



Edmunds, T. (2017). *Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa: States of Somalia*. EU-CIVCAP. <https://eu-civcap.net/portfolio/working-papers/>

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Maritime Capacity Building in the Horn of Africa: States of Somalia

Tim Edmunds¹

1. Executive Summary

Maritime capacity building in the States of Somalia² remains a relatively recent activity, with few initiatives dating back more than five or six years. In this time, it has undoubtedly had a positive impact in some areas. However, the success of these activities has been narrow and uneven. They have been able to strengthen pockets of capacity in specific organisations and institutions, but they have done so in a manner that has not always been well coordinated with other donor activities or local priorities, and in an environment of wider political, economic and institutional weaknesses that have constrained their impact and on which they have been dependent. Given the scale of the challenge, the transnational and regionally situated nature of the maritime problem space, and the timescales over which such activities have taken place, it is perhaps not surprising that they have struggled to be transformative in nature. Even so, the extent to which they have often taken place in the absence of local involvement at the levels of problem identification and project development and evaluation is also notable. This deficit has led to a ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ legitimacy amongst local actors, and has exacerbated existing challenges of relevance, duplication and sustainability.

2. Recommendations

1. **Maritime insecurities are often linked closely to issues of insecurity and governance failure on land.** Maritime capacity building activities must likewise grapple with these land-based issues as well as strictly maritime ones if it is to meet its objectives.
2. **Similarly, by their very nature, most maritime insecurities are regional and transnational in nature.** National maritime capacity building processes need to be considered in relation to wider regional approaches.
3. **Capacity building is not well served by a top down, ‘cookie cutter’ approach** that seeks to impose externally derived models of reform on diverse and complex local environments. Notions of best practice in capacity building can be important, but are

¹ I am grateful to Filip Ejodus, of the University of Bristol, and the staff of Transparency Solutions, Hargeisa, for their assistance in preparing this paper, and to Andrew Saddleton, associate consultant to Aktis Strategy, for his helpful comments at the draft stage. The analysis and conclusions within remain the author’s own. Interviews for this paper were conducted by staff from Transparency Solutions (1–6); the author (7, 18); and Ejodus (8–17).

² Somalia remains a contested political entity. The term ‘States of Somalia’ is used here to refer to the entities of the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of Somaliland and the Puntland State of Somalia.

best considered in terms of general principles rather than as a formulaic guide to action.

4. **Maritime capacity building is too expansive a concept to function as a good guide to policy in and of itself.** Instead, it works best as a strategic framework through which specific activities can be planned and coordinated, drawing on appropriate professional and local expertise, and in ways that nested within wider good governance and development and security goals.
5. **Local context is key.** Where possible external donors should engage meaningfully with local knowledge and interlocutors in determining the nature and scope of the challenge at hand. Local actors should be central to the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects. Donors should strive for ‘thick’ rather than ‘thin’ legitimacy in their programmes. Doing so will increase the likelihood that activities will be sustained once the donor leaves.
6. **There is a danger of local stakeholder fatigue** with multiple, uncoordinated initiatives that do similar things in different ways, particularly planning strategies, short-term consultancies and workshops.
7. **‘Hard’ capacity building, in the sense of equipment and infrastructure that will endure, is often valued highly.** However, such activities need to be accompanied by support and training for maintenance and upkeep if they are to be effective. Equipment provided should be suitable to the environment, operating parameters and technical skills of local actors.
8. **The ambition of donor programmes should be tailored to the resources available to support them.** There is a danger that grand claims to transformation will founder in the face of local challenges and insufficient donor funding to meet them. Donor credibility and legitimacy can be undermined if this happens.
9. **Beware the blanket term ‘political will’.** Apparent absences of ‘political will’ generally mask real problems of politics, which should be understood and addressed on their own terms.
10. **There will be winners and losers in any process of reform.** Programmes should consider how losers could be incentivised and motivated to engage in the process of reform, or at least not to disrupt it. They should consider ways in which the range of winners can be broadened. Stakeholder analysis of this sort should be factored into projects and have appropriate time and resources allocated to it.

3. Introduction

Maritime capacity building has emerged as an important component of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and development activities in the Western Indian Ocean region in recent years. The immediate driver for these initiatives was the proliferation of Somali piracy in the region from around 2005. However, they have also taken place in the context of conflict and instability in Somalia, including the fragmentation of the Somali state and an ongoing struggle against the Islamist insurgent group Al-Shabaab.

Maritime capacity building is one of the key strategies through which international actors have attempted to mitigate the insecurities of the region. These include international organisations such as the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) the United Nations (UN), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); individual nations including the US, UK, UAE, and Turkey amongst others; non-governmental and non-profit organisations such as Oceans Beyond Piracy (OBP); and private security actors such as Aktis Strategy and Bancroft Global Development.³

Such a diverse range of actors exhibits a similarly diverse range of motivations for engaging in capacity building. These broadly consist of three inter-linked categories of justification.⁴ The first of these relates to addressing maritime security concerns, in the sense of threats and risks that emanate from or are facilitated by the maritime environment, including piracy and terrorism. The second concerns the capacity to exploit the economic opportunities offered by the sea, both for the littoral states themselves and for external actors and interests: what is often called the blue growth agenda. Finally, there are a series of what might best be characterised as human security justifications, including fisheries protection and sustainability for coastal communities, the safety of lives at sea, and the need to manage the negative impacts of climate change or marine pollution.

4. The concept of capacity building

Capacity building in the maritime arena incorporates a wide range of activities and initiatives aimed at assisting littoral states to develop effective local mechanisms for managing these maritime threats, risks, and exploiting the opportunities presented by marine resources. The EU NAVFOR anti-piracy mission in the region, for example, understands capacity building as consisting of:

...activities which are directed at the *empowerment* of governments and coastal communities to efficiently and efficaciously *govern* and *sustainably exploit* the maritime domain, including territorial waters and exclusive economic zones (EU NAVFOR 2015: 1, emphasis in original)⁵

³ See Annex 1 for further details.

⁴ For selected articulations of these themes see: AU 2012: 7-11; CoEU 2014a: 6–8, 14; HM Govt. 2014: 19; US Govt. 2005: 3–6. See also Edmunds 2014: 1–3.

⁵ The EU NAVFOR definition is drawn directly from Bueger 2014: 4.

Such a conceptualisation is exceptionally broad in scope. Potentially at least, it comprises a wide range of issues and actors in the maritime arena, from infrastructure development in port areas and beyond, to the rule of law and justice sector reform, administrative reform in local and national governance structures, and security sector reform amongst coastguard and naval forces.

In practice, those organisations engaged in maritime capacity building have focused on discrete areas of this wider agenda. Thus for example, EUCAP Somalia (formerly and until March 2017 known as EUCAP Nestor), the EU's capacity building mission in the Western Indian Ocean, focuses specifically on strengthening the security capacity of states in the region in order that they can better fight piracy, as well as to effectively manage and protect their territorial waters and maritime resources (CoEU 2012: Arts. 2, 3). The EU's Programme to Promote Regional Maritime Security in the Eastern and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Region (MASE) aims to support police, court and prison staff in littoral states in the arrest and prosecution of pirates (OBP 2016a). Similarly, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has, amongst other activities, focused on Somali maritime law enforcement capacities, including the criminal justice mechanisms for the prosecution and imprisonment of pirates (UNODC 2016). For its part, the IMO has conducted various activities under its Djibouti Code of Conduct initiative, aimed at strengthening coastguard capacities and maritime legal regulation in Somalia and Somaliland (IMO 2015: 7). The FAO works with the Somalia Ministry of Fisheries to strengthen its governance and resource management structures (FAO 2017).

These initiatives manifest in practice into three main categories of capacity building activity. The first of these concerns issues of strategic planning and governance in the maritime arena. Thus, for example, international organisations and actors played a key role in supporting and encouraging the Somali government to produce a Somali Maritime Resource and Security Strategy in September 2013 (Federal Republic of Somalia 2013: 3).⁶ The purpose of the strategy is to provide a coherent framework for policy in the maritime arena, identifying Somalia's key goals and priorities in this area, as well as the risks and threats it faces and the actions it needs to take in order to meet these challenges. Other activities include assistance by organisations including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and EUCAP Somalia amongst others on drafting new legislation for maritime governance, such as the new Coastguard Bill for the Somaliland region.⁷ Similarly, the United Nations Assistance Mission to Somalia's (UNSOM) Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group (ROLSIG) has provided assistance to the Somali government on the harmonisation of their maritime code with international law (UNSOM 2016). External actors have also provided expert advisors to Somali policy-makers, to assist them in the development and implementation of maritime policy initiatives. The aim in all cases is to encourage good governance practices in the maritime arena, in the sense of local policy making that takes place in a transparent and accountable manner, incorporating a respect for human rights and democratic principles, and according to rationalist models of organisational planning.

⁶ In terms of international organisations, these are: CBCG, CGPCS, EEAS, EU Commission, EU NAVFOR, EUCAP Somalia, FAO, IGAD, IMO, Interpol, IOC, IOM, OBP, UN, UNDP, UNODC, UNPOS, UNSOM. In terms of states, these are: Australia, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles, Turkey, UK and USA.

⁷ At the time of writing, the Coastguard Bill had been awaiting approval by the parliament of Somaliland for over a year.

The second category of activities concerns the direct provision of training, equipment and support to local actors, particularly in the maritime security sector, including the judiciary and penal system. EUCAP Somalia, the IMO and UNODC all provide various courses and training sessions for the Somali and Somaliland coastguards, focusing on skills provision in areas such as swimming, boat handling, marine repair and maintenance, search and rescue, and maritime law.⁸ The UK has provided training to the Somaliland Attorney General on Serious Crimes, in areas including forensics, crowd control and intelligence, and has also contracted training for Somalia coastguards to the private company, Aktis Strategy, and in Somaliland to a joint venture between Aktis and Axiom International.⁹ The IMO, under the auspices of its Djibouti Code of Conduct, has established a Regional Training Centre in Djibouti to provide maritime education and training to local actors from across the region. The Centre was funded by Japan, with equipment provided by Denmark and the Republic of Korea (CGPCS 2015).

As well as training, international donors have provided equipment and support directly to maritime organisations and institutions. EUCAP Somalia has provided equipment to the Somaliland maritime authorities.¹⁰ The IMO too has donated speedboats to the Somaliland coastguard, as has the UNDP.¹¹ UNODC provides technicians on the ground in the Port of Berbera to repair and maintain the boats of the local coastguard, as well as two (Finnish) police investigators to the port of Garowe and support to the port police in Bosaso, both in Puntland. The UK government, through Aktis/Axiom, have assisted in the development of staff records, HR systems and IT skills for the Somaliland coastguard, as well as in the provision of communications equipment and vehicles.¹² In all cases, these ‘train and equip’ programmes provide direct skills and material support to those local organisations charged with the management of maritime territorial spaces and resources.

Finally, there are a range of initiatives by various actors aimed at strengthening local infrastructure, again, with a particular focus on the security sector, judicial and penal system. The UK for example committed GBP 14.3 million in 2013 under its Conflict, Security and Stabilisation Fund (CSSF) to support policing and justice in Somalia, including a GBP 1.5 million project aimed at rebuilding Mogadishu’s prison to increase capacity and meet international standards and the building of a new Coastguard Headquarters in Somaliland, as well as the refurbishment of a coastguard base at Zaylac amongst other activities (DFID 2013: 14; HMG 2013).¹³ The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), funded by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands and the UK, was involved in the construction of a new 500-bed prison in the Puntland region of the country with the aim of providing secure, humane and locally-based facilities in which convicted pirates can be incarcerated (UNOPS 2016). UNODC, with EUCAP Somalia and OBP, have worked to develop a Maritime Operations Centre for the Somaliland coastguard in the port of Berbera (OBP 2016b).

⁸ Interview 11, Hargeisa, 27 November 2016.

⁹ Interview 7, Skype, 28 November 2016.

¹⁰ Interview 12, Hargeisa, 27 November 2016.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Interviews 7 and 18, Skype, 28 November 2016 and 2 March 2017.

¹³ As has been the case with training and equipment, the UK government’s capacity building has been delivered through private sector actors, including Aktis/Axiom and Adam Smith International, under the CSSF.

Such activities share a number of characteristics. First, and for the most part, they have been driven primarily and at least initially by the problem of piracy in the Western Indian Ocean region. Secondly, and for related reasons, they have centred on the three political entities comprising Somalia: Somalia itself, Somaliland, and Puntland. Finally, they have tended to concern issues of security and security sector reform (SSR), in the sense that they have focused on the strengthening of local maritime security actors – particularly coastguards and prison systems – as well as the wider administrative and judicial frameworks in which they sit.

4.1 The rationale of local capacity building

The link between maritime capacity building and peacebuilding and conflict prevention comprises external (donor) driven and internal (local) interests that are, at least in principle, considered to be mutually reinforcing and mutually beneficial. Such activities take place on the assumption that developing local states' capacities to manage and police the insecurities present in and often emanating from their own regions will in turn contribute to the security of the donors themselves. There is also a common view that doing so will also help strengthen the security, peacebuilding and development prospects of the recipient states themselves. For example, the EU strategic framework on security sector reform states that:

Insecurity and instability are frequently generated or exacerbated by a lack of effective and accountability security systems. Helping partner countries to reform their security systems supports the EU's objectives of peace and stability, inclusive and sustainable development, state-building and democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law (EC 2016: 2).

The EU Maritime Security Strategy echoes these rationales, stating:

Several factors, such as illegal activities of non-state actors, cross border crime, international terrorism or piracy, exploit the weaknesses of fragmented local, regional and global governance systems. Using all EU instruments within the comprehensive approach enables the EU to effectively address maritime security threats at and from sea, tackle the root causes and restore good governance (CoEU 2014b: 9).

Similar rationales are visible amongst other key maritime capacity-building donors too.¹⁴ In these cases, maritime capacity building takes place on the assumption of a positive and reciprocal relationship between peace, democracy, development and security (CoEU 2015: 2–3). It is concerned not just with the strengthening of specific capacities in a purely operational sense, but also with normative questions about how such capacities should best be employed, managed and governed against a wider framework of democratic governance, state-building and reform. In conception and potential therefore, maritime capacity building is both highly ambitious and deeply normative, albeit in a manner that is nested within wider processes of reform and intervention on the part of both the donor community and the local state concerned.

¹⁴ See for example OBP 2016a; UK Govt. 2014; US Dept. of State 2010: 1.

4.2 Whose capacity?

While this agenda is often presented, at least implicitly, as being to the mutual benefit of both donors and recipients, it can also be in tension with the priorities, practices and interests of the local actors concerned. At a minimum, there may be a fundamental difference in problem definition, or at least prioritisation, between local and international actors.

There have been two main drivers for maritime capacity building in the region. The first of these was the emergence of maritime terrorism as a significant concern, following the bombing of the USS Cole in October 2000, and the MV Limburg in October 2002. The second, and more recently dominant driver has been the problem of piracy in the Western Indian Ocean. The concern with piracy particularly has persisted and endured since the decline of endemic pirate activity in the region in 2013.¹⁵ Such concerns are unsurprising given the disruptive impact of Somali piracy on global commerce, which is estimated to have incurred an additional USD 5.7–6.1 billion cost to the shipping industry in 2012 alone (OBP 2012: 2). Even so, local actors sometimes articulate a rather different set of priorities in relation to both the maritime arena and to national security more widely. In Somalia at least, the latter remains dominated by the Al-Shabaab insurgency in the south of the country and the ongoing political fragmentation of the Somali state. In contrast, the specific problem of piracy can often seem a relatively low priority for local actors, or even an unfair obsession by the international community. This is particularly the case given that many Somalis view piracy as a legitimate defensive response on the part of impoverished and disempowered coastal communities to rampant Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and the dumping of hazardous waste by international actors (Samatar *et al.* 2010: 1384–1387).

Local actors have tended to attach more importance to those aspects of the maritime capacity building agenda associated with blue growth and human security. For example, anti-piracy activities are barely mentioned in Somaliland's key Five Year National Plan for 2012–16. Maritime capacity building is framed primarily in relation to issues of fisheries protection and the development of facilities and infrastructure at the Port of Berbera (RoS 2011: 76–81, 130–134). The Somali Maritime Resource and Security Strategy of 2014 evidences an even greater emphasis on marine resource protection and exploitation. Piracy is only mentioned once, and even then, as a subordinate issue to maritime crime, and as a problem that has reduced (RoS 2013: 6). Instead, the most important maritime security risks and threats are identified as IUU fishing and illegal maritime dumping of waste, alongside 'transnational terrorist groups, narcotics and human trafficking smugglers and transnational criminals' (RoS 2013: 8). Priority is also placed on a lack of maritime skills capacity and experience in Somali civil society, in relation to fishing communities and so on (RoS 2013: 8). A similar balance of emphasis can be seen in the AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy for 2050, which, though it recognises a series of maritime security challenges including piracy, remains focused largely on blue growth issues (AU 2012).

There are also potential tensions between the normative aspects of the international capacity building agenda on the one side, and local preferences and practices on the other. There are two aspects of friction in this respect. The first concerns the explicitly political normativities

¹⁵ See for example CoEU 2012: Art. 1; IMO 2015: 2; OBP 2016a; UNODC 2016.

associated with key international actors' commitments to principles of democratic politics and good governance in their capacity building activities. Thus, for example, while states in the region, including both Somalia and Somaliland, are nascent democracies, they continue to face considerable challenges in consolidating and institutionalising democratic politics, which extend beyond the narrow problem space of the maritime arena alone. In this respect, the democratic and good governance aspects of the maritime capacity building agenda are dependent on, conditioned by and mediated through a wider process of political practice and development, over which international donors may have little influence (Edmunds 2014: 8–9).

Secondly, capacity building is also normative in that it tends to be premised on rationalist principles of organisational effectiveness, efficiency and planning. Such approaches may appear unproblematic and neutral. However, they can often be in tension with established local practices and ways of doing things, which may derive from informal, personalised and pragmatic approaches to problem solving (Bueger 2014: 21). Such tensions are particularly pronounced where formal institutions and practices of governance have been undermined by decades of civil war and state collapse. The danger here is that the prescriptions of the international capacity building agenda are so at odds with existing practices of governance that they become irrelevant to local circumstances, counterproductive, or undermined to such a degree that they become fundamentally comprised in practice (Edmunds 2014: 9). The manifestations of these tensions are explored in further detail in the second part of this paper.

4.3 Alternative approaches

The discussion so far has focused on initiatives from major international organisations and Western states. These have been conditioned by the rationales and normativities identified above, and might best be described as representing a liberal model of maritime capacity building. However, there are at least two other significant actors in the region who have taken a markedly different approach: Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Turkey has invested heavily in commercial and security infrastructure, including a major renovation of the Port of Mogadishu under the auspices of the Albayrak Group, as well as other projects such as road building (Ozkan and Orakci 2015). The UAE-based company DP World has been granted a 30-year concession to run and develop the Port of Berbera in Somaliland, reportedly based on potential investment plans of USD 442 million (Gulf News 2016), including plans to build a military base on a 25-year lease (VOA 2017). The UAE has also donated boats to the Somaliland Coastguard and provided financial support to the Puntland Maritime Police Force (PMPF), with whom the EU does not officially work due to its controversial human rights record.¹⁶ The Turkish and UAE initiatives depart from the liberal model in that they do not include commitments to governance reform or the other normativities discussed above. Nor have they been coordinated through the UN. Instead, they have taken place primarily for reasons of commercial, strategic or other national interest, and in the context of significant contractual, financial and political opacity (Gullo 2012; Hurriyet 2014). In this respect they offer an alternative, and in some ways oppositional and even competing, approach to the liberal model that is promoted by Western actors and many international organisations.

¹⁶ Interview 12, Skype, 27 November 2016.

5. Local capacity building in practice: the record so far

The picture of maritime capacity building activity in the region, and particularly in Somalia, is complex and multifaceted. The donor sector includes a wide range of different international actors and organisations, and of different divisions and agencies within them. The local level too exhibits a significant degree of complexity. In this context, and despite the various efforts and resources that have been devoted to it, maritime capacity building has not been a straightforward or unproblematic activity. The following section explores these tensions through the themes of effectiveness, sustainability, local ownership and legitimacy.

5.1 Effectiveness

Assessing the effectiveness of maritime capacity building programmes in the region is complicated by several considerations. The maritime arena is only one, comparatively narrow, component of a much wider series of processes of political change, peacebuilding and state reformation across the entire region. Despite the sometimes rather grand ambitions and rationales implied by its link to governance reform and security building, maritime capacity building cannot function as the driver of these wider changes in and of itself, and, in many ways, is dependent upon them for its success.

Such tensions point to a wider and ongoing dilemma faced by all such initiatives, at least in their liberal guise. Maritime capacity building is, in conception, holistic. It comprises all elements of the maritime sector – from fisheries, to coastguards to port police and infrastructure, and it addresses not only the operational capacities of organisations, but also the wider administrative, governance and judicial systems in which they sit and on which they are dependent. The rationale for what the EU calls this ‘Comprehensive Approach’ (CoEU 2015: 9) appears sound: an effective police force or coastguard will only be of limited utility if the suspects they arrest cannot be processed and tried by an ineffective judicial system, or if their staff are not paid due to a dysfunctional human resource management system in the Ministry in charge of their salaries.

However, the very ambition of this holistic agenda means that it has been difficult to implement in practice, particularly given the relative complexity and diversity of the problem space. Indeed, one of the most common criticisms of such projects is that there has been a lack of effective coordination in the conception, planning and implementation of individual initiatives, leading to duplication, redundancy and occasional irrelevance. As such, capacity building initiatives have tended to manifest as discreet, technically separate activities, rather than as part of a strategically coherent, coordinated endeavour. One obvious reason for this weakness concerns the sheer number of donors involved. The Somali Maritime Resource and Security Strategy of 2013, for example, acknowledges the assistance of 17 international organisations and eight bilateral donors in its preamble; all this for a 12-page document of only 3,690 words (see Federal Republic of Somalia 2013: 3). This lack of coordination can lead to frustration amongst local stakeholders. An official in the Somaliland Ministry of Interior noted in 2016 that the ‘key challenge’ faced in implementing programmes has been overlap

between them and lack of coordination between donors.¹⁷ Similarly, an official in the Somaliland Coastguard observed that there was little coordination between donors, and significant overlap between programmes.¹⁸ Such challenges can sometimes be a consequence of a basic lack of capacity on the part of the local actors themselves, who can struggle to coordinate between donors in an environment of financial and human resource constraint. They can also reflect the difficulties of transplanting what may be successful coordination between donors at the local operational level to the higher level of strategic planning in what are often large and bureaucratic international organisations or state actors.¹⁹

Several organisations have been established to improve coordination between donors to the region. The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), for example, was created in 2008 precisely to better coordinate international actions in the fight against piracy in the Western Indian Ocean, with some success (OBP 2016c). Similarly, OBP acts as a clearing-house for information on maritime capacity building and other anti-piracy initiatives in the region. However, the impact of these initiatives on the ground has been limited. For example, the Capacity Building Coordination Group of the CGPCS attempted to establish an online Capacity Building Coordination Platform through which donors could catalogue and share information on projects. However, this has foundered for lack of user engagement and a reluctance to share information that could be politically or commercially sensitive. The Maritime Security Coordination Committee (MSCC) is a forum for information sharing, optimisation and coordination of maritime security capacity building programmes. Although it is formally supposed to bring together all Somali authorities as well as international donors, Somaliland authorities have been reluctant to take part due to its whole Somalia remit.²⁰

Perhaps a deeper problem underpinning complaints about overlap and duplication amongst activities is a lack of strategic coherence amongst donors about what maritime capacity building is attempting to achieve, and how it is to go about doing so. At a minimum, each donor has their own goals and mission parameters, and each is responsible to its own mandate or contract rather than to the entire project of international capacity building. There are also tensions between the transformative ambitions of the agenda as a whole, and the specific praxis of what can be accomplished with available resources, within the timescales of the projects concerned, and in the context of the requirements specific to the organisation or sector whose capacity is being built.

In consequence, many initiatives have been relatively limited in scale and specific in scope. EUCAP Somalia for example has provided the Somaliland coastguard with ten computers, five cars, 30 radios and one inflatable boat, amongst other sundries, as part of its equipment donation programme.²¹ Such donations are helpful in their own terms, particularly given the low base of capacity that local actors are often working from. However, they fall short of providing the level of capability that is required if it is to function effectively as envisaged. As one EUCAP Somalia official put it: ‘mentoring, monitoring and advising is a multiplication

¹⁷ Interview 3, Hargeisa, 20 August 2016.

¹⁸ Interview 1, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

¹⁹ Interview 18, Skype, 2 March 2017.

²⁰ Interview 11, Hargeisa, 27 November 2016.

²¹ Interview 9, Hargeisa, 18 November 2016.

factor of what's already there. When you have nothing in place, you multiply zero by zero. And you can multiply from here to infinity, it will always be zero'.²² The feeling that the current training programmes are insufficient in the absence of hard capabilities is universally shared among the local stakeholders as well. In the words of an official from the Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'if you train people and the resources are not there, it's useless. After the training, people return to empty offices and to projects that have to be implemented in which the resources are not there'.²³

Even then, there may be underlying skills deficits amongst local actors that prevent them from making good use of the equipment they do have, or maintaining it so it will continue to be of use. One key donor has noted that the first few months of their training programmes (in Somaliland and wider Somalia) are often focused on inculcating basic skills amongst students, such as learning how to swim.²⁴ Another noted that the equipment provision served little substantive purpose if recipients lacked the necessary wherewithal and skills to look after it properly once it was in their possession.²⁵ Some locals also complained that some of the training with which they are provided is partial and demonstrates a lack of trust. For example, while a range of different donors are active in teaching boat-handling skills and so on to local coastguards, certain essential skills – for example, opposed boarding techniques – are not provided by some donors because of a lingering suspicion about their potential use in piracy activities.²⁶

Donor programmes have thus been limited by the sheer scale of the challenge presented by the local environment, where acute shortages of skills, equipment and resources are the norm. This is how one insider described a meeting during which an EUCAP Somalia official suggested a new command structure for the Somaliland coastguard leadership: 'The locals were only listening; they didn't ask a single question. Most of them had an extremely poor command of English [...]. They didn't really get what was said. Finally, they promised that they will take a look at this and they never implemented the structure'.²⁷ Any assessment of the effectiveness of international maritime capacity building activities thus needs to be set in context. In particular, they have simply not yet taken place on the scale – nor over time timescales necessary – to inculcate transformative change in what are often still very weak states that are attempting to build these capacities from scratch. Where they have had an impact, this has been limited to the specific cohort or project concerned, in a piecemeal fashion, rather than across the sector as a whole.

For their part, local actors recognise these challenges, and at one level appear to value all the help they can get. In interviews, respondents were cautiously positive about these programmes on their own terms, noting for example that: 'The help we receive from donors is our lifeline',²⁸ and that 'our capability is slowly growing'.²⁹ One respondent estimated that

²² Interview 8, Skype, 18 November 2016.

²³ Interview 16, Hargeisa, 29 November 2016.

²⁴ Interview 7, Skype, 28 November 2016.

²⁵ Interview 18, Skype, 2 March 2017.

²⁶ Interview 17, Hargeisa, 2 December 2016.

²⁷ Interview 15, Hargeisa, 28 November 2016.

²⁸ Interview 2, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

²⁹ Interview 1, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

‘around 40 per cent’ of programmes were effective,³⁰ while another suggested that there had been some successes, although there would have been more with better coordination and a focus on local needs.³¹ Set against these relatively positive views, there was also a common feeling across all respondents that donor programmes were insufficiently ambitious to meet the scale of the challenge faced on the ground, especially in the face of the wider economic and governance challenges of the region as a whole.³² More specifically, there was a lack of patience amongst locals with donor initiatives that did not result in concrete outcomes. In particular, this impatience was directed toward what were seen as multiple and often duplicated exercises in strategic planning and assessment, and – again multiple and often duplicated – workshops, meetings and conferences.³³ In contrast, those initiatives that were most valued were those that delivered capacities that would remain in place once the donors had left. This included equipment and, particularly, infrastructure.

5.2 Sustainability

The local preference for concrete outcomes that will endure is indicative of wider concerns around the sustainability of projects. There are two elements of vulnerability in this respect. The first concerns the sometimes-finite nature of donor projects, budgets and personnel appointments. Such initiatives are often self-contained, in the sense that they are conceived and implemented based on producing a specific deliverable, whether that is the delivery of strategic advice, a training programme or equipment donation. Even if these activities are successful on their own terms, they may founder over time if they are not sustained by appropriate follow-on support, or if they create isolated islands of capacity in otherwise unreformed organisations.

Second, wider structural impediments may blunt the impact of individual projects. Specific successes in training personnel will only have a limited influence if those same personnel are not then employed in the positions for which they have been trained, for reasons of organisational politics or even simply a lack of communication, awareness, and understanding in the institution concerned. Such problems have been apparent in Somalia, where appointments to positions of responsibility within organisations such as the coastguard are often determined by clan politics or informal power-sharing agreements rather than technical expertise or relevant qualifications.³⁴ Another problem is the absence of experts in civil service and centralisation of decision making in the hands of politically appointed ministers. As one EUCAP Somalia official explained:

There is no middle in their bureaucracy. In my home country you engage civil servants because with politicians you don’t have the continuity. They are in positions now but they might not be there after the next elections. In Somalia you don’t have that. All the people that you work now might disappear after the next elections.³⁵

³⁰ Interview 3, Hargeisa, 20 August 2016.

³¹ Interview 1, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

³² Interviews 2, 3, 4 and 5, Hargeisa, 18, 20 and 21 August 2016.

³³ Interview 10, Hargeisa, 27 November 2016.

³⁴ Interview 1, Skype, 28 November 2016.

³⁵ Interview 7, Skype, 18 November 2016.

These difficulties are indicative of the wider tension, discussed above, between the donors' often holistic ambitions for reform, local circumstance, and the narrow, specialist or organisationally specific demands of the capacity building agenda in practice. They also illustrate the pitfalls of assuming that individual reforms will be sustained by formalised principles of organisational effectiveness, in societies that may operate in very different ways in practice.

5.3 Local ownership

Underpinning many of these problems of effectiveness and sustainability is the question of 'local ownership'; that is the extent to which the demands of the maritime capacity building agenda are accepted and internalised by the institutions and political communities in which they take place. Almost all donors recognise the importance of local ownership in capacity building projects, at least rhetorically. Thus, for example, the EU's strategic framework for supporting security sector reform emphasises 'the participation of all stakeholders' and the importance of 'inclusive consultation processes' as baseline principles for its SSR initiatives. The same document notes that to be 'applicable and effective', programmes should be 'developed on the basis of nationally owned processes', and that '[r]eform efforts will be effective and sustainable only if they are rooted in a country's institutions... owned by national security and justice actors, and considered legitimate by society as a whole' (EC 2016: 5, 7). The Council of the European Union's Conclusions on the Horn of Africa document is clear that '[t]he effectiveness of [our] support is... dependent on local ownership and the political commitment of the countries in the region' (CoEU 2011: 2). The US government's framework for Maritime Security Sector Reform also stresses the importance of local context for example (US Govt. 2010: 13) while the UK's Building Stability Overseas Strategy notes the importance of 'effective local politics and strong mechanisms which weave people into the fabric of decision making' (HM Govt. 2014b: 12).

Despite these multiple commitments however, the reality of local ownership is often more questionable. Certainly, Somali respondents were nearly unanimous in their view that capacity building projects were driven by donors, with little involvement of local actors in either the planning or the assessment of projects.³⁶ Respondents noted for example that, while 'local involvement in the planning process' was a 'key element' for the success of programmes³⁷, there was a 'lack of communication between locals and external stakeholders'³⁸ and 'the impact is not felt, because everything is top down'.³⁹ In general, the picture is one of local actors who engage with external programmes, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, but who feel left out of the processes through which these activities are conceived, developed and evaluated.

The reasons for the disconnect between local actors and programmes are multiple, and mirror similar experiences with similar initiatives in other post-conflict environments, and on

³⁶ Interviews 2, 3, 5 and 6, Hargeisa, 18, 20 and 21 August 2016.

³⁷ Interview 2, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

³⁸ Interview 4, Hargeisa, 20 August 2016.

³⁹ Interview 1, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

land as well as at sea (Edmunds 2014: 9–10). One of the most important of these concerns the difficulties international actors face when attempting to develop close relationships with local actors and gain local country knowledge, especially when donor postings and projects may only be short term in nature. This is particularly the case in environments where local power structures and ways of doing things may be informal and take place parallel to, rather than within, formal institutional structures and procedures. In the words of a local expert, ‘One of the biggest weaknesses of [international donors] is that they don’t understand the local context, the dynamics of the institutions that they work in’.⁴⁰ Under such circumstances, building a knowledge of local needs and practices – and even of the key stakeholders for any given project – can be difficult to accomplish on a short timescale. As explained by an official of the Attorney-General Office of Somaliland: ‘Most of the EUCAP Nestor [now EUCAP Somalia] staff are not local. They don’t hire local staff. By the time they get certain degree of understanding the local context, they leave the mission’.⁴¹ Certainly, local respondents in Somalia bemoaned an apparent lack of local knowledge amongst donors, noting that they ‘do not know much about this country’ and that they ‘do not value local knowledge’.⁴² Even the role of diaspora Somalis as interlocutors was criticised on the basis that they had been out of the country for too long to really understand local circumstances, needs and structures.⁴³

Such difficulties can be compounded by what are often chronic absences of human and resource capacity at a local level, creating a ‘chicken and egg’ dilemma for many donor programmes. Even a local needs assessment requires some specialist knowledge in order to identify what capacities need to be strengthened and why. However, in the Somali case, decades of war and state weakness – and indeed the very fact that so many institutions are being built from scratch – means that local actors are often dependent on donors to provide the very competencies that are necessary for local ownership to be meaningful.⁴⁴ Similarly, a lack of financial resources can create a dependency of local actors on donor contributions simply in order to function, let alone assert ownership over a programme or initiative. In essence, locals may know that they should be coordinating activities, but simply lack the capacity to do so. Indeed, an official in the Somaliland Coastguard was blunt in his assessment that there could be no meaningful local ownership in the face of a fundamental lack of resources at the local level.⁴⁵ Such problems can create frustration for donors anxious to get things done and achieve their goals within project timescales. As Christian Bueger notes, these problems can also lead to the distrust of local actors, who can under these circumstances come to be perceived by internationals as feckless, disorganised or often corrupt (2012: 10).

⁴⁰ Interview 14, Hargeisa, 28 November 2016.

⁴¹ Interview 13, Hargeisa, 27 November 2016.

⁴² Interviews 1 and 3, Hargeisa, 20 and 21 August 2016.

⁴³ Interview 1, Hargeisa, 21 August 2016.

⁴⁴ Interviews 2 and 5, Hargeisa, 18 and 21 August 2016.

⁴⁵ Interview 4, Hargeisa, 20 August 2016.

5.4 Legitimacy

Maritime capacity programmes have been welcomed by actors in the region because they at least aspire to address self-evident local weaknesses, and also because they bring new resources, both human and financial, into the often chronically under-funded institutions and organisations concerned. However, as the discussion above suggests, an embedded sense of local ownership of these programmes – of their goals, implementation and impact – is largely absent. At a minimum, local actors perceive these activities as serving a narrower purpose than that conceived of by many donors. Indeed, almost without exception, local respondents understood such activities in terms of basic skills development and equipment and infrastructure provision, with little to no engagement with their wider goals of conflict prevention, peacebuilding and development.⁴⁶

More broadly, there is little connection between these activities and the wider societies of the countries in which they take place. The vast majority of people in the states concerned are unaware of either the capacity building activities that have occurred in this area, or indeed the maritime problem space as a whole. In one sense this is to be expected, and mirrors experience in most donor states themselves. Maritime capacity building is a rather technical and specialised activity that in any society is likely to be of interest only to professionals and enthusiasts. However, it does mean that what local legitimacy there is, is conferred by a thin layer of local elites, who view capacity building as a way of empowering their personal, institutional or political positions in a context of local competition for scarce resources.⁴⁷ There are some exceptions to this absence, in that large, very visible infrastructure projects that make a tangible contribution to the local economy and environment – such as the Turkish renovation of the Port of Mogadishu, for example – can have wider purchase and support. However, the lack of transparency surrounding such initiatives, and questions over how the benefits of such investments are shared, point to further problems relating to an absence of popular legitimacy and ownership.

Accordingly, it might be said maritime capacity building programmes in the region have a ‘thin’ legitimacy – in the sense that they have been broadly accepted and often welcomed by a small section of elite local actors, even if they are not always seen to be successful in practice, nor particularly cognisant of local needs. However, it is also clear that such initiatives have yet to be fully internalised and adopted by local actors on their own terms, and have little purchase in wider society. In most cases, locals do not decide what programmes are needed and why, and they have little to no role in driving their implementation and assessment. In this way, and to date at least, such activities lack the ‘thick’ legitimacy – in the sense of the capacity building agenda being accepted and understood in its holistic entirety – that would make them self-sustaining and enduringly effective over time in the absence of external tutelage, funding and direction.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6, Hargeisa, 18, 20 and 21 August 2016.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to Filip Ejodus for this point.

⁴⁸ This conceptualisation of thick and thin legitimacy is drawn on Walzer 1994 and related literatures. See Gilley 2007 for a review.

6. Conclusion

Maritime capacity building in the States of Somalia remains a relatively recent activity, with few initiatives dating back more than five or six years. In this time, it has undoubtedly had a positive impact in some areas. There is a more developed coastguard and port infrastructure in Somalia now than at any time since the early 1990s, for example, and this is, in part at least, a consequence of the efforts of the donor community. Similarly, judicial mechanisms and penal infrastructure for dealing with piracy suspects have strengthened across the region. However, the success of these activities has been narrow and uneven. They have been able to strengthen pockets of capacity in specific organisations and institutions, but they have done so in a manner that has not always been well coordinated with other donor activities or local priorities, and in an environment of wider political, economic and institutional weaknesses that have constrained their impact and on which they have been dependent. Given the scale of the challenge, the transnational and regionally situated nature of the maritime problem space, and the timescales over which such activities have taken place, it is perhaps not surprising that they have struggled to be transformative in nature. Even so, the extent to which they have taken place in the absence of local involvement at the levels of problem identification, and project development and evaluation is also notable. This deficit has led to a ‘thin’ rather than ‘thick’ legitimacy amongst local actors, and has exacerbated existing challenges of relevance, duplication and sustainability.

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