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Somalia, Factor 14

Somalia: Political Stability to Abolish Clans and Produce Equality in Resource Use

The average family in Somalia consists of five: a mother, a father and three children. The Somali people are Muslim, which means that the men are permitted to have four wives at a time. The infant mortality rate in Somalia is high, so only about 3 children make it past the weaning (infancy) age. Due to food insecurity most men can only afford to have one, sometimes two, wives. Only about 38% of Somalis are literate; 49.7% male and 25.8% female. Currently there is access to healthcare in 8 regions spread across Somalia. Some people will travel for days to reach the closest available doctor. Ambulances by ox carts take the sick to hospitals. Most people depend on the drugs sold in the market because it is often that hospitals don't have the resources needed to cure the sick.

Usually the men are nomadic stock herders and spend days at a time walking (occasionally watering) the animals in search of new grazing grounds. All these men have is a spear or a stick to protect themselves from lions or enemies. They often are out on these trips without food or water for long periods of time. Women stay at home tending to the children and completing household chores, getting water, firewood, cooking, butchering, and weaving mats and rope. The kind of food eaten depends on where the family lives and the kind of land available.

Only 1.6% of Somalia's land is cultivated, 69% is permanent pasture. Somalia's method for food production is rain fed dry land farming or inland irrigation farming. The crops grown include corn, sorghum, beans, rice, vegetables, cotton, and sesame. These crops are only available to people with money. Farm sizes for the average family are very small and scarce. In the poorest parts, the family eats preserved animal meat mixed with dates and salt. Some even eat roasted animal skins. Because of droughts, the production of livestock far surpasses the production of crops. Livestock production consists of goats, sheep, camels, and cattle.

Drought is the big cause of agricultural failure. The climate in Somalia is very hot, dry and rain does not come often. There are few areas with land fertile enough to grow crops. Another factor is the economy. The people of Somalia are impoverished, leaving them with no savings to invest in new agricultural technology. There are no places to work because people in these areas have no money. Because of the lack of education, very few people have the knowledge needed to maintain a productive farm. Crop rotation, integrated pest management and modern methods to boost crop productivity are unknown to them.

There is no stable government in Somalia in spite of having a current president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. There has not been political stability since 1991 when Siyad Barre was in office. Opposition from the Somali National Movement (SNM), the United Somali Congress (USC) and the Ogadeni Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) caused Barre to resign and flee on January 27, 1991, leaving the country in utter chaos. The USC then developed a provisional government lead by Ali Mahdi Mahammad, which never gained adequate control over the country.

Presently, the country is controlled by as many as 12 different clans. These clans compete for power over different areas. When a clan comes to a village it pretends that its going to be a representative of the village; but in actuality it is just looking to boost its power. Control over a land means control of all the resources. The clan takes most of these resources (land and water) for itself, leaving the villagers poverty stricken. Daud Mohamed, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation,

measured the poverty in his Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI shows that 65.6 percent of the Somali population is in severe poverty. When additional factors such as access to education, healthcare, and standard of living are considered, a startling 81.2 percent of the population are considered to be in poverty (UNDP in Somalia).

According to the CIA's World Factbook there are 10,085,638 people in Somalia. 2.085 million are food insecure. Food security refers to food availability and an individual's access to it. People who are food insecure are plagued with significant food gaps and are classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity. 2.12 million people are expected to stay in the food crisis throughout December of this year. That's a 2% increase since last year. Currently, 236,000 children are acutely malnourished across the country. Severe acute malnutrition affects 54,000. 70% of the malnourished children live in Southern Somalia.

Ali Mahdi Mohammed, an influential clan leader and former contender for president, says "clanism is our country's cancer". Somalia is a lawless country run by many different warlords. Having so many different leaders, who do nothing to help the poor, causes the people of Somalia to be weary of government. By removing the clans and bringing in an official government with laws that protect the villagers, equality amongst the people of Somalia could be established. This would give everyone an equal opportunity to acquire the resources which will ultimately restore food security.

Lucy Hannan's documentary "Somalia: A State in Need", is an in depth look at life for the people of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. The people of Mogadishu agree that, since the removal of the major clan, life is better. There is now security to stop fighting amongst the villagers. It is still not good. There still is no stable government to protect the people from being cheated out of relief benefits stolen from them.

Occasionally, security allows support from international organizations, but this is not enough. The majority of villagers in Mogadishu survive from handouts from Muslim organizations. Muhammad Isak, a man who fled from his home because of clan fights, tells this story. He lives in a small hut and survives day by day by making traditional toothbrushes and selling them in the market. He then buys a bit of food. He says "I fled because of drought and fighting amongst the clans. That's why I ran. I want this country to get peace and settle down. Then I hope I can go back home."

Lucy then interviews the mother of a family who lost its herd of cattle due to drought. The woman is talking about the last remaining cow, she says, "Her [the cow's] mother died and I fed her tea with milk. But sometimes, I cannot do that. The only thing we survive on is livestock. When the livestock dies, what is left? We had one bag of maize which my husband brought- we fed it to the cows." Her husband once had forty head of cattle, now they have none.

Agriculture in Somalia is suffering because of political instability. Political instability allows conflict as clans and warlords to rule the country. With clans ruling the country there are no rights to protect the people. Most of Somalia's fertile lands are occupied by villages. Clans take over villages and seize control over the resources provided by the land (such as water, growing space ect). Diplomatic initiatives do little good because clans make it difficult to get food to the people who need it most.

Mohamed Amiin Adow wrote an article for CNN entitled "Somali, AU forces seize Al-Shabaab base in Mogadishu". He states "Somali government forces backed by forces from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) took over a base used by al Qaeda-backed Al-Shabaab militants on the northern outskirts of Mogadishu." Currently, the Somali government is trying to gain control of the country, which will bring back food security. There are still many powerful groups, like Al-Shabaab, who make it hard for the Somali government to seize control over Somalia. Most of the country suffers from only stressed acute food insecurity. One third of the country is in crisis and less than 5% at an emergency level (FEWS NET Geographic Data).

The environment is being degraded because of poverty. All the resources available are used up very quickly because nobody has the time or money to practice sustainability. Also, due to the political crisis

in Somalia, environmental protection has not been prioritized. The women are particularly disadvantaged. They are expected to go out and find wood for fuel and water for cooking/drinking, but these resources are frequently depleted because there is such a high demand. In addition, changes in environmental conditions often restrict access to vital sources of energy. They all have children to take care of and households to run, but without the resources they need, they cannot fulfill their household duties. UNDP's newsroom states "competition over natural resources is now emerging as one of the most serious threats to conflict escalation and to the human development of future generations" in a January 3, 2012 press release.

Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (ACLED) conducted a conflict trend report depicting the rise and fall of political conflict in Africa. Somalia is amongst the nine regions they studied. There are 6 conflict reports ranging from April 2013 to September 2013. In April, ACLED reports "Somalia's conflict profile is characterized by a vast number of politically violent actors, including a large number of highly fractured, politically violent ethnic militias. Among the most active conflict actors are Al Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Ethiopian and Kenyan Military Forces, and a large number of highly active Unidentified Armed Groups. Al-Shabaab has increasingly resorted to guerrilla style tactics, characterized by a large number of hit-and-run attacks on armed targets." The graph depicting conflicts by regions shows that Somalia's fatalities are very high, especially in Banaadir. As Al Shabaab was decreasing the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was subtly increasing.

Since May, violence and fatalities are steadily decreasing in Somalia. Violence was at an all-time high for 2012. In 2013 the fatalities are much less. ACLED writes "Recent political developments certainly give cause for optimism, but a closer look at the conflict dynamics suggest multiple, overlapping and cross-cutting challenges remain: conflict levels across the country remain elevated over the past six months, in spite of persistent claims that Al Shabaab is on the verge of collapse" Somalia no longer has the highest amounts of conflict in its region. In September ACLED writes "For years, the secessionist and autonomous pressures of northern regions was low on the Federal Government's list of security priorities. Now, ironically, the prospect of a more peaceful Somalia may itself pave the way for more conflict in this area." Compared to 2012, Somalia has made some very good progress in protecting its people, but the country still needs to gain control of their government.

Resolving Somalia's political instability would increase the amount of food that gets to the people. Everything is interconnected. As of now, Somalia is ruled by weaponry. Whoever has access to weapons has the ability to control the places they want. One villager in Lucy Hannan's documentary says, "The gun is the authority here. The AK47." By returning control to Somalia's official government, instead of dangerous and greedy clans like Al Shabaab, food and resources can be fairly distributed to the civilians of the country, thus ending food insecurity. This will also put an end to environmental degradation. If the poverty in Somalia ceases to exist, then the people would have the means to better utilize their resources. With a stable government, their agricultural staples could flourish into a profitable market to the benefit of everyone. This would also take stress from the women who are responsible for maintaining the household. With an increase in sustainable resource availability, women would be able to fulfill their household duties without harming the environment. Political stability would also give people access to better education which would lead to more advanced, sustainable agricultural practices that are also sustainable.

Resource depletion in Somalia is caused by the people of Somalia, but they have no other choice. There are so few resources that they use them at an unsustainable rate.

Population growth is also destroying the Somalis. In 1960, the population of Somalia was roughly around 2.8 million. Now the population stands at 11 million and growing by 450,000 people every year. Somalia does not have the resources to provide for a population increasing at this rate. Poverty will just get worse and worse. Water scarcity and drought cause disease and famine in Somalia. There is little safe water for

people to consume. Some Somali resort to drinking unsafe water out of desperation. This can cause parasites and infections, which are even worse in places where healthcare is not option.

To improve food security, a stable political system needs to be established in Somalia. Rebuilding Somalia is going to need removal of non-official governments, strengthening of official government, and cooperation from the civilians. Goal 8 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) plans to “Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system. That includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction both nationally and internationally.” By applying this goal to what needs to be done in Somalia, the country could see a big change by 2015. The government in Somalia needs support from powerful nations around the world. If the Transitional Federal Government had additional support, they could eradicate non official governments responsible for destroying Somalia.

Environmental degradation is another project to be worked on in Somalia. Charcoal and wood are the primary resources collected and used by Somali women to cook. Their consumption of wood surpasses the growth rate of the trees. Somalia’s climate is characterized by its dried out river beds and animals hiding in the shade of trees from the hot sun. The sun is the most abundant perpetual resource there. Solar power is a good alternative that could be applied.

Many people feel that Somalia is a failed and forgotten country. Some feel that it cannot be helped. Reform in Somalia is not impossible. With cooperation from the Somali and international allies, Somalia can be rebuilt by 2015. Some of the most helpful organizations would be the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank. The UN could organize a large group of volunteers who were willing to go to Somalia and aid the Somali government in restoring its power. The US or another developed country could send troops over to help. Any volunteer/troop should be educated in some Somali culture so that they may have an understanding of the people. Volunteers should be stationed in villages to ensure that the Somalis know that they are there to aid the country. These projects could be funded by the World Bank. Developed countries all around the world should start organizations specifically to raise money to help Somalia. There isn’t a lot that the Somali people can do since their problem stems from political instability caused by clans. As these reforms take place, the Somali people can do their best to cooperate by being peaceful with the troops and volunteers.

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