

The quest for stability



Somalia's national institutions collapsed in January 1991 when the late president Siyad Barre fled the capital. Since then factional fighting and the formation of fiefdoms and mini-states have replaced the unified Government. At least five authorities now coexist and various groups strive for one cause or another. Instability and insecurity have pushed the country further into poverty despite its low population density and significant natural resources. There is much to be done to restore stability and statehood in order to initiate effective development.

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Despite Somalia's abundant resources, the lack of effective development policies through successive governments since independence in 1960 have contributed to a continuous cycle of poverty that has often led to upheaval. In 1969, for instance, a military coup put army officers into power and ushered in a pro-socialist regime that eroded human rights. Social unrest led to rebel group challenges to the military regime of the late Major General Mohamed Siyad Barre in the 1980s, a situation made worse in January 1991 when rebel militias toppled the regime but failed to fill the power vacuum. When rebel factions turned their guns on each other, they initiated a two-decades long struggle for power.

Governance structures subsequently emerged in Somaliland and Puntland in the north of the country that allowed for the attainment of some degree of stability and economic recovery. However they have shown no concern whatsoever regarding environmental issues and so the potentially rich territory of Somalia has been marked by degradation.

Yet despite the unrest Somalia has maintained a healthy informal economy based mainly on livestock, remittances and telecommunications. Living standards have actually improved faster since the early 1990s than in the average sub-Saharan African country.¹ The most interesting part of this relative success is that it has been achieved in the absence of any effective central government. Yet about 43% of the population still lives on less than USD 1 a day, a figure that rises to 53% in rural areas, where extreme poverty is more prevalent.² Somalia remains very dependent on international aid.

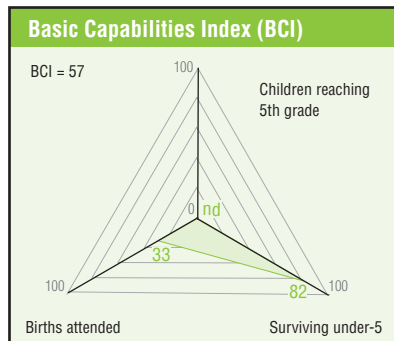
The economy

Due to the lack of official government statistics and the recent civil war, it is difficult to gauge the size or growth of the economy. The CIA World Factbook

* There are no available data on GEI.

1 B. Powell, "Somalia: failed state, economic success?" *Freeman* 59(3), (April 2009).

2 Rural Poverty Portal, "Poverty in Somalia."



estimated GDP at USD 5.61 billion in 2008, USD 5.75 billion in 2009 and USD 5.89 billion in 2010, with a projected real growth rate of 2.6%.³

Agriculture is the most important economic sector, accounting for about 65% of GDP and employing 71% of the workforce. Livestock contributes about 40% to GDP and more than 50% of export earnings.⁴ Other principal exports include fish, charcoal and bananas, and the country is also a major world supplier of frankincense and myrrh. The main imported goods are sugar, sorghum, corn, qat (*Catha edulis*, a natural stimulant) and manufactured goods. Imports total about USD 798 million per year while exports total about USD 270 million, leaving an enormous trade deficit.

This deficit, however, is far exceeded by remittances sent by Somalis in the diaspora. Remittance firms (*hawalas*) have become a large industry in the country with an estimated USD 1.6 billion annually, or 71.4% of GNP, sent to the region via money transfer companies.⁵

Taking advantage of the country's location near the Arabian Peninsula, Somali traders have increasingly begun to challenge Australia's traditional dominance over livestock and meat markets in the Persian Gulf. In response, Arab States have started to make strategic investments in the country, with Saudi Arabia building livestock export infrastructure

and the United Arab Emirates purchasing large farmlands.⁶ Additionally fishing fleets from Europe and Asia have reached commercial fishing agreements in the northern Puntland region. This is considered one of the richest fisheries in the world, which has led to a lot of illegal fishing by foreign ships in Somali waters.⁷

On the other hand, the industrial sector, based on agricultural products, accounts for a mere 10% of Somalia's GDP.⁸ Medium and large manufacturing firms foundered due to the conflict. However, primarily as a result of substantial local investment by the Somali diaspora, many small-scale plants have re-opened and newer ones have been created. The latter include fish-canning and meat-processing plants in the north, as well as about 25 factories in the Mogadishu area that manufacture goods such as pasta, mineral water, sweets, plastic bags, sheets, hides and skins, detergent, soap, aluminium and foam mattresses.⁹

According to the UNDP, investments in light manufacturing have also expanded in Bossaso and Hargeisa, indicating growing business confidence in the economy.¹⁰ In 2004 a USD 8.3 million Coca-Cola bottling plant opened in Mogadishu, with investors hailing from various constituencies in Somalia. The robust private sector has also attracted foreign investment from companies such as General Motors and Dole Fruit.¹¹

Telecommunications

Telecommunications is a major area of success in Somalia. The number of telephone landlines has shown dramatic improvement from about 2 per 1,000 of population in 1990 to 25 in 2011. Some nine private operators provide competitive telecommunication services to almost every part of the coun-

6 C. West, "Africa a poor alternative to Aussie exports," *Farm Weekly*, (12 August 2010).

7 Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), *Peace and development in northern Somalia: opportunities and challenges*, (2009), <www.mballi.info/doc200.htm>.

8 CIA, op. cit.

9 M. Yuusuf, "Somalia: The resilience of a people," *The African Executive*, (2011), <www.africanexecutive.com/modules/magazine/article_print.php?article=4693>.

10 AfricanSeer, *Economy in Somalia*, <www.africanseer.com/countries-in-africa/somalia/economy.asp>.

11 Ibid.

try. Research has shown that this moved Somalia from 29th to 8th position among African countries studied.¹²

Funded by Somali entrepreneurs and backed by expertise from China, Korea and Europe, the nascent telecommunications firms also offer affordable mobile phone and Internet services.¹³ Somalia ranks high in mobile phone (16th in Africa) and Internet users (11th), while it ranks 27th in the number of households with televisions.¹⁴

Deforestation and soil erosion

According to RMSN (Resource Management Somalia Network) and other local environmental agencies, the environment is one of the sectors in the country that has suffered as a result of the anarchy and particularly in the absence of a functioning government.

Coastal people, for example, have complained of hazardous waste dumping and pastoralists have reported the increased loss of forests. Moreover the country is marked by water scarcity as rainfall is very low (250 mm a year) while evaporation is generally very high (over 2,000 mm a year).¹⁵ Frequent droughts especially in the southern part of the country have serious impacts on rural communities, whose survival greatly depends on the availability of rainwater. These droughts are often followed by devastating floods.¹⁶ Tree cutting, deforestation and overgrazing contribute to soil erosion and other ecological problems.

Deforestation in Somalia is closely associated with charcoal production for local use and export. This puts a severe strain on wood resources, especially in a country with only 9% of land covered by low-density woodland. According to the World Bank 55% of Somalia's land area is suitable for grazing, while the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates only 29% demonstrates a certain degree of suitability for livestock production.¹⁷

The land is also affected by inefficient irrigation methods, causing higher salt concentrations. This has a negative effect on farmland.

Waste dumping

People living on the coast frequently complain of waste being dumped in the sea. In early April 2011, for example, residents in Hobyo district 660 km northeast of Mogadishu spotted three large, drum-shaped containers washed up on the beach by the high tide. They were afraid these might contain dangerous industrial or chemical waste, which they blame for a number of health-related issues in the area. The event revived the long-held suspicion that the marine environment was being spoiled by foreign vessels taking advantage of the political confusion in the country and lack of central government to dump hazardous waste in Somali waters.¹⁸

The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and other agencies have in the past promised to assess the issue of illegal waste dumping; however lack of security in the war-torn Horn of Africa has hampered local and international efforts.¹⁹

Social services

In addition to environmental and economic challenges, all Somali regions face real challenges concerning access, availability and quality of indispensable social services.

Enrolment in education, for instance, is one of the worst in Africa. Just over 20% of school-age children are in school, and only a third of them are girls. This is accompanied by a high female dropout rate. Both the quality and quantity of vital educational resources and materials are poor, even in relatively more stable regions such as Somaliland and Puntland.

In the absence of a fully functioning government, and following a joint needs assessment carried out in 2005–2006,²⁰ many groups have supported the public education system, including UN organizations (under the UN Somali Assistance Strategy), donor agencies, international and regional banks, NGOs and other associations. Such groups have also contributed to improving the health, water and sanitation sectors. These services are purely in unregulated private hands or reliant on traditional sources, and in most cases their affor-

ability is beyond the capacity of poor families.²¹ In addition to seemingly endless wars and an ongoing culture of impunity that have eroded people's ability to enjoy civil and political rights, the absence of an effective central rule has also eroded economic, social and cultural rights.

Gender inequality

Women make up some 50% of the population but lag behind in access to resources and services. Policies are needed to guarantee women and other disadvantaged groups access to education and health care, especially to maternal health and family planning. Further research and improvements are vital in the areas of HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation (FGM). The latter is profoundly rooted in the Somali culture, necessitating strong measures to eliminate or at least minimize its impacts on society as a whole and on women in particular.

Equitable provision of social services calls for appropriate policies and adequate resources as well as legislation. Instability in Somalia originating from two decades of power struggles has hindered the country's ability to empower women through skills training and incentives and make significant improvements in gender equity.

Conclusion

Events in Somalia are proof that development is tied to peace and stability. Apart from the clan-based factions, self-styled authorities and rag-tag militias, opportunists emerged to vandalize everything from private property to natural resources and the environment. Regarding the latter, civil society activists insist this negative trend must be reversed. No central coordinating body was in charge of environmental protection even under the last Government prior to January 1991 and a strong agency is needed. The transitional Federal Government needs to renew its attempts to set up relevant ministries. State policies must be put in place to protect and improve the environment.

One way to reverse the negative trends is to strengthen development cooperation under Goal 8 of the Millennium Development Goals and other development programmes in order to stimulate stronger collaboration between Somalia and its development partners. It is time to turn risks and challenges into opportunities to stabilize and rebuild a country and society shattered by years of civil war. ■

12 Powell, op. cit.

13 A. Mohamed and S. Chidress, "Telecom firms thrive in Somalia despite civil war, shattered economy," *The Wall Street Journal*, (11 May 2010).

14 Powell, op. cit.

15 A. Sadyhan, *Somalia's Degrading Environment*, (11 October 2001), <www.aaefrica.org/cgi-bin/africa/index.cgi?action=viewnews&id=78>.

16 Ibid.

17 A.E. Mohamed, *Somalia's Degrading Environment: Causes and Effects of Deforestation and Hazardous Waste Dumping in Somalia*, (2001).

18 A. Khalif, "Suspicious containers wash up on Somalia's coast," *Africa Review*, (8 April 2011).

19 Ibid.

20 United Nations, "Somali Joint Needs Assessment: Social Services and Protection of Vulnerable Groups Cluster Report," draft, (14 September 2006), <www.somali-jna.org/downloads/SSPVG%20140906%20AD%20Final%20Draft%20rec-social%20rev-1.pdf>.

21 Ibid.