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Somalia, Education

Somalia: A Struggling Country in Need of Stronger Educational Roots to Prosper

Somalia is a federal republic country located on the horn of Africa, where the weather is blistering, and the storms are rancid. Somalia is predominantly desert, and the entire country is affected by irregular rainfall, recurring droughts, and seasonal monsoon winds. Plains, plateaus, highlands, and, even to the north, mountains can be seen. Central and southern Somalia is flat, and its east side is subtropical, surrounded by the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. This diverse place not only comes with unique geographic pieces, but also with a distinctive culture and way of life (Janzen and Lewis, 2021).

Somalia is a rural country where over 54% of their 15.9 million inhabitants live outside of the city lines. 70% of jobs are agricultural based, and the other 30% percent consist of various jobs involving telecommunications and manufacturing. A typical household size in Somalia is six or more people which is a stark difference when compared to the United States' average of 2.5 people per household (Janzen and Lewis, 2021). This fact becomes even more astounding when you bring housing into consideration. The average house size of a middle-class citizen is the size of the living room in a United States civilian's house. Somalian dwellings are either a cylindrical hut or a rectangular hut. All family members live in one room. They eat, sleep and defecate in the same room. In many lower-class citizen homes, they are lucky to have a clean place to eat and sleep (Janzen and Lewis, 2021). According to Kenneth Roth (2019), in 2018, over "2.6 million Somalis lived in protracted internal displacement" (para 19). This means in 2018, close to 3 million Somalis were forced to flee their homes due to natural, or human-made disasters, leaving most civilians in crowded housing situations or living a nomadic lifestyle. Farms in Somalia have made many improvements over the years, but most are small. According to the Nations Encyclopedia on Somalia Agriculture (2011), the average farm size is around twenty acres, and only 1.6% of Somalian land is cultivated. An additional 69% of the land has been set aside for permanent pasture. Somalia's major crops are bananas, sugar, sorghum, and corn. They export a large amount of livestock, bananas, skins, fish, charcoal, and scrap metal which helps the country provide more food and economic stability to their citizens.

Today, over 3.2 million people are food insecure, and over 275,000 children are malnourished in Somalia (World Food Program, 2019). Those numbers may still be huge today, but the country has recovered immensely. Most of Somalia's food insecurity came from natural disasters, such as flooding and drought destroying their crops and killing their livestock, violence and conflict, and their limited diet. Somalis have a special diet that consists of "halal", or allowable foods. Most Somali people are Sunni Muslims under Islamic Law, so they are prohibited from eating pork, drinking alcohol, or smoking. Meat consumed by Somalis must be slaughtered in a certain way while reciting prayers. Their diet is 98% meat, rice, and pasta (Davila, 2020). Eating fish is not popular there. Vegetables appear largely in every meal, but Vegetarianism is rare. The concept of "healthy" food and "junk" food does not matter in Somali minds, as long as the food they eat is "halal". Meals are usually cooked by the women who base meals largely on meat. Common meats include goat, beef, lamb, and sometimes chicken which are seasoned and served with basmati rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Somalis love fruit, most commonly mangoes, guava, bananas, dates, apples, oranges, pears, and grapes. Other popular foods include anjara, a homemade bread, black tea, and sambusas, dumplings filled with meat and vegetables. Somalis are required to fast from eating starting in the morning to the night during Ramadan (Davila, 2020). Fasting like this can also take place any time Somalis want more spiritual purification. Most fast for one day or more every month.

Somalis must follow certain dietary guidelines, and these guidelines are one of the main reasons they suffer from food insecurity. Their famine also resulted from violence and political instability in the country over the past twenty years along with natural disasters, both of which civilians cannot help. Organizations cannot do much to help with food insecurity in Somalia because their strict dietary guidelines prevent it (Davila, 2020). This consideration is where I believe hunger is no longer the biggest concern in the country, providing education is. Education, though it comes with many challenges to establish, is necessary in order to open Somalis' minds to new ideas that will help to improve the status of their country in the future, and to address the issues they face today.

Many circumstances make it difficult for Somali people to get an education. According to UNICEF (2019, "more than three million children in Somalia are out of school" (line 1). Funding inabilities, distance from school, safety concerns, favor of the male gender, lack of teachers, and low availability of sanitation facilities are issues that hold back parents from enrolling their children, especially their daughters, in school. Females have a difficult time trying to get basic education as well. Women in Somalia are still seen as housewives. Their spouses, and even themselves, believe they are not in need of an education to do housework, and for the women who seek a job out of the house, education is hard to come by (UNICEF, 2019). Additionally, basic healthcare is inadequate to meet the needs of the communities. This issue is so severe, according to the World Health Organization (2015), "only one in three Somalis has access to safe water; one in every nine Somali children dies before their first birthday; and the maternal mortality ratio is 850 deaths per 100,000 live births" (para 5). In addition, only fifty-two 52% percent of the population has access to a safe water source. Private water suppliers often lead to expensive prices which causes most families to get water from unsafe wells. As collecting water is usually a responsibility for women, the risk of physical or sexual assault at water points is high (UNICEF, 2019). Also, "twenty-eight 28% percent of the population defecate in the open," leading to high risks of contracting preventable diseases like diarrhea, cholera, and respiratory infections" (UNICEF, 2019, para 3). When women have to give birth in these conditions, their lives, as well as their babies' lives are at stake. As stated above, Somalis are still food insecure. Children and their parents will not prioritize education if they are hungry or worried about where their next meal will come from. Though there are many issues Somalis face on a daily basis that would make education seem impractical, education can actually improve their lives immensely. Education can provide facilities that can be a safe place for citizens to not only learn, but receive their life necessities. These facilities ideally would provide "halal" foods and clean water for families, guaranteeing one meal every time they attend their curriculum. Being an agricultural country, Somalis would not have to adopt the idea of farming. Instead of a traditional curriculum of Mathematics, Reading and Grammar, and Science, like you would see in the United States and other further developed countries, Somalia's educational system should consist of lessons on self-defense, women's rights, proper sanitation practices, water filtration, proper nutrition and possibly higher level lessons about farming, illnesses and care, pharmaceuticals, reading, and math. This system should be designed for women, specifically, because women control the home life of their families where many small things can be adjusted to save many lives. Children's most pressing needs are access to basic services, protection from violence and abuse, opportunities like access to education, and increased resilience. By educating Somali youth and women, these issues can be resolved. According to UNICEF (2019), "Quality education equips children to succeed in life, providing them with life skills to take care of themselves, and fulfill their potential" (para 4). The children's curriculum would also consist of self-defense and women's rights lessons, but would focus more on being self-sufficient and providing life skills that would make them more confident in their lives and their future. We hope with this education they will be able to gain knowledge to help them get good jobs that will provide food and other resources for their families. Education in Somalia is a priority because without it, Somalis will continue to die every day due to causes we know how to prevent.

Getting an education is a great opportunity for the future generations of Somalis, but the conflict in the past two decades has nearly destroyed Somalia's educational system they had established. The education provided was poor quality, had insufficient numbers of teachers, and inadequate necessary resources. The educational deficit in Somalia is one of the worst in the entire world. Of the 4.7 million school aged children, one out of every five is displaced due to drought and floods (USAID, 2020). Being displaced, or not living in a permanent home, takes away a child's opportunity to go to school. Somalia's livestock farming families, which is nearly sixty percent of the population, face even more problems getting education because their families are constantly on the move seeking water and pasture, making education impractical for them (UNICEF, 2019). Somalia faces issues with hunger, healthcare, and even basic services. Education is foundational to everything else. The issue that arises for us, the people that want to help, are the nomadic families. We must develop a way to educate those who do not know what the next day will bring. Being a mainly agricultural country, being able to feed and sustain livestock and grow produce is not an issue I see placed families facing, but it is a concern for the nomadic families. They too will need education on water quality, how to grow produce that travels, and further education about livestock nutrition. There is hope these families can still get the education they need. Now, Somalia just needs outside help. With a substantial recovery in its economy, Somalia has an opportunity to normalize its relations with International Financial Institutions which could help boost education access and quality (UNICEF, 2019). International Financial Institutions help to manage the global financial systems. The institutions are willing to develop a fund that will ensure adequate education financing across states that have incentives to increase student enrollment. Partnerships could complement the institution by providing technology to support teachers and students. To make this potential idea work, Somalia needs a few solutions to be ready to sustain a strong educational system. First, they need to increase enrollment and retention of school age children and target groups, like women. Then, they can start to explore established organizations that are willing to help.

Several organizations have started programs to try to increase the enrollment of students. An organization called the Alternative Basic Education for Pastoralists (ABE), works to expand the idea of education for nomadic pastoralist students. Their target group are children and youth six to fourteen years old who have been disconnected from school or have never been to school. ABE achieves its goals by creating a flexible calendar and times, temporary learning spaces along migration routes, mobile libraries, and interactive audio instructions. The curriculum is accelerated and condensed to fit grades one through eight into four years (USAID, 2020). ABE is also putting together a group of strengthened teachers to put through specialized training to learn the unique needs of students in displaced and nomadic communities. They are trying their best to work with communities to help support educational programs and increase interest among parents, elders, and religious leaders (USAID, 2020).

The most critical part of having a successful education system is support from community members, support groups, the government, and organizations. To start, Somalia needs to strengthen the capacity of community groups in order to support educational programs. Community support needs to be the first step. If there is no support from the community, Somalia cannot expect to increase enrollment in their programs. They can increase support by promoting the good results of education. After Somalia gains support for education in community support groups, the next step is to increase the support for education among parents, elders, and religious leaders. Somalis have certain restrictions when it comes to their Islamic religion. If religious leaders knew the benefits of education and promoted it to their people, it might help hesitant Somalis come around on the idea of education. In many countries, it is known that elders tend to have more of a traditional mindset. If they did not go to school, they may not want their grandchildren or nieces and nephews to attend school either. Organizations are more likely to work with community groups to promote education because they do not want to interfere with personal or family traditions and cultures (USAID, 2020). Somalis, like any other citizens around the world, are more likely

to listen to people of their own country. If leaders and people they know believe education is what the country is in need of, they are more likely to be open to the idea of sending their children to school, or supporting others to go to school.

Another issue that comes up when establishing a solid education system is enhancing the capacity of the government to develop a non-formal education policy and strategy. In other words, the government needs to raise money as well in order to create a non-formal, or out-of-school, education system that helps its citizens to grow in order to establish themselves in society and the community. An organization called Bar ama Baro aims to increase student enrollment in accelerated education centers, improve student safety, make improvements in literacy and socio-emotional development, and improve the Federal Government of Somalia's capacity to regulate accelerated education spaces (USAID, 2020). Bar ama Baro wants to encourage out of school aged children to reintegrate into the education system. They offer a compressed curriculum of basic education that is flexible, safe, and has high quality opportunities. Most of the education will be focused on improving literacy and numeracy skills as well as socio-emotional skills. They will also work to create positive gender norms, and provide technological assistance with the help of partnerships. The ultimate goal is to promote children and women receiving the education they deserve (USAID, 2020).

Once Somalia gains vast support and the government establishes a solid non-formal education policy, they need high quality education executed to the students. In order to do this, the education system needs to improve professional development and performance of teachers. As stated above, programs like ABE put potential teachers through specialized training. This training puts them through many classes to learn how to address the vulnerabilities and needs of their affected students. People around the world can help by providing funding for these specialized training programs. If aspired, people can also become a teacher in Somalia. The country is in desperate need of more qualified educators, especially of the female gender. Getting more women to teach in Somalia could also motivate more girl students to enroll in school (UNICEF, 2019). Educators will give the students the knowledge they need to be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to them later in life, therefore, these educators must be highly qualified for this situation.

How can we help Somalis adopt the idea of education? People in the United States can help increase enrollment by raising awareness about Somalia's situation and donating or volunteering for non-profit organizations that support education in third world countries. Non-profit organizations can head mission trips or other activities with tons of volunteers to help inform the people of Somalia of the benefits of education in the United States and in other countries that have had economic success through education. With time, promoting education enrollment in Somalia will get children and families excited to learn. With lots of support, volunteers, and funding, education enrollment can improve.

Somalia. A country, like a small seedling that needs nourishment to grow, needs an advanced educational system to take on its other issues. Education is the top priority in this country because it teaches the present and the future generations of Somalia to succeed, take care of themselves, and fulfill their potential. They are the future. Through many steps to form foundational accelerated educational institutions, build support walls in the community, and insulate the knowledge children gain through qualified teachers, children in Somalia will find that there is no limit to their potential in life.

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