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Somalia, Conflict

Somalia: The Key to Food Security Lays in Peace

Conflict and food security often combine to form a positive feedback loop: increasing one factor causes and expands the other. In a sort of Catch-22, neither issue can be rectified without the resolution of the other. Somalia is a prime example of this situation. Decades of civil war have torn apart a once-prosperous and self-sufficient nation, creating a country of chronic conflict and food insecurity. Crumbling infrastructure, a destabilized government, and climatic issues have further exacerbated and been exacerbated by conflict and food insecurity. In a country of 14.32 million people, an end to these problems is paramount.

Located near the equator, Somalia has a year-long temperature of 30-40 °C. Only 1.6% of Somalia's total land area is cultivated, while 69% is permanent pasture. The average Somali farm is four hectares, and produces corn, sugar, beans, sorghum, millet, and bananas (WFP). Together, bananas, fish and livestock are 90% of Somalia's exports, as agriculture is the largest economic sector in Somalia, providing 80% of employment and 60% of Somalia's Gross Domestic Product (FAO). Livestock is particularly integral in Somalia, as most Somalis are pastoral, keeping goats, sheep, camels and cattle. This lifestyle has led to a small urban population in Somalia- only 14%- while 60% live in rural areas, and 26% live nomadic lifestyles (UNFPA).

Somali herdsmen, nomads, and farmers live similar lives. Their diets consist of durra, sorghum, rice, dates, honey, corn, tea, and milk from goats, cows, and camels (WFP). Cooking is mainly done outside over charcoal or wood fires, or in communal cooking huts. The typical house of Somali herdsmen and nomadic families are dome-shaped collapsible huts called aqals. Aqals are made of hides, fiber-mats, or cloth-covered poles (UNFPA). Farmers and other rural groups live in round or rectangular huts built of poles and brush, with thatched or tin roofs called mundals. In urban areas, houses are typically Arab-style, made of white-washed stone or brick. Rich Somalis and Europeans live in Western-style villas; some of the few locations in Somalia with access to electricity, running water, sanitation services, and paved roads. As for other Somalis, only 45% have access to improved water sources, while only 25% have access to sanitation facilities within 10 metres (United Nations).

Officially, Somalia has public education. Unofficially, few people can take advantage of it- and those who can rarely finish their education. Somalian schools are few and far between, often only accessible to children in urban areas. Even within urban areas, underqualified teachers and a lack of food and resources cause many Somalis to drop out by the fifth grade. Due to these factors, only thirty percent of school-aged Somali children attend school, and only 37.8% of Somalis are literate (UNICEF).

Somalia's healthcare system is similar to its educational system- in theory, Somalia has one, but in practice, it's poor, inefficient, and inaccessible to the majority of the population. The United Nations Children's Fund and the UNICEF provide most of the health care and health information services in Somalia (UNICEF). Unfortunately, they have few locations, and many people lack access to them. To counteract this deficit, most Somalis visit folk healers or private doctors, both of whom are largely unqualified.

The Somali Civil War has been a main cause for the lack of Somali healthcare. Beginning in 1987, the civil war has taken place between a number of belligerents- Islamic and jihadist groups, rebel groups, warring factions of the government, and outside countries. Currently, the battle is split between the Federal Government of Somalia and extremist groups Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Somalia (United Nations). Each group is supported by other nations providing air-strikes, raids, and supplies.

For decades during the Civil War, Somalia didn't have an official government. In 2012, the Federal Government of Somalia became internationally recognized. Unfortunately, this has produced problems of its own, as the Somali government is one of the most corrupt in the world (Gan). In 2009-2010, \$131 million of government money was found unaccounted for (World Bank). Embezzlement, misappropriation, and theft of public resources is systematic and commonplace, creating a structurally-unsound country with little faith in its own government. This lack of governmental trust and faith has lent credence to other factions of the civil war, especially as many of these factions distribute food to those who follow them.

No matter which faction they support, though, the Somali Civil War has had a host of negative effects on the lives of all Somalis. Many innocent citizens are killed each year as byproducts of conflict, while others are forced to watch their homes and families be destroyed. Over 2.1 million Somalis have been internally displaced, with thousands more attempting to leave (Human Rights Watch). With so many warring factions, there are no concrete justice or judicial systems, leading to arbitrary punishments and executions by different groups. Women have been particularly affected by this, as after the collapse of the government in 1991 the "legal protection of human rights of women" was removed (Somali Women). Since then, Sharia Law, rape, sexual and gender-based violence, female trafficking, female genital mutilation, and early and forced marriages have increased. Children have been similarly affected, as many become orphaned and homeless as a result of the war. Thousands more have been drafted or kidnapped, indoctrinated and forced to fight as child-soldiers (Human Rights Watch).

Frequent battles and air-strikes have destroyed Somali infrastructure and agriculture. This has driven up the price of staple foods, and inversely dropped the price of livestock, driving many Somalis to poverty, and forcing 43% of Somalis to live on less than 1 US dollar a day (Burke). Further, the war has destroyed agricultural systems in place to conserve water and provide irrigation, leaving Somalis more susceptible to droughts (US News). The combination of these actions has caused Somalia to reach high levels of food

insecurity, with 2.3 million people in a food crisis state, 802,000 in an emergency state, and 1.2 million children projected to be malnourished in 2018 (FSNAU). Food insecurity has increased 10x since early 2017, and has steadily worsened with the length of the Somali conflict.

At the same time, international aid to Somalia has decreased, as humanitarian agencies are blocked by extremist groups, attacks against aid workers, and foreign counter-terrorism legislation. This legislation often interprets aid as “material support for terrorism”, and creates restrictions on aid distribution. When food aid is allowed, it’s usually obstructed by the Al-Shabaab, who block the routes the aid trucks need to take, and steal the food for themselves and their followers (Onyulo).

The first step in improving Somalia’s food security is ending the Somali Civil War. The de-escalation of this conflict will take several steps, beginning with the declaration of Somalia as a demilitarized zone, off-limits to all foreign militaries, aside from a UN peacekeeper force. Passing an international referendum making Somalia a no-fly zone- with sanctions against countries in violation- would immediately end airstrikes and foreign military missions that perpetuate conflict. This would end the arbitrary mass destruction of Somali infrastructure, livestock, and agricultural land, giving Somalis the chance to regain control of their food supply.

Next, the Somali government must be amended. Currently, it lacks any citizen trust or support, and only increases the negative effects of the Somali Civil War. An end to the Somali government’s corruption would allow previously-misappropriated resources and money to be used in support of citizens. This would enable them to rebuild infrastructure, create an adequate healthcare system, and provide agricultural assistance. Humanitarian organizations could then access vulnerable populations and distribute food aid as a short-term solution to end the rising possibility of famine in Somalia. With the government’s support, and a decrease in aid-disruption and militant attacks, millions of lives could be saved through food aid.

This food-aid would protect Somali lives while the Somali Civil War is brought to an end. Decades of fighting have ripped Somalia apart and kept it from stabilization. An end to the war would further the peace formed by de-milizarizing Somalia, permitting the government to allocate more resources to the Somali people, and allowing them to focus on ending food insecurity. Ending the Civil War would give Somalia the opportunity to rebuild itself, and create a long-term solution to food insecurity.

The issue of Somali food insecurity cannot be solved in a single day or process. Food security will require the end of a decades-long war, and the formation of unity among the Somali people. To reach this goal, we must follow the wisdom of an old Somali proverb, “Sorrow is like rice in the store; if a basketful is removed everyday, it will come to an end at last” (Lieberman). It’s important to treat both conflict and food insecurity in Somalia in this way, continuing our efforts and making both short and long-term plans and solutions. Each day’s effort will make a difference, and eventually, through the end of conflict, Somalia

will have the chance to know both food security and peace.

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