

Tamara Damjanac
Roseville Area High School
Roseville, MN
Somalia, Factor 16

The Problem with Somalia: How Efficiency in Aid Administration Can Help Somalia's Smallholders

How do we solve world hunger? This is a question that people have grappled with since the beginning of civilization; a question that seems almost unanswerable as the world gets older and more populated. Even as we move further into the 21st century, there are many countries for which the answer to this question appears to get farther and farther away: one such country is Somalia. Located on the east coast of Africa, Somalia is a semi-arid nation with a hilly northern area and a flat southern and central region (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia” 3). The country is hot year-round, with irregular rainfall, seasonal monsoon winds, and droughts (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia 3); unfortunately, the climate is not the country’s only problem. Somalia’s last president, President Barre, was overthrown in 1991; since then, the country has not had a stable government. After over 14 attempts at implementing a new government, the TFG or Transitional Federal Government was formed as a temporary replacement for a true government in Somalia. Somalia’s political woes did not end there: in 2006, Islamist insurgents from the group Al-Shabaab gained control of the capital, Mogadishu, and the southern region of Somalia (“BBC News Country Profile: Somalia”). The political situation in Somalia has remained precarious since 2006 and there have been no true signs of significant improvement. The unstable government has made it close to impossible to fight the famine and disease caused by frequent droughts and poor living conditions in Somalia. All of these problems resulted in 280,000 deaths in 1991; all of them caused by mass starvation (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia” 6).

There is an ancient Somali proverb that says, “Where material help is needed, words do not suffice.” Nothing is truer for the 3.2 million people currently living in Somalia in need of emergency assistance (Dagne 1). Humanitarian aid from the United Nations and other world organizations is something that Somalia depends on for survival in their war-torn, starving nation. Consequently, the effectiveness of organizations that provide humanitarian assistance is crucial to the development of this country and the overall reduction of starvation. Making aid organizations more effective is not an easy problem to solve, however it is something that must be done in order for the doors of development and food security to be opened for Somalia.

Although agriculture and subsistence farming have significantly declined since pre-war times, about 60 percent of Somalia’s gross domestic product comes from agriculture (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 1). Somalia’s staple foods are sorghum and maize, but the number of small farms that grow these staple crops continues to diminish (“GIEWS Country Brief on Somalia” 1). About 80 percent of people in Somalia are actually nomadic pastoralists, or livestock herders (Koshen 76). Before 1991 and the start of the country’s civil war, farms and rain-fed agriculture were predominant in the southern and northwestern parts of the country and crop production was mostly large-scale (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 2). In these regions, sorghum, maize, and bananas were grown. The worsened political situation and a series of floods led to decreased production of all three crops and, as a result, local production of maize and sorghum dropped 60 percent below pre-war average (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 1), while banana exports have almost stopped altogether (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 2). Agro-pastoralism (a mixture of agriculture and livestock herding) and nomadic pastoralism are convenient alternatives to normal subsistence farming because of the irregular rainfall in Somalia; 67 percent of the population receives subsistence needs from camels, cattle, sheep, and goats (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 2). The typical Somali family consists of on average six people, and many

households consist of both nuclear and extended family members (Koshen 77). Usually in these families, the male head of family is in charge of the safety of the herd, while the female head of the family is in charge of cooking, and household chores (Koshen 77). The young girls are often responsible for sheep and goats, while the young men are responsible for the camels (Koshen 77). Although livestock represents Somalia's main form of wealth ("Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia" 7), a 2002 World Bank study showed that the poverty rate for nomads is more than double than that of the urban population. In addition, people in rural areas have less access to health facilities, water sources, markets, and education (Koshen 79): the country's literacy rate currently stands at a rather measly 37.8 percent ("Background Notes on Countries Around the World: Somalia" 106). The nomads and smaller coastal farmers are suffering the most from the civil conflict and unstable climate conditions in Somalia. The country's susceptibility to natural disasters such as droughts and floods ("Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia" 49) has made agriculture of any kind in the country largely unsuccessful. The Joint Needs Assessment also found that the absence of government in Somalia is a major cause behind weak development and low agricultural production; physical roadblocks placed by Islamist insurgents in the south raised the cost of land occupation for Somali citizens ("National Investment Brief: Somalia" 2). This left much of the land that could be used for farming, uncultivated and un-pasteurized.

Right now, Somalia needs help. In order to jumpstart their economy and stabilize the country's political state, Somalia needs some remittance from other countries. Currently, there are multiple organizations in charge of providing aid in the form of money, food, and manpower to countries in need. One of the predominant aid groups is the World Food Programme (WFP), an aid initiative created by the United Nations in 1962 ("When Feeding the Hungry is Political" 52). Another large-scale group is Oxfam America: an international development and relief agency (Scribner). Both aid groups, along with various smaller aid programs, have done much to help improve the situation in Somalia. In 2008, Oxfam America spent \$7 million on emergency programs in Somalia (Scribner), and the WFP had a budget of \$2.6 billion for Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years ("When Feeding the Hungry is Political" 52). Much of the aid is given in the form of money; however the aid the United States gives to Somalia is in the form of food (generally wheat). As helpful as the food aid can be, it can also sometimes be harmful to the growth of Somalia—instead of allowing the Somali people to use aid to purchase locally grown food, aid in the form of food makes Somalia more dependent on other countries. Even after a plea from the World Food Programme to the United States to give aid in the form of money, the United States Congress rejected the idea. In March of 2010, the World Food Programme was under fire because of allegations that WFP staffers had given up to half of the aid meant for Somali citizens to Islamist jihadists (Barovick 6). Whether or not corruption exists in the WFP, the allegations that some of the aid money is not actually going to people in need but to the jihadists is a good example of why some countries do not feel comfortable giving aid in the form of money—it is a big risk. Unfortunately, the discrepancies about aid groups and the general lack of organization within these groups has proved to be detrimental to Somalia's future outlook. To make matters worse, the political instability in Somalia has prevented aid workers from helping in Somalia. In August of 2009, a WFP compound in Wajid was attacked—this was the fourth U.N. compound attacked in Somalia within 2 months (Okabe). Graham Farmer, the U.N. Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia responded to the attacks: "The direct, deliberate, and sustained attack on aid organizations and aid workers is intolerable" (qtd. In Okabe). It is clear that this is the common sentiment for aid workers, as many aid organizations are currently inadequately staffed—most notably, Oxfam America (Scribner). The sad truth: no one wants to go to Somalia right now.

As the civil war in Somalia rages on, the success of humanitarian aid groups remains primarily the same. This of course is not only the fault of aid organizations; the climate change and natural disasters in Somalia caused by its irregular rainfall and hot temperatures ("Background Notes of Countries of the World: Somalia" 49) makes food production and starvation problems worse ("When Feeding the Hungry is Political" 52). Also, the absence of a true government in Somalia has made for a general lack of

accountability by Al-Shabaab and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Since 2007, this lack of accountability has allowed for attacks on civilians and aid workers (Scribner), which has in turn stalled the success of aid distribution in Somalia. This lawlessness has also proven to be especially harmful towards Somali women; in addition to becoming victims of hunger, poverty, and disease, Somali women are also targets of domestic violence, kidnappings, sexual assault, and rape (“Status of Women” 113). Improving the way that aid is administered in Somalia will help the country be independent and will allow the people of Somalia to establish a government that can be held accountable for their actions. If monetary aid is used efficiently, the Somali government would be able to give the money to Somali residents to buy local food and even to buy a piece of land to start their own smallholder farm. Because of physical roadblocks that prevent entrance into much of the southern part of Somalia (“National Investment Brief” 2), only 2% of the 13% of arable land in Somalia is cultivated (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia” 2). The money flow within the country will help strengthen Somalia’s economy and help the country’s exports exceed their imports—right now, \$241 million is being exported from Somalia in the form of livestock, bananas, hides, fish, charcoal, and scrap metal, while \$576 million is imported in food grains, animal and vegetable oils, petroleum, construction materials, and manufactured products (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia” 2). Additionally, the stabilized economic state allows for a growth of smallholder farms, and therefore an increase in jobs—an incentive to return to Somalia for the 250,000 Somali refugees now living in Kenya (Scribner). Solving the economic problem in Somalia opens the way for focus on the political situation. In other words, the status of aid administration and aid organizations is decisive to Somalia’s future.

Of all of the problems in Somalia, there are two factors that cannot be controlled by an outside source. These are Somalia’s political state and climate. Any attempt by outside countries to “solve” another country’s political problems has the potential to take them down a slippery slope of war and serious financial problems. In Somalia’s case, the consequences of meddling in political issues are even greater; attempts by the African Union to strengthen peacekeeping efforts in Somalia have been largely unsuccessful due to the Somali people’s tendency to mistrust foreigners (“Be Beefier” 2). Somali communities must trust aid organizations enough to cooperate and ask for necessary help in order for the aid organizations to work effectively. This trust will be impossible to achieve if the Somali people feel that the aid organizations are responsible for any additional turmoil in their country. As for the second factor, controlling the rainfall in Somalia would unfortunately not be cost-effective—nor would it be within reason. This leaves one factor that actually can be improved: the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

In 2006, approximately \$800 million to \$1 billion (including food aid) was remitted to Somalia from the U.S., the E.U., Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Somalia” 2). In order for these countries to continue to give aid to Somalia and perhaps increase the amount of money aid given as opposed to the amount of food aid remitted, the aid organizations must be fully trusted—meaning there cannot even be suspicion that corruption exists within groups such as the World Food Programme. The best solution in this case, is seemingly the most simple: accountability. Within all aid organizations, there needs to be a specific office in charge of one particular country. Each time aid needs to travel to that country, there must be five assigned people from that office to follow a specific itinerary documenting windows of time that certain stops around the country must be made and to accompany the various trucks providing different emergency aid to the citizens who need it. To start, these people will accompany trucks transporting medical and food aid, but as countries such as the United States begin to trust the organizations more, the trucks will be used solely for medical aid. According to a senior United Nations official, Islamic rebels are open to allowing relief work in Somalia to continue (Bloomberg), which means that an official agreement between the Islamic rebels, the Transitional Federal Government, and the United Nations to allow aid organizations free access to any part of the country will make trips to Somalia more efficient and successful. In addition, a specific person in this office that

works only with administering aid to Somalia will be responsible for making sure that the money itself goes where it is intended. The previous problem with aid organizations was that money was being pocketed by “crooked contractors” and was being given to Islamist jihadists. There was not a specific person held accountable for what happened—since the people responsible were supposedly just employees of the World Food Programme, the entire organization was blamed. When there is a specific person from a specific office, whose job it is to make sure the money goes exactly where it is intended, there is less opportunity for the money to be intentionally swindled and for those responsible to be easily forgotten. In general, this is a system of “checkpoints” in which a certain person can “check” that the money goes to a certain place, and increasing the chances that all of the aid goes exactly where it is intended: the 3.2 million Somali people who need it. In May of 2010, the United Nations began to revise the WFP’s control system (MacFarquhar 6)—a smart move on their part since this accountability system has proven to be successful in the past. In 2002, the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act directed people from the Government Accountability Office to monitor the implementation of U.S. aid to Afghanistan (Gootnick 1). The successful aid administration resulted in a 17 percent increase in Afghanistan’s GDP (“Background Notes on Countries of the World: Afghanistan” 3). When specific people are held accountable for a job, and their reputation and morality is determined by that job they will work harder for a successful outcome.

Increasing the security within aid organizations will not solve all of Somalia’s problems overnight. However, it will help the Somali people start to fight starvation *themselves*. The more money that ends up in the hands of the Somali people, the more people there will be who can afford to start a smallholder farm or purchase locally grown food. There is high potential for increasing exports and food production in the southern region of Somalia (“National Investment Brief: Somalia” 2), and all the Somali people need is the means to break through roadblocks and poverty to get to that land; in this case, aid money. In order for all of the countries currently giving aid to Somalia through aid groups to trust this new checkpoint system, the system must first be implemented on a smaller scale. The best small scale is to start with the World Food Programme and to use aid coming from the United Nations. The United Nations is an organization that is meant for this particular purpose—to be used for experiments with a completely new system. As previously mentioned, the United Nations is on track to starting this part of the process. After a year of successful aid remittance, the checkpoint system can spread to other countries giving aid through the World Food Programme. If the system proves to be both efficient and reliable, other aid organizations like Oxfam America can adopt it. With enough time, a simple solution like this one can begin something new for Somalia—it can give the Somali people the tools to improve conditions in their country without any outside help.

When successful, humanitarian aid organizations truly are the best thing that the human race ever thought of. However, even if aid organizations run efficiently and have good intentions, the organizations still need manpower. One of the biggest problems with humanitarian aid right now is that the aid organizations are understaffed—this is something that cannot continue in order for humanitarian aid administration to be the most efficient that it can be. As specialist of African Affairs Congressional Research Service Ted Dagne said in his 2009 Congressional Testimony, “one thing is clear: the determination and commitment I saw 15 years ago at the height of the civil war by Somali women, human rights advocates, and Somali nationalists is still very much alive.” Unfortunately, Somalia is in a state right now in which as vehement as the Somali people are, they cannot solve their country’s hunger and political problems on their own. A push is needed, and that is what the humanitarian aid organizations are for; that’s why they are so important. Aid organizations cannot force people to work for them; however, as administering aid becomes dangerous, as it has in Somalia, the effort to recruit willing people to the humanitarian cause must prevail. The flaws in the human race will never be “solved,” but as long as they play an important role in things as necessary as humanitarian aid, there has to be a continued effort to appease those flaws.

We are a long way from “fixing” world hunger. In fact, it has become almost implausible to imagine a world without hunger—but if people have an interest in their fellow race, we will get closer to that utopia. Somalia is a country that is drowning in its problems; but there aren’t any problems that cannot be solved. In the end, the Somali people have to be the ones to pull themselves out of their problems in order to stay independent and to prosper. Humanitarian aid is not and has never been a system meant for continuous dependency; but without a doubt, the fervent Somali people will use the aid wisely and pull together to solve their problems. As President Obama stated in his speech “To Young African Leaders,” “There’s going to be a path that takes us into a direction of more conflict, more bloodshed, less economic development, continued poverty even as the rest of the world races ahead—or there’s a vision in which people come together for the betterment and development of their own country.” Humanitarian aid can help Somalia solve their hunger problems, but even more importantly it can help solve world hunger: one country at a time.

Work Cited

- “Background Notes on Countries of the World: Afghanistan.” *U.S. Department of State*. U.S. Department of State. Dec. 2006. Web. 30 Aug. 2010.
- “Background Note on Countries of the World: Somalia.” *U.S. Department of State Bureau of African Affairs*. U.S. Department of State. Aug. 2008. Web. 12 Aug. 2010.
- Barovick, Harriet, et al. “The World.” *Time* 22 Mar. 2010: 6-7. Print.
- “BBC News Country Profile: Somalia.” *BBC News*, N.p. 11 Aug. 2010. Web. 14 Aug. 2010.
- “Be Beefier.” *The Economist* 13 Jul. 2010: 2. Print.
- Dagne, Ted. “Somalia Situation.” FDCH Congressional Testimony. Washington D.C. 25 June 2007. Address.
- “GIEWS Country Brief on Somalia.” *FAO*. Food and Agriculture Organization. 23 June 2010. Web. 15 Aug. 2010.
- Gootnick, David. “Afghanistan Reconstruction: Despite Some Progress, Deteriorating Security and Other Obstacles Continue to Threaten Achievement of U.S. Goals.” *GAO Report to Congressional Committees*. N.p. 28 Jul. 2005: 1. Print.
- Koshen, Hawa Ibrahim A. “Strengths in Somali Families.” *Marriage & Family Review* Jul. 2007: 71-99. Print.
- MacFarquhar, Neil. “Somalia: U.N. Revamps Food Program.” *New York Times* 13 May 2010: 6. Print.
- “National Investment Brief: Somalia.” *Water for Agriculture and Energy in Africa: the Challenges of Climate Change*. N.p. Dec. 2008. Web. 18 Aug. 2010.
- Obama, Barack. “President Obama to Young African Leaders: 50 Years From Now, When You Look Back...” Washington D.C. 3 Aug. 2010. Speech.
- Okabe, Marie. “Regular News Briefing.” United Nations Secretary General Briefing. New York City, New York. 17 Aug. 2009. Address.
- Scribner Shannon. “Developing a Strategy for Somalia.” FDCH Congressional Testimony. Washington D.C. 20 May 2009. Address.
- “Status of Women.” *Somalia Country Review*. Country Watch Inc. 2010. Web. 12 Aug. 2010.
- “When Feeding the Hungry is Political.” *The Economist* 20 Mar. 2010: 52. Print.