

SOMALIA

At the mercy of pirates



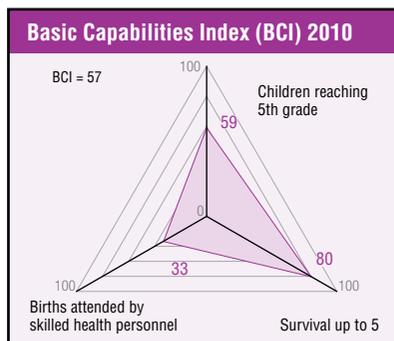
As one of the world's least developed countries, Somalia depends on international assistance. However, aid is scarce and insufficient due to the global economic crisis and the reluctance of donors to deal with either regional armed groups or the national authorities. Resources from piracy are almost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

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After 20 years of civil conflict it is war logic that rules Somalia. Several opposing armed groups have had the country in their grip since early 1991. Multiple efforts by the international community to bring peace between the groups have ended without tangible results, and violence and poverty have proliferated. Due to this chaotic situation, there has been no international measurement of poverty for many years but it is estimated that over 43% of people are living in extreme poverty – earning less than USD 1.00 a day.¹

Insecurity, instability and lack of central rule have prevented Somalis from utilizing their rich natural resources and have kept many sectors completely paralyzed. The economy is largely driven by individually based entrepreneurship and most people survive through coping mechanisms (such as collecting wood and selling it or begging, and many people simply skip meals). Somalia has therefore progressively become a net recipient of assistance, particularly humanitarian. At the same time, however, international donors are reluctant to deal with the groups that rule over the various regions and also constrained in terms of releasing funds to Somali authorities due to the lack of transparency and accountability.

Also, the multiple crises affecting the globe have a direct effect on the Somali people. Since major donors allocated their resources to bailing out ailing companies in their own countries, Official Development Assistance (ODA) has decreased. A lack of policies on food security and sovereignty has left Somalia highly vulnerable to the effects of inadequate farming techniques, to the scarcity of investment into the productive sector and to climate change. This inadequate environment does not allow Somalis to benefit from the positive aspects of world trade, transfer of technologies, capital flow or universally agreed programs such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The lack of investment and attention has particularly affected infrastructure, the productive sector, health, education and gender inequalities.



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.² 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. Somalis 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.

1 UNDP Somalia, "Progress in achievement of MDGs in Somalia." [data from 2006 and 2007] Available from: <www.so.undp.org/index.php/Download-document/142-Progress-on-achievement-of-MDGs-in-Somalia.html>.

2 Maps of World.com, "Somalia economy." Available from: <Finance.mapsofworld.com/economy/somalia/>.

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 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."⁴ Data were not collected from some regions as they were inaccessible due to floods and insecurity.

In a population of just over 8 million about 1 million children are out of school, the vast majority of whom are girls according to the EU.⁵ This reality has prevailed over many years and left a legacy in terms of gender disparities in adult literacy. Only a quarter of women (25.8%) are literate while for men the rate is 49.7%.⁶

The Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS), a network of educational institutions launched in 1999 in Mogadishu, is currently working hard to restore educational facilities and provide much needed educational services. By 2007, it had a membership of 150 schools with over 90,000 students.⁷ The FPENS target is to facilitate the transfer of skills, knowledge and information among member organizations.

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 Ac-

tion, 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. ■

4 UNICEF, "Somalia: Education." Available from: <www.unicef.org/somalia/education.html>.

5 European Union, "The EU marks International Women's Day on 8 March 2010, recognizing the essential role of Somali women in peace and development," press release. Available from: <www.delken.ec.europa.eu/en/news.asp?newsid=140>.

6 Index Mundi, "Somalia Literacy." Available from: <www.indexmundi.com/somalia/literacy.html>.

7 Lee Cassanelli and Farah Sheikh Abdikadir, "Somalia: Education in Transition," *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, Vol. 7, 2007. Available from: <digitalcommons.macalester.edu/bildhaan/vol7/iss1/7/>.