As one of the world’s least developed countries, Somalia depends on international assistance. However, aid is scarce and insufficient due to the global economic crisis and the reluctance of donors to deal with either regional armed groups or the national authorities. Resources from piracy are almost as significant as those coming from the European Commission. In Somalia’s gender-biased society, war and poverty hit women the hardest.

Infrastructure, aid and piracy
The country’s civil war has resulted in the complete devastation of the physical infrastructure. While the UN announced USD 253 million for rehabilitation of Somalia in 2007, more than 55% of that amount was allocated for feeding programs and resettlement to remedy one of the worst famines and displacements of people in Africa. These two processes severely depleted the fund.

Mogadishu, the capital, experienced the worst consequences of the war. Public utilities – electricity, water, sewage, telephone services and road networks – as well as banking systems were totally destroyed during the fighting. After two decades of chaos, only telephone, water and electricity systems seem to be recovering, due to strong private sector investments. However, more has been invested in telecommunications than in water and electricity combined. In the northern regions of the country investment and financing remain scarce and are based on profit and cost-effectiveness.

Most of the funds from donors – excluding those from the European Commission (EC) – are concentrated in the south-central region and go to water supply projects in drought- and war-affected zones. The EU and UNDP launched a three-year USD 8 million project of urban development in April 2005 that was designed to target all Somali towns and cities and focus on areas included infrastructure, basic services and urban planning and design.

With the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the marked increase in the need for aid, the World Food Program (WFP) started a Special Operation Project in February 2005 targeting the rehabilitation of the Mogadishu Port, the Kismayo Port and bottlenecks in the road networks of Lower Juba, Middle Juba, Bay and Bakol regions in order to streamline the delivery of emergency food aid within southern Somalia. In March 2008 the WFP extended the period for another year with approximately USD 13 million.

In December 2004, the tsunami that affected South-East Asian countries reached Somali shores. UNICEF and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) announced that more than USD 1.5 million would be provided for a resettlement and reconstruction project for the worst-affected stretch of coastland in north-eastern Somalia, where there was heavy damage to water sources and loss of livelihood assets.

Pirate incomes from ransom seem to be playing a key role in development. Cities have been expanded and the prevalent perception is that the rapid increase in the construction of new buildings across the country – including in Mogadishu – is mainly funded by pirates.

The productive sector
Agriculture is the most prominent sector in the economy and accounts for 60% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The main agricultural crops are sorghum, sugar and maize. Yet, there is almost no investment in this sector and the country experiences constant fears of famine and food shortfalls, especially when it is plagued by drought. In 2010, however, much improved crop production is expected in the southern parts of the country due to the heaviest rains in more than seven years.

About 50% of the population are nomads who raise livestock, which comprises two thirds of the economic value of agricultural production as well as two thirds of revenues from exports. Somali also catch fish for consumption but not on a very large scale.3

To date, no significant investment has gone into the productive sector. However, during the 2009 pilgrimage season Saudi Arabia lifted a nine-year ban on livestock imports from Somalia. According to local traders, the market in Burao in the Togdheer region, in the north of the country has had a 10-fold increase in sales. This investment came as a relief for shepherds in particular and Somalis in general and is a good omen for the future of business in the northern parts of the country.

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3 Ibid.
In addition, the Islamic Development Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) signed a joint fund agreement in March 2010 amounting to USD 1.5 billion for implementing agricultural development projects in Africa and Asia. It remains to be seen what effects this will have on the Somali agricultural sector.

Health care

During the military regime of Siad Barre (1969-1991), health conditions improved and the number of medical personnel and health facilities increased, although they still did not meet Somali needs. The collapse of the regime, in January 1991, led to a worsening of the health situation. While smallpox had been nearly wiped out, occasional epidemics of measles had a devastating effect. The high prevalence of diseases reflected the unstable environment, inadequate nutrition and insufficient medical care.

In the 1990s public health declined and the Government no longer provided free medical services; private health care became widespread in the big cities. Fortunately, assistance from some international medical organizations reached the southern regions including Mogadishu. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), for example, brought in physicians from various countries and provided free drugs to needy people. In the big hospitals the also recruited Somali doctors and nurses to work alongside the foreign doctors. Although MSF and ICRC subsequently left the country due to the widespread insecurity, these Somali physicians continue to provide free medical assistance.

Education

In the chaos that followed the fall of President Barre, the education sector collapsed. Education and formal classroom learning opportunities in Somalia are limited. Although there have been substantial increases in the number of schools and the enrolment rate, huge disparities in the quality of and access to primary education continue to exist in several regions due to the anarchic situation.

Most schools are concentrated in and around the main cities and are financed by parents and communities. According to the Survey of Primary Schools in Somalia for 2003-2004, "there are 1,172 operating schools with a total enrolment of over 285,574 children representing a 19.9% gross enrolment ratio. This places Somalia among countries with the lowest enrolment rates in the world." Data were not collected from some regions as they were inaccessible due to floods and insecurity.

Women suffer the most

In Somalia it is women who are the most affected by disasters, both natural and human-made. Gender discrimination is deeply rooted in society, and the insecurity resulting from over 20 years of civil war has further exacerbated the plight of women in a male-dominated environment. In a war-torn society, men use the power of guns to dominate the political scene. The same power is employed to exclude women from decision-making positions. In this scenario, violence against women and girls has become an important weapon of political power.

Furthermore, competition for resources and power tilts the balance against women. They are progressively being deprived of capital ownership, including property such as land and livestock that are highly valuable to farming and pastoralist communities. As more resources are dedicated towards armaments and militias, women and other vulnerable groups suffer the direct consequences. They hardly participate in warfare but as unarmed civilians they suffer its impacts as the victims of killings, injuries, rape, displacement and other abuses that affect them both physically and psychologically.

Conclusion

Millions of Somalis remain mired in poverty and there is very little chance for the country to benefit from ambitious international and regional programs – such as the MDGs, the Brussels Program of Action, the New Partnership for African Development and the Economic Partnership Agreements – that could help alleviate this situation. Most of the meagre funds that are provided for construction and basic services are observably motivated by disasters, European Commission initiatives, profit generated by businesses and income from piracy.

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