

S3. Ep. 4: Water justice for all - but how?

[00:00:00] **Ntombini Marrengane:** What do you think of when you hear the sound of water? Perhaps you think about standing on the shore of the ocean or swimming on a hot summer's day and sipping on some ice-cold water to quench your thirst. Perhaps it also brings to mind the challenges facing regions all over the world. From almost reaching Day Zero in Cape Town during the drought a few years ago to current water supply issues in Johannesburg and other cities and towns around South Africa.

[00:00:29] Droughts, floods and other climate-change-associated water issues are occurring- *literally, everywhere* it seems. Water is a precious resource and it's more of a political, social, environmental and relational issue than we perhaps realise. Water and its abundance or scarcity is all a matter of perspective, access and lived experience. Something many living in Somalia right now know first-hand.

[00:00:56] **News Clip 1:** But first, the African Nation of Somalia has long had a forbidding [00:01:00] climate, searing heat, and dry desert conditions. Now, relentless droughts have stripped millions of rural herders of their animals, their only real wealth and driven humans closer to the scarce water supplies.[00:01:13] It's a living example of the effects of climate change.

News Clip 2: Surviving in Somalia's City has turned into a dire challenge. Hundreds of thousands of people have poured into the city after severe droughts made their remote villages unliveable. The UN Children's Agency, UNICEF, says Somalia could suffer rates of infant death unseen for half a century as warnings of a looming famine intensify.

[00:01:39] The number of people now being affected by the worst drought in 40 years has more than doubled, but less than half the money needed to help them has been raised. Climate change and conflict have contributed to severe food shortages across the horn of Africa.

[00:01:53] **Ntombini Marrengane:**[00:01:57] Welcome, I am Ntombini Marrengane. In season three of the *Just for a Change* podcast I have conversations with change-makers, from South Africa and further afield. We hear from innovators, social entrepreneurs, industry leaders, activists and more about the work they do, and what makes them tick. We'll find out how they keep the fire burning when it comes to tackling some of the most - to use a systems change term - wicked problems - facing the world today. In addition to the worst drought in almost 40 years and mounting challenges related to climate change, Somalia has been experiencing conflict, activity from terrorist groups and political instability for over 30 years now. As a result infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is almost non-existent.

[00:02:47] Around 60% of the population is nomadic and so with water scarcity, the drought and now a famine - one can imagine the desperation people feel and it's easy to see why water and access to water are causing huge conflicts. It's not all doom and gloom though, there are stories of hope and some incredible work being done by change-makers on the ground. My guest today is one such change-maker.

[00:03:09] Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein is a current Bertha Fellow and has been working with the Somali government, as well as local and international organisations for the last 10 years in peace-building and humanitarian assistance. Good morning, Abdikhayr.

Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein: Good morning.

[00:03:32] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you so much for joining me today. It's a real privilege to share your story with us. Abdikhayr, you were born in Somalia and have spent much of your life working towards making it a better place to live. Please tell me a little bit about your early years and what has shaped you.

[00:03:45] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Thank you very much. Uh, this is actually now a great opportunity for me actually to share with you my story.

[00:03:53] You know, at age of three when I was very young, you know, Somalia, central government collapsed [00:04:00] and the country, you know, slipped into a civil war in 1991. So in that time I was displaced five times. I lost family and friends in that civil war. I have spent, you know, five years of my life in displacement in a camp.

[00:04:17] So in early days of my childhood, I used to just work with and assist my grandfather, who was actually a traditional elder and peace activist that lost his life in peace building efforts, you know, later on. So I was admired by his bravery, so, and his actually heroism. So that was when I decided, you know, to continue the legacy of my grandfather when I grow up.

[00:04:47] That was the time I have decided, you know, to continue the legacy of my grandfather and to follow after him. So this is how I started actually to be a social rights activist and a peace [00:05:00] activist, you know, and work in peace building in Somalia.

[00:05:04] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you. And you, and you mentioned just before we started recording that peace building is still a very much, um, in demand now because you experience regular violence in Mogadishu, the capital city, um, with explosions and bombs.

[00:05:26] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Yeah, that's true, uh, because of, you know, Somalia has been, uh, in a conflict, in a violence for last 30 years. So there is still a need of this building. There is still a need of reconciliation and to bring together, you know, the war factions because of their different political groups fighting each other, uh, over the control of over the management or, or maybe just, you know, over the governments of Somalia.

[00:05:57] **Ntombini Marrengane:** As we heard earlier in this episode, Somalia is also [00:06:00] experiencing a drought, the worst drought it's had in 40 years. What are some of the issues facing the people of Somalia as a result of this drought?

[00:06:07] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** It has been a drought for the last 40 years. That drought has caused large scale, crop failure and livestock death. As you know, 60% of Somali people are rural people who depend on a livestock or keeping camels, goat, these animals, you know. So because of the drought, you know, uh, all of these animals, you know, have to die in starvation. And this has impacted, you know, livelihoods and the food supply, which has already resulted, you know, starvation.

[00:06:49] Where 70% of our rural families do not have any food to eat and that are around 5 million uh, rural population or 5 [00:07:00] million Somali population are in hunger or maybe are food insecure. There's actually no protection of a famine in the coming months if there's not actually, no rain. Now we are in the rain season, so if this rainy season fails too, then there will be a famine.

[00:07:20] There will be a great big nutrient crisis in Somalia.

[00:07:27] **Ntombini Marrengane:** There seems to be a lot of elements to the water crisis and, and the worsening drought. Um, you've mentioned already that most people live, uh, rural lifestyle where they depend upon livestock, which are not being, they're not able to look after in the absence of water and food insecurity.

[00:07:47] Um, and in this environment, the water crisis has led to conflict in the region. Can you share something about that with us?

[00:07:54] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, Somalia is a water scarce country, you know, and [00:08:00] there has been continuous decline of fresh water availability, and there has been repeated droughts as a result of the climate change.

[00:08:09] All of these has resulted in fierce competition of water resources. And this is what actually, you know, cause, you know, conflict of water resource and also unfair access of water resources. Uh, you know, 70% of the rural population have limited access of safe, clean water, although Somalia is a water-scarce country.

[00:08:36] Uh, so water-related conflicts remain widespread as a result of the looming climate crises and lack of water management structures, you know, in place in the rural areas in Somalia because of there is no government and there is no law enforcement institutions and there is no, you know, dedicated institutions that can manage, you [00:09:00] know, water resources among the people.

[00:09:02] So this is how the conflict, you know, comes actually always.

[00:09:07] **Ntombini Marrengane:** If we reflect on, uh, the 2010 declaration by the United Nations, that access to water and sanitation is a basic human right and yet so many people, um, in the conditions you described are not able to enjoy this human right. Can you please talk to me a bit about water justice and why you think it's a key part of peace building in Somalia?

[00:09:28] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** In 2021, water-related conflicts left death of around 300 persons and displacement of 160,000 persons, mostly women and children, which are taking place in Somalia. So water conflict is a, is actually one of major causes or major, you know, contributing factories to the insecurity and conflict in Somalia.

[00:09:57] Therefore, how [00:10:00] fair access to the water and also transparency and fairness in management, in accessibility and affordability of water resource is vital and important for addressing claim threats and also to the peace-building efforts in Somalia.

[00:10:18] **Ntombini Marrengane:** In, in the conversation before this recording with our production team, you mentioned that some of the justice issues arising have got to do with [00:10:27] powerful or bigger clans having more or better access to water than minority clans. Can you tell us a bit more about this and what it means practically?

[00:10:37] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, those who are fighting over the water resources are powerful, you know, rural

clans. And within these clans there are minority groups who are the most affected in water-related conflicts, and they have to suffer.

[00:10:56] In the hands of a bigger or [00:11:00] superior clan who are fighting over the management of water resources. So in such times when there's a conflict, when you know powerful clans are fighting each other, you know, minorities, they find difficult in access to the water source or they have to opt to far away water sources.

[00:11:24] Or they have to pay water for higher prices. You know, so they are the most affected, uh, you know, when it comes for water conflicts.

[00:11:35] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Yeah. So can you maybe, can you, you **Abdikhayr** explained that in 1990 and the government collapsed, right? So that's like your formal public administrative government. But you still have [00:11:52] a very, um, extensive system of clans, which actually controls people's access to [00:12:00] resources. Is that right?

[00:12:01] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Yeah, of course. You know, 60% of Somali population are rural people, so we have, you know, a very weak, you know, authority that are concentrated on, you know, urban areas, but the rural areas, Are, are just, you know, are controlled by these clans, you know, and each clan has an elder.

[00:12:27] So these are the elders. These are actually know the guys or maybe actually know the people who are actually know, uh, responsible for the management of the, of the water sources in the rural areas. You know?

[00:12:43] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And can you please maybe explain how do these elders get into their positions of authority?

[00:12:48] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** This is, this is actually the same as a kingdom or maybe kings. So this is, you know, they in-

herit from their fathers or grand grandfathers. Actually, no. [00:13:00] So they inherit these positions and they are not elected.

[00:13:06] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So this is actually quite remarkable. You're explaining that the majority of the population actually lives outside of accountable and transparent [00:13:17] public administration, um, that's only something that you find predominantly in the urban areas where a minority of the population lives and the majorities' instead ruled under these hereditary, um, systems, which I'm wondering, how does that, um, influence who gets to have water, right? Because if I'm from particular clan, I'm going to prioritize [00:13:45] people who share my identity over others, is that something that you see often?

[00:13:51] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Yeah, of course. That's what makes you know the conflict. Mm. When there's no, you know, a system. When there is small actually, you know, [00:14:00] structure between these powerful clans, when there is small agreement of how they actually share the water sources, the water sources that I'm talking about are actually know the streams, the river.

[00:14:15] Valley's, the water source, open water sources, uh, which are not, actually, not private, but actually not public water source or shared water source. So these powerful clans do not have, uh, you know, agreements or somehow actually, you know, formalities Uh, to share the water, you know, so this how they actually, you know, come into conflict, you know?

[00:14:41] **Ntombini Marrengane:** when you say conflict, what, what does conflict look like? [00:14:43] Does that mean that there are people who restrict, like physically restrict access to a particular water source, or, um, does it involve, uh, capturing particular parts [00:15:00] of a, a specific geographic area that has access to water. Could you maybe explain that a bit more?

[00:15:06] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** So it's all about management. It's all about, you know, controlling the water source and accessing it first, you know, so that's all about, it's not about, you know, uh, going to that area and capturing it, but it's all about

actually know, uh, who's going to, who's going to actually control it, who's going actually to be, uh, the firsts to access it?

[00:15:26] So this is the way, because of there's the water scattering. Sometimes this water sources can dry up when there's a drought. These water source, you know, dry up and water, you know, level decreases. So this is what makes actually conflict, you know? So they want actually to be the first group who actually accesses the water water before it decreases or before it dries up.

[00:15:52] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's incredible. So if the water supply dries up before smaller groups can access it, [00:16:00] then there's no plan for them?

[00:16:01] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Of course. So when that clan, you know, and, uh, it takes, you know, uh, drinks all the water and the water, you know, can or maybe actually dries up, then others, they have no option, but they have to actually go to far away water source else. Another water source, which is far away from them [00:16:21] which actually will cost them a lot.

[00:16:23] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And with the kind of unpredictability that you've already mentioned about having four, um, four years of drought, um, in the immediate path makes it quite difficult to, to plan where to get water from.

[00:16:41] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** 50 years ago, it was actually 10 year, once is in 10 years, but now it's actually not, it's become continuous.[00:16:49] So this what, this is actually a factor that, you know, contributing, you know, an increase of the conflict of the, of the water. You know?

[00:16:58] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Do, do women in [00:17:00] particular play a particular role in this water conflict?

[00:17:04] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, I was going to actually share with you that issue when I was actually talking about the minors. Because of those who suffer, those who actually are most affected in, you know, these conflicts are minority

[00:17:19] groups and the women and children because of, you know, uh, traditionally women, they are responsible to fetch water for the water source. When the water source is actually near to the, you maybe actually the settlement. So, so, you know, uh, there are actually cases of actually, you know, gender violences.

[00:17:40] There are cases of rape. There are cases of actually, you know, um, uh, violence against women when there's a conflict because of, uh, it hap what happens is that when there's a fighting between two clans, maybe this clan can use actually, you know, [00:18:00] uh, to actually, you know, use a rape or maybe violence against a woman as a revenge.

[00:18:05] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Something that has become clear to me in hearing about the work that you're doing is that the conflict over water and access to water is a serious issue and it's a source of trauma and actually has cost a number of people their lives. Tell me about the work you've undertaken this year in getting together various warring clans to sit at the same table and find mutually beneficial solutions to this crises?

[00:18:29] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, I have been working with rural communities, particularly with the clan elders, who are actually now, who actually are actually leaders of these powerful clans. So I have been working with them to mediate their water conflicts and also find a permanent solution for water sharing. So with this process and with the inputs of the elders, I [00:19:00] have developed a guidance book for fair and sustainable management of shared water source.

[00:19:07] I had a meeting with elders powerful of, of these, you know, fighting clients. Then I succeeded, actually know to bring them together and then mediate, you know, their conflicts and disputes and then come up a solution. And with that solution I have to actually now convert into a book that will help other clans and will help other, you know, people, rural people.

[00:19:32] Who actually maybe actually have a fighting same, same conflict in the future, you know? So I came up that actually

guidance book, which will help them actually to share the water equally and fairly, you know, without conflict.

[00:19:46] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Can you give me some more information about the work that you've undertaken to get these varying clans around the same table?

[00:19:53] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** The rural people, they live in the rural areas and the elders, they're living in the rural areas. So I have to travel to the rural [00:20:00] areas, then I have to start the process with a conscious building. Uh, means I have to actually meet a clan elders individually, you know, separately, each of them, each, you know, maybe there are two clans fighting each other.

[00:20:16] So I have to, you know, start the process to meet at the elder of this clan and then convince him, uh, that they actually to resolve their conflict through a dialogue. And then when he accepts, you know, that, uh, maybe actually offer, I have to go to the other clan and meet, you know, the elder of that clan and do same when they accept both groups.

[00:20:41] When they accept, you know, to meet and resolve their actually, you know, conflict through a dialogue. Then I have to organize a big mediation meeting where actually they came together in a circle. And usually I have to actually know, uh, hold this, actually know, uh, [00:21:00] mediation meeting under a tree, not under a house.

[00:21:03] We have that actually know in the rural areas. So the feeling that I have been using, you know, in the rural areas was under a tree to bring them under that tree. And then they actually sit in a circle and then they actually discuss, they actually discuss their actual dispute and their conflict. And I mediate.

[00:21:22] I take the role to mediate. Actually know their conflict, then I have to mediate. I have to give them, you know, alternatives, I have to actually know, give them, you know, maybe guidance, uh, you know, that relates to their conflict and dispute. And

finally they came up a solution. They came up actually know something.

[00:21:41] And also something maybe arrangement, uh, that will lead to that both clans share the water equally. One good thing that came out from this mediation meeting was that they actually, you know, form a committee, a water management committee where the members came from these, [00:22:00] you know, fighting clans. So that means there's a, there's a structure for presenting you know, both clans that will manage, you know, water resources for them, you know, equally and fairly.

[00:22:13] So this was actually, you know, a good thing that came out from the mediation meeting and that actually, you know, has helping me a lot.

[00:22:20] **Ntombini Marrengane:** From my understanding, this way of dealing with problems is not new. In generations past, clan elders would mediate and negotiate with each other when issues arose. Can you discuss a little bit how that's changed in recent times?

[00:22:36] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** That's true. You know, there has been, uh, a, there has been actually know always that my system. Uh, and there was a tradition where when there's a conflict, you know, the elders of clans to, they came together and then they solve the problem, you know, uh, mutually that has that. We used to have that, and we actually, we actually be, we have been proud of [00:23:00] that actual culture.

[00:23:01] We has been, you know, uh, existence in Somalia for actually now, uh, from generation to generation. But what has been changed? You know, this good tradition, or actually good culture is actually you know the climate change, the looming climate change, uh, you know, the, the decreasing water sources and, you know, the clan with political crisis because of, for example, uh, some water conflicts between the, you know, between, you know, rural people are activated by actually third parties.

[00:23:38] It has been activated by other, you know, third party who is in the, uh, urban areas. Maybe, uh, you know, a, a, a powerful group, political group, or maybe actually, you know, a powerful like, you know, politicians who have interests, you know, in the, in the fight of these two clans. [00:24:00] So, you know, this something that came out now and that not existed, you know, before.

[00:24:08] Or maybe actually no, uh, when there was actually no a good culture where people, they come together and solve their problem.

[00:24:15] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So can you tell me a little bit more about these politicians who are actually based in urban areas? What are they trying to achieve by interfering with the consensus building in rural areas around to conflict?

[00:24:27] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** For example, Al-Shabaab, which is a tourist organization, they used actually no, a water conflict between clan groups actually know as a, as a, as a mechanism to fight and rule these clans. For example, if these clients are in agreement or maybe in a peace, they can join together and they can keep against, you know, Al-Shabaab. They can fight and they can join their force to, to uh, root out, you know, [00:25:00] Al-Shabaab.

[00:25:00] So Al-Shabaab they have to use water conflict or this conflict actually to manage and to and to actually know, uh, these clans.

[00:25:12] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Wow. Um, obviously part of working with clan elders, um, requires building trust. So can you share with us how you were able to gain the respect and trust of various clan elders that you've been engaging with?

[00:25:28] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, that's true because of when you are not actually an elder, or maybe actually, maybe actually not some, someone who's actually not a popular figure, uh, you know, you could have that problem. But the thing

that has helping me was actually know, my grandfather was actually, was actually popular in peace building efforts in Somalia.

[00:25:49] He was popular, so most of the clan elders know him, know his name, so I have his name. So whenever I tell [00:26:00] them my name and I tell them that I actually know came from that, uh, you know, that actually know, uh, elder and have that name, they give me respect. They give me a chance that I can talk to them, that they can, I actually mediate.

[00:26:17] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Okay. I was gonna say, obviously you are, you're, you're able to refer to the legacy of your grandfather but your own work speaks to, um, the importance that you place on peace and conflict resolution and enables them to trust you. Um, and to engage in a, in a, in a dialogue with you, you work with an organization called Bareedo, which is a youth led organization that promotes democratic values.

[00:26:44] Can you tell me about the work that Bareedo does and perhaps comment on how you see young people leading the change in Somalia?

[00:26:51] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Bareedo Platform is a non-governmental, nonprofit, youth led organization. They work in a promotion of democratic [00:27:00] values and institutions for an inclusive society in Somalia. You know, 70% of Somali population are, you know, youth and, under 35 years age, and they are not engaged [00:27:17] In decision making. They are not included in decision making and they have no role, uh, in actually, you know, in decision making or maybe actually public, you know, uh, uh, public issues. They are excluded. So, you know, uh, in respect of this as if of this, we have actually, you know, this is how Bareedo came out to actually know, promote participatory and Inclusive society.

[00:27:46] Where all people are included, where all people are engaging, where no one is left behind because of what we have in Somalia is that, you know, women and youth are excluded. It's only [00:28:00] actually know the, all the people. It's only clan, you know, system that works in Somalia. We don't have actual democ-

rats, we don't have, we don't have where people, you know, vote, uh, who actually they want actually to uh, represent them.

[00:28:13] We still have aware that the representatives are elected by the clan elders - the people that I was talking about, uh, that was telling you - you know, the government representatives, the government representatives are elected by clan elders. So the clan elders, they prefer older people, they prefer older politicians, although the woman over the youth.

[00:28:38] So youth and women have no role. They're excluded. So this how Bareedo came out to actually promote that issue. And what they did was actually know, uh, they delivered, you know, a leadership skills, uh, like conflict profession, conflict escalation and resolution. You know, trainings that targeted or reach out [00:29:00] to 300 youth members who are women and mean you, ya, young woman, uh, to certainly, you know, participation and influence and representation of young people in decision-making [00:29:12] in order to exercise their role as a responsible citizens in Somalia.

[00:29:17] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think you've touched on a really, really important issue. Um, the African continent is overwhelmingly populated by young people, and yet we fail to see them in decision-making roles. We fail to see them engaging at the policy table, and we fail to hear their concerns and their voices and their [00:29:40] hopes for the future incorporated in, in planning at a policy level, um, in many governments, not just Somalia. Um, and this deliberate exclusion is going to have consequences. You've shared with us some of the very dire consequences, um, that have, have shown themselves in Somalia with young people [00:30:00] engaging.

[00:30:02] In conflict, um, through terrorist groups to have their voices heard or possibly taking the long and potentially deadly, um, trek to Europe to try and migrate and find other opportunities. And I think what you've explained to us is such a missed opportunity, not only in Somalia, but um, all over the continent.

[00:30:25] Um, and I think the leadership of your organisation really speaks to your values. We did get a chance to visit Bareedo's website, and we're very impressed to see so many young people taking on quite weighty and important, uh, roles and responsibilities. Um, and I hope that can be a lesson for other youth around the continent.

[00:30:48] Many people would feel overwhelmed by all the issues facing Somalia, including the examples that you just shared with us of, um, violence against innocent people while they're simply [00:31:00] trying to improve their access to resources, um, for themselves and their communities. Um, it's very traumatic. What helps you to stay engaged and hopeful [00:31:10] and what is your vision for Somalia?

[00:31:13] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** You know, what makes me to stay, uh, resilient is when I see actually see resilience of the Somalia people who have been in a conflict for almost 30 years. And it's still hopeful that, you know, to get peace. Still hopeful actually to reconstruct, uh, you know, their country.

[00:31:32] Whenever I see these people, whenever I actually remember how, actually know, hopeful, how actually know, uh, uh, brave was my grandfather actually know how he was actually know, not sleeping in a, in a, in a, in a, in a, in a time or maybe in an hour and he was actually engaging. He was actually, you know, a, a peace for actually, you know, a peace-building all the time

[00:31:57] in a hope of achieving peace. And [00:32:00] what I hope from Somalia is that finding a solution, uh, to the, you know, to long lasted, you know, conflicts in Somalia, uh, and achieving a more peaceful and prosperous, uh, you know, country or society in Somalia.

[00:32:16] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Thank you, Abdikhayr, for sharing your story with us, I've been so inspired to hear about your work and the power of mediation and peace-building in conflict resolution, particularly in your work in creating equitable access to water. And I can say that, um, the continent, not only Somalia, but

the continent is also a better place for having people like you who are committed to its future, um, to its peace and to its sustainability. Thank you so much for your time today.

[00:32:45] **Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein:** Thank you for much. I appreciate that.

[00:32:49] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Perhaps fighting for water feels a little foreign to you right now but according to the World Wildlife Fund, two-thirds of the world's population will be facing water shortages in the next few years. It's possible that in our lifetimes we will experience conflict over water access.

[00:33:06] I'm so encouraged by the work done by Abdikhayr and people like him - it keeps me hopeful that even if this were to be the case, then we have proven ways of working collaboratively for the greater good of everyone, rather than stockpiling enough for just ourselves.

[00:33:25] And that brings us to the end of another episode. Thank you for tuning in to season 3 of the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. If you're interested in hearing more conversations with change-makers, then make sure you subscribe to this podcast so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes!

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