

# Power blocs: Rienzie Perera

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"In all societies, there are power blocs. The question is how to win them over. If you bypass them, they can make life miserable for you."

Rienzie Perera, Research Director for the Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala, Sweden, offered that observation during a Friday afternoon discussion group on "Tradition, Culture and Reconciliation."

Founded in 1985, the institute's first projects included peacemaking in Somalia. Asked to help after the United Nations pulled out, the institute determined that it would build on traditional Somali ways and structures, Mr. Perera said.

The institute concentrated on training members of clan-level governing bodies in civic education and conflict resolution, he said. It also sought to reinforce women's particular roles within Somalia's traditionally patriarchal society. For example, women are able to promote peace among clans to which they have family ties through their own and their children's marriages.

Judging results is not as easy as counting blankets or mosquito nets distributed, noted a video about the institute's Somalia work ? now being transferred into Somalis' hands. "We are distributing ideas and attitudes," the video noted. "But we can see whether the people coming to training are enthusiastic, and whether they implement what they learned back home in local decision-making structures."