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Somalia, Food Insecurity and Governmental Conflict

Somalia and Food Insecurity: A History and How to Solve it

Six million people in Somalia are facing severe hunger (World Food Program USA. 2023, March 12). Somalia is the eighth hungriest nation in the world with 43,000 hunger related deaths in 2022 alone (UNICEF. 2023, March 20). The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is incapacitated, thanks in part to political and physical conflict. The Somali Government requires some major changes, and all sparks of violence must be put out.

Somalia was originally under British and Italian control and gained independence in 1960. A provisional president was appointed in 1960, and a constitution in 1961. But it didn't last long. In 1969, a military coup d'état overthrew the current government. Thus began a cycle of violence and war that would continue for the next 50 years. Multiple constitutions were made, fought over, and destroyed. Even when there were periods of relative stability, people still suffered from violence. The most recent government, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), was established in 2012 when Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected president. This period of Somali history (2012-present) is called a conflict period. There have been many of these throughout the past 50 years, and this period is one of the most destructive and violent in Somalia's history (University of Arkansas, 2024)

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has struggled with controlling poverty and famine due to internal and external conflict, both physical and political. The most undermining factor of the FGS is al-Shabaab, a terrorist organization founded under the wing of the Islamic Courts Union (Congressional Research Service, 2023). This group has been around since the mid-2000s and has been undermining all attempts at peace in Somalia (Congressional Research Service, 2023). Al-Shabaab controls large portions of central and south Somalia and has maintained this control for over five years. They do this by providing support and security that the FGS fails to provide, which helps them gain the support of the people. Much of the rest of Somalia is controlled by clans or separate governments (Puntland, Somaliland), while the FGS controls some major cities including Mogadishu.

Internal conflict also plays a role in the FGS's power. Much of this comes from the system of clans in the region. Somalia has many large clans with significant military and political influence over the FGS. The oldest of these clans trace roots to the ninth century, and most people in Somalia hold more faith in their respective clans than the government. This leads to an electoral system where members of the high clans get the most voting power over the president and anything the president tries to do. This further limits the passing and implementation of life-saving bills because if a clan doesn't agree with the act, they can shut it down in the Somali senate or militarily in the areas they control. The Somali Senate also has diversity

problems, as most senators are men. Any internally displaced citizen who may be directly affected by these measures does not have any political power. All of this compounds the Somali government getting pressured into doing what the clans want, even when it isn't in the best interest of the wider population. And even when an act gets passed, it is most often met with resistance by al-Shabaab.

When a government cannot function properly, its people get left behind, resulting in widespread suffering. In the case of Somalia, the internal and external conflict described above resulted in the deaths of over 40,000 people in 2022 and millions more at risk each year (. One proposed solution is a total reform of the FGS, with international aid as needed. The first place to start is in the election of government officials. With the current system, the people of Somalia do not have voting power, which gives the power to self-serving clans. I propose implementing a one-person, one-vote system. This would allow every citizen in Somalia to have equal voting power and remove the direct influence of the Somali clans on elections. In connection with this, a removal of the electoral system so that the president must win the popular vote.

The next major step is an overhaul of the Somali Congress. One possible solution is moving into a district system. This would assign representative seats to each district of Somalia, and allow the residents there to vote on their representatives. This would further democratic efforts in Somalia but could pose some challenges. The largest being corruption. If these changes were implemented while clans still had power, then they could gerrymander the regions in an attempt to stay in power. Another possibility is removing all sitting members of Congress, and holding a nationwide election to choose new representatives. This has the benefit of allowing the citizens to choose, while not allowing for gerrymandering. But this could also overwhelm the people and cause more confusion. We know this has potential because of Somaliland, an autonomous region in north Somalia. In 2017 they had a very successful election, despite the chaos in the region (Safer World, 2017).

With the FGS' resources spread so thin, proper financing remains a significant issue. This is challenging to solve at the national level, so my solution would be to reach out to other nations, mainly the United States of America. In 2023, the US spent \$61 billion on foreign aid, with over \$3 billion going to Israel to fund their devastating military campaign against Gaza (Concern USA, 2024). If the US were to divert just \$1.6 billion toward Somalia, then that would go a long way to help solve food security (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024). This money would be diverted into three main areas of need. "Prevent loss of life by decreasing the prevalence of hunger and acute malnutrition, public health threats, and the impact of armed conflict and natural disasters" (OCHA, 2024), "Sustain people's lives by ensuring safe, equitable, inclusive and dignified access to livelihoods and critical basic services" (OCHA, 2024), and "Address critical protection risks arising from exclusion, displacement, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians and their objects" (OCHA, 2024). With these areas covered, the new FGS could put money towards humanitarian needs.

Now that Somalia has a more stable government and funds to address food insecurity, we need to look at al-Shabaab. They are considered one of Somalia's biggest enemies, so addressing them is a priority for food insecurity. An international alliance with nations like Egypt would be a good option. Egypt and Somalia have had good relations with Egypt's President recently stating that, "Egypt will not allow anyone to threaten Somalia or affect its security," (Al Jazeera, 2024). On August 27, 2024, Egypt completed its first delivery of arms to the FGS, with the promise of more to come (Sheikh and Paravicini,

2024). Even with Egyptian help, al-Shabaab will not go down without a fight. To further repel al-Shabaab the rest of the African Union (AU) must get involved. The AU has had a military presence in Somalia since 2007 (Hochet-Bodin, 2023), but the current plan is ending at the end of 2024 (Hochet-Bodin, 2023). If the AU renews their military plan, then the end of al-Shabaab's reign of terror may be in sight.

Somalia has been ravaged by war and food insecurity for over 60 years. With the Somali Government fixed, and al-Shabaab suppressed, Somalia is well on its way to greatness.

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