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Somalia, Conflict

Somalia's Civil War and Its Agricultural Sector

Somalia is an African country bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean to its north and east respectively, surrounded by Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya (Stremlau, 2019). It is a semi-arid country with mountains in its north and a subtropical region to its south, hosting a population of around 16 million people (Stremlau, 2019). Somalia is relatively ethnically homogenous, 85% of the population being both ethnically Somali and Muslim (Stremlau, 2019). After the collapse of the dictatorial Siad-Barre regime in 1991, inter-clan violence spiraled into a deadly civil war that is ongoing to this day. The Somali Civil War has led to the deaths of over 450,000, as well as the internal displacement of over 1.5 million (Norris and Bruton, 2011). The displaced population of farmers coupled with clan competition over resources and a weak federal government has led to cereal yields decreasing by over 66%, resulting in mass food insecurity and Somalia having to increasingly rely on foreign imports (Agricultural Livelihoods and Food Security in the Context of Covid-19, 2021). In order to assist the Somali population, the Somali government must take a more proactive approach in ending the civil war through diplomacy and construct stronger infrastructure to assist Somali farmers in crop production.

In Somali culture, family is the most important aspect of an individual's life, forming the basis of their support networks (Stremlau, 2019). A Somali's family refers to their extensive kinship network, which belongs to a greater sub-clan and clan based on shared ancestry (Stremlau, 2019). Somali family culture is very collectivist, with clearly defined gender roles and parents being held in high regard (Stremlau, 2019). A majority of Somali households are agro-pastoralist and rely on their livestock as a staple food, but differing environmental conditions lead to a diverse fusion cuisine (The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity, 2012). Because 77% of all ethnic Somali are Sunni Muslim, Somali cuisine is united in being halal (The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity, 2012). With regards to the living conditions of the average Somali household, there is a severe lack of infrastructure due to the ongoing civil war. Only 34% of all Somali households have access to sanitation services, and only 6% have access to antenatal care (Triolet, 2019). Households also face severe food insecurity due to drought and armed conflict, with over 2.1 million Somali requiring urgent care to prevent acute malnutrition as of 2021 (Somalia: Agricultural Livelihoods and Food Security in the Context of COVID-19, 2021).

Somalia's burgeoning agricultural sector is a source of major optimism for Somalia's future prospects. Around 46% of Somali are employed in crop cultivation, and in the first half of the 2010s, agricultural exports accounted for 93% of all of Somalia's total exports (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Somalia's vast and fertile land mass represents a diverse and untapped source of development that could support economic recovery and future development. Vast lands could support greater livestock rearing, while forests provide one of the world's few sources of frankincense and arabic gum (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Particularly along Somalia's Shebelle and Juba rivers, cereal crops such as sorghum and maize are grown, which represent important staples of the

Somali diet (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). More efficient exploitation of these resources could be the catalyst for future economic development.

However, Somali farmers face a multitude of challenges that prevent Somalia's agricultural sector from flourishing. The average Somali farm is 2-5 hectares, with average yields of 300 kg/hectare, 20% of that in developed nations (Haji and Porter, 2021). This can be mainly attributed to a lack of any real agricultural infrastructure; Somali farmers typically lack access to farming equipment, resources to make informed decisions regarding their crops, and irrigation and transportation systems in an environment where water is scarce (Haji and Porter, 2021). Climate change has exacerbated the issue of lack of water, with frequent droughts, especially in Somalia's central and northern regions which received very little rainfall (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Conflicts over a lack of water have become a source of conflict between nomadic pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, contributing to the Somali Civil War's excessive length (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Civil unrest, in part caused by conflicts over water resources, directly causes the further deterioration of irrigation infrastructure, worsening water scarcity and beginning a vicious cycle of water scarcity and desperation (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). From this, it is clear that in order to rebuild Somalia's agricultural sector, the Somali war must first come to an end.

Since its beginnings with the fall of the Siad-Barre regime in 1992 and its continuation to present day, the Somali Civil War has wreaked havoc on Somalia's agricultural sector. Somalia's troubles can be traced back to the brutal and authoritarian Siad-Barre regime, who exploited and worsened clan rivalries for political gain. After a coup attempt due to a failed invasion of Ethiopia, the Siad-Barre regime began a campaign of brutal retaliation against the main clans of Somalia, leading to the eventual overthrow of the Siad-Barre regime in 1992. However, the resulting power vacuum led to the outbreak of locally based clan conflicts all across Somalia, worsened by the emergence of radical terrorist groups. Particularly in the south, where armed militias control large swaths of farming land, crippling insecurity makes access to markets difficult and unprofitable (Somalia: Food Security and Malnutrition Snapshot, 2021). Uncontrolled warfare has led nearly 3.5 million Somali to be acutely food insecure, with the lives of over 1.2 million children at stake, acutely demonstrating the severity of the situation (Somalia: Food Security and Malnutrition Snapshot, 2021).

In particular, the terrorist insurgency Al-Shabaab has arguably contributed the most to wartime devastation of the agricultural sector in Somalia. A group of radical Islamic militants, Al-Shabaab generally aims to oust the current Federal Government of Somalia established in 2012, enforcing Sharia law in broad sweeps of land in the south (Felter, et. al, 2021). Although having mostly been driven away from Somalia's capital of Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab has been locked in an over seven year bloody stalemate with Somali federal forces, prolonging the civil war and foiling attempts at statebuilding (Felter, et. al, 2021). Al-Shabaab places strict limitations on international humanitarian intervention, for example banning all food from the World Food Drive, worsening the conditions of already food insecure households (Harper, 2020). Furthermore, Al-Shabaab places exorbitant tributes on already burdened households, who demand 2.5% of all of farmer's yearly profits, along with regular monthly payments (Harper, 2020). Because of this, farmers turn to cash crops such as sesame in order to survive, instead of

producing staple crops such as sorghum which offer better food security. These two factors lead to the devastating 2012 drought, in which 260,000 Somali died (Somalia famine 'killed 260,00 people', 2013).

Any solution developed to address Somalia's problems must involve returning legitimacy and control to Somalia's federal government. Somalia's current government is extremely unpopular and internally contradictory, so much so that local bad actors have used the faults of the Somali government to gain public support and justify their existence, leading to prolonged conflict in Somalia's civil war (Samatar, 2021). In response to this, the Somalia government should adopt a three pronged plan dedicated to returning legitimacy and prosperity to Somalia's public sector. First, the Somali government must work towards ending the civil war by negotiating with al-Shabaab, establishing institutions of local conflict resolution to reduce the outbreak of conflict. Next, the Somali government must protect farmers from war and exploitation, incentivizing them towards food production. Finally, the Somali government can directly invest in Somali's agricultural sector by teaching farmers land management techniques as well as directly investing in infrastructure, further boosting economic development. This three step plan can effectively address criticisms of the federal government, as well as paving the way for Somalia's future development through the agricultural sector.

First, the Somali government should begin to use negotiation as a tool to end the long Somali civil war. In particular, the Federal Somali Government is in a prime position to negotiate with Al-Shabaab after years of bloody stalemate. As of late, Al-Shabaab has shifted its focus from global jihad to a local one, cutting ties with al-Qaeda and beginning recognizing Somalia's borders (Shire, 2021). As such, Al-Shabaab has become more mindful of public opinion, reinventing its much feared military police Jaysh al-Hisbah to an "unarmed unit to provide moral guidance" as well as signaling its willingness to engage in debates with the public (Shire, 2021). In light of these facts, the Somali government should use respected clan leaders as a backchannel for communicating with Al-Shabaab. In response to a lack of institutions for conflict resolution, respected clan leaders have developed a system of conflict resolution called Xeer. Clan leaders have, in the past, already been influential in negotiating settlements with Al-Shabaab, negotiating in 2016 a truce to prevent the execution of hundreds of Somali federal soldiers in the captured town of Gal-ad (Shire, 2021). By using clan leaders as an intermediary, the Somali federal government can engage and support Al-Shabaab's more moderate voices, paving the way for future concessions and peace. Furthermore, by allying with clan leaders and religious voices, the Somali Federal Government can extend its influence past Mogadishu and establish systems of informal conflict resolution, reducing the onset of local violence. If the Somali Federal Government takes more proactive action in negotiating peace with Al-Shabaab, conflict related pressures will be lifted on farmers, allowing them to thrive better.

After these steps have been taken, the Somali government can then incentivize food production through the protection of farmers. Currently, farmers are de-incentivized from food production by illegal taxation of goods by rebel groups and government officials alike, as well as a vacuum of judicial institutions which prevents farmers from reclaiming their lost land (Porter and Haji, 2021). Poor land ownership laws lead to vulnerable groups having their land stolen from them by more powerful clans or individuals, with no clear method of judicial recourse. In response to this, the Somali government should instigate land ownership laws and strengthen its judicial

arbitration system, which would not only resolve current land ownership disputes, but also incentivize farmers to improve agricultural infrastructure on their own land. These institutions would need to be developed in tandem with local communities to fit their unique needs, as well as requiring security means to enforce new land ownership if necessary. The Somali government could use freed up military personnel to provide enhanced security in local areas as well as to enforce land ownership laws after negotiations with Al-Shabaab succeed. Further platforms of accountability and interlocutors can help vulnerable individuals navigate new systems of justice, giving them ways to air grievances to power abusers. Enhanced security in agricultural areas would also prevent illegal taxation by rebel groups and government officials, freeing humanitarian donor funds preoccupied with providing basic security to go directly to helping the Somali people. These policies lay the foundation for an independent agricultural sector, while also further reducing the outbreak of conflicts over land ownership by establishing stronger justice institutions (Porter and Haji, 2021).

The Federal Government of Somalia can further boost its own legitimacy by promoting agricultural management techniques to its farmers through its Ministry of Agriculture. Simple agricultural management techniques have been established to be key factors in increasing crop yields in sub-Saharan Africa, so the Somali federal government should integrate these techniques in public awareness campaigns towards farmers. The government should aggressively promote proper land management and irrigation techniques to increase the production of staple crops to prevent food insecurity. Furthermore, local programs could introduce fertilizers, seeds, and techniques to best maximize their potential to farmers, many of which lack basic farming necessities. With only slight integration of these sorts of simple managerial techniques, sesame farmers have already produced yields almost four times higher than their current average yields (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). The Somali Federal Government can fund these programs through redistribution of their military budget towards agriculture, which represent over 32.2% and 1.4% of the total budget respectively (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). This redistribution is justified with the lessened need of fighting insurgencies after peace negotiations have taken place. Greatly increased tax revenues from increased agricultural production can further make up for the loss. By allying with NGOs and expanding the reach of agricultural educational programs, the Somali government can drastically increase crop production in the whole of the nation, bringing unprecedented prosperity to the nation. These policies could move Somalia from relying on humanitarian aid to development aid, providing much needed jobs for Somalia's youth, which make up almost 70% of its total population (Porter and Haji, 2021).

Initiatives such as ProAct by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation serve as a model on how local outreach programs can drive rural development. ProAct aims to bolster resilience and food security in local communities by teaching improved crop management and improving irrigation access (Assessing canals and restoring irrigation in Somalia, 2019). ProAct not only scouts out and digs irrigation canals, but conducts technical training with local ministers so communities have the tools to maintain and utilize canals (Assessing canals and restoring irrigation in Somalia, 2019). Increased access to irrigation allows farmers to farm year round instead of waiting for the rainy season, and the land management techniques ensure they have the skills to be self-sufficient. By ensuring universal access to water, farmers had incentives to work together to properly manage resources, ensuring a more peaceful community as well as increased

food security. Although funded by the EU, programs such as ProAct frequently run into budget issues, highlighting the real need for governments and NGOs to adequately fund these programs. Future programs could synthesize with ProAct, teaching farmers important management skills on how to adequately utilize fertilizers and technologies, while simultaneously building the infrastructure and teaching the skills needed to utilize such infrastructure.

Another step the Somali government could take is to directly invest in public infrastructure, much of which is severely lacking due to the war. The Somali government should also build infrastructure such as roads and canals to improve transportation of key goods to markets, much of which is at risk of perishing before it can be sold. To further prevent the postharvest waste of food, which is estimated to be in the 20-30% range, the Somali government should both promote better post harvest storage techniques and provide dry storage facilities such as metal silos to farmers (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Investments in Somalia's much deteriorated irrigation canals and flood controls can further maximize cereal production, helping solidify food security in the struggling nation (Rebuilding Resilient and Sustainable Agriculture in Somalia, 2018). Better infrastructure such as the ones listed above mainly serve as reinforcements against drought and other forms of climate volatility, conserving water and food resources for challenging times, reducing conflicts over resources that prolong the civil war.

The complexity of Somalia's war and its drastic lack of infrastructure has led to many characterizing it solely as a failed state. However, such a classification ignores the resilience and power of the Somali people to persevere through over thirty years of strife, as well as the boundless potential of Somalia's agricultural sector currently being strangled by poor management and relentless war. By directly protecting the Somali people, proactively moving towards peace through negotiation, and establishing greater agricultural infrastructure, the Federal Government of Somalia can pave the way for future prosperity.

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