

Anna Olson
Boone High School
Boone, IA
Somalia, Human Rights

Somalia: The Challenges and Opportunities to Make it a Better Place for its People

There is a state that you enter before sleep where you're half awake and half asleep. Known as hypnagogia, this is the transitional point before sleep where there are no dreams and no nightmares, just a peaceful interlude. Imagine that you are coming out of this peaceful interlude and you start to stir, you feel the soft flutter of your eyelashes against your skin, the sun's warmth streaming through your body, and a feeling of tranquility enveloping your body. But as you awaken, you lift your drooping eyelids to see that you are outside. The dirt is your floor, and you have been lying there the whole night. The grass, shrubs, and sticks are what make up your bed - your home. This is the reality for many people living in third world countries. This is the reality in Somalia. Somalis constantly wake up to face the hard realization that they may lose their home, however meager, at almost any time. They face the reality daily that they may not be able to eat, sleep in a safe place, or support their family. Worst of all, they face the reality that they could be personally violated, or murdered, at any given moment.

Somalia has many serious problems and is notorious for having human rights violations. According to Human Rights Watch, "over one million Somalis remain internally displaced, facing serious abuses and very limited access to basic services." These issues contribute to the food insecurity issues in Somalia and all around the world. By focusing on overcoming these issues, many individuals can prioritize the food insecurity problem. Based on a report published by The Guardian, "Human rights are the best weapon to combat hunger." Lawrence Haddad and Arne Oshaug in an International Food Policy Research Institute document, showed the way that Somalia can be helped requires by prioritizing important actions. "In terms of promoting food and nutrition security, it is argued that the human rights perspective can, among other things (1) provide food and nutrition policymakers with increased leverage in the battle to prioritize food and nutrition issues higher in public spending allocations (Oshaug, Barth Eide, and Eide 1994), (2) lead to a greater appreciation of the integrated nature of approaches to overcoming food insecurity and malnutrition (Oshaug, Barth Eide, and Eide 1994), (3) result in a better synergism between process-oriented and outcome-oriented development approaches (Jonsson 1995, 1996), (4) unlock existing resources for the fight against malnutrition (Robertson 1996), and (5) provide "minimum moral standards and targets for humanitarian relief" (Marchione 1996, 99)."

Somalia has many very important human rights issues that need to be addressed, based on the Human Rights Report from the US Department of State. They include child recruitment, sexual abuse, killing of civilians by security forces and many other notable violations caused by a Somali Al Shabaab terror group. Focusing on eliminating the stripping of children's youth, eliminating sexual mistreatment of Somali woman and eliminating corrupt practices of its security forces are very important solutions that can improve Somalia and its quality of life. These solutions are the foundation necessary to rejuvenating Somalia's food production and distribution processes.

The first very important human rights issue that needs to be addressed in Somalia is elimination of child recruitment. Children in Somalia are being "recruited" into two predominantly known groups, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and the Al Shabaab. The AMISOM is a group that focuses on global peace keeping efforts in the region. The group is operated by the African Union with approval by the United Nations. One of their roles is supporting the Federal Government in fighting the

Al Shabaab. However, the group, seemingly helpful, hides many underhanded and corrupt actions. For example, the group reportedly recruited 218 children to work as child laborers and spies, forced them to transport explosives and ammunition and other dangerous tasks.

The other group actively recruiting children in Somalia is Al Shabaab, a Somali group that the United States designated as a foreign terrorist organization in March 2008. An article written by Holly Yan and published by CNN explained that Al Shabaab wants to turn Somalia into a fundamentalist Islamic state, according to the Council on Foreign Relations. An informational video published by the Human Rights Watch displayed the stories of two unidentified children that experienced the horror of the terrorist group. The fittest and most admirable children were identified by the Al Shabaab and were forced out of their classrooms to the front lines of war. There, children are strategically placed in front of adult Al Shabaab fighters to be used as human shields or “cannon fire”, explained Zama Coursen-Neff from the Human Rights Watch. This example is one of many atrocities that children may go through if recruited into the Al Shabaab.

How does this situation affect food insecurity? These groups force children out of their classrooms, leaving them uneducated in many areas of study. The UNICEF report, *Federal Government of Somalia launches its Child Rights Bill Drafting Process*, explains “Somalia has one of the world’s lowest enrollment rates for primary school-aged children – only 30 percent of children are in school and only 40 percent of these are girls.” Without being in the social school environment many children don’t have the necessities they need to be successful and help their country thrive. A statistic from Global Partnership for Education stated “Education reduces poverty, boosts economic growth and increases income.”

A way to address the problem of child recruitment is involvement by countries like the United States. According to the Borgen Project, U.S. Foreign Aid helps to provide military assistance to allies, aid developing nations, dispense economic assistance to fledgling democracies, promote U.S. exports abroad, make U.S. payments to international organizations and contribute to international peacekeeping efforts. The goal would be to help Somalia strengthen its democratic systems so that it can eventually solve the problem itself. Since the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Somalia in 1960, there are many things that America can offer, including promoting, enforcing and stopping the recruitment of children.

Another key way that America can help Somalia is to work to reduce the recruitment of children into Al Shabaab by providing better security in schools, and by helping Somalia increase security in communities to decrease the recruitment of children. This action will hopefully lower the risk of children being unprotected in their learning and growing environments. The United States must also encourage and support the passing of child rights bills and other important protections that help keep children from being recruited by government officials. An example of a bill that focuses on the rights of children is the Child Rights Bill. This bill was launched by a drafting process by the Ministry of Women and the Human Rights Development of the Federal Government of Somalia. This promoted the protection of all children’s rights in the country. The United States could support one of the many efforts like this in Somalia.

Unfortunately, ways to address problems aren’t always easily found. The challenge for the United States in offering assistance and support to Somalia at this time is the newly installed travel ban put in place by the United States. The travel ban, ordered by President Donald Trump, “indefinitely suspends the issuance of immigrant and nonimmigrant visas to applicants from the Muslim-majority countries Libya, Iran, Somalia, Syria and Yemen — plus North Korea and Venezuela” explained the New York Times. This ban

causes citizens of these countries to be denied the opportunity to learn from the United States, along with not allowing world leaders to have negotiations and important world changing conversations on United States soil. The President claims that the purpose of the ban is to reduce the chance of terrorists from reaching the United States. However, it may actually cause a divide between countries, thus promoting more isolationism to already struggling countries and potentially allowing more terrorist cells to emerge. On the other hand, seeking United States help would have many noticeable pros. If Somalia continues to seek help, and the U.S. agrees, this could unify Somalia and the United States. Stabilizing the country of Somalia can help the U.S. gain a strong ally in the region to help in the future. Secondly, the United States would also gain from access to Somalia's important exports and crops such as bananas, sugarcane, sheep, and goats if they assist the country with their problems.

A second very important human rights issue that needs to be addressed in Somalia is sexual assault. According to Human Rights Watch, most sexual assault violations occur among women and children. "Here rape is normal" a Somali woman proclaimed according to Human Rights Watch. With women often traveling long distances to purchase food and other necessities in towns like Mogadishu or Baidoa, they are often found on a journey that leads them to unsafe areas and an increased likelihood of being sexually assaulted. In many instances women turn to police informants for aid after they have been violated. The common response of an officer tends to be a demand that the woman go home to clean herself. This leads women to not report the violation acted against them. Not only is the violation a huge issue, but this also causes females to feel uncomfortable in their communities, consequently they cannot safely obtain the food needed to distribute to their families. These terrible violations by predators, and even the Somali government, prevents them from focusing on growing and distributing food, which is their predominant role in society as explained by the Human Rights Watch.

It is very important to focus on eliminating sexual assault. One way to prevent sexual assault is by establishing healthcare institutions and decreasing corruption in the police force. Healthcare institutions have trained professionals that know how to help victims after incidents of sexual assault. Healthcare professionals can establish different programs to help the victim heal in order to return to their homelife and assist their family in the way they need to. Healthcare assistance can also spot an endangered person and then follow certain rules in order to protect the individual. These healthcare institutions are necessary for the health and protection of women.

A third very important human rights issue that needs to be addressed in Somalia is eliminating corrupt practices of its security forces. There needs to be tighter government regulations on police and militia members. When a government official is involved in a human rights violation like sexual assault, there is a lot of mistrust within the community. The government needs to eliminate corruption from within and educate the military on human rights. Then it can strengthen and enforce the punishment for those military members who commit violent crimes against its citizens.

One way to address this problem is education and training for its officers. This can be done through training sessions that teach police enforcement how to file reports against fellow officers that have violated a law. These trainings can also consist of daily reminders to police authority about what they are able and unable to do in their positions and clear repercussions if they don't abide by and enforce the rules. If these options are adopted, sexual assault will slowly diminish and survivors will receive the assistance they need and be able to become productive members of society again.

How will these ways to address the problem directly help the situation of food insecurity? Somalia is currently trying to recover from the food insecurity and famine of 2011, although the country has been

making its way up from the famine, it has another problem that needs to be addressed. With poor rainfall in rural areas and low river levels there is increasing crop failure. As addressed by the World Food Programme “As of May 2018, 2.7 million people cannot meet their daily food requirements today and require urgent humanitarian assistance, with more than half a million on the brink of famine. Another 2.7 million Somalis need livelihood support to keep from sliding into crisis. An estimated 300,000 children under age 5 are malnourished, including 48,000 who are severely malnourished and face a high risk of disease and death.” There is no room for more economic failure. With the current level of corruption within Somalia's government, it is nearly impossible to focus on the struggle of hunger, clean drinking water, or many other important issues. A corrupt government cannot focus on the major issue of human rights violations and ensure that the country is thriving. With children being recruited into the hands of the corrupt government, they are not in school receiving an education. With children being the future of the country, they have no chance to learn how to make Somalia better through education when they themselves are being violated. If the issue of recruitment is solved, young students will be educated on ways to improve their food supply and their country. In Somalia women are a big part of the distribution and making of food. Women being empowered and educated can provide the answer to food insecurity. However, they cannot solve the food insecurity problems while being victims of sexual assault, being afraid to leave their homes to do what they predominantly do, which is providing food to their family. Living in a society where women aren't able to access law enforcement and emotional support services that are offered to women in other countries is not acceptable. If the issue of human rights violations is solved, the issue of food insecurity will likely decrease.

Finding a solution to these problems is complex. However, there are many things that Somalia can do to counteract civil rights violations and to focus on the dire need of food insecurity. The Somali government can reach out to other countries like the United States for support if the United States showed that it is willing to help. The United States government could help Somalia focus on decreasing the amount of corruption evident in the police force. Once security is established, it can help Somalis ensure a safe and secure country for its people, develop much needed health centers to care for victims of sexual assault, and help Somalis safely obtain the food needed to distribute to their families. The country can also focus on establishing healthcare institutions that will give back to the Somali people that struggle with issues in their community. Once Somalis feel they have outlets they can reach out to, they will start to take more action within their country and make a change. The last things Somalia can do is focus on its corrupt police forces. These citizens are spearheads in making decisions within in the government. If corruption occurs in law enforcement, what stops it from happening in the community. By focusing on the police force Somalia can have positive influencers that will boost the security of Somalia. These solutions may take time and energy, but they could lead to rejuvenating Somalia's food production and distribution processes.

Imagine again that you are in the state of hypnagogia now, the transitional point where there are no dreams and no nightmares, just a peaceful interlude. You start to stir, you feel the soft flutter of your eyelashes against your skin, the sun's warmth streaming through your body, and a feeling of tranquility enveloping your body. As you awaken, your eyes flutter open to see the sun streaming through the cracks of the blinds that are covering your bedroom window. You look down to see you are on a comfortable and clean bed, in a clean home with food available. You realize that you can leave the house you are in and seek jobs, opportunities, and love, without the fear of facing an assault. This may be your reality as an American, but shouldn't it be the reality for Somalis too?

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