

ARTICLES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS IN SOMALIA

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Introduction

A decade ago, events in the Horn of Africa seldom made the wire-services. Then as socio-political conditions changed drastically in the 1970s, the Horn became the arena for political turmoil and ferocious wars that were newsworthy enough but gave small comfort to those who prefer their ideological conflicts neat and tidy.

In Somalia, a military-dominated Supreme Revolutionary Council overthrew a parliamentary government ten years ago, adopted a national policy of "scientific socialism," reduced links with western states, established close ties with socialist nations, and entered a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with the Soviet Union in 1974, the first of its kind in black Africa.

The empire-state of Ethiopia, a perennial adversary of Somalia, was still an American ally as the country had been since the 1940s. Emperor Haile Selassie received half a billion dollars in military hardware and economic aid from Washington. Then, in 1974, a new regime (the Provisional Military Government or "derg") swept away the Emperor's inept and corrupt government and announced its commitment to "socialist reconstruction," turning to the Soviet Union and Cuba for assistance. The United States suspended all military programs, and by 1977 most Americans had left Ethiopia.

In mid-1977, the Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), with regular troop support and mil-

itary assistance from Somalia, captured a Somali-inhabited portion of southeastern Ethiopia known as the Ogaden. Ethiopia, with the help of Cuban combat personnel and Soviet advisors, and \$1 billion worth of sophisticated weaponry, routed the insurgents. Somalia, in turn, dramatically expelled the Russians from its country, abrogated the Friendship Treaty, and turned to the US and her allies for military aid.

An area so notorious for fluid, ephemeral, incomprehensible alliances was much on the minds of political analysts. James Reston called the Horn "a vital key to world politics for the rest of the century." Gerard Chaliand concluded that since the "heart of the matter" was "control of the Red Sea," the outcome of the Somali-Ethiopian struggle was "bound to have a major impact beyond the Horn, affecting the course of superpower relations."¹ Global strategists insisted that Russian-Cuban "adventurism" in the Horn threatened the safety of shipping lanes and hurt the chances for Soviet-American detente. After the recent series of political somersaults in the Horn, however, I doubt whether "domination" by any superpower in that region will ever amount to very much in the late 20th century.

Recent reporting from the Horn has accentuated "action news" — border violations, expulsions of former patrons, inter-African warfare. This article concentrates instead on "development news" about Somalia, a poor country that has honestly tried to improve itself through efficient and humane pro-

grams to resolve the majority.

Somali Unification

Economic

Before examining socio-economic developments, it is useful to view their long-simmering causes. That conflict springs from factors which cannot be explained by traditional background. The Somalis have tried to unify under one flag since the 1950s. They live in southeastern Africa, in a region which the Organization of African Unity has upheld the sanctity of independence since the time of independence in 1960. The Somalis are the only African people who do not have boundaries. They may be people for whom some matter of ecological and

In order to survive, the Somali pastoralists rely on water resources, feeding on the other side of the boundary. Nearly 90% of their animals are handled at the port of Berbera in a series of transactions in a marketing system. Clothing, dates, rice, and other goods are traded in Somalia. This interplay has led Somalis towards the agricultural sector of Somalia's economy, which is financed by Somalis living abroad. Somalia tries to improve its economy through programs to improve domestic agriculture, but cannot ignore this reality.

The Somalis long ago developed a nomadic rotation across the seasons, nomads were able to use their home wells; in wet seasons, they moved to the rangelands, allowing different water sources to regenerate. The different kinds of plants required that ranges be

grams to resolve the plight of the nation's poor majority.

Somali Unification—An Ecological and Economic Necessity?

Before examining some of those socio-economic developments, it is useful to consider how Somalis view their long-simmering dispute with Ethiopia. That conflict springs from a set of distinctively local factors which cannot be severed from their historical background. The Somali government is pledged to unify under one flag the Somali-speaking people of northeast Africa, including close to a million who live in southeastern Ethiopia. This dream of a "united Somalia" challenges a cardinal principle of the Organization of African Unity, that member states uphold the sanctity of boundaries inherited at the time of independence, regardless of their arbitrary nature. The Somalis realize they are not the only African people still divided by colonialist boundaries. They may, however, be one of the few people for whom some sort of unification is also a matter of ecological and economic necessity.

In order to survive in the Ogaden, for instance, Somali pastoralists rely on trans-border pastures, water resources, feeder roads, and market facilities on the other side of the present Ethiopia-Somalia boundary. Nearly 90% of all Somali animal exports are handled at the port of Berbera, following a long series of transactions through a traditional livestock marketing system. Ogaden Somalis import their clothing, dates, rice, and pharmaceuticals from Somalia. This interplay of forces so pulls the Ogaden Somalis towards Somalia proper, that a major sector of Somalia's economy is constantly influenced by Somalis living outside of the country. As Somalia tries to implement comprehensive programs to improve domestic livestock production, it cannot ignore this reality.

The Somalis long ago evolved a system of nomadic rotation across the rangelands. In the dry seasons, nomads were densely concentrated near their home wells; in wet seasons they scattered over the rangelands, allowing the grazing land near the water sources to regenerate. Different animals eat different kinds of plants; so effective utilization required that ranges be grazed when vegetation was

the most nutritious. If the word "integrity" means a state of being whole, undiminished, and sound, then the term "ecological integrity of rangelands" probably best describes the relationship between forage, plants, water, animals, and people as the most salient feature of Somali ecology.

The colonialist partition of the Horn disrupted that integrity when Somali rangelands were chopped up and divided among Italy, Britain, and Ethiopia. Colonialists restricted transhumant grazing patterns, taxed and expropriated animals, and intimidated nomads who tried to reach seasonal grazing areas and water holes across the boundaries. These realities sometimes forced nomads to take actions in the best interests of their animals if not of the rangelands. By the 1940s, ranges steadily subjected to longer grazing periods were threatened with deterioration.

After the allied forces expelled the Italians from northeast Africa in 1941, the eastern Horn was placed under a loosely-unified British wartime administration. As British officers moved easily across the Horn, they came to appreciate the links between open boundaries, access to wells and pastures, and the livelihood of Somali pastoralists. While touring the area in 1943, Governor Gerald Fisher noted that "Somali products, if freely exchanged throughout the region, go far to meet the people's food requirements."² Fisher suggested that "from a social and economic point of view the only hope of improving the living standards of the nomads is to create a united Somalia."³

In 1944, a comprehensive study of grazing areas (*The Glover Report*) substantiated that "grazing facilities in the British Protectorate were insufficient for the people's needs for the greater part of the year."⁴ The report suggested that without access to other areas, pastoral life was impossible because some groups were compelled to use during the rainy season the dry-season grazing reserves of other groups. "To anyone versed in desert pasturage," commented one official, "that is economic suicide."

Lt. Col. R.D. Arundell, a military intelligence officer, was indignant. "The [Ogaden-Somaliland Protectorate] boundary is worse than ridiculous; it is wicked," he wrote. Arundell realized that the rich grazing areas of the Haud were as essential to Oga-

den Somalis in the rainy season as the permanent wells within the British territory were in the dry season. "There is but one answer," Arundell concluded, "and that is to form a Greater Somalia."⁵ A secret War Office memorandum said flatly that "Greater Somalia without the Ogaden would be a contradiction in terms: its exclusion would bring about all the disadvantages which the proposals to establish a unified administration are designed to effect."⁶

Local colonial and military officials in the Horn vigorously supported post-war boundary rectifications to create a "United Somalia" under British sovereignty. The British Foreign Office, however, encountered stiff international opposition to such plans. France and Russia denounced it as a simple scheme to expand the British Empire. Ethiopia demanded restoration of its authority over the Ogaden and drew strong American support, especially after Sinclair Oil Company signed an exclusive concessionary agreement with Haile Selassie in 1946 permitting oil exploration in the Ogaden. With Britain's financial status reversed from creditor nation in 1939 to debtor in 1946, Parliament refused to allocate funds for a new colonial commitment.

Britain withdrew its support for a "united Somalia," and participated instead in the "second partition" of the Somali lands. Despite strong Somali opposition, Italy was granted a ten-year United Nations Trusteeship over Somalia in 1950, and the recognition of Ethiopian sovereignty over the critical wells and pastures of the Haud in 1954 completed the return to the *status quo ante*.

Somalis have never reconciled themselves to this legacy of colonialist divisions. A culturally and linguistically uniform people with the economic dependence on open borders characteristic of nomadic populations, the Somalis remain determined to reunite somehow the Somali territories and reestablish its ecological integrity.

Critics may tell Somalia to concentrate on improving the lot of its own people and avoid costly wars with Ethiopia, but they should not underestimate the seriousness with which Somalia views the political and economic subjugation of her kinsmen in the Ogaden. Somalis consider Ethiopian control over the Ogaden an example of *African* colonial domination over a part of the Somali lands. The Somali ambassador to the United Nations referred specifi-

cally to Somalis in the Ogaden when he remarked recently that "colonialism is not a phenomenon solely identifiable by the accident of geography or the color of a man's skin."

After their military conquests of the Ogaden lowlands ninety years ago, Ethiopian rulers expressed their "sovereignty" by intermittent expeditions and raids in which Somali livestock was taken as tribute. In 1892, the British Consul in northern Somaliland reported that "a large Abyssinian expedition has returned from the Ogaden bringing with them as booty some thousands of camels and cattle and property of all description. I hear from other sources that they have devastated a large part of the Western Ogaden and slaughtered the people Many people are dying of starvation, and an epidemic said to be cholera, but which may be 'starvation fever' has broken out, and carries off numerous victims daily This state of affairs is attributed entirely to the conduct of the Abyssinian soldiery who eat up everything."⁷

Ethiopia barely administered the Ogaden until the 1950s, and twenty-five years later there were still no signs of any attempts to improve the area — not a single paved road, school, hospital, or electrical line. The Ethiopian presence was always a colonial one, consisting primarily of soldiers and tax-collectors whose houses were flimsy, stick-and-mud huts with metal roofs and dirt floors. "Because the Ethiopians always felt temporary there," observed Bashir Muhammad, an Ogaden resident, "they never bothered to build decent houses because they thought they'd be thrown out."

"We kept paying taxes, but got no services," complained Osman Hassan, a spokesman for the WSLF. "The Ethiopians occupied us like a feudal kingdom: they took and took and gave nothing back." Abdullahi Hassan Muhammed, the Secretary-General of the WSLF, recalled how "in the towns, Somalis were barred from most jobs; in the countryside, the Ethiopians filled in our wells and water canals to drive us from the land."

The Ogaden Somalis were treated as colonial subjects. Scarcely integrated into the Ethiopian empire-state, never considered as equals by their Amhara conquerors, is it any wonder that they developed only hatred — never loyalty — towards Ethiopia? Amidst the disastrous drought of 1973-74, a provincial medical officer again demon-

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inated Ethiopia's callous disregard for Somali victims when he reasoned that "people have always starved down in the desert and help has never reached them before."⁸

Captain Keseteberhan Ghebrehiwet, chief desk officer for Somalia in the Ethiopian government of Haile Selassie and a military intelligence officer in the subsequent administration (the Derg), candidly discussed Somali alienation in the Ogaden in a recent interview. "The day-to-day lives of the Ogaden Somalis are so attached to Somalia," said Captain Keseteberhan, "that even if they get primary education in Ethiopia they then go for higher education to Somalia and get jobs there. Some even hold very high government posts. They observe rules and regulations made for the Somali public. They normally cross the border when they need legal help to settle disputes — or else mediators are sent from Somalia. They do not believe themselves Ethiopians, in fact the hatred they have for the Amhara is monumental. During the many operations that Ethiopia conducted to suppress popular revolts in the Ogaden, there was such inhuman treatment of the population that children grow up with a deeply imbedded hatred of the Amhara."⁹

Somalia has withdrawn its troops from the Ogaden, although it still considers the WSLF a legitimate movement for self-determination from a colonial power. With territorial boundaries that Somalia considers artificial and ridiculous but which are regarded by Ethiopia as the non-negotiable essence of its "national integrity," the obstacles to peaceful settlement seem insurmountable.

There are many examples of persistent colonialist divisions in Africa: the Bakongo in Zaire, Congo and Angola; the Ewe in Ghana and Togo; the Yoruba in Nigeria and Benin; the Beni Amer in Ethiopia and the Sudan. Even with those examples in mind, the weekly publication *West Africa* editorialized in 1978 that "there is much force behind the argument of the Somalis, in favor of the Horn of Africa being regarded as a unique case, the exception to all the rules, amenable to a solution that would not be regarded as a precedent for any of the multitude of other border disputes. It is unique because it concerns an African state, Ethiopia, in the role of the imperialist. Former colonial territories, so the argument runs, can claim that their boundaries at the time of independence are sacred, but this

can surely not be claimed by a colonizing power."¹⁰

Perhaps if more African states acknowledged the singularity of the Somali predicament, it might make them more sympathetic to the Somali cause than has otherwise been the case. For their part, both Somalia and Ethiopia might give serious consideration to a sensible suggestion that they "abandon the conventionally rigid notions of territorial sovereignty in favor of a more fluid and functional architecture of political authority . . . where both sides accept some overlap of national jurisdiction."¹¹

The Background to Transformation in Somalia

Within Somalia, the government of President Mohammed Siad Barre has committed itself to increase national production through a wider application of science and engineering, decrease rural-urban income differentials, and enlist popular support for participation in development programs. Making headway towards those goals has not been easy and there are some serious discrepancies between political rhetoric and social action. Demonstrable socio-economic improvements have, nonetheless, occurred in Somalia throughout the 1970s.

For the first nine years following independence in 1960, Somalia was administered by a succession of parliamentary governments which eventually gained a reputation for indolence, folly, and injustice. On October 21, 1969, power was seized in a bloodless coup by a sector within the state apparatus, led by the armed forces and aided by public employees, intellectuals, and members of the petit bourgeoisie, frustrated by the nepotism and ostentatiousness of the post-independence governments. Unwilling — or unable — to compete effectively in the insane quest for wealth which they associated with nascent capitalist acquisitiveness, alienated civilians were radicalized to the point of accepting a socialist alternative, supported the military takeover, and then worked to implement programs directed at beginning a transformation of Somali society.

The military ruled Somalia through a Supreme Revolutionary Council until July 1, 1976 when it was replaced by the Somali Revolutionary Socialist

Party (SRSP), whose membership presently exceeds 25,000. Mohammed Siad Barre, the Somali President, is also Secretary-General of the SRSP and presides over a five-man Politbureau drawn from a 73-man Central Committee. National policies are customarily determined by the Politbureau and implemented through the Ministries and a network of subcommittees throughout the sixteen regions and eighty-two districts.

The government is determined to mobilize people through projects that improve living standards and put resources and enterprises into Somali hands. There has been expansion of the public sector, collectivized ownership of many resources, and nationalization of banks, schools, insurance companies, and petroleum distribution. Private doctors were nationalized but local pharmacies remain under private control, and official policy allows private initiatives in banana cultivation, livestock sales, and internal transportation.

In the past decade, Somalia adopted a modern script for its previously unwritten language, launched massive campaigns that boosted literacy from 5% to 60%, fought a devastating drought by resettling 200,000 destitute nomads in farming and fishing communities, implemented a public health program that reduced the incidence of malaria and eradicated smallpox, narrowed government salary divergences, and channelled foreign aid into projects directed at the needs of the poorest sections of the population.

The number of people per doctor has declined from 21,000 to 14,000, available clean water increased from 15% to 30% of the population, and life expectancy rose from 38 years to 41 years in the same period. In 1970, only 7% of primary school age children were actually enrolled; in 1977 it was 28%. Primary and secondary student populations rose from 56,000 in 1970 to 243,000 in 1978 and the proportion of females rose from 20% to 35%.

At considerable risk for a Muslim country, women are encouraged to take an active role in national development. Within the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, for example, Mrs. Faduma Ahmed Alin is the Director-General and Ms. Deeqa Jaama, a Stanford-trained anthropologist, is President of the National Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In 1977, an International Labor Office report scrutinized the achievements, defects, and potentialities of Somalia's "poverty-oriented strategy," and concluded that the state's basic education programs, health services, and self-help schemes were "providing the socio-economic foundations of growth."¹² The ILO study implies that going steadily in the right direction is better than going rapidly the wrong way.

Somalia is heading in the right direction because its government demonstrates a grasp of the particularities of Somali society. Its domestic objectives reflect the country's most important reality: that 90% of the people live a rural, primarily *nomadic*, existence. The Somali heritage of nomadic pastoralism is being integrated into Somalia's political philosophy of socialism in order to encourage more nomadic participation in the affairs of state.

As previously stated, nomadic pastoralism is inextricably tied into the ecosystem of the Somali lands (including the Ogaden). The eastern Horn is a semi-desert region of rugged mountains and sparse plateaus where ground water is scattered, inaccessible, or unreliable. A southern agricultural region between Somalia's two perennial rivers (the Juba and the Shebelle) and a grain-producing plateau in the northwest are the only exceptions to a landscape of coarse grass, thorn trees, and giant anthills.

Less than 11% of Somalia is potentially arable for productive farming, and only 10% of that amount is actually under cultivation. Over 75% of Somalia's 246,000 square miles is classified as "rangelands," areas that produce the vegetation essential for livestock forage. Shallow soils, poor drainage, rockiness, and alkalinity make rangelands unsuitable for cultivated agriculture. Pastoral nomadism thus represents a flexible, specialized, sensitive approach to the use of poor and variable lands. This land of meager natural endowment offers few alternatives to animal husbandry, so over 70% of all Somalis are nomads or semi-nomads.

The Somalis form a national community with a common language, common religion (Islam), traditions of egalitarianism and anti-authoritarianism, and little social stratification. "Rich and poor are never far apart," observes a proverb, "in fact, they inhabit the same house." With a large non-

monetary sector, no crystallized middle class, rudimentary industries, and an ethnic homogeneity rare in Africa, Somalia is a nation where "everyone has a foot in the nomadic culture."

Somalis efficiently manage their resources, tolerate austere living conditions, and are skilled in the techniques of bargaining and compromise. An economic network through which pastoralists barter milk and livestock for farmers' grains and merchants' commodities assures broad social contacts, the material basis for a national consciousness that transcends clan divisions.

Pastoral Development in the Somali State

With otherwise limited assets, the size and importance of the pastoral sector make it the backbone of the Somali economy. The rangelands support a livestock population of approximately three million cattle, six million sheep, eight million goats, and four million camels. Livestock exports and animal products (meat, skins, hides) annually generate \$62 million, or 77% of the state's foreign exchange earnings. Another \$75 million worth of livestock is slaughtered annually for domestic consumption. The range industry is a major resource attracting outside capital (primarily for veterinary care and water resources). For livestock marketing to be linked to national development, pastoral surpluses must be utilized to initiate internal capital formation.

The Somali pastoral economy, vulnerable to drought every four to six years, demands flexible management. Somalia is trying to recreate a viable pastoralist society, while it slowly expands an agricultural and small-scale industrial base. The government is giving the highest priority to the maintenance of rangeland resources, attempting to balance animal and human populations with forage supplies. The ecological decline of rangelands may be arrested and productivity restored, provided it can be done on a large scale by bringing Somali-inhabited lands under a rest and rotational plan of grazing reserves. This involves the art and science of range management — a form of applied ecology — to protect, plan, and direct the use of rangelands to obtain sustained yields of animal production.

A central organization with the political author-

ity, technical means, practical experience, and financial commitment to impose economic controls, land use discipline, and determine correct stocking rates might be able to ensure increased productivity without degrading the environment. Improper management or failure to utilize the rangelands wisely will only promote more damage to the country. To improve nomadic existence, safeguard man and beast from drought, and preserve an adequate level of subsistence, it will be necessary to continue traditional patterns of livestock movements and superimpose upon them some system of scientific rangeland management.

Within Somalia itself, state authority has spread gradually into pastoral areas to shift a few functions from the pastoral society onto the central government. In 1974-75, prompt and efficient drought relief programs provided the Somali government with an opportunity to "take the state" to the nomads just when nomads needed state aid as never before. The priority of the relief programs was to rehabilitate, not politicize, the captive audience. The rescue of 200,000 nomads became another way to initiate changes and created a constituency of participants for other development projects.

The removal of so many nomads from the rangelands eased ecological pressures, while subsequent range management schemes are now attempting to halt the unchecked growth of herds. Under the Northern Range Project, nomads learn modern cross-breeding techniques to improve the quality of their sheep, cattle, and camels. They formulate local bylaws to keep wells safe and clean, but must begin to establish land tenure laws to guarantee rights to lands left ungrazed by clans or lineage groups. A few thousand nomads have joined pilot cooperatives that utilize rotational grazing methods whereby lands are periodically fenced off to enable vegetation to regenerate. In the late 19th century, powerful northern Somali chiefs occasionally declared pasture closures to let the grasses grow. The aim of the modern cooperatives is to improve depleted grazing lands and to strike a balance between production for consumption and for export. It is hoped this approach will increase forage growth and make it more "drought-proof" during times of greatest water scarcity.

The Ministry of Livestock relies on six Nomadic

Education Centers to teach nomads basic literacy, soil conservation, range management, and how to avoid overstocking, so that livestock-raising might eventually be less subject to the vagaries of weather fluctuations. In the 1950s and 60s, the commercialization of livestock exports to the Arabian peninsula, and the haphazard development of cement water tanks promoted the private appropriation of previously communal herds, accentuating rural economic differentiation without any adequate modern replacements for declining communal institutions.

In order to avoid egregious inequalities, some private herds may have to be replaced by communal ones. Somalia has thus far avoided any enforced communalization of pastoral cooperatives but either windfall gains by the mercantile livestock class must be taxed more regularly, or the government may be forced to take drastic steps necessary to absorb increasingly under-employed nomadic labor. For the moment, anyhow, it appears that the private ownership of some herds will continue for the foreseeable future, although animals kept in excess of certain figures should certainly be taxed.

The development of nomadic cooperatives and rangeland management projects will take time. It is important that pastoralists, supervisors, engineers, and scientists not become impatient. One cannot improve in a few years what man and his animals have misused for decades.

In southern Somali resettlement villages, such as Kurtun Waarey, Sablale, and Dujuma, 90,000 former pastoralists are farming collectively within an infrastructure that may eventually change nomadic habits. Scattered nomads have been brought together in embryonic communities to facilitate agricultural, medical, technical, and educational assistance programs, and to provide at least the basis for a new way of life.

Local government in the settlement communities consists of district and village committees where posts are all elective, filled by both men and women. These committees attempt to define local needs, suggest necessary changes, and encourage people to experiment with new methods in the execution of projects. Schools, a dispensary, and political orientation centers are clustered around the unit. The unit is linked through regional committees

to various Ministries responsible to the SRSP. The pyramidal framework allows a two-way flow of exchanges and influence.

At Kurtun Waarey, a resettlement camp established for drought victims in 1975, 23,000 "settlers" originally lived in crowded dwellings of sticks, mud, and skins that soon deteriorated from insect damage and heavy rains. Adequate shelter is a prerequisite to satisfaction with a way of life quite different from nomadism and is a key element in helping assure the success of settlement programs.

Last year, prototype housing units were designed and constructed. The low-cost program used local labor and materials, including bricks from local clay and roof thatching from dried fronds. When they checked for possible ecological side-effects, local officials discovered that cutting nearby trees to get charcoal to fire the kilns was contributing to deforestation. Village representatives eventually convinced the Settlement Development Agency to replace the kilns with imported ovens operated on cheap kerosene.

Residents will soon select the model home they consider most functional and comfortable, and by early 1980 approximately 500 homes should be completed. In an interview with me at Kurtun Waarey in January, Mohammed Issa Salwe, the district commissioner, expressed a hope that the unit might serve as a demonstration model for a replicable housing program, and stimulate interest in a more generalized minimum shelter industry.

The farming cooperative at Kurtun Waarey contains instruments to enable nomads to learn agricultural production. Within the cooperative, land is held in common and crops belong to everyone. Individual families will eventually have three-hectare individual plots for irrigated land and six-hectare plots for rain-fed land. The level of agricultural production remains rudimentary, with only 1500 hectares of a projected 20,000 currently under cultivation. The cooperative will not be self-sufficient for at least three years and it must create surpluses if it hopes to attract underemployed nomadic manpower into agriculture.

Some evidence of nomadic adaptability and hints of a slow transformation are visible. On the rangelands, the nomads subsisted mainly on milk, wild plants, and meat. At Kurtun Waarey, they grow

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National Language Development and Literacy

The adoption of written Somali as the national language has been another accomplishment of the Somali revolution. The Muslim Somalis say prayers and often greet each other in Arabic, but it is not their mother tongue. In fact, Somalis have had a long, but ambivalent, relationship with Arab culture, and the Somali language remains a vital force sustaining the uniqueness and integrity of Somali culture.

Somali is a Cushitic language. Whenever a Semitic language like Arabic is written, vowels (which have only grammatical functions) may be omitted and the remaining consonant structure of a word usually suffices for identification. Whereas Arabic is vowel-poor, Somali is vowel-rich. The elimination of vowels renders Cushitic consonants, alone, senseless and meaningless.

Latin characters could accommodate the Somali vowel system since the ten basic Somali vowel sounds can be handled by the five Latin vowels standing alone or doubled, an impossible function for the six vowel sounds of Arabic. Strong opposition to the adoption of Latin characters came from Somali religious leaders who associated the script with "infidel" Christian colonizers.

Fifty years ago, Osman Yusuf Kenadid invented an entirely new script for the language — Osmaniya — but debates ensued between those who favored his new script, others who recommended the use of Latin characters, and still others who urged the adoption of the Arabic language. Committees and debating forums were established, but fundamental conflicts over orthographic principles and between key personalities prolonged the so-called "alphabet wars" that prevented establishment of a national orthography suitable for use in the modern Somali state.

The inability of the 1960s parliamentary governments to agree on a national script assisted the entrenchment of foreign languages. The post-colonial "linguistic elite" was restricted to Somalis

literate in either Italian or English, while Somali remained unwritten. A self-sustaining administrative core governed an uneducated mass of people in languages that few could read or write, much less comprehend. As the parliamentary governments did little but postpone action, many people came to realize that their non-decision was very much a decision.¹³

Within a year of taking power, the Supreme Revolutionary Council appointed a National Language Commission (including many old protagonists) to study the problem, and gave it the responsibility to establish a new script. In 1972, Siad Barre ended the years of acrimonious debate when he announced the introduction of a new Somali orthography (a modified version of Latin characters). Written Somali was declared the official language of the state, the bureaucracy, and eventually, in different stages, the schools.

The Somali script was promoted nation-wide through mass literacy campaigns in 1973-74 and 1974-75 when 15,000 teachers, students, civil servants, and army and police officers spread systematically throughout the cities and countryside teaching the new script. The motto of the national campaign was: "If you know it, teach it; if you don't know it, learn it." Given special materials designed to teach basic hygiene and animal health, instructors used almost any convenient place as a classroom. Many Somalis found the new orthography easy to learn and, by 1977, 60% of the population had passed literacy tests in the written language.

The long-term impact of the literacy campaign has not been studied in depth and the necessary statistical data to evaluate the campaign in qualitative and quantitative terms are not all in yet. The fact that many teachers often used the Koranic method of rote learning and that few follow-up reading materials were made available to the "neoliterates" suggests that the original figures on literacy rates should be revised downwards.

When their language was unwritten, Somalis had developed a rich body of oral literature. With adoption of the new script they began to create an expanded modern vocabulary. Somalis combined older words in novel ways to form compound terms (linking ordinary language to a scientific one), and

gave new specialized meanings to existing words. They preferred to coin words, not borrow them, but were hardly absolutist: the new term for atomic weight, "culays atam," combines a Somali word for heaviness with the standard word atom.

There are many such new word combinations. In elementary science texts, the Somali term satellite is "dayax gacmeed" (literally, "handmade moon"), and "cadaadiska hawada" ("pressing air") means atmospheric pressure. In math books, "kulanno" (the Somali word for meeting) designates "points on a coordinate plane"; and the term for triangle is "saddexagal," a combination of "saddex" (three) with "xagal" (bends).

The State Printing Agency has published Somali language books on hygiene, nutrition, chemistry, biology, folklore, history, and a dictionary of scientific terms. A phonetics handbook written entirely in Somali is used in the Department of Somali Language and Literature at the National University. Any specialized language can now be "Somalized." This helps teachers and students better understand scientific terminology and begins to reduce the mysteriousness of scientific explanations.

Hussein Adam, the editor of *Halgan* (a monthly Somali news magazine) described how daily use of Somali in administrative communications provided a practical and conceptual exercise for civil servants. "Administrators learn how to write in clear, succinct Somali," he said, "which not only helps them conserve paper but ensures a more efficient storage and retrieval of administrative records."

Political art posters enjoy a pride of place in Somali towns. The striking posters — all in Somali — are educational, informative, colorful, and amusing. As Somalis see their language on public display, the clever posters help to promote cultural self-confidence while propagating political ideology.

Prof. B.W. Andrzejewski, a University of London linguist and member of the Somali Language Commission, has long urged Africans to develop new vocabularies for modern usage. While he thinks Somalia's language policy is "a model for imitation and emulation by other African states," Andrzejewski acknowledges that the Somali education system must still be fed with the latest knowl-

edge originating from outside centers of learning. "The modernization of the Somali language and its extensive use in all aspects of modern Somali life," he explained, "do not remove the need for intensive study of foreign languages." To provide Somalia with a constant flow of reliable technical and scientific information, there must be more Somali scholars, officials, and technicians proficient in foreign languages. Intensive training courses in Italian and English are part of the established curriculum at the National University and a 1980-81 Fulbright Scholarship to Somalia (the first in eight years) will go to a scholar qualified to teach English as a foreign language.

Literacy, Immunology, and Midwives

The ability of the government to communicate news of cultural developments and to conceptualize socio-economic programs to Somalis makes it easier to mobilize public energies to attack ignorance and disease. The unity between literacy and health improvements was evident in 1977 when Somalia launched a smallpox eradication project with help from the World Health Organization (WHO). On October 26, 1977, a young cook named Ali Maaw Malin became the last case of smallpox in Somalia. The subsequent interruption of smallpox transmission in Somalia also meant the world had seen its last case of endemic smallpox. This will allow the WHO to make an unprecedented announcement in 1980: that mankind has actually eradicated a disease.

For the smallpox eradication campaign in Somalia, the government mobilized over 3500 Somali searchers, vaccinators, and administrators. With pamphlets, search records, and wall posters — all printed in Somali — surveillance teams conducted examinations in villages, houses, and at wells throughout the countryside. Equipped with containers of needles and quantities of dried smallpox vaccine, trained teams vaccinated people and quarantined confirmed cases. Their ability to diagnose fever, rash, or chickenpox made possible the correct prognosis.

Project personnel acquainted nomads with modern medical practices and taught them basic preventive measures, such as boiling drinking water. The

campaign emphasized treatment, but also to combat disease. The smallpox researchers were the first to conduct examinations and learned how to use the benefit of the former Director of the Nobel Committee of the Somalia from vacation to read and write in the program. Sometimes, walking rendered inadequate. Rovers."¹⁴

At the Ministry of Health, the sense of confidence in the problems given the plans, community management. Manager of the campaign distributed its success and commitment to the WHO epidemic. The joint effort of the smallpox cases directly from the campaign that the case of smallpox in 70% of the Somalis was a reward and were, of course, industrious feelings. "a self-employed person collected six boxes of work."¹⁵

Reaching nomadic states is a major problem. Few nomads have status among their attendants, the nomads. Mogadishu's nomadic groups are better educated and mid-wifery. The

campaign engendered increased demands for more treatment, better education, and requests for drugs to combat dysentery, anemia, and malaria.

The smallpox eradication program provided searchers with a lesson in how to approach nomads. Workers had to employ guile, charm, ire, and even shame to convince some nomads to submit to an examination or vaccination. The nomads, in turn, learned how the Somali government can work for the benefit of its people. Dr. Donald Henderson, the former Director of the WHO Smallpox Program and Nobel nominee for his work, stated that "the ability of the Somali government to mobilize workers, from vacationing students to camelherders able to read and write, was critical to the success of our program. Somali workers covered enormous distances, walking night and day to reach remote areas, rendered inaccessible by heavy rains even for Land Rovers."¹⁴

At the Ministry of Health, there is a perceptible sense of confidence in its ability to deal with health problems given modest support, well-conceived plans, community involvement, and an element of management. Dr. Abdullahi Deria, the Project Manager of the Smallpox Eradication Unit, attributed its success to international contributions, the commitment of the Somali government, and the WHO epidemiologists who lent their expertise to the joint effort. Dr. Deria remarked that of the 3100 smallpox cases reported in 1977, 40% resulted directly from citizen responses to a poster reward campaign that offered \$35 to anyone reporting a case of smallpox. According to Ministry estimates, 70% of the Somalis contacted already knew there was a reward and where to report cases. The posters were, of course, in Somali. "There was even an industrious fellow from Tiyeglow," recalled Deria, "a self-employed 'smallpox bounty hunter' who collected six cash rewards for his detection work."¹⁵

Reaching nomads to convince them that the Somali state is concerned about them is an enormous problem. Few people, however, enjoy a higher status among nomadic women than traditional birth attendants, the "umulissas." In a pilot program at Mogadishu's Benaadir Hospital, a handful of umulissas are being trained in modern techniques of mid-wifery. They are taught how to treat the ter-

rifying, even disabling, after-effects of child-birth, such as vaginal and rectal fistulas, infections sometimes so unbearable to women that they may cause a husband to repudiate his wife, who in turn may commit suicide. The umulissas also learn something about fetal disorders, umbilical tetanus, and pneumonia.

With their new skills the umulissas could become another agency to promote literacy, numeracy, and rural health services among nomadic women. Finally, the newly-formed Somali Democratic Women's Organization has been preparing Somali language materials for use by umulissas and women in general that suggest female circumcision is a medically unsound and antiquated practice that could be done away with.

No culture has a monopoly on the ability to develop science and technology, and history is the record of cultural and technological learning of one people from another. "But the successful borrowers," observes economist Harry Magdoff, "who were able to master and advance knowledge learned from others, borrowed on their own terms and in their own ways."¹⁶

The use of written Somali evidently helps Somalis maintain their sense of national identity when dealing with the outside world. Although Somalis appreciate western technical achievements, they insist on combining such advances with a "practical" knowledge of their own environment to achieve the synthesis necessary for effective utilization. Somalis neither overvalue what is foreign nor allow expatriates to dictate changes. They say it contributes to "gumeysi maskaxeed" — colonization of the brain.

Foreign Aid, Domestic Developments, and Somali Non-Alignment

The development of Somalia will depend upon the continued motivation of the population and the training of local cadres, managers, and technicians. If that challenge can be met, the gradual transformation can continue. But until more Somalis have been trained to administer the country's services, international assistance for capital and recurrent costs will remain vital to its economy.

Somalia requires direct economic aid to achieve

its developmental ambitions, but the government appreciates the limitations of foreign aid which it insists should complement internal progress towards self-reliance, not serve as a substitute engine of development. A nomadic proverb reminds Somali leaders to "never let anyone who merely promises greener pastures control your herds."

Given the interdependence and inequities of the international economic order, questions must be asked about any development scheme: development for whose benefit? and at whose expense? Foreign aid to Somalia does not go to prestigious, easily identifiable, projects that serve foreign, not Somali, interests. Funds are channelled instead into organizations designed to meet basic human needs, ameliorate social distress, and improve production activities. Somali officials and planners are eager to evaluate the performance of their programs and to take corrective measures. One thing is certain: aid to Somalia no longer lines the pockets of speculators or bureaucratic crooks.

Somalia is non-aligned in its foreign policy, but does seek closer economic ties with western powers while re-affirming a domestic socialist policy. When the Russians were expelled in November, 1977, the Soviet Union cancelled all technical and economic aid and withdrew its experts who had been working in Somalia. In order to balance the loss of that aid, Somalia diversified its sources of outside assistance. It accepts economic aid and technical assistance from China, North Korea, western capitalist states, the eastern European socialist bloc, Arab League allies, and international agencies.

The Kuwait Fund and the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization are helping to develop the Northern Range Project. The Chinese have completed a 700-mile tarmac road connecting the southern city of Belet Weyn with Burao in the north. They are also installing a modern water supply system to serve the 80,000 inhabitants of Hargeisa, the major city in northern Somalia. The North Koreans built a polytechnic institute in Mogadishu and are working on a cement factory in Berbera. The Arab Fund and World Bank provide loans for rainfed and irrigated agricultural projects. UNICEF consultants and WHO doctors assist the Ministry of Health in training community health workers.

A private Italian company, the Pessina Corporation, has begun construction of the Hargeisa-Borama road, while a hundred miles away a workers cooperative affiliated with the Italian Communist Party is improving the narrow mountain road between Berbera and Burao. Cooperative and corporation even share their cranes when unloading construction equipment from ships in Berbera harbor.

The development of Somalia presupposes an expanding monetarization of the economy and the transfer of resources from a subsistence economy to internal markets. In some districts, recently completed feeder roads are slowly promoting new trading activities. There were often seasons when isolated villages had plenty of milk which was wasted, while at the same time there was a shortage in the district market. Villagers are beginning to use feeder roads to bring milk formerly considered "useless" to district markets to sell.

In the southern Somali town of Baydhaba, people traditionally raised chickens primarily for sacrificial offerings, not consumption. The Ministry of Health provided citizens with Somali language pamphlets and the Ministry of Education sent teachers to the area in 1977 to demonstrate the principles of basic nutritional improvement. Within six months, the people cautiously began to eat more poultry products, their diets slowly improved, and by 1979 some of them actually produced enough surplus chickens to sell in domestic markets. As a few internal markets have slowly expanded, a money economy has begun to emerge in some villages whose inhabitants previously led only subsistent lives.

Somalis would like to continue the development of their country with American cooperation as well. An expansion of American aid to Somalia is evident in the Foreign Assistant Act for FY 1980 where preliminary estimates are that Somalia will receive over \$30 million. Title I food sales would total \$13 million, nearly double the 1978 amount, while Title II emergency food aid adds another \$6.5 million. Bilateral developmental assistance has been increased from \$3.7 million in 1978 to over \$12 million.

The US AID proposals generally respond to Somali needs as the Somalis see them. Funds are to be used to strengthen institutions that provide ser-

vices to the rural areas. Minimum shell road construction is underway at Kismayo, and local residents are involved in building design and plans involved in the project, assistance in rural areas, upgrading of agricultural services.

With improved infrastructure functioning in Somalia in ways that enable the people towards actualization of previous programs, national awareness is the fulfillment of the plan.

Despite the economic imbalances previously emerged, some progress has not been realized. Governmental action has been slow. The recession has been slow. There are still high rates of unemployment for males and females. Educational facilities are below those specified. Exchange remains high. Disease exports have been high. The designed to combat unimplemented projects have been victims from the budget. The State has not yet formulated a clear plan.

Reliable statistics on the extent of skilled labor force in the Middle East are not available. If funds, it could be used to undermine planned economy. There is a need for project evaluation, to analyze achievements in major planning areas, the pastoral sector, the Somalis. With the help of funds from other countries, Somalia must

vices to the rural poor. The package includes a minimum shelter program to support the one underway at Kurtun Waarey, with a provision that local residents be trained in the techniques of building design, construction, and planning. Other plans involved a new ground water development project, assistance to women's groups, improvements in rural health care delivery systems, and an upgrading of agricultural and veterinary extension services.

With improved organizational structures already functioning in Somalia, American aid can be used in ways that enable Somalia to continue its efforts towards actual rural development. The success of previous programs provided the rudiments of a national awareness and cohesiveness that should make the fulfillment of other basic needs easier.

Despite the progress toward alleviating poverty imbalances persist and new problems have emerged. Some projects remain incomplete, ideals not realized. Good intentions must still be translated into action. The war with Ethiopia and a recent recession have taxed the government severely. There are still disparate educational opportunities for males and females. Per capita expenditures on educational facilities for nomadic children remain below those spent in urban areas. Available foreign exchange remains inadequate, prices for merchandise exports have declined recently, and measures designed to control domestic price fluctuations are unimplemented. The operation of refugee camps for victims from the Ogaden war adversely affects the budget. The State Planning Commission has yet to formulate a clear, long-term industrial strategy.

Reliable statistical data is urgently needed on the extent of skilled labor migration to the oil-rich states of the Middle East. Unless the government imposes tighter controls to monitor the influx of private funds, it could fuel speculative operations that can undermine planning in a publicly-controlled economy. There is a shortage of trained researchers and project evaluators who can assess entire programs, analyze achievements, and review shortcomings. A major planning task of the government is to develop the pastoral sector, the main occupation of most Somalis. With almost no comparative experience from other countries to guide the government, Somalia must develop a more accurate statistical

gathering and feedback system to assist planners with reliable and current data.

Although it is anxious for renewed western loans, Somalia should be careful not to let foreign banks monitor its economic policies. Experience elsewhere suggests that if creditors use short-term profitability to measure the validity of projects they may attempt to revise budgets or policies. In the next few years, the capacity of the Siad Barre government to continue the steady transformation of Somalia will depend largely on improvements in its economic record, especially the integration of livestock production as a permanent feature of the economy.

Conclusion

Even by third world standards, Somalia is a poorly-endowed country and pastoralism is a particularly precarious resource base. Enormous problems exist today which any government will have to confront and which will take decades to surmount. Ten years is perhaps too short a period upon which to base definitive statements about the actual extent of transformation. Maybe the data is scanty and inconclusive, but there are some clear messages from Somalia: cleavages between rural and urban areas and the communications gap between bureaucrat and citizen have been reduced; opportunities for women have increased; and civil servants are at their desks working, not sitting around tea shops "making their chairs tired," a common complaint before the 1969 revolution.

If history is a process whereby humans struggle to overcome restraints and limitations, then the transition from pastoralism to a sedentary life constitutes a radical change. In a few places in Somalia, a gradual transformation of the nomadic world view seems to have begun, and some Somalis, like those at Kurtun Waarey, are in fact nomads no more.

Although a poor country, Somalia's socio-economic priorities are sound, its developmental strategies rooted in local realities, not derived from imported ones. The state is building structures that are beginning to meet the country's needs for shelter, food, and education. Poised and confident the Somalis seem to consider no difficulty insurmountable, no tradition immutable. Said one Somali plan-