

SOMALIA

New thinking is imperative



Crime, rape and forced recruitment of child soldiers are on the rise in a country already registering some of the worst social, political and economic indicators of exclusion in Africa. Donors and a future national government will have to change in their thinking radically to revitalize the country. Somali political leaders, with the help of all private sectors, donors, multilateral institutions and official and non-governmental organizations should take concerted action to develop the country.

Somali Organization for Community Development Activities (SOCDA)¹

Mohamed Ali Shidle

Seven hundred thousand civilians fled in 2007 as members of the Council of Somali Islamic Courts (COSIC) fought against the Ethiopian-backed Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) troops in Mogadishu. Neither the COSIC nor the pro-TFG forces had mercy on the general population during the clashes. Both employed mortar attacks and remote-controlled landmines, which killed and maimed vulnerable Somalis.

Human rights abuses are increasing, crime is rampant and ordinary Somalis are murdered every day. Forced recruitment of child soldiers for all types of combat, including the handling of remote-controlled landmines and hand grenades, is growing. Armed groups rape girls of any age and ethnicity (unless they belong to a powerfully armed clan able to retaliate). Journalists and civil society activists have been targeted and brutally assassinated.

Continued fighting between the opposition groups and the Ethiopian-backed Somali Government troops has greatly exacerbated poverty in Mogadishu. Marginalized groups such as beggars, child collectors of *qat* (a narcotic herb widely chewed in the country), street children, orphans and displaced children cannot feed themselves – or even sleep at night, due to rockets fired at their living quarters in tents, huts or makeshift structures. Future generations will continue to suffer from this genocide disguised as struggle for power.

This report is devoted primarily to describing the human rights abuses and insecurity endured by the inhabitants of South Central Somalia, where the rule of law is nonexistent. In the words of the late President, Major General Mohamed Siad Barre, “I left wolves in Mogadishu and I fear their barbarism against innocent peace-loving Somalis.”

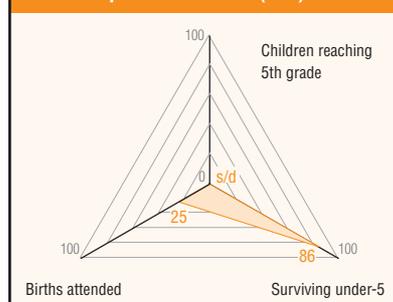
Human rights violations and insecurity

Criminal activity, including violent crime, has reached an extraordinary level in Mogadishu. Even some Somali policemen commit crimes against humanity.

* There are no available data on GEI components.

1 SOCDA houses the Secretariat of SW Somalia Coalition. Mohamed Ali Shidle edited the report.

Basic Capabilities Index (BCI)



Some human rights activists, such as Issa Abdi Issa, have been assassinated. Every day youngsters abandon the city, heading for the Gulf Region.

Mrs. Mulki Mohamed Maye, Chairperson of Afgoi Centre for Education and Community Development (ACECOD) in Mogadishu has stated that the tragic war between the rebel groups and the Ethiopian-backed Somali forces has caused the injury or death of many innocent civilians. The more than a million members of disadvantaged minority groups are particularly at risk.

Agriculture has also been heavily damaged, worsening the hardship of the general population. “The climate of insecurity has had an adverse impact on local products,” according to Abdifatah Abbas Muridi, a Somali human rights defender from the Lower Shabelle province. “Confrontations between the warring parties make it impossible for poor farmers to till their fields. They have abandoned the productive areas and headed for countries where they will be able to feed their families and live in a peaceful environment – the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates) and Europe.”

“Insecurity has been on the rise since 1991,” observed Ibrahim Abdulkadir Osman, known as “Ganga”. “This has led to the emergence of warring groups reluctant to engage in peaceful negotiations unless the Ethiopian Army withdraws from Somalia.”

Marginalized groups

Even though Somalis are Muslims and Islam prohibits racial discrimination, Somalia has some of the worst social, political and economic indicators of exclusion in Africa. Minority groups such as the Ba-

juni, the Jareer Weyne, the Eyle, the Reer Hamar and the Bravenese have suffered systematic discrimination for many years, particularly in South Central Somalia. The Bantu, the largest minority, have been in the southeast since 500 BC; now the land they have farmed for generations is being progressively expropriated.

Before the outbreak of the Civil War, two major socio-economic groups, the urban poor and landless farmers, were particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable. Their situation has become even more precarious over the past two decades. An influx of stigmatized sub-groups and others displaced from zones of conflict and natural disaster (drought and floods) has swelled the outskirts of the big cities, particularly Mogadishu. Many marginalized Mogadishu young people (street children, disabled children, displaced and returnee children, children of sex workers and orphans) depend on local philanthropists and charities for their survival.

Islam forbids discrimination and social exclusion, and encourages communal collaboration of all people in human development activities. During the six months of rule by the COSIC, the rights of marginalized groups were respected. Members had an opportunity to experience security and happiness, and were even able to compete with members of other Somali communities. It must be said, however, that ensuring the political, social, cultural and economic rights of minority groups will require an Islamic constitution that enumerates these rights and protects them.

The current Somali Prime Minister, Nur Hassan Hussein, known as “Nur Adde”, is committed to ending instability and human rights abuses by building peace and developing both the nation and the country.

Child soldiers in Mogadishu

After the collapse of the central government, child soldiers became a common phenomenon in Somalia. Children of both sexes are recruited by warlords to defend their clan or the warlord’s properties. They end up with no alternative to a life of mayhem, knowing nothing other than how to hold a machine gun, pull the trigger and kill people in a brutal manner. Without proper training in using a weapon, they sometimes accidentally kill themselves. When a child soldier is killed or maimed, he or she is simply replaced by another one.

Potential regionalization of the conflict

The current conflagration was caused by the intervention of Eritrea and Ethiopia in war-torn Somalia's affairs. It seems as if the leaders of these two neighbouring countries are determined to bring about the partition of Somalia into smaller states. However, that desire will not be fulfilled as long as the current generation is on the lookout for Islam. Many people, within and outside Somalia, fear that the fighting could trigger new confrontations and civilian massacres in the capital and escalate to an uncontrollable level, especially since it is being linked to the USA-led "War on Terror".

The rapid rise of the COSIC has threatened the authority of the TFG, which is based in the provincial town of Baidoa, 240 km south of Mogadishu. Nevertheless, it has also opened a 'Window of Hope' for the Somali people. The COSIC appears to be under the guidance and constitution of Islamic teachings. The TFG and its backers, especially Ethiopia, regard the COSIC with suspicion; however international donors have affirmed that they would be ready to rebuild Somalia if the TFG and the COSIC reach a power-sharing arrangement.

Piracy

"Groups of outlaws continue to intercept boats, ships and other vessels along the coast of Somalia to take hostages," according to Mr. Aweys Abdi Abduh, a Somali human rights defender and advocate currently residing in Minnesota, USA. "These gangs, formally called pirates, often demand a huge ransom for the release of the vessels and their crews."

Victims of these attacks include commercial vessels, relief fleets and even fishing trawlers. The International Maritime Board and the International Maritime Organization have issued repeated warnings that the Somali coast is among the most dangerous water routes in the world. Many shipping lines have been scared away; insurance rates have escalated for vessels that still brave those waters. More importantly, chemical poisonous substances have been dumped.

HIV/AIDS

Somalis have benefited from globalization, which in some aspects has transformed the globe into a small village in which the world's population can share information, exchange ideas and engage in activities with one another. Somalis can travel from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa and from there journey across the Mediterranean to Europe, Latin America, USA and Canada.

However, two-thirds of all Somalis coming back to the country in early 2007 were discovered to be carrying HIV/AIDS. The majority was returning from African countries, but one-third came from Western countries. Due to the destruction of the capital's entire infrastructure in the fighting, the diseased are not receiving the medical treatment they require.

The economy and the role of political opposition groups

The collapse of public institutions has battered the economy. Even before the outbreak of Civil War, the country's private sector initiatives and market mechanisms struggled to survive without good governance – an efficient public service, a reliable judicial system and an administration accountable to the public. Since the collapse of the central government in January 1991, bias and self-centred extremist ideology have prevented social, political, economic and behavioural progress.

The country urgently requires measures to foster grassroots, non-governmental and intermediary organizations, as well as nurture – rather than obstruct – the informal sector. This is not an impossible dream. Despite formidable difficulties, civil society organizations emerged after the 1993 arrival of the USA-led international coalition forces to save the starving population, especially in South Central Somalia.

Recommendations

Somalia's continuing economic crisis presents an extraordinary challenge to the development community. Somalis are almost as poor today as they were 48 years ago, when the country achieved independence. Donor agencies and foreign advisers have been heavily involved in the past Somali development efforts; thus, responsibility for the economic crisis is shared. Both donors and a future national government will need to modify their thinking radically if they are to succeed in securing the country's future and prosperity. Somali political leaders, the private sector, donors, multilateral institutions and official and non-governmental organizations can and should join together in concerted effort to develop the country.

That said, the Somalis themselves should shape their country's future; external agencies can only play a supportive role. Therefore, the *Somali Social Watch Coalition* calls upon the warring parties in Mogadishu, the Ethiopian-backed Somali troops and the Council of Somali Islamic Courts, all of which have been vying for power since 2006, to propose reasonable solutions to the current conflict.

Once calm is restored in the capital, a future Somali democratic government will be able to reduce poverty and inequality, especially by increasing the access of the poor to productive assets. A primary mechanism for this will be capacity-building programs for civilians in the Mogadishu and Bosaso regions provided by the Somali Organization for Community Development Activities (SOCDA). SOCDA's mandate is to provide a high level of training to Somali civil society organizations, community-based organizations and networks engaged in social development. ■

References

- Sisyphus Human Rights Violation Report, 2007.
- Amnesty International Report 2007.
- The Monthly Watch Newspaper, 2007, SOCD, Mogadishu, Somalia.
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 18 May 2007.
- Human Rights Watch Report 2007.
- Human rights reports from various local organizations and networks, 2007.