of WSPI.* WSPI simultaneously seeks to catalyze changes in post-conflict development at the field level and in donor and UN agency headquarters. These distinct objectives have tended to split the organization, with Geneva focused more on advocacy aimed at global policy reform and the field committed almost entirely to local needs and objectives. The WSP-Somalia and

Academy team members possessed a very strong commitment to their work on behalf of Somaliland, but did not see themselves as stakeholders in the broader WSPI goal of reforming and informing universal UN and donor policy. As a result, Geneva's requests for "lessons learned" and other reporting from the field to feed into its headquarters-level advocacy were viewed as onerous and secondary concerns which were often delayed or ignored.

- *"Lessons learned" capacity.* The lessons learned component of WSPI-Geneva during most of the Somaliland project was relatively weak, in part due to the fact that the Geneva office was undergoing a lengthy period of restructuring and in part due to the Somaliland team's increasing reluctance to devote time to the effort.
- *Complexity of the WSP message and mission.* The WSP methodology and mission, as expressed in its own literature, is relatively and perhaps unnecessarily complex. At times this creates difficulties in explaining and marketing the project and its approach to local communities and aid agencies.
- *Regional comprehensiveness of the project.* The Somaliland project was not able to fully involve all populations within the territory claimed by Somaliland. Parts of the easternmost section of Somaliland, in sections of Sanaag and Sool regions, are divided over affiliation with Somaliland, and Hargeisa-based projects are unable to work effectively in those areas. This was an unavoidable constraint on the project.
- *Outreach to UN agencies and NGOs at the national level.* The WSP-Somaliland project continued to feature the same low level of engagement with the international aid community as occurred in the earlier WSP-Puntland project. The inability to integrate international aid agencies into the national dialogue on development priorities, and the low level of WSP involvement in aid agency meetings in Nairobi, were the only instance in which the project clearly did not achieve a stated objective. This was more a conscious policy choice than a failure, based on the field project team's assessment of the feasibility and worthiness of the objective.

I. Introduction

This report constitutes the findings of an external evaluation of WSP-International's Somaliland project.² The evaluation itself is one of several tools which WSPI employs to learn lessons about project impact, capacity to meet objectives, organizational efficiency, and the relevance of the participatory action research methodology in post-conflict societies. More explicit delineation of the objectives of the external evaluation is set out in the Terms of Reference, provided as an appendix to this report. The evaluation was pursued with the intention of serving as a useful instrument for self-reflection and institutional learning by WSP.

Project Objectives

The War-Torn Societies Project in Somaliland, embodied in the WSP affiliate “The Somaliland Academy for Peace and Development (APD),” is the second of three zonal WSP projects in Somalia. All three zonal projects fall within a single WSP-Somali programme, headed by a single programme coordinator. As with the WSP projects in Puntland and South-Central Somalia, the WSP-Somaliland project has several objectives:

- to provide local and national actors in Somali society with a new tool – the WSP participatory action research method – to set priorities, build consensus and formulate policy responses through an inclusive, locally-driven process;
- to provide the international community with a partner organization to assist them in the field and in reforming policies and practices by contributing to their understanding of local actors and post-conflict realities and by providing space for regular informal consultation with local and national actors;
- to promote a better understanding of the challenges faced by Somali society;
- to contribute to global networks linking the many actors involved in rebuilding war-torn societies, improving their capacity and expertise.

These objectives are pursued through a project which “brings together actors from local and national administrations, civil society groups, the private sector, community leaders, local and international NGOs, and external assistance partners in a consensus-based process for the identification and prioritisation of reconstruction and development needs, action-based research and problem solving, and development of recommendations for improved policy and practice.”³ It is against these stated objectives that the project is evaluated.

² The evaluation was conducted by Ken Menkhaus, Associate Professor of Political Science at Davidson College. He also conducted the evaluation of the WSP-Puntland project (see Menkhaus 2001). Any errors of fact or interpretation are solely his responsibility.

³ Annex 1, “Description: Participatory Action Research in Support of Peace Building, the Prevention of Renewed Conflict and the Building of a Democratic Culture.” WSP Project Proposal to the European Union, B7-703/2001/3190, p.1. These objectives are a modified but roughly similar version of objectives laid out for the WSP-Somalia project in 1997; see Kane (1999), pp. 53-54.

*Evaluation Methodology*⁴

Projects which aim primarily at the promotion of processes rather than products, and which target critical yet intangible objectives such as good governance, participation, and peacebuilding, are particularly challenging to evaluate. Despite the growing centrality of these objectives in foreign assistance, the tools and yardsticks available for measuring the impact of process-oriented projects are underdeveloped. The dilemma exists on several levels. First, we have only rudimentary means of measuring changes in political participation, the extent to which governance is perceived as “good” (or at least “better” over time), and the extent to which peace has been consolidated. Second, the kinds of indicators which are most useful in measuring these processes tend to be least accessible and affordable in post-war settings, where a combination of poverty, displacement, distrust, and weak or outdated statistical databases render extensive surveys and other tools of the trade unfeasible, unreliable, or simply too expensive and time-consuming for the purposes of a project impact assessment. Finally, there is the basic problem of establishing causality when discussing project impact. Even when relatively strong indicators exist suggesting a clear improvement in participation, good governance, and peacebuilding, it is virtually impossible to make a clear causal link between those changes and a foreign aid project. Far too many intervening and external factors influence such societal trends. Ironically, at the same time that aid agencies are called upon to promote more intangible, process-oriented development goals, they are also under growing pressure from both internal monitoring procedures and external donors to produce “measurable outputs.”

For the moment, the best tool in our evaluation toolbox continues to be qualitative assessments based on a combination of in-depth interviews, site visits, and participant observation by an evaluator who is familiar with both the country setting and the project. Those are the main methods employed in this evaluation. The site visits for the evaluation were conducted over a three-week period from July 14 through August 6 2002. The evaluator spent seven days in Nairobi, 13 days in Somaliland, and two days in Geneva. A total of 55 persons were interviewed. Interviewees included all but one of the members of the WSP Somaliland and Nairobi teams, and seven of the WSPI staff members in Geneva. Other interviewees included a sample of project participants, government officials, civic leaders, donors, and staff of international aid agencies. In addition, the evaluator attended the final project presentation to the National Project Group (July 31-August 1) at which the draft entry point papers were presented and discussed and the videos shown. The evaluator also participated in an Academy Forum session. Finally, the evaluation includes a review of the project written products and video productions.

The decision to conduct the evaluation during the final project presentation had advantages and drawbacks. The chief advantage was that it provided the evaluator with the opportunity to be an eyewitness to an important, final phase of the project itself, see

⁴ General guidelines for WSP project evaluation are detailed in WSP, *War-Torn Societies Project in Practice* (1999), pp. 88-95.

the Academy team in action, and observe and record the many responses of the National Project Group and guests (100-150 attendees) to the project research papers and videos, all without the limitation of “filtered” recollections common to evaluations of projects in the past tense. The main disadvantages were that the project team was busy and preoccupied, limiting the quantity and quality of time that the evaluator had with individual team members; a number of important external actors in Nairobi were absent, as the evaluation took place at the height of the European vacation season; and the critical transition phase of the project lay ahead of the evaluation and thus is more a topic of speculation than assessment. The external evaluation also took place prior to the completion of an internal evaluation process. Whenever possible, key individuals who were unavailable for live interviews were subsequently contacted by electronic mail or telephone for input. Follow-up discussions by electronic mail were also used to secure confirmation or clarification from team members.

Efforts were made to secure a representative sample of interviewees from the broader community. A cross-sample of interviewees was achieved along regional, clan, professional, and gender lines. The main shortcoming of the sample was that the evaluator was partially reliant on the Academy team to direct him to the most useful and thoughtful interviews, introducing the possibility of bias in favor of “friends of the Academy” (though interviews with known critics of the Academy were also scheduled). The decision was also made to keep the evaluation in the capital Hargeisa, mainly on the grounds that participants from outlying regions would be attending the workshop in Hargeisa. This also saved considerable time which otherwise would have been spent in transit. Nonetheless, this decision introduced the possibility of an urban bias into the evaluation.

The comparative method was also employed as part of the evaluation. The evaluator drew on his earlier assessment of the WSP-Puntland project to serve as a benchmark against which to measure WSP-Somaliland’s work. This was an especially useful tool for assessing the WSP’s capacity to learn and apply lessons from previous operations. Finally, the evaluation drew on insights and observations made in an interim impact evaluation of the project by USAID in September 2000 (Schwoebel 2000).

Project Chronology

The WSP project in Somaliland is the second of three zonal projects in Somalia. It was prepared and initiated during the operational phase of the WSP-Puntland project. The WSP-Somali programme team based in Nairobi – including the WSP-Somali programme coordinator, deputy coordinator, principal researcher, and external affairs/operations manager – assist all three WSP affiliates in Somalia, including the Puntland affiliate and the South-Central project based in Mogadishu. The fact that most of the Nairobi office had worked for WSP since the inception of the Puntland project in 1996 gave the Somaliland project a strong and useful institutional memory, allowing it to learn and apply lessons from the Puntland experience with ease. This considerably reduced start-up costs and mistakes in the Somaliland project.

With a few exceptions, the Somaliland project followed the same chronological template of the Puntland project. Prior to a decision to launch a project in Somaliland, a long period of preliminary investigation and advance work was conducted by a combination of WSP-Geneva, the coordinator of WSP-Somalia, and key members of the WSP board.⁵ This exploratory period lasted from 1996 to late 1997, and allowed WSP to develop a strong network of contacts, a sense of the viability of the project, a preliminary list of potential candidates for project director, and an invitation from the Cigal administration to initiate a program in Somaliland. In 1997, following informal meetings and investigations, the position of director was offered to noted Somali psychiatrist Xuseen Cabdullahi Bulhan, and in 1998 the Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development (later renamed the Academy for Peace and Development) was established as a local NGO. Positions for a director of research, four researchers, a director of the audio-visual component (who was also a researcher), and project administrator were filled by the end of 1998.

With the team in place, the project entered its operational phase. From January to May 1999, time was spent in extensive training sessions and discussions on the participatory action research methodology, at the same time that the Academy (originally known as the Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development) was legally established as a local NGO and its office set up. The first research phase of the project occurred between March and August 1999, designed to produce the Country Note, entitled *A Self-Portrait of Somaliland: Rebuilding from the Ruins* (December 1999). The researchers were assigned to produce studies of contemporary politics, economics, society, culture, and women's issues. The team traveled as a group throughout the country, meeting in towns and villages with hundreds of local community members, listening to and recording their concerns and expectations. During this period the team also collected existing secondary reports toward the establishment of a basic database and library at the Academy. Over the next three months, the chapters of the *Self-Portrait* were drafted, discussed, and edited.

The next phase of the project began in November 1999, with the convening of the first meeting of National Project Group (NPG). The 80 individuals invited to the National Project Group were chosen by the Academy team with the aim of compiling a group of eminent "opinion-shapers" in Somaliland, from government, civil society, and the private sector. The NPG reviewed and amended the *Self-Portrait*. On the basis of discussion of the *Self-Portrait*, the NPG then identified four entry points for further research: the impact of the war on the family; the role of the media; the livestock economy; and political decentralization. Within each of these four entry points, three sub-topics were identified, each of which formed the basis for a workshop.

The Academy subsequently began a lengthy period of convening workshops. Twelve workshops were held over a 12 month period. The workshops were held in a variety of locations, ranging from the capital Hargeisa to remote outlying towns in five of the six regions of Somaliland. A core "project working group," consisting of 15-20 members of the national project group, were established for each of the four entry point topics, and were invited to the three workshops devoted to that topic. In addition, local

⁵ More detailed description of the preliminary phase of the project is provided in Kane (1999), pp. 58-60.

authorities in each workshop location were asked to identify individuals fitting a number of social, economic, occupational, and other categories who were invited to participate in the three day workshops. The workshops brought ordinary citizens and local authorities in outlying regions into extended discussions with “opinion-shapers” from the project group. Resource persons who were experts on the workshop topic were hired to help facilitate the workshop proceedings. A local individual was also hired in each location to serve as “anchor,” managing many of the logistical matters which required advance on-site attention. The results of the workshops formed the basis for the analyses produced in the entry point papers.

Following the workshops, researchers set out to produce drafts of the entry point papers. Initial drafts were reviewed and critiqued by the team, including the research associate and project coordinator. An external editor was also brought into the process. At the same time, the video component of the project was produced and edited. Both the films and drafts were presented to the final meeting of the National Project Group on July 31-August 1 2002. The National Project Group’s comments were recorded and will be incorporated into a final draft of the papers and a final edited version of the films.

The Academy entered a six month transition period beginning August 1, 2002. During this phase, it will complete the final aspects of the WSP project and begin to take on external consultancies, toward the goal of achieving financial sustainability as an independent entity enjoying continued affiliation with WSPI.

II. The Somaliland Context

The WSP project in Somaliland cannot be assessed in isolation from the political and social context in which the project has taken place. What follows is a brief overview of that context. The thesis presented here is that WSP stepped into a political and social context in Somaliland which proved to be exceptionally enabling environment for the project inside Somaliland, but that the external context – the world of UN agencies and other development actors – proved to be a non-permissive environment for the WSP project’s externally-focused objectives.

Somaliland – comprising the northwestern regions of Somalia – is a secessionist state which has not as of mid-2002 received any external recognition.⁶ It declared independence from the rest of Somalia in May 1991, following an extended period of repression and then a brutal civil war in the late 1980s which resulted in the destruction of its largest city, Hargeisa, by the regime of Siyad Barre. It bases its claim to independence on legal, political, and moral grounds. Legally, Somaliland authorities point to the fact that it was a separate colony of the British and enjoyed a brief period as an independent state in 1960 before forging a union with the former Italian Somaliland to the south. Somaliland authorities thus argue that its declaration of independence is not

⁶ This paper takes no position on Somaliland’s claim of independence either implicitly or explicitly, and nothing in this paper – including choice of words to describe Somaliland – should be inferred to reject or accept Somaliland’s sovereignty.

secessionist, but rather the termination of a failed attempt at a political union. Morally, they argue that repression, atrocities and massacres committed by “southern” Somalis against Somalilanders in the 1980s justify its withdrawal from the union. And politically, Somaliland’s supporters point to the referendum held in Somaliland in 2001 which overwhelmingly supported Somaliland independence. Somaliland’s claim is flatly rejected by Somali political leaders in the rest of the country, and has yet to be recognized by any outside state mainly due to reluctance to establish what is viewed as a dangerous precedent for secessionism elsewhere in Africa.⁷ WSP’s decision to work in Somaliland as a distinct zonal project in Somalia thus carried a certain amount of political baggage, and was viewed in some quarters as a pro-secessionist agenda. The fact that WSP had already established a project in non-secessionist Puntland helped to allay those fears.

While Somaliland enjoys no *de jure* status as a sovereign state in the international community, it possesses *de facto* most all of the attributes of a functional state authority within its borders. Over the course of the 1990s, it has slowly and sometimes painfully built a rudimentary state structure, established rule of law and good security over most of the country, and has overseen a modest but real economic recovery.⁸

Somaliland’s accomplishments have not come easily. The country had to endure a period of political paralysis in 1991-93 and armed conflicts in 1992 and again in 1994-1996. These clashes were driven mainly by factional competition and sub-clan rivalries within the dominant Isaaq clan over control of the self-declared state and its key resources – seaports and airports – which clan militias were reluctant to hand over to a government. Peace accords have involved lengthy, laborious negotiations between clan elders. Portions of the non-Isaaq populations in eastern regions of Somaliland have rejected inclusion in Somaliland and remain outside the government’s control. The lineage-based system of representation on which the Somaliland political system has been based since 1994 has institutionalized and deepened clannism in the country, complicating efforts to foster systems of representation and recruitment based on meritocracy. The government of President Maxamed Xaagi Ibrahim Cigal, from 1993 until his death in May 2002, was characterized by personal rule, corruption, and low levels of institutionalization. A weak tax base means the government operates on a very meager budget. About 70% of the government’s budget is devoted to defense and security forces, leaving the rest of the government with slim resources and civil servants on very low salaries. Successive livestock bans by Saudi Arabia due to fears of Rift Valley fever have hit the already poor Somaliland economy hard. Lack of recognition has deprived Somaliland of access to World Bank loans and other resources which might have facilitated economic recovery. Unemployment is high and social services such as education and health care remain essentially accessible only for those who can pay. Collectively, these factors create a challenging environment for WSP.

⁷ For a careful assessment of the politics of recognition and non-recognition in Somalia and Somaliland, see “Government Recognition in Somalia” (2002).

⁸ For a more comprehensive review of Somaliland’s history in the 1990s, see the Academy’s *Somaliland Self-Portrait* (1999).

Yet post-war Somaliland has nonetheless achieved impressive gains, creating an environment which is much more conducive for a WSP project than other regions of Somalia. The country features an impressive level of peace, stability, rule of law, and public safety. Government ministries and municipalities, and the bicameral legislative body, are very modest in capacity but do function. Despite occasional government attempts to suppress opposition, Somaliland enjoys a free press, organized opposition to the government in power, and open discussion and debate of political matters. “Civil society” in Somaliland is somewhat stronger than in central and southern Somalia; local NGOs have raised funds from the diaspora to build hospitals, libraries, and provide other public goods. A larger set of educated professionals exists in Somaliland relative to the rest of Somalia, giving the country stronger local capacity. Clan elders have retained a far greater capacity to negotiate and maintain peace between clans than is the case in south-central Somalia, and have been at the heart of the major traditional assemblies which have achieved peace and established a framework for government. There is a widespread public commitment to avoiding political destabilization and armed conflict, and very little support for radicalism, including Islamic extremism. A high level of remittances from the large Somaliland diaspora has helped sustain the economy and is the source for growing levels of investment in real estate and the vibrant service sector. Trade through the port of Berbera sustains a large commercial and transport sector and generates customs revenues for the Somaliland state. Though still a weak and impoverished state by global standards, Somaliland is by far the most developed area of Somalia, so much so that it was begun to attract migrant laborers from south-central Somalia and Ethiopia.

As a “war-torn” society, Somaliland is a post-war setting twice over – first as the site of the destructive 1988-90 war waged by the Barre regime against northern populations (especially the Isaaq clan), and then as the scene of internal armed clashes between 1992 and 1996. Each conflict left its own distinct set of post-war challenges. The 1988-90 war produced by far the most casualties, refugees, and damage to infrastructure. When the Barre forces were finally driven out of Somaliland in 1990, Somaliland faced a massive clean-up and reconstruction task of Hargeisa, which was largely reduced to rubble. Other post-war challenges from the 1998-90 war have included a major demining initiative; demobilization of tens of thousands of Somali National Liberation movement militiamen; preventive diplomacy in the early 1990s to preempt clashes between rival clan militias following the liberation of the region; establishment of rule of law in a context of state collapse; the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees from camps in Ethiopia and Djibouti; and economic recovery without the benefit of political recognition or World Bank loans. The damage caused by the armed clashes in 1992 and 1994-96 included widespread displacement in Burco and Hargeisa, and extensive damage to the town of Burco. But its main impact was political, leaving a legacy of distrust and bitterness in some quarters of the country, delaying the integration of the important town of Burco into the Somaliland polity for several years, and requiring extensive reconciliation and confidence-building measures.

In 1998, when WSP began its project in Somaliland, the country had clearly passed beyond its period of political turbulence and armed conflict. The government had

not yet declared a date on which to hold a national referendum on a new constitution which had been drafted in 1995-96. Though the referendum was in principal about the constitution, it became in reality a plebiscite on a declaration of independence. The main item of interest to Somalilanders was Article I of the constitution, which states that Somaliland shall “become a sovereign and independent country.”⁹ That referendum, which was held on May 31, 2001 and which overwhelmingly approved the constitution, but which featured unnecessary and ill-advised government manipulation of the voting to insure a positive result, ushered in a new period of political ferment and transformation in Somaliland. An electoral commission was named to determine the rules and dates for voter registration, municipal elections, and national elections; the commission relied heavily on the Academy to help research electoral procedures elsewhere and review their draft proposals. The WSP project found itself initiating a program of national dialogue on post-war public policy at a very opportune moment in Somaliland’s history.

Following the referendum, Somaliland’s political landscape shifted to a tense debate over the legitimacy of the move to multi-partyism. A “government” party, UDUB, was created and appeared to enjoy a number of unfair advantages associated with lack of separation between party and government. A number of opposition groups and parties argued that the constitutional amendments were a thinly-veiled attempt by President Cigal to maintain his hold on power, and threatened to boycott elections initially slated for December 2001 and then postponed. This increasingly worrisome political stand-off ended suddenly in May 2002, with the death of President Cigal while undergoing surgery in South Africa. His death initially posed a dangerous crisis of constitutional succession. The Vice-President, Daahir Riyaale Kahiin, is from the Gadabursi clan, one of several smaller clans in a polity dominated by the Isaaq clan. It was not immediately apparent that Isaaq power-brokers would tolerate a non-Isaaq president, even in a caretaker role. But the succession went smoothly, indicating that key political groups in Somaliland were committed to constitutional processes and rule of law. The situation turned even more opportune when opposition parties opted not to exploit the situation but rather to close ranks as Somalilanders. With the Academy playing a facilitating role, the parties agreed to a set of “rules of the game” for the upcoming elections. Cigal’s death began as a crisis but ended as an opportunity for Somaliland to advance democratic consolidation, constitutionalism, and political consensus. For the Academy, this was also a shift in fortune, creating an even more favorable environment for its public discussions and forum.¹⁰

WSP thus stepped into Somaliland at the optimal moment, when the political process was most in need of the kind of catalyst and mediator for dialogue which the Academy provided, and when civil society and political authorities were most receptive to that dialogue. This created an enabling environment which expanded the project’s

⁹ The public enthusiasm for a vote in favor of independence was fueled by the simultaneous convening of the Arte peace conference (discussed below), which threatened Somaliland independence.

¹⁰ Cigal in fact had some reservations about the Academy’s work and felt threatened by the open dialogue and criticism it facilitated. In some instances he took steps to undermine Academy leadership. By contrast, Daahir Riyaale had actually opened the Academy’s first National Project Group meeting on 2-3 November 1999 and was considered a friend of the project.

possibilities well beyond what was originally anticipated. Whether it was the product of good judgement or happy coincidence, WSP and the Academy were at the right place at the right time in Somaliland.

The external environment was not, however, so conducive to WSP's work. WSP's goal of integrating international aid agencies into the national dialogue on development priorities confronted a number of challenges. First, international aid to Somalia and Somaliland declined over the course of the late 1990s, reducing the scope, capacity, and relevance of aid agencies in Somalia. Many agencies have had only modest assistance programmes inside Somaliland, executed through local NGOs. The attempt by WSP to survey and catalog development efforts in its initial *Self-Portrait* research had the potential to expose inflated aid agency claims about their programmes in Somaliland and was thus met with a certain amount of suspicion and lack of cooperation by some aid agencies.¹¹ Second, the UN and NGO aid agencies as well as donors are all headquartered in Nairobi Kenya, reducing their ability to participate in discussions and workshops in Somaliland. Third, turnover of UN and NGO international staff working on Somalia is quite high, eroding WSP's ability to build working relationships and reducing incentive to invest time in agency personnel.¹² Finally, with the exception of a few individuals, the aid community in Nairobi has tended to be relatively uninterested in a Somali dialogue about development priorities, taking their cue instead from the development priorities of donors. In this sense, many of the international NGOs and UN agencies operating in Somalia act more like subcontractors than development agencies, driven primarily by the need to secure donor funds to maintain their own existence. The resulting aid community "culture" in Nairobi is, on aggregate, unhealthy, featuring a combination of inward-looking policy discussions, preoccupation with funding, bureaucratic in-fighting, cynicism, and an alarming unfamiliarity with or indifference to Somalia itself. WSP staff in Nairobi, having already dealt with this unsatisfactory situation during the course of the Puntland project, came to share the view of many others that the Somalia aid community in Nairobi was not fertile soil for the kinds of seeds WSP was hoping to plant.¹³

This already unfavorable environment worsened considerably with the advent of the Arta Peace Conference in Djibouti in May 2000. Up to that point, the international community had adopted a "building block" approach to Somalia – namely, a strategy of supporting the development of regional authorities as a means of creating local rule of law and as a first step toward eventual re-establishment of a central government. Though Somaliland authorities rejected the building block approach as it applied to their country – they did not accept the premise that Somaliland would eventually be part of a unified Somalia – the building block approach was more-or-less compatible with aid projects

¹¹ In addition, some aid projects were plagued by embarrassing allegations of corruption, and could not have been enthusiastic about a national research project which had the potential to expose such problems.

¹² By way of example, during the fieldwork the evaluator was given a new brochure describing the Somali programmes and projects of a major UN agency. Though the brochure was produced only months earlier, virtually the entire list of international programme and project managers had moved on.

¹³ Difficulties in integrating external actors into WSP- Somalia project have been a source of concern within WSP from the outset; see Kane (1999) pp. 60-62.

designed to promote capacity-building and governance in Somaliland. WSP's work was in Somaliland was not therefore particularly controversial prior to the summer of 2000.

The Arta national reconciliation process changed all this. The conference, convened in Djibouti from May to August 2000, promoted a Somali national reconciliation based on clan representation rather than regional or factional authorities. The conference organizers invited individuals claiming to represent the clans in Somaliland, and the conference proceedings emphasized the territorial integrity of Somalia – two moves which clearly threatened the Somaliland government. Not surprisingly, the Somaliland government rejected the conference outright. Top UN officials in Nairobi, meanwhile, promoted the Arta process enthusiastically, and came to view Somaliland as a major obstacle. Relations between the UN and Somaliland, which were contentious even in the best of times, plummeted as the UN became closely identified with the Arta process. Aid agencies, projects, and staff which were viewed as too pro-Somaliland, or which failed to fall in line with official UN support of Arta and the subsequent creation of a Transitional National Government in Mogadishu (one which claimed jurisdiction over Somaliland), found themselves under verbal attack in Nairobi. For a time in 2000-2001, there was very little tolerance within the UN for debate or dissent on Arta, the TNG, and Somaliland.

For the WSP-Somali programme, the Arta process and the TNG constituted a thorny dilemma. No matter what position WSP took – including the option of taking no position at all – it faced problems. Because the WSP affiliates were very much local organizations reflecting local perspectives, it was impossible for WSP-Somalia in Nairobi to take a position on Arta and the TNG without creating major problems either for the Academy in Somaliland (which promoted Somaliland interests) or for its Mogadishu-based affiliate, the Center for Research and Development, whose team was initially supportive of the TNG and which was operating in the pro-TNG capital. WSP-Somalia's own Nairobi team was divided in its sentiments. When the WSP programme coordinator (Matt Bryden), whose expertise on Somalia carries considerable weight in diplomatic circles, declined to attend Djibouti during the Arta conference and then subsequently raised thoughtful but critical concerns about both Arta and the TNG, WSP was viewed by UN officials as a subversive threat and a rogue actor. Working relations between WSP and some UN offices – never very strong even before Arta – deteriorated further, and WSP had to fend off complaints raised at high levels of the UN and donor headquarters that it was too pro-Somaliland. Ironically, WSP was being told by the UN not to engage in the very kind of open public policy dialogue that it was created to promote.

In the end, the TNG's failure to evolve into a functional authority, and Somaliland's ongoing incremental progress toward democratic consolidation and recovery, have vindicated WSP's reluctance to join the UN in its hasty embrace of the Arta process and TNG. By mid-2001, donors and diplomats increasingly distanced themselves from the TNG, with the UN eventually following suit. Many of the concerns raised by the WSP leadership about Arta and the TNG which had been attacked a year earlier became conventional wisdom. Meanwhile, widespread deterioration in security in

most of central and southern Somalia – including Puntland -- meant that Somaliland stood as one of the only places in Somalia where aid agencies could operate normally. Somaliland has as a result attracted somewhat more foreign aid agencies in 2002 than before, and is now the main focus of the modest levels of development assistance targeted for Somalia. In the aftermath of September 11, there is also renewed interest in the West in supporting stable and lawful regions in the Horn of Africa. External donors are considering providing support to the upcoming municipal elections (October 27 2002) and voter registration in Somaliland. A quiet discussion about the possibility of recognizing Somaliland as a sovereign state is also occurring, though it is unlikely at this time that that will yield a policy change. Somaliland has, in sum, weathered the pendulum swings of external interest and disaffection in the past few years and currently is enjoying greater internal and external legitimacy than ever. The recent shift in external attitudes towards Somaliland comes too late to salvage relations between WSP and the UN in Nairobi, but does increase belated external interest in the Academy's promotion of good governance and peacebuilding in Somaliland.

III. Project Design and Execution

The Somaliland project design was generally based on the conventional WSP template, but with a number of modifications to suit the particular situation in Somaliland. On the whole, those modifications proved to be useful and beneficial to project execution; many reflected thoughtful application of lessons learned from the Puntland experience.

Throughout the project, WSP-Somalia and the Academy faced challenges which did not lend themselves to obvious solutions. In only a few rare instances were project execution and design choices the product of a flawed decision (or non-decision). Instead, most of the challenges WSP and the Academy faced involved difficult trade-offs regardless of the policy option chosen. To its credit, the project leadership seemed well aware of these trade-offs as it contemplated its options, and sought to insure that it was entertaining as wide a range of policy options as possible. This flexibility, open-mindedness, and preference for thorough consultation within the Academy team enabled WSP-Somaliland to “think outside the box” in several instances to adapt to unexpected challenges and opportunities. To the extent that the project history reveals a pattern in policy choices, the patterns which emerge are an intriguing mix of decisions based on principle and pragmatism. The most obvious principle which emerges is a very strong commitment to protecting and promoting national ownership over the WSP-Somaliland project. A strong skepticism about the interests, capacity, and relevance of the external aid community also constituted a principle on which the project leadership refused to bend, even though that position came at a price. Patterns of pragmatism in project execution – defined here as a willingness to set aside certain values or principles in order to protect the overall ability of the project to function and succeed -- is equally evident in many of the day-to-day operational choices made by the project leadership, ranging from recruitment practices to choice of workshop sites.

Preparatory work. WSP was able to navigate a number of potentially dangerous political shoals in Somaliland by devoting extensive time and energy to preparatory work before establishing the project. Members of the WSP Board of Directors, the Geneva office, and the WSP-Somalia Nairobi office staff worked together in the effort to make discreet preliminary inquiries and determine when the time was right for the project. The superb timing of the project, the excellent team the Academy assembled, and the critical assistance provided by the contacts who eventually formed the informal circle of “friends of the Academy” were among the outcomes of the project’s careful advance preparation. This project could not have succeeded had it been subjected to the rushed time-frames typical of conventional development projects.

One important aspect of the preparatory phase was the “selling” of the project to influential civil and political leaders who could then be counted on as friends of the Academy. WSP has consistently run into problems explaining its purpose, a fact which hampers the ability of the project to market itself. Currently, the WSP methodology and mission is relatively and perhaps unnecessarily complex and hence difficult for newcomers to comprehend. One key supporter of the Academy, who holds a high position in the government and an advanced degree, joked that he needed three weeks of explanations before he finally understood what WSP’s purpose and program would be.

This marketing problem is caused by several factors. It is in part due to the fact that WSP does not deliver a conventional development “output” – a school or a water system – that Somalis have come to expect as the main purpose of development projects. That has been a source of confusion and sometimes criticism of WSP in the broader public. It is also due to the complexity of WSP’s literature and jargon about its purpose, which is challenging even for professionals fluent in English. A third aspect of this problem is the multiplicity of objectives which WSP claims in different documents and settings. A review of WSPI’s literature, WSP-Somalia’s documents, WSP-Somalia’s grant proposals to donors, and the Academy’s mission statement reveal a wide range of distinct goals and self-explanations. These objectives can include, among others, development of local research capacity, promotion of participatory action research and public debate on post-war priorities, provision of neutral space for dialogue, political mediation, peacebuilding, empowerment, consensus-building, democratization, capacity-building, facilitation of development strategies, data collection, and reform of aid agency engagement in post-conflict settings. These objectives are not at all incompatible, but they are distinct – some constitute core goals, others useful “value added.” The complexity of the project and the multiple objectives it entails created a situation in which different observers – and, it should be stressed, different members of WSP and the Academy -- had very different and often incomplete understandings of WSP’s purpose. WSP-Somaliland was akin to the elephant in the “four blind men and the elephant” parable – depending on which body part of the elephant one touched, one could come to quite different conclusions about the nature of the beast.¹⁴ The fact that even well-educated and experienced individuals in the community had difficulty grasping what it is precisely that WSP is setting out to do suggests that WSP needs to clarify and simplify its

¹⁴ This same difficulty occurred in Puntland, where this same evaluator observed that “at times it seemed interviewees were discussing separate projects.” See Menkhaus (2001) p. 359.

mission statement, perhaps by distinguishing between core and secondary objectives and functions, and then by communicating them consistently.

Troubleshooting functions. An essential aspect of working in sensitive post-conflict settings is the capacity to anticipate and pre-empt or manage problems before they become crises. To do this, the project must possess excellent eyes and ears to garner information, an extensive network of local contacts, and a strong ability to assess information. The Academy devoted considerable time and energy to this troubleshooting function, aptly described by the WSP-Somali Programme Coordinator as the equivalent of a mine-sweeping operation for the project.¹⁵ The Programme Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator, and Academy Director were especially active on this score. Extensive inquiries were made about individuals under consideration for national project groups or other roles with the Academy; careful attention was given to clan balance and government and opposition reactions to Academy functions; and the Academy's "social capital" – its extensive network of friends and contacts in the broader community – was constantly cultivated and enriched. Even with this strong commitment to troubleshooting, the Academy and WSP-Somalia was unable to avoid a few "mistakes" and one serious security incident related to the firing of an employee. But the WSP-Somaliland experience clearly demonstrates the need for this kind of role to be built into project design when the project deals with sensitive issues in a post-conflict setting.

One problem with this type of "intelligence" and troubleshooting function is that it is awkward, vague, and somewhat unusual as a term of reference for a position in the development project. WSP-Somalia's solution was to write somewhat more conventional, administrative terms of reference for staff members who were in actuality devoting most of their time to troubleshooting, not administration. This had the unavoidable effect of creating disjoints between titles and functions in the office, and at times produced some confusion over chains of command and administrative responsibilities in the office. It also made WSP-Somalia appear more top-heavy with administrators than it actually was.

¹⁵ Matt Bryden, "Forward," in WSP, *Rebuilding Somalia: Issues and Possibilities for Puntland* (Haan, London, 2001), p. 5.

Establishment of the Academy. The Academy for Peace and Development was created at the beginning of the project rather than as part of the final phase of the project. This modification in the standard WSP project template was based on a desire to house the project at the outset in a local institution, giving it stronger local ownership and minimizing the extent to which it was perceived as an international aid project. It was also intended to give the Academy a longer period of time to establish itself, increasing the likelihood that it will survive and flourish as an independent affiliate once WSP financial support ends. The modification succeeded on both counts and is clearly worthy of emulation in future WSP work. The Academy quickly established itself as the preeminent national think-tank and forum for political, social, and economic issues in Somaliland, enjoys an exceptionally strong sense of local ownership, and has already successfully taken on several research and training contracts outside of the WSP project. As a successor body to a WSP project, the Academy may well be the most promising WSP affiliate yet created.

Nairobi office. The WSP-Somali programme is unique in that it is composed of three separate zonal projects rather than a single national one. This design was chosen to cope with the fact that Somalia remains without a central government and without a level of national reconciliation which would enable a single project to cover the entire country. The Somalia setting is also unusual in that the UN agencies, donors, and international NGOs are all headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, rather than in-country. In order to liaise with the international aid community, inform donors, and facilitate the many logistical challenges of working inside Somalia, WSP had to follow suit and maintain a WSP-Somalia office in Nairobi. But the project design shifted over the course of the Somaliland project, in an attempt to cope with a number of problems and needs which arose during the Puntland project. The main problem at that time was that the programme coordinator was expected to take on responsibilities which amounted to three full-time positions – overseeing the field projects, representing WSP to the international aid, donor, and diplomatic community, and serving as chief financial and administrative officer. The programme coordinator’s strong preference was to devote more time to oversight of the field project; this played to his professional strengths and matched his beliefs about project priorities. To this end, a decision was made to allow the programme coordinator to spend most of his time in Hargeisa rather than Nairobi. In response to concerns that WSP was not adequately engaging the aid community in Nairobi¹⁶ and that it needed to better manage financial and administrative paperwork, a senior administrator with considerable experience with both the EU and the UN was hired to take on both tasks. The new position which was created, “external affairs/operations manager,” was thus intended to fill two of the three roles which the coordinator had been handling on his own.

On paper, this reconfiguring of the Nairobi office was a much-needed project modification. In practice, the twinning of the two outstanding responsibilities – administration and external affairs -- in a single position was only a partial solution to the problem. The Nairobi external affairs/operations manager ended up devoting almost all

¹⁶ These concerns are explored in the WSP-Puntland evaluation, Menkhaus (2001).

of her time to office and financial management, especially follow-up with UNOPS, the executing agency for the project, due to the weak capacity of UNOPS to administer and report on project finances and the time-consuming complexity of WSP's dual status as an NGO with UN affiliation. The administrator was able to report satisfactorily to donors on the project, but never had the time nor was in a position to develop an expertise on WSP's field operations to fulfill the role of liaison officer to external agencies. That role, which had been increasingly abandoned out of frustration with the aid community in 1997-99, continued to go largely unplayed, leading some UN observers to conclude that WSP had "essentially disappeared" in Nairobi. This was not entirely true – WSP-Nairobi officers did selectively attend what were considered to be the most important SACB sectoral meetings -- but they refused to devote most of their working days to what can be a virtual carousel of aid meetings and functions in Nairobi, at the expense of urgent operational and administrative duties. Meanwhile, the redesign of the Nairobi office created some confusion about overlapping responsibilities within the office. In sum, the redesign of the Nairobi office only partially met the unfilled needs it was intended to address.

Field Administrative Officer. WSP-Somaliland learned from the WSP-Puntland experience that project design must include an administrative officer in the field in order to achieve acceptable financial reporting. This position was built into the Somaliland project at the outset with favorable results; the only element missing was the need for additional training for the position (discussed below).

Recruitment. The recruitment process for the research team is one of the most important and most sensitive aspects of WSP projects. In Somaliland, WSP faced a familiar choice in how it designed its recruitment process: it could advertise the positions openly, choosing the most qualified candidates, or it could discreetly inquire about promising individuals in order to field a team which was not only high-quality but also carefully balanced by clan, region, sectoral expertise, and gender. WSP-Somaliland opted for the latter approach. The result was a high quality team which was able to move throughout Somaliland society thanks to its clan diversity, and a selection process which did not place the Academy under the kind of open social and political pressure and expose it to security problems which can result from open hiring procedures which involve saying "no thanks" to dozens of candidates. The benefits of this approach were made clear during the course of the group field research for the *Self-Portrait*, when one of the team members was arrested in a rural area because one of his clan members had committed a crime which had not been resolved by blood compensation. It was only because the team included a member of the aggrieved clan that the Academy was able to negotiate the release of its detained researcher and proceed with the research. Though hiring with an aim of forming a team balanced along clan lines rather than on the principle of pure merit is offensive to many outsiders, a research team hired with indifference to clan identity would never have been able to conduct the field research which the Academy did.

However, the recruitment design chosen by WSP-Somaliland had the clear drawback of lacking transparency and of sacrificing the principle of merit to the pragmatism of clan balance. This was an especially painful concession to pragmatism

since the Academy's own entry point paper on governance calls for transparency and meritocracy in the Somaliland government. It is impossible to second-guess the WSP-Somaliland recruitment process, only to observe that under the circumstances WSP faced considerable trade-offs regardless of which type of recruitment design it chose. It is however worth noting that WSP's South-Central Somalia project, the Center for Research and Development in Mogadishu, did advertise research positions openly and was able to hire a team without encountering security problems or undue pressure – though it did so with the explicit understanding that it was forming a team based on clan balance.

As for gender balance, the project benefited from lessons of WSP-Puntland by hiring a female researcher at the outset and fully integrating her research into the project. That researcher was however the only female member of the Academy team (apart from a secretary), and was given the research topic of women (for the *Self-Portrait*) and family issues (for the entry point research), raising concerns in some quarters that the Academy had engaged in tokenism regarding females.¹⁷

Training. Training of the researchers in the participatory research method was given considerably more time than in the case of the WSP-Puntland project, a modification which yielded positive results. The training consisted mainly of periodic afternoon team discussions during a four month period devoted to establishing the office and project, and was integrated into more general team-building exercises. Some of the WSP literature was used, but much of the training consisted of general discussion, led by the Academy director, who had years of experience teaching research methods at an American university. The WSP-Nairobi team shared observations about the Puntland project in order to impart lessons learned from past experience. A senior consultant/trainer from Geneva spent several days with the team as well, though Geneva played a surprisingly minimal role in the training phase, a choice which had the benefit of strengthening the team's sense of ownership of the project but which may have contributed to the weakness of the Academy's sense of commitment to the broader WSPI identity. Overall, the training of the Academy researchers in the PAR was relatively informal and unstructured but extensive. Judging by the fruits of the Academy's work, the training was effective. In the future, however, more structured learning tools, such as WSPI's new PAR learning manual, may be a useful supplement to such training. As the Geneva Learning Unit generates more lessons learned from WSPI's global experiences, it should be brought into a more central role in the training process as well.

'Self-Portrait' research methodology. The execution of the participatory action research which provided the basis for the *Self-Portrait* represented a considerable improvement over the WSP-Puntland project. In the Puntland exercise, three researchers were separately assigned different regions to cover. That deprived them of an opportunity to work together and benefit from different sectoral specializations each possessed, and raised problems of accountability and oversight. In Somaliland, by contrast, the team traveled throughout the country as a group, separating only when meeting with particular groups (the female researcher, for instance, met separately with local women). This allowed the team to benefit from one another's specializations and fostered much greater

¹⁷ Gender concerns are for instance raised in the USAID interim evaluation; see Schwoebel (2000), p. 40.

levels of verification and brainstorming. By all accounts, the field research conducted by the team was exceptionally strong. They met with thousands of people over a four month period, covering almost all of the territory of Somaliland. Most meetings were scheduled, but the team also took advantage of spontaneous opportunities to interview road-side villagers and others. Considerable care was taken to provide local authorities with advance communication about the visits, and a local resource person was relied upon to insure that no problems arose with the visits. The selection of interview targets was generally comprehensive; the only group which was relatively under-represented in the interview process were pastoralists.¹⁸

The Academy used a trial run of interviews in a single district -- Gabiley -- to test their interview skills, review their progress, and refine their methods prior to engaging in the country-wide interview process. This use of a field-based trial interview proved to be a very useful training technique and should be encouraged in future WSP projects.

The approach to the interviews themselves -- open-ended discussions which allowed interviewees to direct the conversation towards social, economic, or political issues of their own choosing -- has both advantages and disadvantages. The chief virtue of such an approach is that it eliminates problems associated with leading questions and prompting by interviewers. Presumably the issues raised by interviewees reflected their actual priorities and concerns as a result, and gave the interviewees much more ownership of the interview than is typically the case. The chief drawback of open-ended discussions is that it precludes any systematic and comparative gathering of attitudes and concerns, making it difficult to determine the relative salience of each issue and to disaggregate interview results by region, gender, clan, or other potentially significant social cleavage. This leaves open the potential danger of "cherry-picking" -- that is, the possibility for research members to selectively emphasize or disregard responses and concerns to fit their own preferences and belief systems.

Under the circumstances, the reliance on open-ended interviews and subjective team assessments of the results of the interviews was the preferred method, given other alternatives. Had time, resources, and training been available, however, it might also have been useful to complement these core open-ended interviews with more systematic public opinion surveys. The survey could be based on the preliminary results and priority concerns gleaned from the interviews. Interviews could include a specific canvassing of local communities about what kinds of questions and issues they would most want to see in a national survey, giving the community more ownership over the survey itself. Such a survey would have been helpful in providing the Academy with more precise data about public concerns on particular issues; it would have generated a database which could be controlled for region, age, gender, and other variables, and which could be replicated at a later date to monitor changes over time; and would have provided Academy members with valuable additional skill in quantitative survey research.

¹⁸ Schwoebel (2000), p. 20.

An early external study of the WSP-Somaliland project encountered some complaints that the *Self-Portrait* was not adequately distributed inside Somaliland.¹⁹ Distribution of the English-language document was in fact targeted primarily at government and international organizations. Given budget limitations, this decision was probably justifiable. But it does point to a recurring tension in WSP projects in Somalia – namely, that while the *process* is intensively – almost exclusively – Somali in nature, the *products* (written reports) are written in English, not Somali, and are mainly designed for external consumption.

Data and documentation collection. Part of the preliminary research phase of the project involved collection of existing data, reports, and published material of relevance to post-war development in Somaliland. Extensive use was made of the UNDP (formerly UNDOS) documentation unit in Nairobi to copy relevant studies and reports, and aid agencies in Hargeisa were contacted and asked for copies of any reports or surveys in their possession. The result is a modest collection which currently stands at about 250 reports, books, and articles. The collection process appeared to have been concentrated in the early phase of the project and has not been pursued as aggressively since that time. The Academy's ability to build this collection is limited by time, funds, and variable levels of cooperation on the part of aid agencies. The organization of the files is not especially user-friendly. The reference room remains open to outside researchers, and is one of the top two or three repositories of documents on Somaliland development in the country. But with a relatively small investment of procurement funds, training in basic library science, and development of a network of external 'friends of the Academy' committed to helping identify and acquire important documents and publications for the library, the Academy's documentation center could become a much more valuable asset than it currently is.

National Project Group and Working Groups. The identification of possible national project group (NPG) members was done as part of a group decision-making process in the Academy and as the result of careful inquiries and efforts to achieve a balanced and thoughtful group of "opinion-shapers" both from within government and civil society. This nomination process is a critical point in the WSP project template -- a careless or biased selection of the NPG members can skew the entire project. With only about 80 NPG positions to fill, and a need to insure that this "eminent persons group" met so many criteria – balance in regional, clan, political, gender, sectoral, and professional representation – the nomination process was unexpectedly lengthy. As with the Puntland project, not all of the members of the NPG were able or willing to commit fully to the project, but most did so enthusiastically. Choices were made which unavoidably helped to shape the outcome of the workshops and entry points, but on balance the NPG appeared to represent the diversity of the Somaliland community extremely well.

The Working Groups, about twenty people selected from the pool of NPG members, were invited to attend each of the three workshops held on aspects of one of the four entry point themes. These individuals usually possessed a strong and useful expertise on some aspect of the entry point theme. Typically, about three-fourths of the

¹⁹ Schwoebel (2000), p. 24.

working group members were able to attend a particular workshop. It was at the working group level that the real impact of the NPG was felt on the project results, since these individuals played a central role in the workshop proceedings. One manifestation of the extent to which the Academy succeeded in securing diversified opinions within the Working Groups is the fact that few of the workshops produced a strong consensus position; unresolved debates, not common positions, were the order of the day. In general, individual commitment to their role in the working groups was strong; these were voluntary, not paid, positions, yet were still able to garner a high participation rate.

The one social category which proved difficult to integrate into the working groups and workshops were the business elite – in particular the top import-export merchants who dominated commerce. This group declined invitations to participate, probably because they suspected they would be subjected to public criticism in the forum. The business elite in Somaliland – and elsewhere in Somalia – has generally preferred to keep a low political profile. WSP's inability to draw them into the working groups was regrettable but unavoidable.

Selection of Entry Points. The National Project Group, in its first meeting in November 1999, reviewed and assessed a draft of the *Self-Portrait*. On the basis of that review process, the NPG then discussed and decided upon four broad themes which would serve as the basis for entry points for workshops and research papers. The NPG made several unusual and very astute choices which allowed the project to pursue sensitive topics by wrapping them in a banner of universally-held values in Somaliland. By far the most clever of these choices was the decision to devote one entry point to the theme of “the impact of the war on the family.” Since the impact of the war is a matter of considerable grievance and emotion in Somaliland, it garnered instant attention and respect; and because the family is in Somaliland as in most of the world a social institution of almost sacred standing, the theme was virtually immune from criticism. Yet within that seemingly innocuous theme, the NPG identified two quite controversial topics, the impact of *qaat* consumption on the family and changing gender roles in the family. Had either of those two topics been treated directly, they may have created more controversy. WSP-Somalia had had a very negative experience in Puntland with a gender workshop which was used by Islamists and others to attack WSP, so this clever “back-door” approach to addressing controversial issues was especially astute.

Workshops. The project workshops are a critical part of the PAR method. In Somaliland, the project workshops succeeded in bringing together a wide range of opinion-shapers across clan, regional, gender, and political fault-lines to consider development priorities in post-war Somaliland. The workshops were held in towns throughout Somaliland, and provided opportunities for ordinary citizens to discuss and debate issues with civil leaders and ministerial officials. This allowed the project to foster greater “vertical” dialogue within Somaliland (between ordinary citizens and opinion-shapers) even as it concentrated most its efforts on fostering dialogue between social and political elites. The workshops on the impact of the war on the family were especially important in providing a legitimate venue for frank discussion of highly sensitive topics relating to gender and the family, while the workshops on political reform and

decentralization provided timely opportunities for political actors from across the spectrum to meet and discuss political reforms. Civil society and government officials were enthusiastic about participating in the workshops and expressed broad satisfaction with the workshop proceedings, and the attentive public followed the workshop proceedings closely. All in all, the Academy workshops matched up extremely well both to Somali political culture in general and to the specific needs of Somaliland at an important moment in its history.

The Academy chose to convene three of the 12 workshops in the capital Hargeisa, but spread the other nine across towns and cities in five of the six regions of Somaliland. The good regional distribution of the workshops, and the efforts to include remote towns and communities, insured that a broad spectrum of society was brought into the process. generally good methods for selecting participants. The fact that only one workshop was held per topic ran the risk of creating a regional bias in the workshop results (attitudes towards family issues, for instance, might vary considerably between urban Hargeisa and rural Sanaag region) but the regional and clan diversity of the working groups were meant to reduce this problem, and the project lacked the time and resources to hold multiple workshops in different locations on the same topic. Participants were pleased at the quality of the chairmanship of the workshops; discussions were not too directed and the process not “scripted,” but the chair did step in to prevent individuals from dominating discussions and to bring conversations back to topic when they strayed. The process of selecting local participants for each workshop generally worked well. The Academy provided a general list of categories of participants but left up to local authorities the selection of specific individuals who best represented each category. The fact that individuals invited from the local community were paid a per diem to attend did create a few disputes over invitations, but none was especially serious. The decision to pay per diem to non-working group participants was a policy which had both advantages and drawbacks and was a matter of debate within the Academy.²⁰

In some cases, workshops generated a consensus position and fairly specific recommendations, but in most instances the workshops succeeded only in clarifying and advancing a debate. That consensus was not always achieved is a tribute to the Academy’s success in establishing working groups which included a diverse range of views and positions. The temptation to engage in “social engineering” by selecting working groups with similar views in order to achieve a false consensus was avoided.

The fact that consensus-building is an explicit goal of the WSP project and the fact that consensus often proved elusive could be cited as a failure of the project, but that would be a simplistic conclusion. The Somaliland project illustrates that clarification of debates, framing of policy choices, and frank discussion of sensitive issues across conflict lines are often of equal or greater value than consensus. Only one issue was reportedly too sensitive for workshop participants – the issue of domestic abuse and violence, which was briefly raised in the family workshop but apparently a taboo subject.

²⁰ Schwoebel (2000) p. 24.

WSP's quest for consensus-building, combined with its insistence that the workshops generate a set of recommendations, did create some confusion in some circumstances. Generation of coherent recommendations usually presupposes a consensus on analysis of the problem. Where consensus on assessment of development challenges and priorities was not possible, recommendations were either so generic and watered down as to be of limited use, or likely to represent the position of the dominant group in the workshop rather than a consensus. Participants were not always clear about whether they were mainly tasked with producing a consensus on analysis of the problems or on recommendations; they were sometimes perplexed at how they were supposed to produce recommendations in the absence of a consensus. This conundrum did spark interesting discussions within the working groups and the Academy about the definition of consensus and the value and limits of consensus-based political processes. These useful discussions were not, however, advanced by WSP's own training material and literature, which tends to treat consensus as a self-evident value, not a problematic concept which is useful in some situations but not in others. There are times when consensus-building is a flawed or limited approach analytically, prescriptively, and morally. Overemphasis on consensus can also obscure the fact that good public policy is as much often about the politics of choice as about the politics of consensus.

Drafting and editing of entry point papers. The drafting and editing process again proved to be one of the more challenging phases of the project. Problems faced in drafting of entry point papers were similar to those encountered in Puntland. The research team possessed uneven and sometimes weak writing skills, partly due to the fact that most had been away from research production for a decade, and partly due to Somali culture, where there is often a gap between an individual's eloquent oral expression and his or her capacity to capture ideas in writing. This problem was compounded by the complex nature of the entry point papers, which were difficult to organize and which involved a wide array of data which was challenging to manage and summarize clearly. The fact that the papers were produced first in English (eventually to be translated into Somali) made the drafting process all the more difficult for a research team working in a second language. The written products are essentially targeted at an external audience, the aid community, which required that the writers adopt a writing style and organization geared for foreigners. The writers were also limited by the quality and scope of the workshops – they were forced to work with the material generated by the workshops. This was especially noticeable regarding recommendations.

As a result, the initial drafts took longer than anticipated and required significant editing. The editing process was lengthy as well. First, the drafts were subjected to peer review, with each Academy member making suggestions on each draft. This was an important aspect of editing, as it insured that the team agreed that the papers accurately captured the main themes of the workshops. Second, the revised papers were subjected to considerable editing by the Academy Director, Senior Research Associate, Deputy Project Coordinator and Project Coordinator. Finally, an external editor with extensive research experience in Somalia edited the papers as well. The editing process was carried up to the week prior to the final national project group meeting July 31 2002, which meant that there was no time to distribute advance copies of the drafts to the workshop

participants prior to the meeting. That created an unfortunate situation on the first day of the meeting in which project group members were commenting on oral summaries of the drafts rather than the drafts themselves. Feedback on the political decentralization paper, which was presented on day two of the meeting, was much more detailed as participants had had the time to read the paper overnight.

With so much editorial input, the question inevitably arises as to “ownership” of the papers. In principle, each paper reflects the ideas and input of the workshop participants, with the researcher melding secondary and background data with workshop input. But workshop participants frequently commented that the papers, while very impressive, were not completely accurate reflections of their discussions. Some researchers also felt that they had only partial ownership of the papers. The language and organization of the papers underwent considerable revision, but project members insist that the main ideas remain those advanced by the main writer and the workshop proceedings.

Specific comments and assessment of the content of the entry point papers is provided below in Section VI.

Video production execution. The video component was a resounding success, yielding four high-quality and powerful videos in the Somali language summarizing the main themes of the entry papers. In the final presentation to the national project group, the presentation of the videos had an immediate and deep impact. The visual imagery and carefully selected interview clips injected an element of emotion to the workshop policy debates. The livestock video, which featured moving scenes of nomadic poverty and environmental degradation, had an especially powerful impact on the Somali audience. Part of the success of the videos has to do with the fact that Somalia is more of an oral culture, making the film interviews more accessible to the audience than written reports. But observers also felt that the videos better captured the themes of the workshops than did the entry point papers.

The success of the Somaliland video production stands in stark contrast to previous WSP projects, where the “visions” component has generally been among the weakest aspects of the project. In Somaliland, the video production was a success for several reasons. First, a well-qualified researcher was assigned to video production at the outset of the project. This gave the Academy time to integrate the video production into the entire project and gave the A-V unit time to produce quality products. Second, training was provided to the A-V unit in the form of consultants sent by WSPI-Geneva. Third, the researcher hired to head the A-V unit came up with the excellent idea to create one-half hour summary films of each entry paper. Initially, the Academy was unsure how to integrate the video work into the project beyond using it to document interviews. Finally, the Academy was creative in efforts to find or purchase A-V equipment despite the lack of a budget line in 1999. The A-V equipment used by the Academy is considered very modest, and subsequent WSP projects in Mogadishu and Rwanda are receiving more sophisticated A-V technology, but the unit was innovative in securing

needed equipment. The procurement of an editing machine was critical in enabling the unit to produce short films from the extensive footage it produced.

The film team faced a number of challenges worth anticipating in future projects. First, it was unable to use shots from project workshops because most workshops were held in buildings with such bad acoustics they sounded like “echo chambers.” Choice of venue for workshops may want to consider acoustics when possible. In Somaliland, the unit’s strategy was to request separate interviews with workshop participants in better acoustical environments. A second sound problem was wind, a constant factor in Somalia. The unit did not possess a wind-shield microphone. Shots of everyday scenes of life in Somaliland was made more difficult by reluctance by some Somalis to be filmed, or by the quick congregation of young boys around cameras. Hidden cameras in vehicles gave the unit better opportunities for unimpeded footage. Scripting of the films was a major challenge, mainly because of the need to condense extensive material, ideas, and debates into thirty minutes. Choices had to be made about what topics to highlight which ran the risk of excluding important subjects or oversimplifying complex issues. The head of unit began by reducing each entry point draft to 20 pages of what he considered to be the key issues. That produced the skeletal draft which was developed in partnership with the researcher of each entry point paper. Each film was produced sequentially, and production sped up as the team perfected its techniques. Because the films were based on the drafts of the entry point papers, most of the A-V work tended to be concentrated toward the latter portion of the project, putting the A-V unit under considerable time pressure as the final project meeting neared.

The initial screening of the videos produced a universal conviction that they need to be quickly and widely distributed inside Somaliland and to the diaspora. The videos will likely have more impact on the general public than any other component of the WSP project. Sub-titles in English will be added to the films to enable them to reach a foreign audience.

IV. Project Impact

The WSP-Somaliland project had substantial and positive short-term impact on both government and civil society in Somaliland. Its longer-term impact on Somaliland remains a matter of speculation, but there are already indications to suggest that the project will have significant benefits for Somaliland in years to come. By contrast, immediate project impact on international actors has been generally weak. But there are opportunities for the project to make a lasting, longer-term mark on the work of aid agencies and donors which should be cultivated.

Some of the areas of greatest immediate impact include the following:

- *Community integration and peacebuilding.* One of the worrisome aspects of Somaliland political life has been the fractured nature of political discussions. Dialogue on public policy issues was extensive, but confined to small closed group of like-minded friends, often within the confines of a *mefrishe* (a circle of a *qaat*-chewers who meet daily). The workshops and project groups

fostered much greater levels of contact and dialogue between different social groups – especially across clan lines – than had been the case before the project. The Academy rightly stresses its role as “neutral space” facilitating this “horizontal” discussion across old conflict lines. The new lines of communication and networks which were established thanks to the project considerably reduced mistrust and misinformation, built confidence, and have constituted an important conflict prevention tool for Somaliland society. The Academy’s advocacy for consensus-based governance has been an important source of support for those trying to build peace and reduce tensions in the country, and has helped to set the tone for an approach to problem-solving which resorts to reasoned and informed discussion, not force.

- *Community empowerment.* The project provided an opportunity for civil society leaders, ordinary citizens, women, nomads, and in particular intellectuals to organize and articulate concerns to the government. This “vertical” communication between the average citizen and the powerful had been somewhat lacking in Somaliland prior to the project. Interviewees stressed that the project contributed to a much greater sense of voice and ownership of the policy-making process on the part of the community members who participated. Civil society representatives felt that they had gained, for the first time, a role in “agenda-setting” in post-war development priorities.
- *Government capacity-building.* The project has provided interested government officials – in parliament and in ministries – with a number of new tools which are improving the quality of governance in Somaliland. The data and analysis generated in the written research products are considered a basic resource for government; the flow of ideas and communication fostered by the workshops has improved government responsiveness; and the Academy’s advocacy of extensive consultation in decision-making has raised local expectations of government. Individuals and groups within the government who seek to promote greater transparency, accountability, and democracy have found the Academy and the WSP project work to be invaluable sources of support. The Academy even became a source of government leadership, when one member was tapped to serve as Minister of Planning.
- *Civil society capacity-building.* The project helped to develop new skills among the project working group members and workshop participants. One international aid agency representative observed that she could almost always tell when a Somali counterpart had been involved in a WSP workshop; they were much more effective in meetings, more skilled at organizing committees, and more systematic in use of information and in group problem-solving. Though workshop participants were only given a basic introduction to the PAR method, they appear to have absorbed the key aspects of the approach effectively over the course of the workshops. Working group members, who had much more extensive exposure to the PAR, were even better equipped to use it outside the WSP project
- *National research capacity.* One of the goals of WSP is to strengthen national research capacities in post-war settings. WSP-Somaliland enjoyed

strong success on this score. The Academy research team came to the project with solid research skills, but gained considerable additional skills in the PAR method, conducting interviews, use of computer software, engaging in group projects, writing reports, and use of audio-video technology. The Academy quickly established a reputation as the pre-eminent think-tank in Somaliland. The fact that the Academy was offered several contracts for research projects by external agencies during the WSP project was itself an indication that the Academy's research capacity is respected. The quality of the project research documents establishes a benchmark for excellence which may "raise the bar" for national research efforts outside of the Academy – at the universities, in the NGOs, and in the media, for instance.

- *Confidence-building.* The processes of dialogue and problem-solving which the project facilitated set new standards for rigor, thoughtfulness, and accurate information. The superior results of the workshops and project documents became a source of pride and confidence for Somaliland participants. This psychological element of post-war rebuilding is critical, giving communities confidence to confront, manage, and solve the seemingly insurmountable problems of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation.

Longer-term impact of the project is necessarily a matter of speculation, but the process of dialogue which the project has fostered, and in which the community places considerable value, has the potential to have a lasting impact in Somaliland. To the extent that local communities and civil society have developed new expectations of their role in policy discussions and the obligation of government officials to solicit their views, the project will have helped the process of democratic consolidation in Somaliland. To the extent that the project set new standards for research and research methods, future policy analyses will be better informed. If the Academy is able to sustain itself following the project – and there are strong indications it will – Somaliland will benefit for years to come from a high-quality think-tank. Observers expect the Academy to continue to serve as a source of future government and civil society leadership, as well as an institute for selected government officials to take mid-career sabbaticals to pursue research and broaden their expertise. Finally, if the Somaliland government and civil society embrace the fundamental principles of the PAR method, they will begin to insist that external aid agencies subscribe to the same principles in their work inside Somaliland. Here is where the WSP-Somaliland project may yet have a longer-term impact on external aid agencies – not by influencing them directly in the field, but rather by empowering local communities and authorities to insist upon certain practices, standards, and principles for aid activities in the country.

The inability to integrate international aid agencies into the national dialogue on development priorities was the only instance in which the project clearly did not achieve a stated objective. This was more a conscious policy choice than a failure, based on the field project team's assessment of the feasibility and worthiness of the objective. Short-term impact on the aid community was thus relatively weak.

In Somaliland, few expatriate aid officials based in country were well-informed about the project, and only a handful had participated in any of the Academy programmes. Most had seen and claimed to have read the *Self-Portrait*. The fact that the workshops were held in the Somali language made foreign aid officials feel that the proceedings were intended exclusively for Somali nationals. Aid representatives offered familiar explanations for their lack of involvement – that they are too pressed for time to attend such lengthy meetings, or that their agency “already consults” with local communities so there was no need to attend additional consultations. This latter view was quite common and underscores a serious problem for advocates of the type of PAR method WSP promotes. Aid agency personnel continue to conflate “consultation” (“I am here to explain to you what we are going to do for you”) with bona fide local ownership of development priorities. UN and NGO agencies have tended to appropriate the rhetoric of this approach while only superficially implementing it, so that they can claim to have established projects based on local participation even as they go about their business much as before. This tendency to “pour old wine into new bottles” is all too common in the aid community, and reflects either a lack of understanding of the WSP approach or an intentional indifference to it.²¹

In Nairobi, the problem was not so much one of awareness but of engagement. Aid agency representatives were well-aware of WSP, but were generally of the view that WSP was “non-existent” in Nairobi as it attended few aid agency meetings. Lingering hostilities between some UN offices and WSP related to the Arta process and the TNG were a part of the problem, but not the only part. WSP’s very existence is in some UN quarters offensive. Some UN officials view WSP with suspicion; it is seen as too critical, too prone to exposing flaws in the UN, too “national,” and not a “team player” in the UN system. They resent the dual status of WSP as an NGO with UN affiliation, arguing that it is “illegal” to have staff paid through the UN to administer an NGO project. All of this tends to work against WSP engagement and advocacy with UN agencies. Making matters worse, the suspicion is reciprocal. Some WSP team members question the premise that the UN is reformable. From this viewpoint, powerful interests are so entrenched in the UN that it is impervious to the kinds of changes WSP advocates; hence energy devoted to that task is largely a waste of time. In sum, prospects for direct, constructive engagement with the UN agencies based in Nairobi were limited. Importantly, while engagement on an institutional level was difficult, WSP did succeed in establishing very fruitful relations with a small number of individual aid workers in the UN and NGO community. These were typically individuals who sympathized with the WSP approach and who possessed a strong commitment to Somalia as opposed to their development agency. Indeed, within the circle of some of the most respected and well-informed individuals working on Somalia, WSP’s reputation is excellent and its workshops and papers the source of considerable interest.

²¹ WSP has been concerned about this problem for some time. In a summary of the first four years of WSP’s work, one report noted that the principle of national ownership of post-war development prioritisation is paid much lip-service, but that “at the field level little has changed in the operational reality of aid.” Kane (1999) pp. 82, 91.

WSP's relations with representatives of donor agencies in Nairobi were much better, though project impact on those offices was hard to assess. The WSP Nairobi office reported regularly to donors, and donor representatives interviewed expressed broad satisfaction with the WSP-Somalia project and its objectives. Not all were closely familiar with WSP's work. The fact that WSPI-Geneva is increasingly assuming principal responsibility for project fund-raising may mean that donor country offices are somewhat less invested in the WSP work than are their headquarters. There is no indication yet that the processes of national dialogue on post-war development which WSP sponsored was having an impact on any specific donor funding priorities inside Somaliland, though that may occur at a later date.

Donors' strong enthusiasm for the WSP Somalia project tended to be less informed by the stated objectives of the project than by other donor interests which the project served. Specifically, donors place great value on WSP's ability to provide them with information, contacts, and logistical support for travel to Somaliland or Mogadishu. WSP's affiliates in Hargeisa and Mogadishu are often first stops for visiting embassy officials, a place where they can get excellent briefings from the staff. Indeed, WSP's two affiliates have developed such a strong reputation for being an essential source of briefings for diplomats and journalists that it has become a mixed blessing. The WSP teams in Nairobi and Hargeisa have taken care to provide assistance to representatives of donor states, understanding that a certain quid pro quo exists for the funding they receive. But the team worries about being used primarily for political and security briefings. WSP's purpose in Somalia and Somaliland is hardly to serve as the eyes and ears of absent embassies, yet that is a role it is being asked to play. The ability to shape the understanding of external diplomats and journalists gives the WSP the potential to have enormous policy impact, and in that sense it is a useful tool. The danger, which the WSP team is acutely aware of and seeking to manage, is not allowing its role in providing helpful explanations to outsiders to compromise its primary mission.

One donor relationship that bears close observation but which cannot yet be assessed is that between the WSP-Somali Programme and the European Commission. The Commission is the largest donor operating in Somalia, and as of mid-2002 has become the largest source of donor funds for the WSP-Somali Programme, providing roughly half of the operation's funding.²² The Commission's general approach to funding aid projects in the context of Somali state collapse has been to assume primary responsibility for determining priorities, in a management style which is somewhat top-down and not entirely compatible with the PAR method. It has also exerted fairly robust management prerogatives over the international NGOs it funds, and has been very selective about funding UN projects. The Commission's decision to provide substantial funding to the WSP-Somali Programme is thus a welcome development and an indication of the strength of WSP's reputation in the field, which the Commission representatives are openly impressed with. It remains to be seen if the WSP-Somalia programme will inform and have an impact on the Commission's own funding decisions and protocols in Somalia.

²² European Commission, "Grant Contract –External Aid" (2001) p. 1.

Project impact was considerably enhanced by the astute use of a number of “amplifiers” which extended the message and impact of the Academy far beyond the immediate participants in the workshops. Media coverage of the Academy’s workshops and Forum – both in the local press and radio and on the BBC Somali service -- was extensive and almost always positive, reaching Somalilanders and Somalis around the world. During the two week period of the fieldwork for this evaluation, the project was featured on a ten minute segment of the BBC Somali service and earned two front page stories in the local newspapers. Parliamentarians who participated in the workshops regularly reported to their respective houses on the proceedings and findings. Civic leaders involved in the workshops and the “friends of the Academy” were also important conduits of the Academy proceedings to a wider circle of Somalilanders. In addition, the project coordinator and research associate produced an impressive number of policy papers, conference papers and published articles which reached a much wider policy and academic audience. All this, it should be stressed, was accomplished without a public relations official attached to the project. It is probably fair to conclude that no other international NGO and no other UN project in Somalia has been as effective in using a range of different tools to broadcast its objectives and themes.

V. Broader Impact of the Academy

The Academy has since its inception been primarily invested in executing the WSP project, but has also pursued additional roles beyond the parameters of the project. This additional work has also had a significant impact on the community and merits brief treatment.

Academy public service work. The Academy leadership has made a conscious effort to harness the Academy for public service roles. These are voluntary and non-paying roles in Somaliland’s civic life which have had an enormous impact. By far the most important of this public service work has been the establishment of the ‘Forum,’ a series of public evening discussions and debates on political and public policy issues on the Academy compound. This function of the Academy provided a vital public space for political opponents and opinion-shapers to discuss important topics ranging from the referendum on the constitution to a code of conduct for elections agreed upon by Somaliland’s political parties. This role of mediator, neutral space for political discussion, and catalyst for informed, reasoned public debate has catapulted the Academy onto center stage of Somaliland’s political life and filled a critically important need at a delicate period in Somaliland. The fact that the Academy leadership was able to discern this need speaks volumes about its political acumen; the fact that it was able and willing to fill the need as a public service has earned it a very high level of respect in the Somaliland community.

The Academy has also been sought out as a source of expertise and support for a number of government offices, again in an informal and unpaid capacity. Leaders of Parliament have sought Academy input on the wording and content of bills; Ministers have conferred with the Academy for policy advice; and the electoral commission relied on the Academy for preliminary research into electoral procedures in other countries.

The Academy has also issued its own statements on a number of public policy matters. These policy papers have been careful not to take positions aligning the Academy with one or another political party, but are rather attempts to facilitate the political process and advocate broad principles.

Both through its public meetings and its library, the Academy has also sought to play the role of “intellectual shelter” for Somali professionals and intellectuals who seek a conducive environment for reflection, research, and reasoned discourse.

Finally, some Academy members – most notably the research associate and the project coordinator – have produced a number of academic papers on aspects of post-war rebuilding and reconciliation in Somalia and Somaliland. These papers have either been presented at conferences, published in journals, or distributed as unpublished reports. They have given WSP and its work in Somaliland visibility and impact in the broader academic and policy community.

Academy contract work. The Academy has also taken on several contractual projects for external agencies, including research on the judiciary and a human rights training program for Somaliland police. These projects were an important step in establishing the Academy as an entity independent of the WSP project and as an effective national think-tank capable of taking on contractual work for donors, UN agencies, NGOs, or others. These projects were also useful in providing a modest revenue flow to the research team during the protracted financial crisis WSP experienced in 2001-02.

External outreach. In addition to the substantial service work of providing briefings, contacts, and logistical support to diplomats, aid officials, and journalists, the Academy has also embarked on successful outreach to academic specialists and institutions. A number of foreign academics have affiliated with the Academy while conducting research in Somaliland, and several formal linkage programmes have been forged with universities in Europe and North America. These actions reflect an exceptionally high level of initiative and vision on the part of Academy leadership.

VI. Assessment of Written Products

The five written products generated by the project – the *Self-Portrait* and the four entry point papers -- are a reflection of a much broader process of dialogue. Yet the written works tend to assume a special importance, perhaps out of proportion to other aspects of the project. This is so for at least two reasons. First, the written works are one of the only tangible “outputs” of a project that is otherwise highly process-oriented. As such, the papers attract more attention as the only easily measured and assessed aspects of the project. Second, the written works are in English and targeted more for external actors, in a project that otherwise focuses heavily on local dialogue and processes. The written works are thus the main face of the project to donors, UN agencies, and academics.

WSP-Somaliland produced two different sets of written documents – first the *Self-Portrait*, completed at the end of the initial field research, and then the four entry point papers, the results of workshops and working group deliberations. These written products play different roles in the project life-cycle. The *Self-Portrait* (called a Country Note in other WSP settings) was intended to build a foundation of information and analysis on which a national discourse of post-war development priorities could subsequently take place. This was an especially important task in the Somali and Somaliland setting, where reliable databases and assessments were very scarce and inaccessible, leading to a worrisome information gap in policy discussions. The *Self-Portrait* set out to integrate in a single analysis two very different sources of essential information – first, the data and assessments generated in the hundreds of surveys and studies commissioned by aid agencies but rarely made available to Somali communities; and second, the views, needs, and priorities of local Somali communities on matters of post-war development. The problem which the *Self-Portrait* was meant to solve was stated clearly by one early WSP report, which notes that “discourse on contemporary Somali affairs within Somalia is often uninformed by solid background material and documentation, while discourse outside Somalia, where information and analysis are available, often fails to include those Somalis most directly concerned with the subject at hand.”²³

The *Self-Portrait* largely succeeds in integrating available data from secondary sources and local perceptions and priorities into an integrated analysis. It is an exceptionally clear and well-written piece, written in a style which is at once accessible and user-friendly to general readers while still nuanced and sensitive to the complexities of Somali politics and society. In addition to the clarity of its prose, its organization, layout, structured explanations, and thoughtful use of Somali expressions all makes this publication an outstanding reference document. Most of the issues it treats are handled with enough of a sense of history and depth that the publication will remain useful for years to come, even as current events eventually render portions of the analysis out-dated. The *Self-Portrait* is valuable enough as a stand-alone reference for the country that serious consideration should be given to revising and updating it every few years.

The *Self-Portrait* is at its best in presenting key issues and challenges in Somaliland and then giving voice to local citizens interviewed as part of the research. Direct quotes are liberally drawn upon to this end, and to great effect. For an external reader, the publication provides both a powerful mapping of development issues and a close feel for the views and concerns of average citizens as well as opinion-makers. The publication does not shy away from direct coverage of sensitive or critical views of powerful actors, including the Somaliland government, local NGOs, and external aid agencies. Indeed, the team’s decision to publish dissenting views on Somaliland from the eastern portion of the country created conflict with some members of the Somaliland government when the document was first released.

²³ Quoted in Kane (1999), p. 55.

Where the study is somewhat less successful is in integrating available secondary material on Somaliland development issues. Only a portion of the hundreds of available studies conducted on different sectors of Somaliland are cited or used, and key data is only presented within the text, not in stand-alone tables or charts. Moreover, little effort is made to critically assess the external studies and data which are cited. For policy-makers and citizens, the inaccessibility of these studies is only part of the problem; determining which studies are reliable and which are not is an even bigger challenge.²⁴ Winnowing the (few) good studies and data from the (many) bad ones would have been a very useful and needed service to both Somali and non-Somali readers. The *Self-Portrait* would be an ideal vehicle for such an exercise, and the Academy team the ideal group of experts to conduct such a critical assessment. If the *Self-Portrait* is revised and updated in later years, this would be a useful additional function.²⁵

Because the *Self-Portrait* is written in English, it is necessarily of somewhat limited utility within Somaliland, where its readership is restricted to Somali intellectuals. This is a bit unfortunate, but justified by the fact that a growing portion of literate Somalis are also bilingual in English.

Because the *Self-Portrait* is self-consciously designed to be written from the perspective of the Somaliland community (hence its name), it takes on an explicitly Somaliland point of view on matters related to the contemporary affairs of the self-declared country. This is a very important matter in the introduction, which includes interpretations of recent history clearly dominated by a pro-Somaliland position. There is no attempt to strike a balance with southern Somali views, or to alert the reader that the interpretations provided may be contested by others. As long as the reader is aware that the *Self-Portrait* is designed to give the Somaliland (and in some instances, the Isaaq) point of view, there is no harm in this. But it would not have been difficult to include at least a few footnotes explaining that certain statements in the text would be considered revisionist in other quarters.

The entry point papers are more difficult to assess, as they are at the time of this evaluation still in draft form. The four drafts possess several common features. All have clearly been subjected to considerable editing, and possess a style of English which is impressive but at times bordering on academic – that is, not always easily accessible to readers whose first language is not English. All four papers are well-organized and structured, with relatively short and concise treatment of issues. All are well-researched and draw appropriately on secondary data – including useful presentation of key data in tables and charts -- without overwhelming the text. A good balance is struck between description and analysis. All are very valuable portraits of the debates and concerns of the Somaliland community as it rebuilds after war, giving readers an insight into

²⁴ The variability in quality of externally-commissioned surveys and studies on Somalia is, by any standard, appalling. Some excellent reports, based on close and careful use of field data and featuring excellent analysis, go virtually unread, while others produce whimsical data and badly flawed assessments but are cited as authoritative.

²⁵ The UNDP *Somalia Human Development Report* is also supposed to aggregate, filter, and present available development data; it is published once every three or four years. However, it treats Somaliland as part of Somalia (as it must), limiting its utility as a source of data and analysis strictly for Somaliland.

impassioned and in-depth local dialogue about issues of real concern to the country. In its own way, each is an exceptionally useful and worthwhile read.

At the same time, all four papers struggle with a common problem – namely, how to remain true to the purpose of reflecting the results of workshop proceedings while advancing an analysis and recommendations, when the workshops more often than not produced debates, not consensus. The papers all grapple with an effort to simultaneously frame the issues succinctly, present key data, portray the workshop debates faithfully, generate analysis of the problems, and produce coherent recommendations. Where debates did not move forward, the papers are only able to proceed with analysis and recommendations at the cost of the authors assuming more “ownership” over the papers than the workshop participants. Indeed, in some instances national project group members did note that the entry point papers, while impressive, felt more like the analysis of the Academy team than the proceedings of the workshops. On the other hand, some of the analyses and recommendations were thin and overly general, a reflection of the restrictions placed on the researchers, who could only work with the material that the workshops produced. Where no consensus was achieved, the recommendations were necessarily general and broad. The researchers were clearly caught between a rock and a hard place on this score – a more coherent and powerful analysis and set of recommendations could only be produced by assuming Academy ownership of the analysis, which would defeat the purpose of the workshops and the dialogue they generated. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to fault the entry point papers or their authors. Curiously, the WSPI literature and training manual has little to say about the exact purpose of the entry point papers and how to handle the entry point papers when consensus is not achieved. Their extensive treatment of how to build consensus simply presupposes that consensus will occur.²⁶

Since the entry point papers are intended as policy tools, all would be made more useful if prefaced with an executive summary. Otherwise they are somewhat lengthy by the standards of the policy world; realistically, few policy-makers in Nairobi are likely to take the time to read the entire papers.

Among the four papers, each possesses particularly outstanding features. The “Regulation of the Livestock Economy” is impressive as a deeply informed, well-documented analysis, with extensive and coherent recommendations. This paper clearly benefited from the fact that a strong base of data, studies, and expertise on the livestock sector existed, and it made full use of those resources to deliver a state of the art analysis. Its close look at disturbing trends such as the rise of enclosures should serve as a clarion call for policy action in a fast-changing and badly stressed pastoral sector. The analysis and recommendations this paper produced will likely remain the point of departure for public policy on livestock, rangeland management, and livestock trade for years to come.

²⁶ In WSP, *The WSP Active Learning Initiative: An Overview of WSP Experience* (2001), there is extensive training and guidance for PAR, and a whole section on consensus-building, but nothing specific on the purpose of the entry point papers. The entry point papers get equally short attention in earlier WSP documents, such as *WSP in Practice* (1999) and Kane (1999).

The “Consolidation and Decentralization of Government Institutions” entry point paper enjoyed the greatest amount of public attention and dealt with the most immediate and powerful political questions of the day. It provides an invaluable and richly detailed analysis of the nature of the debate over decentralization and political reform, including the kinds of specific data on matters such as distribution of seats in the House of Representatives by clan and region, and close analysis of aspects of key public laws, which are essential to an understanding of the direction of political reforms in Somaliland. This paper will serve as a standard reference on Somaliland politics for the next several years. Its primary weakness is that political changes are occurring at such speed in Somaliland that parts of the paper will soon be out of date. This was the “dinosaur” scenario the Academy worried aloud about regarding all of its workshops and research papers.

The “Impact of the War on the Family” was somewhat more descriptive and less analytically powerful than the first two papers, but no less valuable. The issues in this entry point produced the least consensus in workshops, restricting the researcher’s ability to move the analysis and recommendations forward. But the paper is an exceptionally revealing portrait of a debate and discussion between Somalilanders on sensitive issues normally kept out of the public eye. The chapter on the impact of the civil war is especially powerful, giving the reader an unforgettable glimpse into economic pressures on households, tensions over shifting gender roles, and the status of children in Somaliland. It presents a compelling picture of a society caught in the midst of seismic changes in its economy and culture, and of households unsure how to cope with the increasingly obvious disjoint between traditional behavior and new realities. The chapter on the impact of *qaat* is also exceptionally useful in explaining why this habit is so prevalent and what the costs are at the household level.

“The Role of the Media in Political Reconstruction” was probably the most challenging entry point topic to manage, as it deals with an important but much more narrow public policy concern. It includes a very erudite and in-depth introduction to the role of Somali oral culture and poetry in dissemination of news, which will be valued more by academics than policy-makers. It also provides a very useful assessment of the many different ways that information – and misinformation – spreads through Somalia, including interesting discussions of the role of *mefrishes* (*qaat*-chewing circles), teashops, and the town square. Treatment of the contemporary mass media tends to be somewhat more descriptive, though the paper is certainly the leading source of information and data on the Somaliland mass media, about which little had been previously written. The paper also presents somewhat weaker policy recommendations, probably due to the fact that this entry point deals primarily with a private sector concern. Still, any aid programme offering training to the media will find this paper to be extremely useful.

VII. Project Administration

Project administration presented an unwanted and difficult set of challenges and absorbed a considerable amount of the team's energies throughout the entire project. For a variety of reasons, Somalia is a famously difficult setting for aid project administration, and WSP was not immune to many of the endemic problems faced by other projects. Still, financial and administrative constraints were serious enough to warrant the conclusion that at certain points in the project life-cycle the Academy succeeded in spite of, not because of, administration which was supposed to support and facilitate the project. In many cases, steps have already been taken by WSPI to correct these problems. Those which have not require urgent action to insure that these problems do not recur.

Frustrations with some aspects of the project administration exacerbated tensions between the three tiers of the project – Hargeisa, Nairobi, and Geneva. While a certain level of tension between field staff and headquarters is normal, in this instance it reached unhealthy levels. Communication suffered, mistrust and misperceptions grew, and cooperation diminished. On certain administrative matters, this evaluation encountered surprisingly incompatible interpretations between members of the Hargeisa, Nairobi, and Geneva offices. Fortunately, a number of strong personal commitments and relationships across the three tiers of the project administration helped to see the project through some trying moments.

The evaluation also encountered an emerging factionalism within WSPI which is totally at odds with the project's identity and reputation, and which needs to be put to rest decisively. Of particular concern is the gap between staff whose careers and commitment are with the United Nations versus those who are committed to the NGO half of the dual WSP identity. These two sets of personnel speak distinct and at times mutually unintelligible administrative languages, operate on very different sets of logic and standard procedures, focus on different priorities, and in some instances answer to different masters. If WSP had been set up as an experiment to demonstrate the difference between UN and NGO cultures, the results could not have been more stark.

Financial planning and management. By far the most serious administrative crisis occurred with project finances. The WSP-Somaliland project (and the entire WSP-Somali Programme) faced severe financial crisis from September 2001 to April 2002. Funds were unavailable to pay staff salaries for almost six months; at one point, a WSPI official in Geneva sent substantial personal funds to Hargeisa to help cover unpaid salaries. Bills went unpaid as well. The Hargeisa office had to deal with over 60 unpaid invoices and ask increasingly impatient vendors for repeated grace periods. In Nairobi, the office was unable to pay rent or electric bills, and eventually had to move out of its office. It continued to function for a time out of an administrative officer's personal home, using her vehicle and phone. The fact that individual team members were so committed to WSP that they made personal sacrifices to keep the project going during this crisis speaks volumes about the sense of commitment WSP engenders. But the episode was nonetheless very damaging. It delayed completion of the project, eroded morale, and

nearly derailed the entire WSP-Somaliland project. It also damaged already strained relations between the field offices and Geneva, as disputes arose over response to and responsibility for the problem.

The causes of the financial crisis are multiple, complex, and in some cases contested within WSP. Most of the crisis was clearly beyond the control of WSPI and the WSP-Somali programme. Donor pledges, for instance, took much longer to clear than expected, and WSP was in no position to speed up internal donor procedures for release of funds. A major grant from the European Commission took a particularly long period of time to clear Brussels. Second, donor funds released to UN receiving and executing agencies (UNDP and UNOPS, respectively) took inordinately long periods of time to secure signatures and clearance through those agencies. Here, WSP needed a better knowledge of complex UN executing agency modalities in order aggressively to monitor and follow up on pledges released to it. In some cases, WSP personnel appeared to believe that funds had cleared to the project when in fact they remained locked in a corner of the byzantine UN financial and administrative system for lack of a form or signature, or because of repeated requests from UN administrators for revised budgets. These delays were multiplied by WSP's unusual dual status as an NGO and UN affiliate, an identity which is essentially indigestible for the UN administration and which thus created an endless series of objections, requests for clarification, and negotiations. The perceived advantages of this dual identity need to be weighed carefully against the costs it entails.

Third, serious irregularities in the management of WSP project funds by both the receiving and executing UN agencies created a situation in which hundreds of thousands of dollars were temporarily lost to the project at the height of the financial crisis, until such time as WSP succeeded in retrieving the money for the project. This was fully resolved in WSP's favor but took months to sort out. Because WSP had outsourced administration of the project to UNOPS,²⁷ it had little capacity to monitor project finances itself, making it all the more difficult to argue its case with the UN offices in question. Incidents relating to the accountability of the UN receiving and executing agencies raise questions about the appropriateness of reliance on UN agencies as executing agents for WSPI projects.

As the financial crisis dragged on, the WSP field offices in Nairobi and Hargeisa increasingly came to the conclusion that the Geneva office was inattentive to the problem. From the perspective of the field team members, some administrators in Geneva lacked the capacity to manage finances, an understanding of UN financial procedures, and a "service culture" to provide timely and consistent support to the field. At one point key members of the field team considered resigning over the issue, which would have almost certainly derailed the entire project.

²⁷ Technically, only part of the WSP Somali Programme is administered by UNOPS – the portion which is considered a UN project. Funds which were channeled to WSP as an NGO were handled by WSP administration directly.

Some Geneva-based administrators continue to express doubts as to the seriousness of the financial crisis, and lay blame on the Nairobi administration for failing to monitor the accounts and provide timely and accurate financial reporting. Within the Geneva office, there is a division of opinion about responsibility for the financial crisis. All agree, however, that the myriad of financial and administrative problems which the Somali programme generated created a certain fatigue with the Somali programme in Geneva, perhaps contributing to a lack of responsiveness in some quarters when the financial problems arose. The fact that nearly a year after the crisis began there is still little consensus between some WSP administrative staff about the extent and nature of the problem is in some ways more worrisome than the fact that the crisis occurred.

Happily, by mid-2002 the project secured all funding which had either been delayed or tied up in disputes with UN receiving and executing agencies. But the entire episode suggests that shortcomings were evident in financial planning and reporting, including monitoring and follow-up of donor pledges, adequate knowledge of complex UN executing agency procedures, sufficient training of financial officers, and commitment to an acceptable standard of financial reporting from the field.

Administrative overhead. Frustrations with administrative problems were compounded by the irony that the project had a large number of administrators managing it. In response to problems encountered with UN receiving and executing agencies, WSP was compelled to create shadow administrations in both Nairobi and Geneva to do much of the administrative work it was paying 10% of its project costs to UNOPS and UNDP to do. This gave the appearance of a somewhat top-heavy organization. The multiple layers of administration – in Hargeisa, in the WSP-Nairobi office, in the WSPI Geneva office, and in UNDP and UNOPS – inevitably created some confusion over organizational division of labor, producing some redundancies and gaps in administrative work. It has also created a certain amount of rivalry between the three levels of administrators, which each questioning the effectiveness of the other two.

The decision made early in the Somaliland project to add a senior operations manager was costly, and has raised some questions about the cost-effectiveness of this additional layer of administration. This question is usually raised as part of a more general concern about whether the expense of the Nairobi office is justifiable (in support of the third WSP project in Somalia, the South-Central project based in Mogadishu). While the move was costly and may not be sustainable in the long-run, in the short term it has had several tangible results which have more than paid for themselves. The operations director and her staff have dramatically improved the financial record-keeping of the office; are providing training to field administrators; helped to smooth over very strained relations between WSP and UNOPS; and secured for WSP staff access to free ECHO flights, saving the project many tens of thousands of dollars per year previously spent on costly UNCAS flights.

Financial and project reporting. Financial reporting by the field project in Hargeisa is considerably improved over the Puntland project, but is still a source of some complaints from both Nairobi and Geneva. Efforts to routinize quarterly reporting and to provide

training and software to the administrative officers in Hargeisa and Mogadishu are among the steps being taken to strengthen field reporting. Financial reporting in Nairobi is extremely cumbersome due to the fact that the Somaliland and Mogadishu projects receive funds from both the NGO and UN side of the WSP. Project budgets have to be color-coded to identify which project expenses are covered by NGO funds and which by UN funds.

Communication. Communication between the different WSP offices (Somaliland, Nairobi, and Geneva) was uneven and generally unsatisfactory, leading to mixed signals, misunderstandings, and complaints about lack of transparency in the project's decision-making process. Several efforts were made to remedy poor communication within the project, with generally good results. First, WSPI brought on an intern (later a regular staff member) to serve as a Somalia desk officer, giving the field a point person who could follow up on requests. It was decided that all field communication would be directed solely to two members of the Geneva office, while the programme coordinator would serve as the focus of communications to the field. Improved access to email in Hargeisa facilitated communication somewhat, though in both Hargeisa and Nairobi email access is often extremely slow and time-consuming. Phone communication between Nairobi and Hargeisa, once extremely dependable, suffered considerably in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks; calls from Nairobi to Somalia subsequently became very difficult to place. This created real problems for the Nairobi office when action was needed at short notice from the project coordinator, who was mainly based in Hargeisa. An agreement for the Hargeisa office to call Nairobi at a prearranged time each day would have offset this problem.

Human resource management. A number of disputes and tensions within the WSP team were in evidence both within and between the Hargeisa, Nairobi, and Geneva offices. In a small organization, such individual disputes can hamper institutional effectiveness and require more intervention by management, but were not always given the attention they deserved. Guidelines related to the proper amount of time staff members may devote to non-WSP related work or business also required clarification.

Feedback and learning structures. WSPI simultaneously seeks to catalyze changes in post-conflict development at the field level ("local" goals) and in donor and UN agency headquarters ("global" goals). These laudable but distinct objectives have tended to split the organization in two, with Geneva tending to focus principally on advocacy aimed at global policy reform and the field committed almost entirely to local goals. The Academy team members possessed a very strong commitment to their work locally, but did not see themselves as stakeholders in the broader WSPI commitment to reforming and informing universal UN agency and donor policy, and to improving upon post-war rebuilding in other countries. As a result, Geneva's requests for "lessons learned" and other reporting from the field to feed into its headquarters-level advocacy were viewed as onerous and secondary concerns which were often delayed or ignored. The field project members at times perceived their relationship with Geneva as "extractive," believing that their principal utility to Geneva was in generating lessons to benefit other post-conflict

situations. When the field team perceived that Geneva was failing to respond to its financial crisis, it simply refused to provide input to the learning unit.

For its part, the Geneva team had long expressed concern that the effort by the Academy to take full national ownership of the project – a goal which was initially welcomed by WSPI -- had at some point crossed a fine line between healthy local ownership and unhealthy autonomy from the broader WSPI vision and commitment.²⁸ The fact that the field project tended to view Geneva solely as a fund-raising and administrative support office was at first a concern and eventually an irritant. Clearly at some point early in the project life-cycle more sustained efforts to build a mutually beneficial relationship between Geneva and the Somaliland project team would have helped to minimize this problem. Instead, Geneva and Hargeisa appear to have wandered apart, punishing each other in small ways for perceived failure to honor reciprocal obligations in a partnership that was not as strong as it should have been.

WSPI's capacity to derive lessons from the Somaliland experience was also hindered somewhat by the fact that the Geneva office was undergoing a lengthy period of restructuring. The restructuring effort, combined with preoccupation with WSPI's expansion into several new countries and perhaps a certain fatigue with the Somalia programme led to a sometimes low level of awareness about the state of the Somaliland project on the part of some key Geneva team members.

Improving WSP's institutional capacity to learn lesson involves several steps. Geneva team members tasked with compiling and distilling lessons learned must be placed in the field for more extended periods of time; the specific types of lessons sought from the field need to be more explicitly defined; regular reports from the field reflecting on lessons learned must be produced; and field teams must be better socialized to embrace this aspect of WSP's work.

In sum, the WSP-Somaliland project was forced to deal with more than its share of financial and administrative challenges. Some of these challenges were met, while others remained sources of endemic tensions within the organization. Strong personal commitments to the project and to the WSP vision were crucial in holding the project together at critical moments, allowing it to survive and flourish despite the problems it faced.

VIII. Transition phase issues

One goal of WSP projects is the creation of a sustainable “successor body” – a national institute where researchers can continue to produce research informed by the PAR method. In Somaliland, the Academy appears extremely well-positioned to survive and thrive beyond the point at which direct WSP financial support is terminated. The Academy has the advantage of having been established at the start of the project; it has an

²⁸ Johansson and Boulle-Weber (1999).

excellent national reputation; it will benefit from a generous WSP financial package; and it has already secured and executed several external contracts.

To insure the success of the Academy, a number of important issues related to the transition phase remain merit consideration.

Financial sustainability. Though the Academy appears likely to attract ample external contracts for research projects in the next several years, it will face chronic financial vulnerability if it relies exclusively on “soft money” from short-term aid contracts. There is always the danger of an extended drought in funding for any number of reasons, at which point the Academy could face losing its research team or simply collapsing. For the Academy to achieve real sustainability, it needs to be able to rely on a steady stream of core funding, enough at a minimum to cover minimal base salaries and essential operating expenses. There are a number of possibilities which could be explored with WSPI assistance, ranging from the establishment of an endowment (an increasingly attractive option pursued by NGOs, especially in the US) to promotion of some for-profit subsidiary activities. Opportunities to host foreign study groups, for instance, could constitute an annual or semi-annual infusion of cash on which the Academy could depend. A real strategy for financial sustainability needs to be aggressively pursued and, where appropriate, external consultants with expertise in these matters brought in to assist the Academy.

Criteria for accepting research contracts. The Academy is intended to develop into a particular type of think-tank or institute, one which promotes and employs the PAR method. But it is likely that external aid agencies and others will turn to the Academy with contracts which may be inappropriate for or incompatible with the PAR method. The Academy should use the transition period to establish clear criteria for itself about which types of projects it will or will not take on.

Remuneration for contracts within the Academy. As the Academy attracts contracts for research and training projects, it will inevitably confront the dozens of sensitive issues related to allocation of work and pay within the research team. It is inevitable that some team members will be drawn upon more than others. The Academy will need to establish clear and fair rules about project division of project labor and remuneration within the team. It will need to establish clear criteria for allocation of tasks to team members, policies for determining when outside Somali expertise must be sub-contracted when the core team lacks such expertise, and at what payment scale. If team members secure consultancies independently, policies regarding Academy administrative overhead surcharges must be established in advance. These are common problems faced by most think-tanks, and there are a variety of different ways different institutions deal with them. The Academy has already confronted these issues with the initial contract work it accepted, and needs set policies to avoid conflicts within the team. Assistance to the Academy in this regard could include a survey of think-tanks and research institutes to develop a “menu of options” from which the Academy can choose the policies most appropriate to its needs.

Retention and replacement. The Academy stands an excellent chance of losing some of its top researchers to other organizations. This is not necessarily a problem. Indeed, the Academy team fully hopes and expects to enjoy a symbiotic relationship with the Somaliland government and perhaps civil society, serving as an incubator for promising new talent for the public sector as well as a point of intellectual renewal for mid-career professionals seeking a sabbatical (or political figures out of office). This is very much the kind of role some think-tanks play in other countries and is an entirely appropriate vision for the future of the Academy. Three potential problems may arise which require advance planning. The first is the need for active and ongoing training in the PAR method if the Academy is to have a significant amount of turnover among its research team. Without a built-in training component, the Academy's core philosophy could quickly be eroded and lost, rendering the organization into just another research-oriented consultancy firm. The second concern is the danger that the Academy the more successful it is the greater the pressure the Academy will face to hire and retain larger numbers of researchers. Policies for maintaining an optimal size of research associates – and perhaps creating differentiated types of association with the Academy – will need to be established. Finally there will be the ongoing danger that the Academy will suffer a brain-drain not to fill government or Somali civil society leadership positions, but rather to high-paying international aid organizations or to work abroad. Filling government and civil society positions with Academy research associates would constitute capacity-building, but the loss of trained associates to aid agencies or positions abroad would constitute capacity-erosion.

Commitment to WSPI network. The somewhat tenuous linkage and commitment to the broader WSPI identity which has characterized the Academy to date is not irreversible. There are ample reasons why both WSPI and the Academy stand to benefit considerably from strengthening their post-project partnership, drawing the Academy more fully into the network of WSP affiliates around the world.

IX. Conclusion

Dozens of lessons can be garnered from the successful WSP-Somaliland project. What follows are some of the most significant.

- *Recruiting and preparation.* WSP-Somaliland again demonstrated that WSPI's care with extensive preparatory work and recruitment of a top team of researchers and project directors is a critical factor in project success.
- *Socialization, morale, commitment.* Team-building and socialization are as important as the actual training of the team in the PAR method. Close-knit teams are better able to handle the many challenges projects face, as WSP-Somaliland demonstrated.
- *Training and research.* The extensive training period WSP-Somaliland employed proved useful, including use of a trial interview prior to the launching of the research phase. Geneva's Learning Unit needs to have a more integral in the training, bringing lessons learned from other settings. Team-based research and

interviews encourage more brainstorming and accountability than individual fieldwork and should be a standard feature of WSP research. Training in survey methods may be a useful supplement to the PAR interviews, providing the project with an additional tool for measuring and reporting community priorities on post-war reconstruction.

- *Amplifiers.* WSP-Somaliland set a new standard for effective use of amplifiers to expand its message well beyond workshop participants. Close attention should be given to these strategies in future projects.
- *Establishment of affiliate.* The decision to establish the Academy at the outset of the project was crucial in allowing the affiliate to establish a reputation and increase its likelihood of survival following completion of the WSP project.
- *Local ownership and WSP identity.* The emphasis which the WSP-Somaliland project team placed on local ownership of the project was vital to its success inside Somaliland. The principle of local ownership and the commitment to a global WSP mission and identity need not and should not be mutually exclusive. Careful effort must be made in the future to socialize the project team to embrace these twin objectives and identities equally.
- *Service.* An essential factor in the Academy's success was in public service activities it pursued apart from the WSP-project. The Forum and other instances of public service should be used as valuable case studies for future WSP projects.
- *Flexibility.* The Academy seized opportunities in the face of changing political circumstances in Somaliland rather than following a scripted project timeline.
- *Trouble shooting.* Participatory action research in war-torn countries is politically sensitive and must run a gauntlet of challenges. WSP-Somaliland devoted extensive energy to anticipating and pre-empting problems. Development of a wealth of "social capital" – including a circle of supporters known as the "friends of the Academy" – helped to promote this goal.
- *Neutrality.* The Academy's success in integrating government officials into a process which was often critical of government policies is a textbook case of how to handle the delicate issue of neutrality in post-war dialogue.
- *Attention to financial administration.* The difficulties WSP-Somaliland faced on this score point to a self-evident need for future projects to devote more time to careful and close monitoring of financial contributions. If the UN must be used as an executing agency, close oversight is required. WSP-Somaliland's experience suggests that avoidance of reliance on the UN as executing agency is preferable.
- *Personnel management.* The WSP-Somaliland experience underscores the lesson that even small and close-knit organizations require constant attention to personnel management; disputes and tensions between individual project members cannot be allowed to fester.
- *Field-headquarter relations.* Care must be taken to cultivate mutually supportive, responsive, and respectful relations between field and headquarters, and to socialize both field and headquarter staff to embrace local as well as global missions of WSP.
- *Selective targeting of external actors.* WSP's experience in Somaliland again confirms that not all external aid agencies are receptive audiences for the WSP

message and method. WSP projects need to be selective in their targeting of aid agencies.

References

- Academy for Peace and Development. (July 2002a). "Consolidation and Decentralization of Government Institutions." Hargeysa, ADP (draft). Principal Researcher: Cabdirahman Jimcaale.
- _____. (July 2002b). "The Impact of the War on the Family." Hargeysa, APD Entry Point Paper (draft). Principal researcher: Sucaad Ibrahim Cabdi.
- _____. (July 2002c). "Regulating the Livestock Economy of Somaliland." Hargeysa, APD Entry Point Paper (draft). Principal Researcher: Maxamed Xasan Gaani.
- _____. (2002d). "The Role of the Media in Political Reconstruction." Hargeysa, APD Entry Point Paper (draft). Principal Researcher: Boobe Yuusuf Ducaale.
- _____. (2002e). "Mission Statement." Hargeisa, mimeo.
- _____. (2002f). "The Judicial System in Somaliland." Hargeisa, Workshop report, April.
- _____. (2002g). "Submission on the Conduct of the Electoral Process." Hargeisa, Academy report.
- Anonymous. (2002). "Government Recognition in Somalia and Regional Political Stability in the Horn of Africa." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 2.
- Bryden, Matt. (2002). "The Undiscovered Option: Which Way Forward for Somalia?" Discussion Paper (15 January).
- Farah, Ahmed Yusuf. (2000). "Resolution of the Somali Conflict: Factional Reconciliation Prces Versus 'Carta(Arta) Peace Initaitive." Paper presented at the conference "African Conflicts, Their Management, Resolution, and Post-Conflict Reconstruction." Addis Ababa, 13-15 December.
- _____. (2001). "Assessing Reconciliation Initiatives by the TNG after the 'Carta(Arta) Peace Process." Paper presented at the 8th Congress of Somali Studies, University of Hargeisa, Somaliland, 3-13 July.
- _____. (2002). "Somalia: The Process of National Reconciliation." Paper presented to the Instituto Italiano per L'Africa e L'Oriente, Giornata di riflessione sulla Somalia, Rome, 15 February.
- Johannsen, Agneta, and Catherine Boulle-Weber. (1999). "Mission Report, Somaliland and Nairobi, 15-24 June 1999." Mimeo.

- Kane, June. (1999). *War-Torn Societies Project: The First Four Years*. Geneva, WSP.
- Menkhaus, Ken. (2001). "Project Evaluation." In WSP Somali Programme, *Rebuilding Somalia: Issues and Possibilities for Puntland*. Haan Associates, for WSPI International, London, pp. 303-369.
- Schwoebel, Mary Hope (2000). "Impact Evaluation of the War-Torn Societies Project: Somaliland." Greater Horn of Africa Peacebuilding Project, USAID.
- Somaliland Centre for Peace and Development. (2000a). *A Self-Portrait of Somaliland: Rebuilding from the Ruins*. Hargeysa, SCPD.
- _____. (2000b). "A Country Devastated by War Moves from Conflict to Consensus." Hargeysa, SCPD (pamphlet).
- "Somaliland Political Parties Sign An Agreement." (2002). *Somaliland Times* Vol. 1, Issue 28 (July 27), p.1.
- WSP. (1999). *War-Torn Societies Project in Practice*. Geneva, WSP.
- WSP Somali Programme. (2000). "From Pilot Project to Sustainable Action." Workshop report. Hargeisa and Nairobi, 27 August – 1 September).
- _____. (2001a). *Rebuilding Somalia: Issues and Possibilities for Puntland*. Haan Associates, for WSPI International, London.
- _____. (2001b). "Participatory Action Research in Support of Peace Building, the Prevention of Renewed Conflict and the Building of a Democratic Culture." Project Proposal, Annex 1 to EU Grant Contract B7-703/2001/3190.
- _____. (2001c) "Participatory Action Research in Support of Peacebuilding and Post-War Reconstruction." Narrative report submitted to REDSO/USAID, in support of Grant no. 623-G-99-00289-00, Nairobi.
- _____. (2001d). "Narrative Report on Activities for the Period March-2000 – September 2001." Nairobi, WSP.
- _____. (2001e). "Progress of Work: Oct 2000 to March 2001." Nairobi, WSP.
- WSP Transition Programme. (2000a). "WSP Somali Programme Activities in 1999." Nairobi, WSP.
- _____. (2000b). "WSP Somalia Programme: Summary Progress Report, 2000." Nairobi, WSP, December.
- WSP International. (2001). *An Overview of WSP Experience*. Geneva, WSPI, The WSP

Active Learning Initiative.