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Somalia's Aid Dependency in 1960-1990

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Abstract

Prompted by the unfortunate situation of the last 30 years whereby Somalia heavily relies on foreign aid, this article aims to probe the magnitude of the aid dependency of Somalia between 1960 and 1990. The article finds that Somalia heavily relied on external economic, development, humanitarian, and military aid throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. This aid mainly originated from the Western World, oil-rich Arab countries, and the former Soviet Union. The economic and development aid received by Somalia in this period had a negligible positive impact on the economy.

Keywords: Somalia, aid dependency, economic aid, development aid, humanitarian aid, military aid, grants.

The net result of aid-dependency is that instead of having a functioning Africa, managed by Africans, for Africans, what is left is one where outsiders attempt to map its destiny and call the shots.

Dambisa Moyo, Dead Aid, 2009

1. Introduction

Somalia received US\$2 billion official development assistance (ODA) yearly in 2017 and 2018 preceded by a yearly average of US\$1.3 billion between 2012 and 2016 (Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, 2019). This implies an ODA to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) ratio of 21 percent in 2016 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2017) and 27 percent in 2018 (Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, 2019) which makes Somalia a highly aid dependent nation. This could be strongly justified by Somalia's current situation – the country is recovering from a prolonged civil war and instability coupled with terrorism, piracy, warlordism, and other forms of civil unrest and the absence of effective administrations. Therefore, one could be thankful to the generosity of the donor countries and the intergovernmental institutions in this critical period (1991-2020).

The unfortunate situation of Somalia in the last 30 years begs the question of whether the situation was different in Somali state's heydays in 1960-1990. In fact, the evidence shows Somalia remained to be a highly aid dependent nation throughout the three post-independence decades. Somalia largely relied on external assistance for all development projects (Laitin and Samatar, 1984; Samatar, 1985; Mets (Ed.), 1993; Mubarak, 1996) supplemented by intermittent dependency on humanitarian and military aid. This aid came from different countries in different times but mainly from the Western world, the Arab world and the former Soviet Union.

However, the fact is that Somalia was not alone. Throughout the five decades after independence, Africa received more than US\$1 trillion development aid from the developed countries (Moyo, 2009). Critics of aid contend these huge amounts of aid have very little success to show and rather exacerbated the existing economic and political problems in Africa. Moyo (2009) argues that aid working in Africa is a myth and rather caused more harm than good by leading to lower economic growth, widespread corruption, and increased poverty levels. Similarly, Mubarak (1996) argues that most of the development funds received by Somalia after independence resulted in a trivial impact on the economy except improvement of physical infrastructure. This was primarily due to the aforementioned factors that undermined the other African economies.

Aid could be a significant foreign policy instrument and proved to be a vital tool in the Cold War diplomacy (Hruskova, n.d.). It is also inspired and shaped by the national interests of the countries that provide aid. On the other hand, aid can define the position of aid recipients in global politics. In an attempt to capture the extent of post-independence Somalia's aid dependency, Mets (Ed.) (1993: xviii) writes: "[f]oreign relations [of Somalia was] characterized by tension with neighboring states and economic dependence on aid from Arab and Western nations".

Gaining independence in 1960, Somalia had a civilian non-military government until 1969 and had two Presidents and three Prime Ministers. A military regime usurped the power with a coup in October 1969 and lasted the following 21 years. Evidence shows that both civilian and military regimes heavily depended on foreign aid even though the first years of Socialist Somalia recorded remarkable economic, political, and military accomplishments. This article aims to probe the extent to which Somalia depended on aid in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Our analysis covers the period between independence (in 1960) and shortly before the collapse of the state (in 1990). The article relies for most of its data on existing literature. It is not the interest of the author to scrupulously examine and evaluate the effectiveness of aid and the performance of the governments in this period but simply to give an overview of the aid received by Somalia, its magnitude and achievements. Readers will be able to understand Somalia's aid dependency before the state collapse and whether the situation was any different than the post-1991 Somalia.

2. Economic, Development and Humanitarian Aid

2.1. 1960s

The former Somaliland British Protectorate and the Italian Somaliland (under UN-mandated Italian Trusteeship) united on first July 1960 after gaining independence from Britain and Italy on 26 June and first July 1960 respectively. The financial abilities of this new country were very weak and its own capabilities were not enough to meet its needs. In addition, there was scarcity of skilled labor, professionals and experts. As a result, some British and Italian technical experts had to remain in the country after independence (Lewis, 1988) to support the continuity of the government work.

In the first three years, the country could not function without the budget support of Britain and Italy which contributed around 31 percent of the nation's national budget (Mets (Ed.), 1993), let alone financing development activities by itself. In fact, the government completely relied on foreign aid for development projects and received a substantial development aid in the 1960s; these funds were invested in physical infrastructure and industries (Mubarak, 1996). Among these projects were

the establishment of canned fish and meat, milk, and fabric factories, national theatre, the national airline, and public schools (Laitin and Samatar, 1984). Moreover, between 1961 and 1963, the yearly average external assistance received by Somalia was US\$23.5 million – this external aid comprised grants, technical assistance, investment, and export subsidies (World Bank, 1964).

Not only that Somalia received significant foreign aid in the first decade after independence, it obtained the highest aid per capita in Africa; "Somalia received US\$90 per capita in foreign economic assistance, about twice the average for sub-Saharan Africa" (Laitin and Samatar, 1984:62). Sponsoring Somalia to establish economic relations with the European Economic Community (EEC), Italy's economic support to Somalia in the 1960s accounted for one-fourth of the all international aid received by Somalia in this period (Mets (Ed.), 1993). In spite of Italy, Somalia also received a generous financial assistance from other European nations and institutions including West Germany and the EEC through the European Development Fund (EDF). Between 1959 and 1975, "the European Community has granted over 84 million units of account in financial aid to Somalia, equivalent to over 600 million Somali Shillings" (Commission of the European Communities, 1975:13). Moreover, the EEC aid through EDF accounted for around 17 percent "of the total official aid received by Somalia between 1967 and 1974" (Commission of the European Communities, 1975:13). Furthermore, aid from China financed factories and hospitals in the 1960s (Mets (Ed.), 1993).

From 1963 to 1969, 85.1 percent of Somalia's overall development spending was foreign financed – the Soviet Union was the largest development aid donor (with 20.4 percent of the 85.1 percent) followed by the US (with 17.2 percent of the 85.1 percent) and the European Economic Community (with 12.9 percent of the 85.1 percent) (Mehmet,

1971).¹ Although sizable aid from the Arab World had to wait until mid-1970s, Egypt gave aid to Somalia in the 1960s (Omer, 1992), while Saudi Arabia's aid constituted 0.8 percent of the 85.1 percent of the foreign development financing in 1963-69 (Mehmet, 1971).

In summary, Somalia remained to be a heavily aid dependent country in the 1960s as the aforementioned evidence shows. Evaluating the overall performance of the civilian governments (1960-1969), Samatar (1985:31) writes:

By the account of most Somali and external observers, the years immediately preceding 1969 were not only replete with the jettison of democratic practices, but also showed serious signs of economic disarticulation and imbalance, acute external dependency, and poor overall growth.

Not far from this evaluation, Mubarak (1996) records that the 1960s governments and their institutions were characterized by corruption, bribery, nepotism, and poor economic performance. 1969 marks the end of the civilian democratic rule in Somalia when President Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke was assassinated on 15 October 1969 followed by a military coup led by Mohamed Siad Barre on 21 October 1969 (Ingiriis, 2016). Barre will rule the country in the following 21 years until his ousting by the armed movements in January 1991.

2.2. 1970s and 80s

On 20 October 1970, one year since the military took over, Mohamed Siad Barre announced that Somalia embraced socialism and became a socialist state (Laitin and Samatar, 1984). Caught in the middle of the Cold War and its land dispute with the neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya, one of the reasons to adopt the socialist development strategy was because Somalia needed the Soviet Union's assistance, chiefly military support (Mubarak, 1996), even though Somali-Soviet relations officially commenced in 1961 when a delegation led by the then Prime Minister Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke visited Moscow whereby certain credit was approved for Somalia (Ivanova, 2019).

Although Somalia allied itself with the East, it still acquired significant development support from the West and the Arab world. This could be perceived from the public spending; external loans and grants essentially financed the Public Investment Program (PIP) which was the largest component of the public investment (Mubarak, 1996). As we have seen in the previous section, the European Community, through the European Development Fund (EDF) provided considerable development support to Somalia up until 1975. Despite the funding of infrastructure projects that spanned from the 1960s to early 1970s, the European Community also financed a massive industrial plantation project in 1975 (Commission of the European Communities, 1975). Additionally, aid from China funded the North-South road in the 1970s (Mets (Ed.), 1993).

As an oil importing country, Somalia largely depended on the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia, among other donors, for its oil needs. Thus, with the assistance of Iraq, Somalia established an oil refinery plant with a daily capacity of 10,000 barrels by the end of the 1970s (Mets (Ed.), 1993). Interestingly but predictably, Saudi Arabia, with the help of Iran, offered a US\$75 million aid to Somalia in exchange of Somalia downgrading its ties with the Soviet union and again immediately withdrew the offer when Barre declined this condition (Mets (Ed.), 1993).

In the 1970s, Somalia received more development aid from – and had stronger trade relations with – oil-rich Arab countries (OPEC member states) than OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. According to Laitin and Samatar (1984:70),

"[b]y 1979, OPEC development aid to Somalia was about twice as high as aid from OECD states. Also, nearly 90 per cent of Somalia's exports went to Saudi Arabia in 1978". In the same decade, the oil-rich Arab countries funded one of the largest development projects in the history of Somalia – the Marerey Sugar Factory. According to Worrall (1980), the project received US\$188 million Arab money but Ali Khalif Galaydh, who served as the Governor of Marerey Sugar Factory in the 1970s and Minister of Industry in early 1980s estimates the project fund around US\$400 million from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar (Galaydh, 2017).

Somalia was in desperate need of foreign assistance in the face of crises. This has been exposed by the two tough crises that the country experienced in the 1970s: the 1973-74 *Daba-Dheer* drought and the refugee influx resulted from the 1977-78 Ethio-Somali war.

Droughts mainly led to the loss of human lives and difficult economic conditions as they affected the livestock sector, one of the most important economic sectors of the nation.² The *Daba-dheer* drought caught the government unprepared and financially impotent to deal with it. The government had to establish a fund for international contributions and revise its budget to divert project funds to emergency spending (Mubarak, 1996). Foreign countries contributed both food and financial aid as the drought hit the nomadic pastoralists in the North hard. There was later an initiative to move those who lost everything to the South so they could survive with agricultural and fishing cooperatives. Different contributions from different countries are recorded as follows:

By January 1975, China, the United States, the European Economic Community, the Soviet Union, Sweden, Switzerland, Sudan, Algeria, Yugoslavia, Yemen, and others had pledged 66,229 tons of grain, 1,155 tons of milk powder, and tons of other food products. Later that year, with aid from the Soviet Union, the government transported about 90,000 nomads from their hamlets to agricultural and fishing cooperatives in the south. [...] The KFAED [Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development] and the World Bank supported irrigation projects in these cooperatives, in which corn, beans, peanuts, and rice were planted (Mets (Ed.), 1993: 129).

Even though the food aid significantly helped those affected, it led to detrimental economic consequences as it affected the local production and, consumption and saving behavior.³ The country became dependent on food aid and food imports which replaced the locally produced food – cereal aid was only one percent of the nation's total consumption in 1970 but jumped to around 25 percent in 1984, not to mention that external grants were used to import additional food (Mubarak, 1996). Throughout the decade preceding 1988, Somalia became not only largely food aid and food import dependent but more food import dependent than any other sub-Saharan nation despite that the economy of Somalia was mainly agricultural and pastoral (Farzin, 1988).

The Ethiopian-Somali War (1977–1978) led to a large refugee influx to Somalia. Although Somalia sought support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other donors, the Somali government has been criticized for exaggerating the actual number of refugees. A United Nations survey estimated the number of refugees to fall between 450,000 to 620,000 as opposed to the government's estimations of 1.3 million in the camps and an extra close to one million dispersed throughout the country (Mets (Ed.), 1993). Not only that the government inflated the number of refugees but it intentionally redirected the food aid to favored individuals who sold it in the open market; this led to a large black market around the refugee camps (Omer, 1992). Moreover, the country relied on the aid for the refugees as a general aid (Lewis, 2008), a plausible reason to overestimate their number in the first place. Consequently, the government repeatedly dismissed "*plans to repatriate the refugees*" as that would terminate "*the more than \$80 million in annual refugee aid*" (Maren, 1997).

The Ethio-Somali war also led to the fall out of Somalia and the Soviet Union; as a result, the Somali-Soviet Alliance came to an end and the Soviet Union suspended its assistance to Somalia. Ivanova (2019:85) summarizes the nearly two-decade-long Somali-Soviet relations, beginning from 1961, as follows: "*The Somali Republic and the Soviet Union have had a very complicated history of establishing and developing relations: many successes and numerous failures; trust and distrust; and friendship and hostility*".

As could be anticipated, Somalia turned to the West, the US in particular, for development aid and military support. The US provided a significant economic and development support throughout the 1980s and sponsored crucial infrastructure projects. Notably, the US financed the "doubling of the berth" and "deepening of the harbor" of Berbera port which cost US\$37.5 million and the 4500 meters extension of the runway of Mogadishu Airport (Mets (Ed.), 1993:139).

Similarly, assistance from Finland enabled the creation of energy plants in Kismayo and Baidoa in the 1980s; Italy also supported further expansion to the Mogadishu Airport (Mets (Ed.), 1993). Italy was the largest donor in economic aid and financed over hundred projects in Somalia from 1981 to 1990 with a total cost of approximately US\$1 billion but the economic achievements of these projects remained negligible due to a top-level corruption in both Somali and Italian governments (Mubarak, 1996).

Estimations from the World Bank categorize the aid received by Somalia into a project and non-project aid. In 1984, the total project and non-project aid received by Somalia was about US\$280 million compared to

more than US\$290 million in 1985; the non-project aid – cash aid, food aid, and commodity aid – amounted to US\$137 including US\$41 in cash aid mainly from oil-rich Arab countries in 1985 (World Bank, 1987).

Table 1
Exports, Imports, and Official Grant Aid Somalia
(in Millions of US\$)

Year	Exports	Imports	Official Grant Aid
1975	88.6	162.2	100.2
1976	81.0	176.1	39.7
1977	71.3	256.9	105.9
1978	109.5	275.5	78.0
1979	106.0	394.2	58.1
1980	134.2	461.0	143.0
1981	114.0	422.0	150.0
1982	136.9	484.0	157.0
1983	100.7	450.0	148.0
1984	62.0	406.0	174.0
1985	92.5	362.0	179.0

Source: World Bank (1987)

The table above demonstrates the trade balance of Somalia and the official grant aid received in 1975-85. The data reveals that Somalia was in trade deficit in the entire decade but fortunately received considerable grant aid to finance this deficit. From 1975 to 1985, Somalia received a total official grant aid of over US\$1.3 billion. Although not depicted here, the country also used foreign loans and credits to finance the trade deficit.

Despite foreign aid and grants, Somalia heavily relied on foreign loans and credits throughout the 1970s and 1980s, although loans are often considered as a component of the official or systematic aid. By 1979, Somalia's total foreign debt amounted to four billion Somali Shillings, equivalent to 75 years' total earnings of the banana exports (Laitin and Samatar, 1984). Somalia's debt totaled US\$600 million – equivalent to four times of the export revenues – by the early 1980s (Samatar, 1985). Furthermore, Somalia's external debt ratio – total external debt divided by the GDP – increased dramatically from 40 percent in the early 1970s to 189 percent (around US\$2.2 billion) in 1989 (Mubarak, 1996).

In the early 1980s, Somalia turned to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Structural Adjustment Loans. The 1981 Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) agreement signed by the Somali government with the World Bank and IMF, which invested the Banana Industry, did more harm to the Somali economy than good – banana production and exports increased but foreign interests gained 75 percent of the export earnings (Samatar, 1993). Throughout this period, the Somali government relied on the instructions of the World Bank and IMF for running the economy (Laitin and Samatar, 1984). The trustworthiness and effectiveness of the technical assistance from these institutions to the developing countries has been doubted and lambasted (Muhumed and Gaas, 2016).

In the late 1980s, the fighting between the Somali National Army and the armed rebel movements intensified and the regime's human rights violations increased. As a result, most of the donors suspended their aid to Somalia. The US for instance, suspended its economic and military aid in 1989 (Mets (Ed.), 1993).⁴

3. Non-Economic Assistance

Somalia also received substantial non-economic aid mainly technical support, scholarships⁵, and military aid throughout the 1960, 70s, and 80s. For instance, Somalia received technical training scholarships and printing presses from the Soviet Union in the 1960s (Mets (Ed.), 1993). In

addition, the Soviet Union (offering diverse scholarships) remained to be a top destination for Somali students, including those in military training, from 1961 onwards (Ivanova, 2019). Somali students received scholarships from Western and Arab countries as well. Since Somalia joined the Arab League in 1974, an increased number of Somalis acquired tertiary education opportunities from Arab countries while many others were employed by oil-rich Arab countries-funded projects (Laitin and Samatar, 1984). On the contrary, numerous Somali students went to study in the US in the 1980s; the shift of Somalia's alliance from the East to the West might have caused this.

Nevertheless, military aid constitutes the largest non-economic aid received by Somalia in this period. Focusing on the military aid is based on the notion that a strong and independent economy will be able to independently manage its military budget; an acute military aid dependency may reflect on, though not always, weak and aid dependent economy. According to Mubarak (1994), shortly after the 1964 Ethio-Somali War, the Soviet Union signed a deal with Somalia to assist them to build a strong army of 5000 soldiers which later increased to 17,000 soldiers. Up until 1977, Somalia received sizeable technical and military aid to Somalia including "*Soviet specialists and technicians to teach Somalis*" in Somalia (Ivanova, 2019:73).

In 1980, Somalia and the US signed a deal in which Somalia would receive a US\$40 million military aid in the following two years while Somalia would let the US use its ports and airstrips in Berbera, Kismayo, and Mogadishu. This was followed by an annual US military aid to Somalia of US\$21.2 million in 1983; US\$24.3 million in 1984; US\$80 million in 1985; US\$40 million in 1986, and US\$37.1 million in 1987 (Mets (Ed.), 1993). From 1978 onwards, Italy was leading the military aid provided by the Western countries to Somalia while West Germany offered assistance to the security services and police totaling DM12⁶ million between 1985 and 1987 (Mets (Ed.), 1983).

4. Conclusion

This article explored Somalia's aid dependency throughout the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Somalia heavily relied on external economic, development, humanitarian, and non-economic aid. This aid mainly originated from the Western World, oil-rich Arab countries, and the former Soviet Union. In addition, Somalia largely depended on external loans and credits and the country's total debt in this period got out of control.

The existing literature underscores that the economic and development aid received by Somalia had a negligible positive impact on the economy and rather led to a detrimental economic consequence such us retarding the local production and changing the saving and consumption behavior of the consumers – the Somali people became largely dependent on food aid and food imports. The Somali economy suffered from rampant corruption coupled with "*institutional weaknesses, poor management, scarcity of trained personnel, and poor capacity for economic policy analysis*" (Mubarak, 1996:162) throughout these years.

One reason that many of these development projects did not materialize was that the money never reached Somalia, the recipient country. As mentioned earlier, Italy approved over hundred projects for Somalia in the 1980s. A staggering fact, though peculiar, is that in 1978, the Somali and Italian Governments opened a Chamber of Commerce Office in Milan, Italy, in which, most of these projects were arranged. The Chamber got a commission from every approved project while implementing partners who were awarded to carry out the projects paid millions of dollars of kickbacks to Italian politicians. Therefore, millions of dollars were looted before the aid money reached the government accounts (Achtner, 1993; Maren, 1997). Due to serious corruption allegations against the then Italian Government associated with this Chamber of Commerce Office, a law suit was filed in 1989 against Bettino Craxi, the Prime Minister of Italy from 1983 to 1987 and his brother-in-law, Paolo Pillitteri who headed the Office (Achtner, 1993).⁷

According to Omer (1992:72-73), donor countries were not interested in the appropriate use of the aid they offer "so long as their own interests were not endangered"; the Western media will sometimes pick up the squandering of their taxpayer's money in which Somalia was several times represented as "the graveyard of foreign aid". The aid was often used for personal interests by the government officials and anyone else who could be involved in managing the funds based on the "attitude of easy-come-easy-go".

Calls from the West to suspend the economic and development aid to Somalia intensified in the late 1980s but the Foreign Minister of Italy Gianni De Michelis and the US Ambassador T. Frank Crigler insisted that as Somalia became more dependent on aid, suspending aid will result in complete disaster and will not only hurt Mohamed Siyad Barre but will mean the end of Somalia (Maren, 1997). Therefore, although foreign aid, refugee aid in the 1980s in particular, delayed what would otherwise be the immediate fall of Barre's regime, we can conclude that external aid contributed, in one way or another, to the collapse of the Somali state.

Somalia is in a recovery and reconstruction stage today. Thus, it is indispensable to learn from the history and avoid the nation's economy to become primarily dependent on external aid. Obviously, the phenomenon of aid dependency occupies the minds of the Somali leaders while Somalia is a rich country in terms of mineral resources, oil, gas, livestock, agricultural land, and with better governance system, have a better future.

Notes

- ¹ The author adds some specifications about this data: "[...] these figures are subject to important qualifications. The U.N. and the Italian shares are almost certainly understated, since the recurrent costs of technical assistance as well as fellowships are excluded, as is the Italian budgetary aid. Also excluded from Table I are technical assistance from the U.A.R. [United Arab Republic] [Obviously from Egypt] for education and health, and emergency aid from a number of countries during the famine of 1964-5." He adds that the data "includes only those projects for which financial agreements exist" (p. 37). Therefore, USSR was not necessarily the largest donor in this period.
- ² Somalia has been a victim of recurrent major droughts in every 10-15 years and medium droughts in every 4-6 years (Mubarak, 1996). These droughts hugely affected, and still affect, the lives of the nomadic pastoralists who rely on livestock for their lives as well as the national economy who depends on export earnings and national revenue for livestock, among other things.
- ³ For more on this, see: Farzin, Y. H., (1988). Food Import Dependence in Somalia: Magnitude, Causes and Policy Options. World Bank Discussion Papers. The World Bank. And Mubarak, J. A. (1996). From Bad Policy to Chaos in Somalia: How an Economy Fell Apart. Greenwood Publishing Group.
- ⁴ In fact, the East-West rivalry on Somalia came to an end in 1978 when Somalia and the Soviet Union parted ways. Therefore, Somalia had no choice but to associate itself with the West.
- ⁵ Scholarships can be considered as an economic assistance if we consider them as a component of human capital. However, in this article we consider education as a social component and thus scholarships are categorized as noneconomic assistance. The technical assistance mentioned in this section mainly associates with military aid and technical trainings, and is therefore categorized as non-economic assistance as well.
- ⁶ Deutsche Mark (DM) was the currency of West Germany between 1948 and 1990 and that of United Germany from 1990 to 2002. Germany then adopted the Euro in 2002.
- ⁷ The corrupt relationship between the Somali and Italian Governments traces its roots back to the 1970s and thrived when Bettino Craxi came to power in 1983.

In this period, Somalia received quite significant economic, development and military aid from Italy.

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