



Ex-pirates in Somalia: Disengagement Processes and Reintegration Programming

Brief by Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik and Tore Bjørge

KEY FINDINGS

- Economic gain and social ties are strong factors pulling individuals into piracy in Somalia
- Disillusionment is an important factor pushing people out of piracy in Somalia
- Many families and local communities in Somalia are against piracy and view it as haram – forbidden by Islam
- Norwegian Church Aid has successfully built on a grass-root initiative by local religious leaders using Koranic teachings to dissuade youths from piracy in addition to providing training for alternative livelihoods to piracy

Introduction

Piracy off the Somali coast has become an increasing problem over the last decade, not only for international shipping companies but also for many affected local communities in Somalia. This brief addresses how and why individuals in Somalia become involved in piracy activities, and how and why some of these individuals eventually disengage from these criminal groups and activities. The study also assesses to what extent Norwegian Church Aid's "Alternative Livelihood to Piracy" (ALP) project is facilitating the disengagement of individuals from piracy groups and their eventual reintegration into productive non-criminal livelihood in the Somali context.

The brief is based on the report by the same authors entitled "Ex-Pirates in Somalia: Disengagement Processes and Reintegration Programming" (forthcoming, in March 2012). The study is a part of a three-country research project entitled "Improving Reintegration Programming in Somalia, Nepal, and Afghanistan Through

Evidence-Based Research”. This project is conducted by the International Research Group on Reintegration (IRGR) at the Centre for Peace Studies (CPS) at the University of Tromsø. The research report on Somalia builds mainly on empirical data from semi-structured interviews with 16 ex-pirates, mainly foot-soldiers, and pirate associates in Somalia and Kenya.

Context

Since the fall of President Siad Barre’s regime in 1991, Somalia has experienced a protracted civil war, mass famine, and large-scale emigration. During this time, Somalia has been described as a failed state. Although it has weak state structures, Somali society has a strong clan system. Islam and the traditional clan system both underpin the informal institutions that manage social and economic activities and form a strong moral community. The problem of piracy may be understood both as an outgrowth of the war economy and an outcome of a weak or non-existent state power and an inadequate police and coast guard.

Motives for involvement with piracy

Fifteen of the 16 interviewed individuals involved with piracy groups stated that economic conditions and motivations was a main factor in their decisions to join the groups. The lack of employment and livelihood served as a push factor, whereas the prospect of economic profit was a pull factor. Piracy groups are often clan- and village-based, consisting of a leader, family members, and a network of friends. Fourteen informants said that the influence of friends, acquaintances, or family members led them to engage with pirate groups. Therefore, processes of recruitment precede formal induction to piracy. Hence, economic gain and social ties are strong factors that pull or attract Somalis into piracy activities. Five informants claimed a political cause – to defend local fishing interests against large-scale illegal fishing by foreign vessels – as a primary motivation. How-

PIRACY IN SOMALIA

- In 2011, reported attacks by Somali pirates were the highest ever registered
- Half of all piracy attacks worldwide in 2011 were committed by Somali pirates
- Somali pirates are becoming more violent and increasing their area of operation

(Source: ICC International Maritime Bureau Piracy Reporting Centre 2011)

THE ALP PROJECT

- Three year pilot-project initiated in 2010 by the Norwegian Church Aid
- Provides 600 ex-pirates with skills training for a non-criminal life
- Raise awareness on the negative effects on piracy
- Implemented in close cooperation with religious leaders

ever, this can be seen as a way of justifying their unlawful actions. Hence, the present data lends credence to the theory that most young foot soldiers do not join because of strong identification with the group’s ideology and beliefs. Rather, they are pulled in by friends and family members for economic returns.

Engagement with piracy

Most of the informants in the sample were only involved with piracy groups for a relatively short time. The majority had just been in the group for a couple of months or joined for one or two hi-

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jackings. Therefore, the notion of "once a pirate, always a pirate" does not apply to those in the sample. Piracy groups often work on a "no prey, no pay" system, which means that they do not get paid in the event of failed raids, which is frequently the outcome. Many of the coastal communities are strongly opposed to piracy. Pirates often spend lavishly, which causes inflation and creates problems for the already financially distressed people in local communities. In addition, the pirates engage in other social activities that the local communities consider unacceptable, such as drug abuse and bringing in prostitutes. The relationship between many of the informants and their families changed once they entered piracy, as many families and local communities view piracy as violating Islamic teachings and values. To make it easier to hide earnings, some pirates moved into rented houses with fellow pirates and isolated themselves from their communities. Therefore, in spite of the riches the successful pirates can show off, there is a considerable stigma attached to their social identity as pirates in the morally grounded local community.

Disengagement from piracy

Disappointment at the lack of expected profit in-

fluenced the decisions by some informants to end their involvement with piracy, which pushed them out of the group. More than half of those informants who were active members of a piracy group, mentioned the hardship and risk involved as another push factor. Most of the ex-pirates also mentioned strong morally condemning statements by local Muslim leaders that piracy was haram (forbidden) as a factor in their decision to stop their involvement. The message of the religious leaders was often reinforced by family and community objections to their involvement in piracy, motivated both by moral arguments and fear about the dangers involved in piracy activities. Most informants joined the group with others, but left the group alone and covertly. However, other family members played important roles in trying to prevent them from joining, as well as facilitating their disengagement. In several cases, fathers used their social connections to get their sons enrolled in the Alternative Livelihood to Piracy (ALP) project and/or relocate them to pirate-free areas.

The ALP project

The second part of the study looks into the Norwegian Church Aid's (NCA) Alternative Livelihoods to Piracy (ALP) project, which facilitates

disengagement and reintegration for pirates in Somalia. Generally, the participants' views on the project and its usefulness were positive. For some, the ALP project played a vital role as a pull factor in their disengagement process, by providing an attractive alternative to continued involvement with piracy. In addition, the ALP project offered vocational and business-skills training, as well as some seed money to help them start a new life. An especially successful part of the ALP project was the close cooperation with local religious leaders as influential moral custodians, who drew upon Koranic teachings to dissuade youths from piracy. These religious leaders also encouraged the youths to enroll in the ALP project. In this way, the ALP project seems to have provided a powerful mix of reinforcing push factors out of piracy with forces that pull youths into a more rewarding alternative.

Looking ahead

Although the ALP project is not part of a formal DDR program and addresses criminal violent gangs rather than ex-combatants, its approach and results hold wider relevance for the DDR process. This process involves UNDP Somalia and other international and local actors who currently undertake an innovative DDR/AVR initiative within the Somali Community Framework. The ALP project provides a useful example of how an international actor has understood and engaged with communities as lived places and as a moral community of believers, in order to promote disengagement from armed and criminal activities.

Programming recommendations for the ALP project

- Maintain and expand capacity building and cooperation with religious leaders; especially those who take a clear stand against piracy. Develop similar partnerships with elders and community leaders. Expand to other piracy-affected areas.
- Support families in preventing their children from joining piracy groups; and/or in persuading their children to quit piracy. Provide information on their important roles and on possible routes of disengagement and reintegration. Invite parents to contact religious leaders who take a clear stand against piracy. Inform about the possibilities the ALP project can offer individuals who disengage from piracy.
- Build stronger and more links to the local market and businesses. Expand arrangements for internships and apprenticeships with local businesses.
- Extend the duration of the training period; and expand to other sectors on the basis of market surveys. Introduce follow-up training and advanced courses.
- Expand the project period beyond three years; in order to provide sustainability, long-term planning, and capacity building and increase the number of participants in the project.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to other members of the International Research Group on reintegration (IRGR) for their valuable inputs. Members of the Inter-Agency Working Group on DDR (IAWG-DDR) have provided useful comments on content and practical advice on design and format of the brief. However, the authors remain solely responsible for the facts and findings in this brief and the opinions expressed herein. Finally, we would like to thank James Morrison for timely and solid proofreading and Bjørn Hatteng for his excellent design of this and the other publications in this project.

This brief and the other publications from the project "*Improving reintegration in Somalia, Nepal and Afghanistan through evidence-based research*" can be downloaded from CPS's webpage: <http://uit.no/peace>.