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RESEARCH BRIEF

Promoting Peacebuilding in Somalia through Youth Employment and Empowerment

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Background

For the last 26 years, Somalia has functioned without an effective central government due to a prolonged and devastating civil war. The civil war has destroyed all national institutions, state infrastructures, social foundations and norms including a collective sense of trust, solidarity, confidence, hope, fairness, community engagement and dialogue. Moreover, due to the on-going civil war, Somalis have experienced collective trauma. This is particularly severe for the young unemployed generation who grew up in a disillusioning environment. Due to their young age, lack of employment opportunities and a dire sense of hope, youth continue to be easily recruited by warlords, and lately by criminal pirate syndicates and ideologically extremist groups such as Al-Shabab. They currently constitute most of the members in Al-Shabab jihadists, clan militia groups and other criminal syndicates. To overcome these challenges, young people need better educational and employment opportunities that can meet their aspirations. As custodians of the future, Somalia's youth have the potential to be the country's greatest source of strength for long term nation building, peace, stability, and prosperity. This study partially fills a significant gap in the literature on the employment situation of Somali youth in different parts of the country. It aims to provide key insights to policy makers, service providers and practitioners dealing with Somali youth.

There are few comparative studies dealing with Somali youth employment. This research fills this gap focusing on the links between youth employment and peace in three main cities in Somalia with special emphasis on the challenges they face, and the importance of employment for peace. However, other important themes linked to peace and development emerged during data analyses such as ineffective governance, poor labour policies and the lack of an

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employment matching system that is free of corruption and nepotism. The study compares differences and similarities between these three cities.

The federal government functions to the extent possible from the capital, Mogadishu, often described as the most dangerous city in the world. After the collapse of Somali national government in 1991, Somaliland, which is a region located in north of the country Somalia declared independence, is currently the most stable region of the country. Though it remains unrecognised as a separate state, it has a functioning government elected by people, its own currency, trained military and a police force to control its territory. Hargeisa functions as its capital. The second most stable region in the country, Puntland, in the north-east of the country, has functioned as an autonomous region of the state of Somalia since 1998. The largest city in the region is Basoso. Like Somaliland, Puntland has a functioning governance structure and its own troops which control its borders and territory. However, Al-Shabab and an ISIS branch have occasionally been operating in some parts of Puntland specifically in the Gal-Gala mountains. Other newly established federal member states of Somalia include Jubbaland, South-West State, Galmudug and Hirshabelle. Apart from the main cities including Mogadishu, which are controlled by Somali National Army and AMISOM troops under UN umbrella, Al-Shabab rules the largest swathes of Central and Southern Somalia.

Somali Youth and Unemployment

A recent study found that Somali youth, particularly young men, resort to violence when they feel humiliated, marginalized and denied access to employment opportunities (Mercy Corps, 2013). Al-Shabab can recruit easily unemployed young people with promises of payment as little as \$50-\$100. Unemployment has also encouraged drug addiction and the formation of criminal networks surrounding the business areas, markets cities. Other sources have confirmed that corrupt and dishonest politicians used financial incentives to motivate youth to engage in violence to reach their political goals (Mercy Corps, 2013).

More than 75% of Somali population is under 30 years old with the majority born after the collapse of Somali government in 1991. Two-thirds of these young people have dreams of leaving the country to flee from the hopelessness and perceived bleak future and seek employment opportunities and better lives. The unemployment rate for youth in Somalia is highest in the world with more than 66% having no jobs (Business Insider, 2016). However, recent studies estimate youth unemployment to be closer to 80 per cent or 90 per cent (Altai Consulting, 2016, p.39). Moreover, according to the International Labour Organization labour force survey carried out in Somaliland in 2012, only 5 per cent of youth (from fifteen to twenty-four years old) were employed. There are significant barriers to get access to the few existing job opportunities. They include lack of information, experience, skills and networks, and the limited interest of the Somali government to engage in economic development and labour market reform.

It is thus clear that the biggest single barrier that prevents young Somalis from reaching their potential and their involvement in violence is the high level of unemployment and economic disenfranchisement posed by prolonged civil war. Somaliland and Puntland Governments also argue that unemployment was the key driver for *Tahriin* (illegal migration). The unemployed youth constitute the group that most readily express their interest in migrating illegally and taking the dangerous boat journey to the West where thousands of them drown (Ali, 2016). The second most widespread push factor for migration was insecurity in the South of Somalia (Ali, 2016).

The creation of jobs for youth, particularly young men, is critical to prevent or reduce the scale of conflict. A recent study on Somali youth concluded that job creation in Somalia will prevent them from engaging in violence and anti-social activities. Another study in conflict-affected

countries proved that labour-intensive programs in fragile and violent settings can be a quick win for stabilising a high-risk situation such as the Liberia's Emergency Employment Plan for youth which created 90,000 jobs within two years. Similarly, Afghanistan's National Emergency Employment Program has been successful in providing jobs for youth (World Bank Report, 2011). However, jobs generated in conflict-affected countries may not immediately meet long-term goals for high skills and wages. Although these emergency employments in fragile states are unsustainable they can contribute significantly to social stability.

For the last few years, Somalia has been recovering from statelessness. However, unless the country can enhance education based on market demand, relevant skills and employment opportunities for young people, the recovery process will remain mere rhetoric. Currently, only young people with good income from their employment or those from well-off families in Somalia or with relatives abroad, can afford to pay for their studies and training courses. This means that unemployment and economic deprivation often leads to further marginalisation and the engagement in risky activities to survive (Altai Consulting, 2016)

During the recovery stage from civil wars and conflict, the focus should thus mainly be on addressing and responding to the underlying factors and the root causes of conflict and longer-term development assistance such as employment, skills, education, and health. Therefore, employment creation is critical for peace building, income generation, and poverty reduction, which can in turn lead to durable stability and prosperity (Mercy Corps, 2013).

Research Objective and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand the key employment challenges faced by youth in major cities in Somalia: Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia; Hargeisa, the capital city of Somaliland and Bosaso, the main city in Puntland. 18 young men and women consisting of 6 participants (3 males and 3 females) in each city were interviewed using semi-structured survey questionnaires. The data collected was then translated into English, and analysed, coded and grouped into key themes. An "emic" perspective was adopted to ascertain the views of participants. These themes identified were then reviewed.

The background of the interviewees was as follows. In terms of marital statuses, four participants from Mogadishu were single and two were married. Their ages ranged from 21 to 32. In terms of education, all participants from Mogadishu had Bachelor degrees. In Bosaso, four participants 5 were single and one was married. Their ages ranged from 21 to 30, and only one interviewee had children (four). In terms of education, four had Bachelor degrees, one had a high school level certificate and one had an intermediate level school certificate. In Hargeisa, all participants were single, with their ages ranging from 20 to 29, and all had Bachelor degrees.

Research Findings

Most participants from Mogadishu and few from Bosaso and Hargiesia emphasised the strong correlation between peace and employment arguing that peace brings an environment conducive to employment creation and vice versa. For instance, a young woman from Mogadishu believed that employment was the main prerequisite for peace building in the war-torn country. Another 26-year-old man from Mogadishu felt that "Employment is necessary for peace. Employment and peace are interconnected and each one needs the other". A 20-year-old woman from Hargeisa stated that "...if the current unemployment trend continues for sure people will start to fight among each other. Corruption, plundering, rape and the likes will become wide spread. All these will create social unrest and will harm peace in Somaliland". Talking from his everyday experience, another 28-year-old young man from Mogadishu stated that "unemployment is an obstacle to peace".

Additionally, participants from Mogadishu confirmed that business activities need peace and stability as much as peace needs businesses because businesses can create employment opportunity, and facilitate social interaction in positive ways. Most participants from the three cities underlined the influence of employment and businesses to make young people busy and that prevents them from engaging in violence and criminal activities.

When talking about development and peace, understandably, Mogadishu participants were more concerned about security and stability than those in Bosaso and Hargeisa. The convergence was that most participants from all three cities agreed that unemployment among Somali youth was leading to social strife, violence and insecurity. As Table 1 shows, almost all participants from the three cities concurred the unemployment was the single biggest challenge facing Somali youth. Another common challenge highlighted in Table 1 was that jobs could only be secured through favouritism and nepotism. Most job offers were not advertised because employers favour the selection of relatives or clan members or friends over the more skilled candidates. This confirms the findings of recent studies that found that the system of nepotism in the selection process was likely to continue as long as security conditions do not improve in Somalia (Altai Consulting, 2016). This selection process further limits the access of qualified young people who do not have the right connections in the labour market or who are from minority groups. As Table 1 further emphasises, participants' employment aspirations were quite similar. Establishing their own businesses or finding decent jobs were the most desired. When asked about skills they wanted but could not find in their cities, answers were very diverse showing a spread of individual interests. However, technology related skills and fisheries were spread throughout their responses. Female participants from Hargeisa and Bosaso mentioned women' beauty salon unlike those in Mogadishu. This could be attributed to the fact that beauty salons in Mogadishu are targeted by Al-Shabab extremists while Hargeisa and Bosaso are quite safe. Hargeisa participants also mentioned the need for health-related skills such nutrition and health services.

In addition to the insecurity and violence caused by unemployment, many participants from the three cities highlighted that youth unemployment makes young people demoralised, hopeless and disconnected from their country and people, and wish to leave the country. They recommended that large employment opportunities should be created urgently to assist young people develop confidence and a sense of belonging in Somalia.

Interestingly, several young people from the three cities established the strong relationship between good governance and employment. They mentioned that effective governance was an important precondition and requirement to create employment opportunities. Conversely, they highlighted that ineffective governance and poor policies hindered job creation even in cities such as Hargeisa that enjoy stability and peace. Those from Hargeisa were particularly outspoken about the link between poor governance and lack of employment. This could be attributed to the fact that the current priorities for participants from Hargeisa are nation building and good governance, employment and skills as long they enjoy peace and security in Somaliland compared to their counterparts in Mogadishu and perhaps in Puntland for whom security was their main priority.

Respondents particularly those from Hargeisa argued that education in Somalia was of low quality and not market driven, making it difficult for youth to find jobs. They also explained that there were many universities in Somalia which produced a lot of graduates but their qualifications did not assist them in the labour market. Therefore, they suggested that more should be done to improve relevant educational courses and skills which would enable them get jobs. A 23-year-old young woman from Hargeisa said that "young people do not work according to their qualifications and education system is chaotic". This further confirms findings of recent studies that suggested that educational institutions in Somalia did not meet the quality and huge demand for technical or specialised training. Unfortunately, none of the

educational institutions in Somalia have plans to connect students to the labour market in the form of internships, job forums or career counselling services. Therefore, several participants in this study argued that Somali youth needed internship, employable skills, guidance and mentoring programs which could help youth get work experience, networks and long-term jobs.

Table 1: Challenges, employment aspiration, and skills needed to be provided

City	Main challenges	Employment aspiration	Skills they can't find in their cities	Skills they want to see in the city
Bosaso	6 Unemployed, 2 <i>Tahriib</i> (illegal immigration) Nepotism in the labor market	2 decent jobs 1 teacher 1 doctor 2 business	Tailoring, first aid, engineering, beauty salon, fishing skills, electricity, cooking, construction	Electricity, tailoring, plumbing, fisheries, auto repair, women beauty, business
Hargeisa	6 unemployed, Poor education, Ineffective governance Lack of mentorship Nepotism in the labor market	3 business 2 decent jobs 1 diplomat	Nutrition, data collection, criminal investigation, graphic design, beauty salon	Health services, small factories, fisheries, banks, minerals, technical jobs
Mogadishu	5 Unemployed, 1 Employment Insecurity problems Nepotism in the labor market	1 youth work 1 Tech. Foreign affairs, 1 own business 2 decent jobs	Technology, mechanics, program development, assembling machines, computer skills, job search skills, diplomatic skills, skill on sustainable energy	Technology and vocational jobs, business, fisheries, small business and governmental jobs.

Conclusion

Almost all participants from the three cities perceived unemployment to be biggest threat to social stability and peace. The research confirmed that youth were most likely to engage in violence when they felt humiliated, marginalised and denied access to employment opportunities or had to risk their lives through *Tahriib* (irregular immigration). They felt that the lack of unemployment benefits and the fact that Al-Shabab and dishonest politicians were using financial incentives to recruit youth for their ends was notable. Moreover, they felt that unemployment was leading to demoralisation, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, lack of a sense of belonging to the Somalia, and illegal migration). Youth in all three cities agreed that unemployment was widespread due to nepotism during recruitment process for employment that limits the access of vulnerable groups to the labour market. Mogadishu participants mentioned insecurity as a challenge. Interestingly, youth participants identified that ineffective governance and poor policies were barriers to job creation and stability.

The research also highlighted that the creation of huge employment opportunities was critical for peace building, income generation, poverty reduction, conflict prevention and state recovery. The interviewees further emphasised the strong relationship between youth employment and peace describing development and employment opportunities as keys for stability and social cohesion. Employment was felt to give youth a positive direction, purpose and meaning for their lives, and prevented youth from joining violent groups like Al-Shabab and engaging in criminal activities. They suggested that it was essential to urgently provide relevant educational courses, employment skills, work experiences and internships for young people for youth. Overall, this study confirms that employment creation is at the heart of peacebuilding and violence prevention in all part of Somalia.

This research was undertaken using a small sample of respondents. However, it provides a solid platform for further qualitative and quantitative research so that the evidence can be strengthened to promote employment friendly development and investment projects that can stimulate peace-building efforts.

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