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The Power Struggle in Somalia: A Conflict of Clans and Climate

Somalia is a country on the Eastern coast of Africa. It is located right on the horn, bordering Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. It overlooks Yemen on the opposite side of the gulf of Aden. With its scenic beaches and coasts, you may think it would be a very popular tourist destination but it has become the opposite. Somalia has been under attack from within for over 30 years now. A violent and bloody civil war has torn through the country, all these new warlords and military leaders fighting for one thing: power. The rocky, arid land provides a desert climate with little to no rain. During monsoon season in the Northeast, December to February, and in the Southwest from May to October, there is major flooding and too much water to live in some places. Between these seasons there is irregular rainfall with large periods of hot, humid, and dry weather. Much of the fighting is happening in the Central and Southern areas of Somalia, making these areas very susceptible to food scarcity. There is little money in the country, the Somali Shilling only adding up to around 0.0017 USD. With the raging civil war, the unpredictable climate, and the lack of money, Somalia is facing a crisis and something needs to be done about it.

The people in Somalia have a very different culture than many of us in the United States do. There are about 19.5 million people living in Somalia, 9.16 million women, and 9.2 million men (O'Neil). 47.9% of the Somali population live in urban areas and as of 2020-2025 there has been a 4.2% rate of change in urbanization. It has gone down around 0.5% since 2000 (CIA World Factbook). They have a population of 19 million people. Over 40% of which is under the age of 14 (CIA World Factbook). This is because the birth rate is very high with a total fertility rate of 5.5 children per woman (CIA World Factbook). Because the majority of the population is under 14 there is a huge workforce, over 25% agriculture, and almost 50% in services (Statistia). Though there is a huge workforce, the average annual salary is around 590 USD. This is almost 335,000 Somali Shillings (WorldData.info).

The small amount of money that they are given for their long work hours can buy little to no food at all. During the growing season many families use pastoral nomadism to get by and sustain their children. The large Muslim population observing Ramadan, means that there is no eating from sunrise to sunset. Pastoral nomadism may play a role in why so few children are enrolled in schools. Their education system is generally low-cost through secondary school. Over 3 million children are not enrolled in any kind of school (UNICEF). The small number of educated people could be why there are almost no doctors in Somalia. The few hospitals they have are extremely expensive and most people can not afford to go to one, much less travel for days to access one.

The access to sanitation and clean drinking water for people in Somalia is limited. Only around half of people have clean water that they can use for drinking and cooking while the other half face disease and

dehydration (UNICEF). This is due to the conflict, the clean water is being polluted by the large amount of weaponry detonating in the area. Water scarcity in Somalia is rampant and many people in the country are facing it due to drought and war. The infrastructure and transportation in the country are not faring any better. Roads are almost nonexistent in places because of age, the country has never had enough money to replace the infrastructure so it is extremely run down and in need of repair. This is the same for airports, train stations, and other modes of transportation throughout Somalia.

The main conflict in Somalia is the civil war that has been going on since the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in 1991. Siad Barre was the previous leader of Somalia and led with a militaristic style. After he was assassinated two main groups split off and began using guerilla tactics to fight each other. The first main group is the United Somali Congress (USC). Who originally planned to kill Barre and end his regime. Later in the war this group also had a major division, splitting into two and fighting for control. The second main group is the Somali National Front. This group is made of people still loyal to Barre and fighting to replace his regime as it was before he was killed. The goal of both sides is to have control of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. The USC held the city for a while before breaking into smaller factions and the fighting has continued since then using militias and small bands of soldiers.

The impact of the war on the people of Somalia was undeniable. There is a major humanitarian crisis going on in the country because of it. The two major groups involved in the conflict began the war using guerilla tactics and the fighting was extremely violent and brutal. They shifted to shelling and bombings later as the fighting worsened. The groups had no value for civilian life, proving this through shelling towns. They shelled schools, hospitals, and government buildings. This has ruined the infrastructure, making the roads impassable and getting around the country nearly impossible. All these things play a part in why Somalia is facing such a large food crisis. The lack of stable government after the fall of the Barre regime made it almost impossible to set up any sort of formal humanitarian efforts in the country. Efforts have been made by the UN to combat this famine but the fragments of politics left and the continuation of violence and war they were unable to help stabilize Somalia.

A second conflict fueling the food crisis is the dry arid desert climate. Growing food in this type of landscape is extremely difficult because there is hardly any water to keep plants alive. Somalia's main exports are sesame seeds, gums and resins such as frankenslice and myrrh, camel milk, goat milk, sugarcane, fruits, and maize. Over 70% of the land is used for agriculture but these main exports do not provide much food for the farmers producing them (CIA World Factbook). The land is most densely populated in the Central and Northeastern regions of the country making agriculture even more difficult there. Somalia is a country riddled with issues that piled higher and higher until the food crisis emerged and a famine began. The ongoing fighting and the desert climate are the main two reasons for this disaster.

The main solution I would propose for Somalia's food insecurity is drought resistant GMOs. Drought resistant crops have become more popular recently, they need less water to grow and therefore places struggling with water scarcity will benefit. Drought resistant GMOs use a multitude of solutions to preserve water including: longer root systems that reach deep into the Earth and tap into more

groundwater. Crops maturing earlier to limit the amount of time water is needed, and stomatal regulation which limits transpiration. The stomata requiring less carbon dioxide limits the amount of water loss. (International Research Journals) Less water being used for the crops equals less money being spent on growing crops and more money for personal needs. Much of the agriculture in Somalia is exported and unaffordable for the people producing it. A recent breakthrough in GMOs was related to the production of drought resistant wheat. This wheat has longer roots and is able to survive with less water. Using this new wheat GMO in the dry arid climate of Somalia could provide farmers with a larger bounty each year. Although wheat was the most common drought resistant GMO at the time, the astonishing pace at which we are producing and discovering new GMOs could lead to more breakthroughs with different crops. With farmers producing more crops, Somali citizens would have more access to food. Genetically modified wheat is already available across the US from a company called DroughtGuard. Drought Guard is owned by Monsanto and is currently working on genetically modifying soybeans to be drought resistant (TheWorld.org). One drawback to this solution is how expensive the new drought resistant crops have become. As GMOs become more popular and more are produced the price will begin to drop due to the economy of scale. Economy of scale means that the more that something is produced the less it costs. This is how using drought resistant GMOs in Somalia may help battle the food crisis.

One of the main reasons I chose to use GMOs as my solution is because of the culture in Somalia. One of the primary crops of Somali farmers is corn. Another large crop in Somalia is beans. Switching natural corn and beans with GMO corn and beans would increase crop yield dramatically. Helping people without modifying their diets is ideal. Drastically changing their diet could negatively impact their established culture, and cultural homogenization is a growing issue throughout the world. The second reason I chose this solution is because of the impact it would have. Planting GMOs rather than the natural plants would increase yields over one growing season. The Somali people would have more food in a shorter amount of time. This could end the food crisis and help stabilize the country enough to possibly begin ending the conflict there. These reasons are why drought resistant GMOs are the best solution for Somalia right now.

In conclusion, the Somali food crisis is the result of many factors. The civil war is raging in the Southern and Central areas of the country. This is a result of the ongoing struggle for power within the clans living there. The war will only end if the groups come to an agreement or one defeats the other. 30 years into the conflict neither seems plausible. The Somali people need a solution to pull them out of the famine that is raging throughout the country. GMOs will stabilize the country, helping the people of Somalia stave off hunger. In the meantime the UN could step in and provide assistance until crop yields improve. As a final note, the Somali people deserve a better life than they have now. No person deserves to starve and no one should condone this kind of suffering. These civilians are hurting and countries must work together and intervene to assist them. This is why the Somalians should look for help from the UN and plant drought resistant GMOs for a brighter future.

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