

# A Study on the Settlement of Herojaale Reconciliation Process: A Pathway to Sustainable Peace in Mudug Region, Puntland Somalia

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## Abstract

The paper studies the inter-clan conflict in Herojaale, Mudug region, Puntland, Somalia, involving marginalized sub-clans. It examines the historical context, key incidents, and reconciliation efforts over the past three decades. It uses qualitative methods including interviews and document analysis. The paper highlights recent peace initiatives and challenges in achieving sustainable reconciliation. The findings of this study are derived from agreements signed conflicting parties, narrative reports of the reconciliation conferences and insights provided by a diverse group of key informants who played significant roles in the reconciliation process. Findings suggest that a combination of land management strengthening, structured mediation, economic revitalization, and inclusive reconciliation strategies is essential for breaking the cycle of violence and fostering peace.

## Keywords

Conflict, Marginalization, Reconciliation, Peace, Violence

## 1. Introduction

The settlement of Herojaale was originally established in 1971 as a base for an oil exploration company. It locates 40 kilometers west of Galkio and under the administration of Galdogob district, Mudug region of Puntland, Somalia. Over the last 30 years, Herojaale has witnessed recurrent inter-clan violence primarily among the sub-clans, namely, Ali-Goray, Jeeg, Shiil and Wa'ays clans, all of whom belong to the Kuulbeer clan group of Madhibaan, a socially marginalized commu-

nity. The conflicts date back to 1991, rooted in retaliatory violence, land disputes, and unresolved grievances, following by 2001-2023 periodic clashes over land and revenge killings continued, resulting a total casualty of twelve men lost their lives, with women and children disproportionately affected by displacement and economic hardship as well as the total closure of all social service facilities including the only school, Mother-Child-Center and the water well in the settlement of Herojaale.

In reaching lasting peace, the incumbent President of Puntland, Mr. Said Abdullahi Deni, during a visit to Mudug in September 2024, appointed a high-level mediation committee led by the second Deputy Speaker of Parliament to address the ongoing conflict. This initiative marked the fifth attempt at formal reconciliation, following earlier unsuccessful mediation efforts in 2003, 2004, 2014, and 2015.

Hence, this study aims to analyze the historical context and peace efforts in Herojaale, with specific objectives 1) to examine the historical causes of the conflict. 2) to evaluate the role of traditional elders, government officials, and local communities in peace efforts and 3) to identify challenges hindering reconciliations. Roddy, Richard, Élise & Valerie (2024) argue that reconciliation processes go through four main arenas of investigation, each of which is driven by the recognition that wars and reconciliation processes are inherently corporeal processes, including 1) dead bodies; 2) disappeared bodies; 3) displaced bodies; and 4) damaged bodies.

## 2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study approach, utilizing key informant interviews to explore the reconciliation process in depth. Participants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement in, and expertise related to, the reconciliation process. The interviewees included two prominent traditional elders (Isin) from the Reer Kuulbeer group, members of the mediation committee led by the Second Speaker of the Puntland Parliament, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture—who was notably the only female member of the committee and also a representative of the Reer Kuulbeer via a phone call interview; the Deputy Minister of Interior, Federal Affairs, and Democratization, the Director of Reconciliation within the Ministry of Interior, as well as two additional members of the mediation committee appointed by the Ministry of Interior. The study also consulted secondary sources, including previously signed agreements, reconciliation and stakeholder engagement reports, and video recordings of high-level reconciliation conferences conducted in Galkaio and Herojaale. These conferences, which formed a critical component of the peacebuilding process, were attended by 120 participants comprising both men and women. The meetings were held at different intervals during the project period from October, 2024-March, 2026, with each session lasting for durations of two, five, and six days, respectively. For data analysis, the study used a thematic analysis approach to classify data into conflict

causes and key events, reconciliation strategies and peace efforts, challenges to conflict resolution and peace dividends as a sustainable strategy.

### 3. Discussions and Results

#### 3.1. Historical Context

The Herojaaale conflict is a protracted and unresolved dispute characterized by multiple cycles of violence and re-emergence. Throughout its duration, numerous casualties occurred, resulted in a death toll of twelve individuals. Such devastating recurrent inter-clan violence for three decades has been witnessing by the larger Kuulbeer subclans—Ali-Gorey, Jeeg, Shiil, and Wa'ays of the Madhibaan community—a historically marginalized minority within Somali society. Despite their ethnic affiliation with the dominant Samale clan family, these groups have been systematically excluded due to entrenched social hierarchies and cultural stigmas as outcasts from the Samale clan. Because the traditional occupations associated with the Madhibaan, including blacksmithing, shoemaking, hunting, and gathering, have been deemed impure or dishonorable by dominant clans, leading to their social ostracization (UNCU/UN-OCHA, 2002; European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2023). Their traditional roles have been devalued, and they often face barriers to entering other forms of employment, perpetuating cycles of poverty (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Furthermore, politically, these groups are largely excluded from decision-making processes and lack representation in governance structures. Their voices are often marginalized in national dialogues, further entrenching their subordinate status (OSAR, 2018). Reer Kuulbeer and related groups such as the Gaboye, Tumul, and Yibir are often face prohibitions against intermarriage with dominant clans. They are frequently denied participation in communal activities and are subjected to derogatory labels that reinforce their outcast status (Lewis, 1994; Farah, 2002). Additionally, these clans are marginalized because of their skills and denied the basic rights such as right to marriage, education and even employment.

##### 3.1.1. Key Incidents and Casualties

1991 Galkio: The conflict originated when a member of the Reer Ali-Goray clan fatally attacked a member of the Reer Wa'ays clan.

1999 Galkio: A member of the Reer Wa'ays clan was responsible for the killing of an individual from the Reer Ali Goray clan.

2001 Herajaale: A land dispute between the Reer Wa'ays and Reer Ali-Goray clans escalated into violence, resulting in the deaths of one individual from each clan. Additionally, another member of the Reer Ali Goray clan sustained injuries.

2003 Bursaalah: An armed confrontation between the Reer Wa'ays and Reer Ali-Goray clans led to the deaths of one individual from each side. Moreover, a member of the Reer Ali-Goray clan and a young boy sustained injuries.

2007: A violent incident occurred in which a member of the Reer Wa'ays clan killed an individual from the Reer Ali-Goray clan using an axe.

2013: A member of the Reer Gaban clan injured two individuals from the Reer Ali-Goray clan. This act intensified tensions, ultimately escalating the conflict to involve additional clans.

2014: A confrontation between the Reer Wa'ays and Reer Ali-Goray clans resulted in the death of a member of the Reer Wa'ays clan. Additionally, three individuals sustained minor injuries, including one member from each of the conflicting clans and a woman from the Reer Gaban clan.

2023: Two members of the Reer Wa'ays clan killed an individual from the Reer Ali-Goray clan. Furthermore, a previously injured member of the Reer Cali Goray clan was wounded again in a subsequent incident.

2023: A member of the Reer Soole clan killed an individual from the Reer Wacays clan. The perpetrator was later apprehended in the Abud-Waaq district in Galgadud region of Galmudug State of Somalia while attempting to flee and remains in custody.

2023: A member of the Reer Jeeg clan was responsible for the killing of an individual from the Reer Waraabe clan.

This catastrophic incident began in 1991 after an unintentional killing of Reer Wa'ays clan sparked initial violence. Then, the tensions resurfaced in several times due a cycle of revenge killings and land disputes, resulting in multiple fatalities, casualties, displacement and widening the conflict in other sub-clans of Reer Kul-beer. Revenge killings can go on for a long while, even after a break of some years or even despite

### **3.1.2. Intensity and Impact of the Conflict**

According to the key Informant Interviews with titled traditional elders, they underlined that Herojaale conflict has tremendously affected vulnerable groups such as women and children. It resulted in loss of twelve lives, several others sustained severe injuries, including the chief of Herojaale, who suffered severe wounds while a bullet had taken out his eye. The conflict of Herojaale had also caused the displacement of 500 householders, approximately 30,000 people, although exact number may vary, which led to some individuals cross the Somalia-Ethiopia border, up to Wardheer zone in Somali region of Ethiopia. The most dreadful consequence has been the escalation of tensions, grievances and hostility within the extended families and the fraternal community at large, reaching a critical point, where the individuals are witnessing their maternal or paternal uncles or their offspring engaging in violent acts against one another, which totally eroded familial bonds and kinship ties. Furthermore, the respondents stated that the main factors igniting the conflict include delay of compensation payments due to economic constrains as a significant number of community members lacked the financial resources to contribute even a minimal amount for compensation, thereby prolonging the conflict. Likewise, the political marginalization of these communities has led to limited access to government services. Consequently, this ongoing violence has deeply affected the community's social structure, limiting access to education and essential resources such as water wells. Additionally, the humani-

tarian agencies have been unable to operation due to prevailing insecurity in Herojaale as you may see every alley of it a man carrying rifle on his shoulder for shooting his brotherly man from other family. This created hatred and grievance among historically marginalized. According to an elder from Herojaale, as cited in an unpublished report by ISRAAC, (2025), he stated that: “For the past ten years, the shop across from me, I have never been sat down for a single day. When I reached that point in life, I was like a walking corpse, always on the verge of being killed at any moment.”

### 3.2. Peace Efforts and Reconciliation Initiatives

According to Lederach’s argues, there are four elements which reconciliation process requires to meet: truth (understanding the past); mercy (forgiveness); justice (restitution and new social structures); and peace (a vision of a shared future based on wellbeing and security for all groups) (Lederach, 1997). Hence, in this section, the study analysis that the numerous peace talks and mediation attempts in which solutions have been sought for Herojaale underwent the four key elements that Lederach put forward as for reconciliation criteria.

#### 3.2.1. Traditional Mediation Attempts

As other African nations, Somalia practices in a state of basic legal system such as customary law (Xeer), religious law (Sharia) and domestic laws are operating (Kariuki & Kazeem, 2009). Elders provide one of the most central frameworks that are in place for the resolution of conflicts and for preventing their escalation into violence, thus threatening the social fabric. In 2003, Elders hailing from the Reer Kuulbeer stood up for reconciliation to settle conflict. However, these efforts have been only temporarily effective, their attempts to resolve the conflict failed due to unpaid compensations that led to violations of terms after retaliatory actions reignited the conflict.

In 2004, a mediation effort led Reer Kuulbeer traditional elders in Bari Region of Somalia took over the reconciliation process and a fortunately reached a peace agreement under the leadership of Ugaas Jamal Abdi Du’ale and Sultan Isma’iil Jama. Sadly, it ended up failure due to delayed the compensation payment in agreed timeframes. An interviewed gentleman of Reer Kulbeer said that “compensation payments are often delayed due to droughts or negligence”.

In 2015, Mudug’s traditional leaders intervened but revenge killings continued. Subsequently, in 2018 mediated discussions led by Islan<sup>1</sup> Bashir Islan Abdille, the titled traditional elder of Omar Mohamoud, a sub-clan of Majeerteen, were proposed compensations that was agreed by the parties, including camels, cash payments, and firearms but retaliation continued. The failure of all those attempts can be attributed that absence of government intervention. Because, most peace initiative on inter-clan conflicts collapses due to lack of clan commitment. Building peace in today’s conflicts calls for long-term commitment to establishing an

<sup>1</sup>Islan is a traditional title bestowed upon senior elders recognized as peacemakers within certain clans (Lewis, 1999).

infrastructure across the levels of a society, an infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside (Lederach, 1997).

### 3.2.2. Government Led Reconciliation

Despite four unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict between 2003 and 2015 led by traditional elders, recent initiatives have shown promise.

In September 2024, the President of Puntland appointed a committee of ministers and parliamentarians led by the Second Deputy Speaker of the Puntland Parliament, a mediation committee of seven prominent elders, adopting new approaches to address the ongoing conflict. Subsequently, in October 2024, The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Democratization of Puntland [MoIFAD] along with the Ministry of Security and DRR as well as Mudug regional authority launched the Fifth phase of Herajaale reconciliation conference. It was commenced with stakeholder mapping and engagement meetings addressing the magnitude of the conflict, and recognized that the government officials, traditional elders, religious leaders, youth, and women as key actors in the peace process. Followed by successive inter-clan reconciliation meetings in Galkio and Herojaale, Mudug region in November 2025, With the facilitation of MoIFAD, and in partnership with SSF Phase 3 (SSF III) III<sup>2</sup> through ISRAAC<sup>3</sup> as implementing partner. As a result, MoIFAD initiated structured dialogue sessions to address key issues whereby the conflicting parties reached a preliminary peace agreement.

According to an unpublished report by the ISRAAC (2025), two reconciliation conferences were held between February 10 and 24, 2025, in Galkayo and Herojaale, bringing together over 120 participants from five sub-clans of the Reer Kulbeer who had experienced conflicts and disputes over a long period, with at least four previous attempts at reconciliation, because of the failure of previous peace agreements was primarily attributed to the weak enforcement capacity of the government. However, this time, the government took firm measures, including the arrest of the chief Suldaan and five other elders who were sabotaging the peace process. Consequently, these conferences resulted in a reconciliation agreement, with the Puntland government serving as the guarantor and the mediation committee acting as a witness.

The elders representing the conflicting parties officially signed the agreement on February 24, 2025, committing all parties to the agreed-upon terms. The agreement stipulates as follows:

1) Reer Wa'ays vs Reer Ali-Goray case: it was agreed that Reer Ali-Goray to pay 100 camels, a gun, a girl known as "godob tir" in Somali language, which is liter-

<sup>2</sup>The Somalia Stability Fund (SSF III) is a multi-donor fund, launched in March 2023 aims to support the development of a peaceful, stable, and secure Somalia through inclusive political agreements, address grievances, promote democratic processes, strengthen local governance and enhance accountability between citizens and the state.

<sup>3</sup>ISRAAC: Institute for Studies, Researchers and Academic Community is a think tank institute officially registered with the State government of Puntland-Somalia as a private organization and currently serving as implementing partner of SSF Phase III through MoIFAD.

arily mean “extinguishing resentment” or “blood compensation marriage”<sup>4</sup>, and 3000 USD (\$2000 for apology, \$1000 deferred for funeral cost). However, before Reer Ali-Goray paid it, Reer Wa’ays committed retaliatory killing, and therefore, the mediation committee arbitrated to pay 50 camels as a penalty. Hence, the State of Puntland contributes 30 camels (valued at \$12,000) to the penalty since Reer Wa’ays could not be able to pay all. The 2025 agreement, therefore, obligates that the remaining 53 camels, \$1000, and a girl are due by May 6, 2025.

2) Reer Jeeg vs Reer Waraabe case: Reer Jeeg was mandated to pay 110 camels as blood money (diya) to Reer Waraabe, (33 camels upfront valued \$500 each, totaling \$16,500), the remaining 77 camels valued \$400 each and in total is \$30,800), plus \$1000 in cash. The 110 camels were divided into two installments: 55 camels with three installments at the first stage, subdivided into 17 upfront, 33 later, and 5 as cash while the remaining 55 camels are due by May 6, 2025. Although four of the remaining 55 camels were pledged by elders from Omar Mohamoud sub-clan of Majeerteen.

3) Reer Wa’ays and Reer Soole case: The perpetrator who hails from Reer Soole is detained, as Reer Soole offered two options, blood money or retribution (qisas), but Reer Wa’ays did not agree on either. Accordingly, the mediation committee set a deadline for May 6, 2025, by which the conflicting parties must submit their financial decisions.

The above agreement is reached in good faith, and hopefully remains binding upon parties who reaffirmed their commitment to sustaining peace after longtime of recycling retaliatory actions and breach of agreement, in which resulted in fine and penalty. Both the traditional elders and government facilitated regular meetings to reinforce peaceful coexistence and build trust among the conflicting parties. The agreement’s hybrid approach—combining traditional diya (blood money) with government oversight—aligns with Lederach’s (1997) framework for sustainable reconciliation, which emphasizes multi-level engagement and culturally grounded solutions. It also emphasizes the adoption of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms because elders who serve as peace-seekers played a pivotal role in reaching a well satisfactory. According to Islamic jurisprudence, the standard diya (blood money) for an unintentional or semi-intentional killing is set at 100 camels. However, in certain circumstances, this amount may be increased. (Iftaa’ Department, 1992). In this particular case, the payment was elevated to 110 camels, with an additional 10 camels serving as a conciliatory gesture to secure a satisfactory agreement from the plaintiff’s side.

On the other hand, there is an awful element (a blood compensation marriage) in the agreement of Reer Kuulbeer revitalizing the abandoned traditions. Although blood compensation marriage is referred to a traditional Somali practice where a girl from the offending clan is given in marriage to the victim’s clan as a way of reconciling conflict, particularly those involved the bloodshed (La Sage,

<sup>4</sup>La Sage, A (2005). Describes blood compensation marriage as refers to a traditional Somali practice where a girl from the offending clan is given in marriage to the victim’s clan as a way of reconciling conflict, particularly those involved the bloodshed.



2005). Yet it is an old-fashioned customary practice among the Somali community.

### 3.3. Challenges to Sustainable Peace

Despite progress, several challenges persist, particularly the delays in compensation payments, which include camels, firearms, and monetary contributions due to financial constraints and disorganization of the Reer Kulbeer, whose members predominantly come from low-income backgrounds. With limited business enterprises and only one female representative holding the position of deputy minister in government institutions, they lack strong advocates within the government to support their financial obligations.

This affected the ability of members of Reer Kuulbeer clan to fulfill compensation commitments in a timely manner. According to Lewis, (1999) notes that “the payment of blood-compensation (mag) is often delayed or reduced in times of economic hardship, when clans lack the livestock or resources to meet their obligations. Drought and poverty thus exacerbate unresolved feuds, as aggrieved parties wait—sometimes indefinitely—for their due.”

An internal clan division regarding compensation vs retributive justice was also unignorable critical challenge. This disagreement came out after a woman, whose son was killed, insisted on a retributive justice, and one of her sons agreed with her. However, according to the Somali customary practices, the decisions regarding blood compensation for deaths and injuries are made by the men or elders of the clan. This resulted in that Reer Wa'ays remains divided on whether to accept compensation or pursue retribution/qisaas. Hence, on this case, the mediation committee and elders of conflicting parties agreed to give more time to family members to discuss about it and reach a final decision, which will be considered as proceedings to adopt for the future.

The findings of this analysis show that women are not actively involved in the initial stages of reconciliation conferences of Herojaale settlement to the same extent as men. As a result, their exclusion hindered the reconciliation process. Women's inclusion in Somali peacebuilding is not merely a normative ideal but a pragmatic necessity. Their networks often transcend clan divisions, enabling them to negotiate compromises where men cannot (Walls & Kibble, 2018). According to Dini (2013), also argues that women in post-conflict societies such as Somalia need to be enabled to enter the corridors of power and formal decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the merely school constructed in Herojaale remains non-operational due to the shortage of teaching staff, a situation primarily attributed to local families' inability to afford the necessary salaries. Because, in Puntland, educational institutions largely depend on community funding, primarily through school fees, with such resources being contributed and subsequently managed by local communities. However, due to their constrained economic status, the Herojaale community is unable to consistently meet these financial obligations, thereby



jeopardizing the sustainability of their local educational infrastructure.

The study also found that one of the critical challenges shadowed the failure of the previous agreements, as observed in the multiple failed reconciliation attempts in Herojaale and more likely to affect this is that the reliance on Xeer without integration into the formal judicial system. In Puntland, Somalia, the reconciliation committees operate without a standardized conflict management or resolution framework. Instead, they predominantly rely on Xeer, the traditional Somali customary law, which consists of unwritten rules and precedents administered by clan elders. However, Xeer is a traditional dispute resolution mechanism based on clan customary law and elements of Sharia law. With Somali society remaining fragmented, most Xeer agreements are unsustainable, lasting only on a temporary basis (Life & Peace Institute, 2023).

Moreover, the current reconciliation processes often exclude formal judicial oversight, even when government entities are signatories to the agreements. This omission raises concerns about the sustainability and legitimacy of such agreements, as the absence of court involvement may lead to outcomes similar to previous failed reconciliations.

Consequently, agreements reached through Xeer are not routinely submitted to formal courts for validation. This pattern underscores the absence of enforceable mechanisms to hold parties accountable for breaching agreements.

#### 4. Conclusion

The conflict between Herojaale communities has taken a significant toll over the past 30 years, but recent efforts by the State government of Puntland and local elders have brought both sides closer to a peaceful resolution. This wittiness that Herojaale conflict illustrates the challenges of resolving protracted inter-clan disputes in Somalia, and particularly Puntland. The progress made provides hope for a lasting peace in the region. Realizing this, the study recommends the government to introduce structured land management and formal dispute resolution mechanisms; create economic and employment initiatives as peace dividends through provision of water supply through piped system from the only water well in the village, small-scale business grants to unemployed youth, skills training and educational programs and/or allocate scholarship programme to youth in Herojaale to deter clan mobilization, establish livestock market to help communities, whose main livelihood source depends on, meet compensation obligations, engaging local women in reconciliation process and establishing peace education programs to change cultural attitudes towards peace and/or organizing sports tournaments for change create a space for integration and unity, and lastly, penalize delays in blood compensation payments and/or with legal action taken against those who breach the agreement and therefore the government is required to construct a prison or detention center for rehabilitation in Herojaale. In addition to that, in order to enhance the efficacy of conflict resolution efforts, it is imperative to establish clear frameworks that integrate traditional mechanisms like Xeer with

formal legal institutions, ensuring both cultural relevance and legal enforceability and each reconciliation agreement reached outside the formal court system should subsequently be presented to the court for affirmation and legal recognition.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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