

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SOMALI STUDIES
and
CENTRE OF AFRICAN STUDIES
and
DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES AND CULTURES
SOAS, University of London

THE EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF SOMALI STUDIES

FIRST CONFERENCE

23rd–25th September 1993

VILLAGES AS SOCIO-ECONOMIC UNITS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERIVERINE AREA OF SOMALIA

by

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INTRODUCTION

Somalia has a surface of 638000 km² of which 45% grazeland, 13% cultivable land, and the rest unusable for crop and livestock purposes. The climate is arid to semiarid proceeding from northern Coast to West and the Southern regions. The rainfall is bimodal occurring in two distinct seasons, Gu (April-June) and Der (October-December). The two rivers Shabelle and Juba originate from the Ethiopian highlands and run through Somalia for 1100 and 800 km respectively.

The area under crop is estimated about 1,000,000 ha of which 11% are at present irrigated. Maize, rice, fruit trees, sesame and vegetables are grown on irrigated land, while sorghum, beans, etc. are grown on rainfed land. The main staple crop products were in 1988 as follows: sorghum 234,700 T, maize 353,000 T, sesame 46,000 T, bean 24,000 T. Livestock husbandry is the most widespread economic activity in the Country. According to the 1988 census there were about 6.6 million camels, 4.8 million cattle, 19.7 million goats and 13.2 million sheep. The sector produces most of the meat, milk and butter consumed locally and provides about 80% of the foreign currency earned by the country. Although Somalia has a coast stretching 3300 km, fishing is not developed, it engages only about 2% of the population and produces about 20,000 T per year.

The population was estimated in 1989, around 8.5 million distributed in the following categories: 52% nomads, 24% settled rurals and 24% urbans.

Somalia is an independent republic since 1960. In 1969, a military coup took power, ruling the Country for 21 years. In 1991 a popular movement drove away the Government and since then no formal national government exists.

At independence the Country was divided in 8 administrative regions and this type of organization lasted till the seventies. At the time new divisions were created for political purposes, leading to the present 18 regions and 89 districts.

The riverine and interriverine area of Juba and Shabelle covers about 200,000 km², and has the greatest potential for both irrigated and rainfed farming. Administratively this area covers Hiran, Middle and Lower Shabelle, Middle and Lower Juba, Bay, Bokal, and Gado regions. The North West Region is similar to the interriverine area from the agriculture point of view.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE VILLAGES

The village ("Tuulo") is here defined as a geographical space, permanently occupied by a community of people. The definition could be extended to other temporary settlements in the area where the lack of permanent water sources is the

main constrain to permanent settlements.

This paper considers only the former type of village situated in the riverine and interriverine area where a sustainable rural development could be possible. In the Seventies the Government adopted the "beel" as the lowest socio-geographical unit in which a district is divided. Beel is not synonymous of village as a beel can group various villages. Recently, during the civil war, some faction adopted "Beel" to classify various clans supporting their movement.

Traditionally the need of the people for defence, regulated common use of scarce resources, trade and social living, led to sedentarization.

Villages were established in areas where basic resources, mainly water and good land, were available. Along the lower Shabelle reach, security needs were determinants for the location of the villages on the right side of the river that runs parallel to the sea coastline. In the rainfed area, water availability was a necessary condition for living. A system of water points for rainwater harvest "War" has been developed in the "Adable" area of Bay region. Techniques for selecting proper location, digging and water conservation and distribution were developed. Here the people live around the wars that are at a distance of about 5-6 km one from the other. The sizes of the villages are different, some along lower Shabelle have more than a thousand households as Mubarak, Genale, Bulo Marenta, however the average households of the villages in this area are about 300-400. Along the Shabelle houses are built with sticks and have a rectangular shape with iron-sheet or leaf roofs, the local name for the houses is "arish". In Bay Region, the houses are circular and have thatch roof, they are called "mundul". On the outskirts of the villages, more recent settlements are found, made of "Agal", the nomadic type of dwelling.

Socially each village is organized in families of 5-6 members, generally belonging to the same clan in Bay region, or to different clans in the Shabelle area. The main activities here are crop production along the rivers and mixed farming in the rainfed area. The average cultivated area for family is 2 ha in the irrigated area and 5 ha in the rainfed area.

Villages are the primary market for farm and livestock products. Normally they have some facilities as shop, forge, and workshop. Grain hullers and milling machines operate in some richer villages. Schools were built in early seventies in some villages, but unfortunately they were closed in mid eighties for lack of budget. The only form of education in the village is the Koranic school. Traditionally a group of elders acts as governing board of the village. The elders "Akhiyaar" some times are associated with clan authorities, have linkages with village founders (Bay region), or they are designated by the communities for their personal merits as leaders, religions authorities, generosity etc. Elders' authority is accepted by local people and they oversee land use, water distribution and manage worship places, burial of poor people and settle the dispute.

In last two decades the Government tried to manipulate committee ("Guddi") establishment appointing some members on political grounds, and using them for tax collection and fund raising for the so called self-help schemes. This was seen with distrust by the people since they thought it would enrich only government bureaucrats.

During the civil war the politically appointed members were excluded and the "akhiyaar" have resumed their original authority supporting the community in this difficult time. They affected the reestablishment of security that allowed many displaced people to return to their villages and resume their ordinary life.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL OBSTACLES TO DEVELOPMENT

The production activities of both livestock and crop farming is based on traditional methods. Sorghum, bean etc, are grown with centuries-old techniques. The small hoe "Yambo" is the universal tool for cultivation. Improved techniques, seed, fertilizers, pest control, are not known by the majority of farmers. Even manure is not used as fertilizer. Soil fertility restoring was traditionally granted by a long rest of the land in shifting cultivation practices. Nowadays good and easy land has become scarce because of increased population and fallow is shortening or disappearing.

As a consequence, yields are very low. Average yields for sorghum, maize, sesame, and beans are kg/ha 300, 1000, 250, and 200 respectively, and soil depletion is progressing and nearly reaching in some places (Modomode plain) sterility.

Average milk yields are around 300 kg for cattle, 600 kg for camel, while average carcass yields for mature animals are around 130, 250, 15, 12 kg for cattle, camel, sheeps and goats.

Except for meat and butter, there are scarce traditional conservation techniques for food conservation. Milk, cooked foods, eggs and perishable vegetables are thrown in time of abundance.

The traditional diet consists mainly of cereals for sedentary farmers and livestock products for nomad pastoralists. Both are not nutritionally balanced and malnutrition is common place. Diet improving requires not only higher income level and availability of different food but also basic knowledge of nutritional principles. For example horticulture and bee keeping are not included in the farming systems. Difficulties are met for the procurement of water, and wood for food preparation which engage women for many daily hours.

Malaria, bilharzia, gastroenteric diseases are endemic in the riverine area, tuberculosis, skin diseases are common in the rainfed areas. All these diseases could be prevented with low cost hygienic measures.

FAILURE OF DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Government interventions have operated in abstract, and with concepts built in Ministerial offices. Farmers were never asked for approval or participation in problem identification, planning and implementation. Only few schemes were addressed to village and farm development: Genale-Bulo Marerta (1982) and Norther West development project (1978). Generally large schemes were detrimental for poor farmers because of eviction from good lands they farmed and pushing into marginal land. In the Thirties reclaimed land in Shabelle and Juba areas were given in tenancy to Italian farmers.

In the last two decades, internationally funded agriculture development projects such as Fanole, Tugwagiale, Mugambo, Mererey, Balad, Libsome, Jizoma etc. were designed and managed as public estates. Even Mordinle project designed for small tenants underwent transformation in a large state farm and later a Join-venture company (Libsoma).

In the mid seventies, a villagization programme was initiated in some places.

Farmers were enforced to transfer and group their houses in common places. The idea behind was provide the community with schools, water and health care. The Government was not prepared to implement such an ambitious project both in terms of funds and technical capabilities. The programme resulted unpopular, as the population in the villages felt controlled by the party (Government) militia (Guulwade). It also had a negative impact on agriculture production as the farmers were far from their fields. The farmers resistance had to a quick abandon of this policy.

A number of institutions was set up in different times that should and support of the agriculture development.

However they confronted with a series of problems, their activities were not coordinated and had practically no links with farming communities.

Their work was mostly aimed at raising production of cereal, export, some industrial crops at the national level. There was no specific focus on rural households income or on the resources-poor farmers livelihoods limits to innovation adoption. Consequently impacts on farm communities was generally negligible.

Genale (1912) Bonka (1952) and Afgoi (1964) centers were established, with the objective to increase yields through plant breeding and crop husbandry improvement. New crops, such as banana, cane, cotton, rice, etc., were introduced. Improved agriculture practices were developed on research station farms, such as proper land preparation, and seed, fertilizer, chemical rats. As a result yields were raised in the modern agriculture sector the research addressed. The ratio between traditional and modern farming was about 3:1 for maize, 4:1 for cotton, 3:1 for banana.

While, although research on sorghum received 30 years attention the gap is not significant and further research is needed.

The research generally was conducted on stations without links with small farmers. The technologies advised are always beyond the capacity of a small farmers. Some internal inefficiencies (lack of motivation, budget constraints, low qualification, discontinuity) contributed also to the ineffectiveness of research activities. In recent years the research concept based on the farming system approach was being introduced but it was not possible to evaluate the results because of the onset of the civil war.

The extension service, well funded in last decade, had operated in isolation from research institutes and sometimes in competition with them.

Funds were misused and diversions for other uses, were normal practices.

The service was not capable of developing a sustainable extension system for a poor Country like Somalia. The adopted system was "Training and visit" that requires an organizational setup based on efficient transport, professional competence and motivate leadership. Most of the trained people abandoned the service, equipment was out of service, demonstration farms in Genale (400 ha) and Afgoi (60 ha), were abandoned soon after the first phase of the project terminated in 1986. The results is that, after expending millions dollar for the extension activities no yield increase has materialized in the traditional small farms.

Other institutions created to favour agricultural developments such as Agriculture Development Corporation (ADC) and cooperatives, were ineffective for the purpose. The ADC, acted as government monopsony for cereals and oil seed. The administred prices by ADC were not reflecting the production costs and the terms of trade of the subsector. The situation worsened against the crop producers, since livestock products and imported goods prices were free in the market. This period was characterized by inflation due to government over-expenditure, labour remittance from abroad and gain from livestock exports. So, farmers begun to swich to producing other commodities not controlled by the State, and facing the risks of black market transactions. In the mid of the eighties under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) grain marketing was liberalized and under agricultural structural adjustment programme (ASAP) ADCs were restructured and became grain buffer stocks.

The cooperative movement erracted by law n° 40 in 1973, failed because of the inconsistancy between the government promises and the reality. The models, although with some transitional phases, were reflecting the socialist mode of production. Local farmers had a tradition based on individual farming and only the "war" and channel digging and management were collective tasks. The first group of established cooperative received tractors, water pumps etc, later on it was difficult to maintain such assistance. With the establishment of the Cooperative Union (January 1980), cooperatives lost even the technical guidance of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Local Coop. Managers were elected with Union consent. Due to these political manipulations, in association with other factors, such as the lack of financial

support, internal mis management, lack of training etc, cooperatives didn't root and most of communal farms were abandoned in the early eighties.

It has been presented above various government policies that, certainly, didn't contribute to the improvement of living standard of rural population. Some intervention might have a good theoretical ground, and this paper has no any pretence to make a critical analysis of the cause of these failures. One argument could be the complete neglect of farmers in decision making process. There is a need of reflection on past policies and perhaps learn from them.

PROPOSAL FOR NEW POLICY

The rural settled people account for about 25% of the population. They live in villages which are different in size and development stage, depending on the environmental conditions of the area where they are located.

Generally village's people share technical and economical backwardness. Most of the food consumed in the country is produced in this area, but local production covers only a part of food requirement. The gap is filled by imports, both commercial and food aid. Food security should be granted by increased local production, availability all over the Country and access for all levels of population. Potentiality for such increase exists in term of land and labour. With the available technologies and inputs, maize productivity could be doubled and sorghum increased at least by some percent. Oil crops such as sunflower, sunflower, groundnut could be extended in the rainfed area. Integrated farms with improved livestock breeds could be adopted. For such purposes there is a need of new Philosophy that considers the rural people as first actors of their development.

The policy followed until recently leaved village people to conserve their traditional way of living, creating and stressing the sectoralization of the agriculture sector. The rural people consider certain functions as governmental attributes (education, health care, etc), consequently on the people's side acceptance was passive and the lack of spontaneous participation justified. The evidence is that at Government collapse, the government properties were the first to be plundered.

The policy objective should be to mobilize and develop human resources, assisting the rurals in acquiring capabilities in self-ruling, in increasing and diversifying production, in creating social amenities for better living.

Not all villages have the same weight, those with a minimum number of families capable to sustain some basic social infrastructure (health center, school) will be considered as a basic unit. This will favour the spontaneous resettlement and enlargement of some villages.

Members of the committee, should represent the will of the majority through the exercise of appropriate democratic system.

Planners, researchers, and extensionists should work with the people for

identification of needs and priorities. Design and implementation of programmes and projects will be done with people's participation. A system of coordination will be established between villages and National structures through appropriate channels in the districts and regions. Registry, primary health care, basic education, extension services, water provision, feeder road maintenance, woodland management, job creation training etc, will be the responsibility of the committees. Resources needed for these activities should be generated locally through taxes, and beneficiary contribution, in order to grant continuity of the services and to avoid past errors, when all the money collected was transferred to district towns or to Central Government. Part of the taxes should remain in the village. Voluntary associations need to be promoted to assist the committees in their functions. The Government and donors should assist the villages with training, provision of basic facilities and technical assistance.

Villages under the new organization and management system will have a dynamic development capacity and create conditions to prevent emigration, increase marketable products, avoid environmental degradation, and to absorb part of the nomads that now are going to town for searching better life, with serious social consequences in the urban slums.

Recent experience demonstrates, the feasibility of such a new policy. At present, in the absence of Governmental institutions, the village committees in the lower Shabelle area have been successful in organizing their self defence, and order and peaceful living together were established. Some NGOs have cooperated directly with the committees for the identification of the vulnerable groups, for food and medicine distribution and for agricultural rehabilitation through food for work. Thanks to this cooperation villages as Mubarak, Audegle, Barire etc, have returned to the pre-war situation characterized by peaceful cohabitation, and hope for a better future. Design of the new policy should be targeted to materialise this future.