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Building a Better World

Grassroots Conflict Assessment Of the Somali Region, Ethiopia

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Glossary

(Somali terms appear in *italics*)

ARDDO	Al-Nejah Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Organization; local CHF International partner
Agro-pastoralist	Pastoralist who also engages in opportunistic sedentary farming activities for limited periods of time
CHF International	US-based non-governmental organization active in Ethiopia and approximately 35 other countries worldwide
Khat (or *Chat*)	Plant traditionally chewed by Somalis as a mild stimulant
Dayr	Short rainy season from roughly October to December
Diya	Traditional fine imposed to settle a dispute (sometimes known as blood compensation)
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front – governing party in Ethiopia
Gode	Largest town in southern portion of Somali Regional State
Gu	Long rainy season, typically from March to May
Guurti	Council of elders that traditionally presides over a community
Highlanders	Non-Somali Ethiopians are commonly referred to as "highlanders" or *Haybasha* (an Amharic term) in the region
Jijiga	Capital of Somali Regional State
Kebele	Lowest administrative unit (village)
Ogaden	Largest clan in Somali region; also traditional term for geographic area that comprises much of the region
Pastoralist	Individual whose livelihood is derived from his or her herd of animals; tends to be nomadic
Region	Highest administrative unit; Zones comprise Regions (nine regions in Ethiopia)
Shari'a	Traditional Islamic law, practiced in Shari'a courts in Somali Region
Shir	Traditional clan assemblies used to ratify positions and settle disputes
SPDP	Somali People's Democratic Party – governing party in Somali Region
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WMCs	Water Management Committees
Weber / *Ugaazi*	Chief of a clan or sub-clan
Wereda	Mid-level administrative unit; Weredas comprise Zones (54 Weredas in Somali Region
Xeer	Somali Customary law and contracts
Zone	Mid-level administrative unit; Weredas comprise Zones (nine zones in Somali Region)

Somali Region Timeline

1850-1920	Ethiopia under Imperial Rule
1920-1977	Ethiopia under rule of Haile Selassie
1955	Revised Constitution dispossesses pastoralists of their land by making it state land
1964	War between Ethiopia and Somalia partially over Somali Region
1972-1974	*Lafaad* drought in Somali Region
1977-1978	War between Ethiopia and Somalia partially over Somali Region
1977-1991	Ethiopia under Derg rule
1984-1985	*Dabadheer* drought in Somali Region
1991	EPRDF comes to power in Ethiopia; collapse of Siyaad Barre regime in Somalia; return of many Ethio-Somalis to Ethiopia
1994	*Hurgufa* drought in Somali Region
1995	New Ethiopian Constitution maintains that all land is nationalized; regional capital moved from Gode to Jijiga
1998	Formation of Somali People's Democratic Party
1999	Somali Regional State formalizes *guurti* elders
1999-2000	*Shanqadhai/Dabagunud* drought
2005	Land Administration Proclamation entrusts power of administering land to regional state

- **Environmental degradation for profit** – An example of such degradation involves charcoal. During the recent drought there is evidence of increased charcoal production in certain zones, which sets up a potential conflict between charcoal producers, who must destroy trees for their product and reap very small profits, and people with an interest in maintaining the environment, including pastoralists.
- **Unreliable information and rumor** – The flow of information in the region is limited and inconsistent and much of the information unreliable. Rumors can be quite influential and incendiary in such environments and, whether true or not, can provide a trigger for conflict.

These potential drivers of conflict are exacerbated by: the scarcity of resources; often poor relations between Ethio-Somalis and the federal government in Addis Ababa, as well as "highlanders" (non-Somalis) in general; and the clan system on which Somali society is based, which can be both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. There exists a healthy supply of both "positive social capital" (relations between individuals and communities that act as a bulwark against conflict, underpinned by the *Xeer* – customary law – that is the bedrock of Somali society) and "negative social capital" (a long history of violence and strife between individuals and communities that poisons contemporary relations). All of this sets up a potential clash between old and new traditions.

These observations lead to several recommendations for both CHF's ongoing programming and future initiatives in the region, described in further detail later. They include:

- constructively engage youth in education, vocational training and leadership development programs;
- work to strengthen traditional conflict management mechanisms among clans, adapt them to new challenges, and carve out an enhanced role for women;
- generate alternative income-generating opportunities for charcoal producers while working to mend rifts they have created; and
- develop locally-focused, reliable mass communication mechanisms that limit rumor and innuendo.

I. Purpose of the Research

CHF International commissioned a study of grassroots conflict in Ethiopia's Somali Region for two reasons. First, in April 2006, CHF International, in partnership with Al-Nejah Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development Organization (ARRDO), began an emergency water and sanitation program (known as the Safe Water and Improved Sanitation in Somali Region (SWISS) program) in the Somali Region in the Gode and Afder Zones, in response to the substantial drought experienced in the region. The program seeks to restore shallow wells while improving sanitation habits in communities where disease is widespread and deadly. When implementing any program like this that brings resources to communities it is critical to adhere to the "Do No Harm" principle – in other words, resources provided should not be the source or trigger of conflict. Especially in Somali society, with its foundation in the clan system and sometimes fierce rivalries between clans, outside organizations must learn about local culture and develop strategies for minimizing unintended consequences of their work. In order to avoid those unintended consequences, a grounded understanding of the potential *drivers of instability* is required.

The second purpose of this research is to develop such an understanding. CHF International has a long history of working to manage and mitigate conflict around the world and continues to expand its capacity in this area. The organization elected to invest in deepening its understanding of the sources of grassroots conflict in the Somali Region, with a view towards programming that may directly address those sources in the near future. Given the chronic poverty in the region, any conflict can rapidly escalate and prove widely destructive. Furthermore, there is a history of conflict in the region that suggests multiple underlying causes unlikely to dissipate if not explicitly addressed. This report is an initial effort to identify and examine those underlying causes.

II. Methodology

This report is based on qualitative research conducted in Ethiopia in March and April, 2006. It combines field research conducted in the Somali Region with interviews with informed Somalis and non-Somalis elsewhere and a significant literature review (see bibliography for list of resources). More then three dozen interviews and group discussions were conducted. Interviews were conducted with informed individuals, NGO personnel, government officials and

members of the donor community in Addis Ababa, Jijiga, Gode and Hargelle. Given time and resource constraints, there was no effort at quantitative research, and all quantitative data is derived from other sources (such data is scarce in the region; Hagmann calls it an “astonishing data gap.”[1]). The USAID Conflict Assessment Framework[2] is employed as a tool for structuring the analysis.

Community discussions were held in 10 communities in the Gode, Adadelie and Afder Weredas of the Gode and Afder Zones. Discussions were typically held with a group of community elders, often led by the Kebele Chairman (equivalent to a local mayor). The majority of these elders were men, though some women participated in discussions. These participants were informed that CHF was conducting an assessment in the region in conjunction with ongoing programming and in anticipation of future programming. Discussions typically lasted for one to two hours and participants were uniformly generous with their time (especially considering that some discussions were conducted in the midst of one of Ethiopia’s most prolonged droughts, which might have somewhat curtailed the breadth of participation).

Researchers sought a diverse set of communities to engage but were limited by several constraints. First, primarily agro-pastoralist communities were included, both because of the general shift towards agro-pastoral activities and because nomadic pastoralists are, by definition, on the move and difficult to locate. Second, discussions were conducted primarily with communities close to a road, as time constraints did not allow for travel to communities further in the bush. Third, security in the Somali Region remains a concern and curtailed travel to certain Weredas, though these Weredas were discussed in interviews with informed individuals. Ethio-Somali translators were engaged for all community conversations.

Several additional constraints deserve mention. First, there is always an issue of trust when conducting interview-based field research. At the time of the research CHF International was a largely unknown entity in the Somali Region, which may have led to some restraint on the part of interviewees. The nature of the clan system that dominates the Region emphasizes trust between clan members but probably heightens skepticism of non-clan members. Second, in hoping to attract future assistance from CHF International and other NGOs, interviewees may have been inclined to minimize any division or fault lines in the community. Third, there are intense political sensitivities in the Somali Region, felt especially in Jijiga, which necessarily

limited questions asked and topics discussed. Given this sensitivity, interviewees are not identified in this report.[3]

Finally, CHF International recognizes the imperfect nature of this report given the limited time frame and complexities of Somali society. It is a best effort at identifying potential drivers of conflict so as to maximize the impact of current programming and set the stage for future programming. CHF International will use this as the basis for continuing to expand the organization's understanding of these dynamics.

III. Background

The Somali Region is one of nine regions of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. Also known as the Ogaden after the dominant clan in the region and located in the eastern Ethiopian lowlands bordering Djibouti, Somalia (including Somaliland) and Kenya, the region is almost entirely inhabited by people of Somali ethnicity (95.6 per cent according to Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency). They speak a common language, Somali, and share a rich cultural heritage that spans Somalis living in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency estimated the region's population at just over 4.3 million in 2005 (with a high sex ration of 120 males to 100 females), though some consider that an underestimate, as a proper census has not been conducted for over a decade and population growth is rapid. Somalis are either the third or fourth largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. The region is almost entirely Muslim (current estimates are that Ethiopia itself is nearly half Muslim despite its Orthodox Christian orientation).

Recent History and Governance

The region has a troubled history of poverty and strife. Two wars have been fought between Ethiopia and Somalia over the land, in 1964 and 1977-78. The region is littered with remnants of those wars, including dilapidated military equipment and rusted weaponry. Somalia, before its

collapse in 1991, claimed the Somali Region as part of "greater Somalia," which also included parts of northern Kenya and what is now Somaliland.

After the overthrow of the Soviet-backed Derg regime in 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ushered in the system of "ethnic confederation"[4] with the ostensible intent "to give greater autonomy to ethnic communities to manage their affairs."[5] The EPRDF remains in power under Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, whose government was reelected in 2005. With the adoption of federalism, the Somali Regional State came into existence. Headquartered first in Gode and then in Jijiga since 1995, the regional government has endured substantial political turmoil and turnover and has struggled at times to gain legitimacy, as "the administration's implementation capacities are extremely limited."[6] The region is divided into nine zones[7], which are sub-divided into 53 Weredas (districts) and hundreds of Kebeles (one Kebele is usually equivalent to one community occupied by one sub-clan, explained in further detail below). Local government institutions exert limited authority at the Wereda and Kebele levels; by all accounts, the real power at the local level lies with the clans.

There is significant detachment between Ethio-Somalis and non-Somali Ethiopians, commonly referred to as "highlanders" or *Haybasha* (an Amharic term) in the region, and between Ethio-Somalis and the Ethiopian state. Conversely, most Ethio-Somalis feel culturally and socially closer to their kin in Somalia and Kenya. Evidence for this lies in the fact that trade with and through Somalia is many times greater than trade with the rest of Ethiopia, even given the difficulties (and advantages) of doing business in a failed state such as Somalia.

Living Standards and Livelihoods

The Somali Region is among the very poorest regions in Ethiopia. Reliable data on living standards is extremely difficult to come by, but a recent Central Statistical Agency report provides health data that is indicative of the extent of poverty. For example, 85.6 per cent of children in Somali Region suffer from anemia and only 7.4 per cent of pregnant mothers receive antenatal care from a health professional.[8] Literacy in the region was estimated at 26 per cent in 2004,[9] and Devereux estimates rural literacy at 13 per cent[10] (compared to roughly 43 per cent nationwide). Less than 3 per cent of the population gets drinking water from their own tap and less than 7 per cent gets water from a protected well or spring.[11] There are no paved roads outside the regional capital of Jijiga and roads throughout region are in deplorable condition. For

instance, on the road between Gode and Hargelle, two zonal capitals, three bridges are partially destroyed and have been so for several years, rendering them impassable and forcing vehicles to traverse the ravine (and sometimes the river) below. Because of this, during the rainy season Kebeles and Weredas can be completely cut off from one another for weeks, leaving people effectively stranded.

Educational opportunities are extremely limited.[12] Informal estimates are that roughly 15 per cent of youth attend school (the government's 2004 estimate is 21 per cent for the region[13]), the majority of them in urban areas or settled rural communities. Islamic Koranic schools are more numerous than secular schools, with most children attending a Koranic school before they attend secular school, if they do so at all. Several interviewees said that the idea and importance of education had not really taken hold in the region until the past decade or so. But in urban areas and settled communities the importance of education has strongly taken hold, as many interviewees professed a desire to see their children receive the education they could not enjoy, which contributes to the heightened expectations of government.

Ethio-Somalis are traditionally nomadic pastoralists, and have been so for centuries. Life and survival revolves around livestock, with people constantly moving about in the interests of their livestock. "Where I make a living, there is my home," says a popular Somali proverb. Being a plentiful livestock owner is a show of wealth and prosperity and connotes high social status, whereas farmers have often been viewed "as inferior and poor people."[14] Pastoralists traditionally move their herds around sizable areas in search of water and grazing land, often moving with their families and clan members. Until recently there were relatively lucrative markets for livestock accessible to pastoralists, primarily in the Arabian Gulf states, which meant transporting the animals through Djibouti, Somaliland or Somalia. However, as discussed below, drought and regulation have substantially limited access to these markets, contributing to the gradual shift towards agro-pastoralist activities that is a focus of this report.

Given the dominance of pastoralist and now agro-pastoralist activities, individuals and communities are extremely dependent on rainfall. There are two primary rainy seasons throughout most of the region, the *gu* (long rainy season) from March to May, and the *dayr* (short rainy season) from October to December. During these rainy seasons people make every effort to collect water in wells and storage containers for their family and animals to consume during the dry season. But over the past two decades these rains have become increasingly

unreliable; there were major droughts in 1984-85, 1994 and 1999-2000 (during which pastoralists claim to have lost 70-90 per cent of their cattle[15]). The region recently experienced what some elders call the worst drought ever, and the international community is rallying to respond. However, Devereux notes that "the defining characteristic of rainfall in Somali region is its variability from year to year and there is no evidence that the recent sequence of localized droughts represents a permanent decline in average rainfall."[16]

An additional, and not insignificant, factor in the affairs of the Somali Region is that the region is said to have the potential of about 142 billion cubic meters of natural gas.[17] To date none of that gas has been exploited, though there have been several efforts to do so and undoubtedly there will be more.

Society and the Clan System

Somali society is highly structured, anchored in the system of clans and sub-clans that bind and divide Somalis.[18] "At the risk of oversimplification" Menkhaus writes, "one can make the case that [the clan system] forms the basis for most of the core social institutions and norms of traditional Somali society, including personal identity, rights of access to local resources, customary law (*xeer*), blood payment groups (*diya*), and support systems."[19] For some the Somali Region is synonymous with inter-clan conflict, which is indeed frequent and has claimed thousands of lives over many years (it is estimated that over 700 people have died in clan conflicts in recent years.[20]) But Hagmann accurately argues that the "primordial interpretation of Somali kinship" and the "cliché of archaic Somali tribalism"[21] that sometimes prevail are stereotypical and inaccurate. Nonetheless, violence is a dominant feature of clan life. One of the interesting ongoing phenomena is the *changing nature of that violence*, as "a new scenario prevails [in which] intra-clan conflicts at sub-clan level are gaining momentum"[22] compared to more traditional inter-clan conflict.

Hundreds of clans, sub-clans, sub-sub clans and so on exist and allegiances are complex. Fundamentally, the strongest allegiance is to the lowest clan division (i.e., allegiance to the sub-clan is stronger than allegiance to the clan), but this is a somewhat simplified depiction and it is important to accept that clan practices are "adaptable and dynamic, not static and timeless."[23] One sub-clan generally resides in one Kebele, meaning Weredas are home to multiple sub-clans, sometimes of the same overall clan, sometimes of different clans.

Clan life is governed by the *xeer*, best understood as Somali customary law. The *xeer* is not formally codified but in reality trumps any laws created by the state. It is the set of rules, regulations, and values that form the foundation of Somali society. *Xeer* can also represent agreements between sub-clans that govern their relations and lay out rules for interaction, but not all sub-clans have *xeer* with one another. For example, sub-clans A and B, in close proximity to one another, may have a *xeer* between them, but sub-clans B and C, geographically further apart, may not have *xeer*, as there is little interaction between them. At any particular time two sub-clans may be allies or adversaries and these relationships are constantly shifting in a "process of fusion and fission between and among clan lineages"[24]

As in many other African societies, elders play an instrumental and influential role in a sub-clan or community. Becoming an elder "is based not in hereditary status but on a lifetime of earned reputation as effective negotiators, trusted mediators, moving orators, or wise and pious men."[25] The council of elders that presides over a sub-clan is known in Somali as the *guurti*, and the sub-clan chief as the *weber* or *ugaazi*. The *guurti* are consulted in and effectively make every major decision in a community. They also play a critical role in resolving disputes; if a dispute cannot be resolved between the conflicting parties it is taken to the *guurti*, who use the *xeer* to guide them in reaching a decision. Verdicts can vary substantially. Sometimes one party is simply asked to apologize to the other and accept responsibility. In more serious cases, particularly when a death is involved, a *diya*, or blood compensation, is paid. A typical *diya* is 100 camels for the death of a man and 50 camels for the death of a woman, though penalties can vary substantially.[26]

The Trouble with *Khat*

Khat is chewed by the vast majority of Ethio-Somali men and is closely associated with ideas of masculinity. It is produced primarily in the area of Dire Dawa, just west of Jijiga and the Somali Region, and is transported to the region daily by road and air (indeed, the maintenance of a regular supply of *khat* throughout the region is an impressive feat). *Khat* is said to be only mildly addictive, but many men are clearly quite dependent on it, and it renders them essentially useless for several hours each day, if not longer.

Youth are using *khat* with increasing regularity, especially as they enjoy greater access to it with their relocation to relatively urban areas. *Khat* clearly has a substantial negative effect on productivity and on Somali society in general; one community leader in Gode described *khat* as "the greatest evil in our society today."

As this ratio suggests, Somali society is highly patrimonial. Men are the unquestioned heads of households and have disproportionate weight in all important decisions. Men are also the traditional breadwinners, but several interviewees observed that women are increasingly working harder while men spend more and more time chewing *khat*, the plant generally chewed in the early afternoon when the heat is greatest, that acts as a mild stimulant. This is consistent with our observations – particularly in urban areas – where men were often idle but women seemingly always at work (in rural areas livestock care and herding remains largely the province of men). Polygamy is also common, with wives being as young as early teenagers.

IV. Incentives for Violence

The first step in understanding drivers of conflict is identifying incentives for violence. What do people fight over? Why are certain resources contested? Who benefits from conflict? The CHF International *Stable Society Study*[27] hypothesizes that it is individuals with "stakes in stability" who are the most effective partners in conflict management initiatives because they stand to benefit from stability and suffer from instability. Who are these individuals in the Somali Region? This section seeks to begin to address these and related questions.

The Changing Nature of Somali Society

Somali society, and the livelihoods that support Ethio-Somalis, are in transition. According to Gedi, the region's inhabitants are "undergoing radical social, economic and political transformation due to national and regional level political changes, frequent droughts, increasing resource scarcity, the adoption of farming as complementary livelihood systems and increased levels of resource use conflicts."[28] The most visible manifestation of this transition is in the shift away from pastoral activities towards more agro-pastoral and farming activities. At its core, this transition is a *diversification against risk brought on by drought and other factors*. The transition is directly related to changing incentives for violence.

It is important not to overestimate this transition. The nomadic pastoral livelihood is still a major livelihood in the region, is still the culturally traditional livelihood, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. But as more and more pastoralists move towards agro-pastoral activities and opportunistic cultivation, and as "destitute agro-pastoralists are becoming settled farmers,"[29] the effects of this transition intensify.[30] The transition is driven by multiple overlapping factors, different combinations of which affect each community. Among these factors are:

- **Drought**. When asked why they altered their lifestyle, many agro-pastoral communities (formerly pastoral communities) cite droughts over the past two decades as the principal cause. As animals die due to lack of food and water (the UN estimates that 60 per cent of cattle in the Horn of Africa have died as a result of the recent drought and that 12 million pastoralists are affected[31]), droughts reduce the viability of the pastoral livelihood for many and compel the transition towards more farming activities. Shrinking grazing lands, which make maintaining livestock increasingly challenging, are an associated and contributing factor. Drought has also "caused herders to migrate to better range resource where agricultural activities are rampant,"[32] which leads to competition and conflict, as detailed below. It is important to note, however, Devereux's argument that "if vulnerability to drought is increasing, the reasons have to do with declining ability to cope rather than increasingly frequent or abnormally severe drought events."[33]

- **Improved farming skills**. Immediately following the 1977-78 Ethiopia-Somalia war many Ethio-Somalis fled to refugee camps in Somalia. In those camps they experienced a sedentary lifestyle without animals to look after and were taught and practiced farming and irrigation skills. Many refugees stayed in these camps for years, some until the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. When they returned to the Somali Region they brought with them well-developed farming skills (some also brought with them irrigation pumps), and had lost some of their devotion to the pastoral way of life, changes that affected their peers who remained in the region.

- **Livestock bans**. The Arabian Gulf states have always been the primary market for livestock originating from the Somali Region. But in the 1990s livestock bans were imposed by many Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, the key market, in response to an outbreak of Rift Valley fever. This severely affected the Ethio-Somali economy and pastoralists in particular, as demand for livestock plummeted, as did livestock prices and pastoralists' purchasing power, leaving sellers with little market power[34] and compelling many pastoralists to take up farming activities. Several Gulf states maintain the ban on livestock from Somalia and the Somali Region.

- **Demographic pressures**. As in most other parts of Ethiopia, the population of the Somali Region is growing rapidly. By some estimates, Ethiopia's total population is expected to

double every 23 years.[35] There are several potential explanations for high population growth rates in the Somali Region: children serve as a source of retirement support as parents grow old, hence parents have many children; children are a source of labor; improvements in health care mean that more children are living into adulthood (though child mortality rates are still extraordinarily high); competition among women to give birth, as we were told that children are a great "source of pride" among women; and "Somalis strongly believe that having as many children as possible is preferred to strengthen their community."[36] Immigration from neighboring Kenya and Somalia, across extremely porous borders, further increases demographic pressures.[37]

- **Accessing services**. There is increasing exposure to and demand for some of the hallmarks of modernity among Ethio-Somalis, such as education, health care and infrastructure development. There is a "chicken and the egg" scenario here: do pastoralists adopt more settled lifestyles and then learn more about these features of modernity, or do they settle because of a desire for enhanced access to these features of modernity? Undoubtedly both motivational relationships are at work, but our conversations with agro-pastoral communities suggest that the latter is a strong force – that they adopt a more sedentary lifestyle because of a desire for access to these and other services. In several communities, interviewees said that they settled near a main road specifically so that they could receive services from government and NGOs.

- **Government Policy**. Generally speaking, it is the policy of the Ethiopian government to support the move towards a more sedentary lifestyle (this change certainly simplifies the jobs of government officials because people are easier to locate). It is unclear, though, how influential this policy is in the shift towards agro-pastoral livelihoods, given the difficult relationship between citizens and government.

The implications of this livelihood transition are widespread, creating dynamics and tensions that may contribute to future conflict. Those dynamics are explored below.

Competition Over Land

According to USAID, the potential for conflict over land is pronounced when "a large landless or land-poor population has limited livelihood opportunities" and "a marginalized population…depends on a small piece of land for subsistence and survival."[38] Both apply, to

some extent, to the Somali Region, as livelihood opportunities are scarce and almost entirely dependent on the land. Of course, the land available is not small by most measures, but *usable* land is limited given the nature of the terrain, especially in times of drought. This sets up inevitable conflict over land, which is not a new phenomenon in Somali society. But exacerbating the situation are relatively new and competing ideas over how land *should* be owned and used.[39]

The livelihood changes discussed above translate into *new types of conflict over land*. In Somali society, land is traditionally communally owned; one common understanding is that all land "belongs to the unborn, living and dead."[40] According to the federal government all land is owned by the state,[41] though in 2005 a law was passed granting regional government authority over land issues. Effectively, though, "land is collectively owned and managed by the sub-clan lineages occupying the territory,"[42] with *guurti* elders exercising day-to-day control over land. Communal ownership is the most rational arrangement in a pastoral society given the nomadic nature of the people; individual ownership over discreet plots of land would make little sense with individuals and sub-clans so frequently on the move.

But the transition towards more agro-pastoralist and farming activities alters this dynamic. Such sedentary activities create incentives for groups or individuals to own, or at least seek rights to, specific plots of land that they can harvest and from which they can derive economic benefit. Land privatization, in turn, has become the "dominant cause of conflict between herders and farmers."[43] Not surprisingly, land privatization over the past two decades has led to something previously quite rare in Somali society: the demarcation and enclosure of land. "

The first enclosures were established in the 1980s and there has been a tremendous growth of enclosures after 1990,"[44] according to Gebre-Mariam, who cites the Abdalla Tolomogge clan of Gode Zone as having started to enclose land in the 1980s and the Awlihan clan, also of Gode Zone, following suit in the 1990s. "This practice of increasing individual ownership of land is contrary to the traditional communal use of land."[45] The erection of physical boundaries demarcating land – an overtly physical statement of land ownership – only heightens the potential for conflict.

These changing norms of land ownership create potential for conflict over land between those accustomed to the traditional notion of communal land ownership (including pastoralists) and

those with a preference for individual land rights (including agro-pastoralists and farmers, at least those with the opportunity to have rights to land)[46]. Consequently, "this trend of privatizing commonly owned lands along with the natural resources restricts the rights of pastoralists to access natural resources in their vicinities."[47] There are numerous ways that these competing ideas can lead to conflict. For example, pastoralists could lead their herds to graze on land now owned or rented by agro-pastoralists/farmers, which might incite retaliation from an agro-pastoralists/farmer. Or an agro-pastoralist/farmer could claim rights to land temporarily being used by pastoralists. Or agro-pastoralists/farmers could be in conflict with one another over who owns or rents what land, just as pastoralists have been at odds over grazing rights for centuries. Furthermore, "agriculture is increasingly encroaching into the pastoralists' high potential basin and hinterland wet season grazing lands,"[48] which is a potential flashpoint between pastoralists and agro-pastoralists/farmers.

Further aggravating the situation is the lack of effective government involvement, especially concerning land tenure policy. "The lack of clear land tenure policy has become one of the factors that contributed to increasing levels of land and natural resource use insecurity and increasing intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts" according to Gedi, who bemoans the "non-existence or incapacity of institutions responsible for land use."[49] The problem is not an absence of land policy, as relevant laws are technically on the books, but rather the lack of adherence to existing policy among communities and the inability of the government to design and implement *effective* land policy. General distrust of government – federal and regional – only compounds the challenge.

Finally, the transition towards agro-pastoral and farming activities intensifies the already intense competition for the most valuable land, which in most cases is land with the best access to water, usually found on or near a riverbank. The need for farmland irrigation makes this especially valuable land for agro-pastoralists/farmers so

they tend to seek farmland with easy river access, sometimes competing with one another over that land. Gedi estimates that "the land demand for riverbank cultivation doubled over the past fourteen years."[50] But pastoralists continue to need drinking water for their herds and with many wells drying up during the recent drought river water becomes an even more valuable commodity. "When desperate pastoralists opt for more pasture and water resources beyond their traditional terrestrial limits of the clans, the conflict within and between clans, sub-clans and lineages of the same group of pastoralists and agricultural groups becomes inevitable."[51] With increasing frequency pastoralists are bringing their herds to the rivers to drink and the herds must pass through farmland – often belonging to a different clan – on the way. Several interviewees recalled incidents of herds trampling over crops and inciting the ire of the agro-pastoralists/farmers cultivating the land. It has been recommended that pathways between farms be established for herds to pass through to the rivers. Of course, animals don't always stay on the path prescribed for them.

Other Issues of Natural Resource Management

The competition over land is just one aspect of the challenges surrounding natural resource management, especially in the context of a drought. Water, in many ways the most essential resource in the region, is often equally contested (and of course land and water use are closely interrelated, as the discussion above demonstrates). "Disputes over access rights to water resources are very common," according to Gedi. "They occur when herders use water sources…without the prior permit request and consent of the individual owner."[52]

A relatively new issue in natural resource management that is generating significant concern is charcoal production and deforestation, which is occurring most intensely in the Degehabur and Jijiga Zones. There, charcoal traders, most of them from Hargeisa in Somaliland, frequently visit to purchase charcoal for nominal sums to be transported back to Hargeisa and often on to the Gulf states. Given the minimal return they receive, Ethio-Somalis are clearly selling charcoal out of desperation. Their activity comes at a high cost, though, as charcoal production requires burning trees that will take decades to grow back, if they ever do. As USAID recognizes, this can lead to conflict with communities dependent on trees for survival:

> Forests are a source of subsistence and livelihood for many people often creating competition over limited resources that can contribute to conflict among users and stakeholders. During periods of uncertainty and intense competition people highly dependent on forest resources may be more prone to engage in conflict when they observe other users felling "their" forests.[53]

The recent increase in charcoal production is indicative of a wider trend in the region of disregard for the environment, which is somewhat surprising – and disturbing – given how dependent Ethio-Somalis are on their environment for their survival and prosperity. "People are very harsh to the environment," we were told by a leading senior member of society and former member of the Federal Parliament. This could be partially due to institutional breakdown, as "the environmental resource degradation process was aggravated due to the weakening of the traditional community resource management institutions and mechanisms."[54] Institutional breakdown allows for activities such as the unchecked production of charcoal, which is beneficial for certain individuals but destructive for the larger community. Accelerating population growth also increases pressure on the environment. Without effective institutions to look after common community interests, such activity is likely to continue and expand and may lead to conflict.

Demand for Services

As described above, many Ethio-Somalis are settling in one place for significant periods of time with hopes of benefiting from services often provided, in theory, by government, such as education and health services, infrastructure development and security. Those who settle for other reasons are being exposed to such services for the first time (or at least the *idea* of such services). These services are sparse in the Somali Region but they do exist – there are enough examples of government services to build expectations of more services. This results in increased expectations of and demand for government services, whether or not there is reasonable hope that they will be provided.

Unfortunately, "in the Somali Region, the state provides no services on a continuous basis."[55] Services are sporadic at best and unevenly distributed. Where there are schools and health clinics, some constructed with government funds, there are often no teachers, books, doctors or medical supplies. Some communities receive food and water but neighboring communities do not, often without explanation. Some services are provided by NGOs, but their assistance is also haphazard and limited by funding and other constraints. In terms of providing security, the Ethiopian military has a sizable presence in Jijiga, Gode and several other towns in the region but almost no presence beyond the towns, where Ethio-Somalis are left to rely on informal (but well-developed) security mechanisms.

Consequently, expectations are left unmet and frustrations with government escalate. It seems unlikely that anybody is going to act on these frustrations in the near future, especially considering how long people have lived without such services. But there is potential for future action and maybe violence. Perhaps a larger concern is the question of who, in the short-term, may step in to provide services in place of government. Their lack of service provision creates a void for others to fill and it is likely that those in need of services, particularly given the desperation brought about by the recent drought, will accept assistance from anybody willing to provide it. Thus services could be provided by groups with political agendas that encourage instability. The population's attitude towards service providers could be affected by the much-needed services they receive. USAID notes that in Somalia, externally-backed groups have stepped into the void to provide services such as kindergartens and bakeries and "as a result of their assistance, these externally-backed groups have amassed increased political, economic and religious influence. Increasingly, many Somalis see this as a threat to local control and peace. Yet without meaningful alternatives, they feel compelled to accept the assistance."[56] It is not difficult to envision a similar situation playing out in the Somali Region, if it is not already.

Tradition vs. Modernity

The tensions discussed above are indicative of a larger contest going on in the region: tradition versus modernity. This contest plays out along several fault lines, including traditional and modern ideas of livelihoods and land ownership and traditional and modern expectations of the state. It plays out elsewhere as well. For example, Hagmann notes that:

> An inter-generational conflict is increasingly observable between the 'young intellectuals' who perceive themselves as the educated elite of the future and the guardian of the legal-rational government, and the 'old political leaders' who base their legitimacy on a lifelong struggle in the service of kinship and patrimonial politics.[57]

These young intellectuals are increasingly assuming positions of power in the regional government in Jijiga after receiving their (primarily secular) education outside the region and sometimes outside the country (many seem to have studied in Khartoum). It is less apparent, though, whether these young intellectuals are taking up senior positions within the clans, as the clans' senior ranks appear to continue to be dominated by an older generation. Relations between younger, more modern government leaders and older, more traditional clan leaders will have a substantial impact on the future of the region.

This contest is also ongoing in the legal sphere. Neighboring Somalia is experiencing a “reemergence of customary law and authority vested in elders as well as through neighborhood watch groups and informal systems,”[58] and there is evidence of a similar trend in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. At the same time, “young scholars returning from Islamic universities abroad increasingly are replacing the older, traditional, uneducated sheikhs.”[59] Shari’a courts (traditional Islamic courts, discussed in further detail below) are increasingly common and influential. They promote traditional Islamic customs that can be at odds with modern secular law. To date the government has been somewhat deferential to the Shari’a courts, but it is easy to see that relationship changing if the courts attempt to broaden their mandate, as similar courts have done recently in Somalia.

V. Escalation and Access to Conflict Resources

One of the striking characteristics of conflict in the Somali Region is how quickly conflicts can arise and escalate. Relatively minor incidents can trigger a series of events that can rapidly lead to widespread violence. The analysis below of escalation and access to conflict resources attempts to account for the phenomenon.

The Clan System as a Conflict Multiplier (and Positive Social Capital)

The clan system can be both a stabilizing and destabilizing force. It’s potential for destabilization lies primarily in the capacity of the clan system to serve as a *conflict multiplier*. The communal nature of the clan system means that an affront to an individual clan member can be interpreted as an affront to the entire clan, which draws the entire clan into what may initially be a minor dispute. “An individual clan member is guaranteed with economic, social and physical security for being born into the clan and has to defend the clan’s interest,” according to Gedi. “As a result, conflicts between individuals are easily transformed into wider clan conflicts.”[60] Thus the potential for conflict escalation within the clan context is substantial. The ingrained sense of retaliation within some clans can lead to an escalating series of retaliations, and soon enough “a small clash may give birth to a huge conflict that incites the involvement of the whole clan.”[61]

This is an instance of *negative social capital* (we follow Robert Putnam’s definition of social capital: “the collective value of all ‘social networks’ (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (‘norms of reciprocity’).”[62]) The strength of the clan system and individuals’ commitment to the prescribed responses to certain actions –

Putnam's "norms of reciprocity" – heighten the likelihood of violent conflict. Social capital is conventionally regarded as a positive asset, and in many instances it is (see the section on traditional conflict management mechanisms below), but when it serves this function it can be a divisive element.

Small Arms in Somali Region

The prevalence of small arms in the region elevates the risk of violence. There is a healthy trade in light weapons throughout the Horn of Africa[63] and they are easily acquired in the Somali Region. Hagmann notes that "all pastoralists in the [Hashin] district possess firearms, a result of the Somali civil war and the influx of small arms,"[64] and the same applies throughout most of the region.

Most people arm themselves primarily for the purpose of self-defense; given the potential for clan- and non-clan-based conflict discussed here and the lack of security provided by the government, it falls to the individual, family and clan to provide their own protection. Of course, the prevalence of arms also contributes to accelerated escalation towards widespread violent conflict.

The Precarious Situation of Youth

Youth are a conflict resource in the sense that they can be a restless, frustrated, easily mobilized group eager for opportunity and advancement but often marginalized. With the demographic pressures cited above, the Somali Region currently has a particularly large youth cohort; research suggests "a strong correlation between large youth cohorts and political violence."[65] One of the consequences of the ongoing livelihood transition in the region is increased rural-urban migration, especially among youth. Even after their sub-clan settles in a particular place, many youth – especially boys – are leaving their rural communities for the (relatively) urban towns of Jijiga and Gode, both of which have grown substantially in recent years (many youth are also going further a field to Djibouti, Somaliland and elsewhere, though few go to Addis Ababa, another indication of strains between Ethio-Somalis and Addis Ababa). They come to these towns in search of economic opportunity, as drought and other factors diminish the feasibility and appeal of pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihoods. Evidence suggests that they are likely to remain in urban areas, as "even persecuting urban youth cannot extinguish their resolve to remain in cities."[66] This urbanization "concentrates precisely that demographic most inclined to violence: unattached young males who have left their families behind and have come to the city seeking economic opportunities."[67]

Consequently, there exists a large pool of unemployed and underemployed youth in the urban areas that are susceptible to recruitment to various causes and inducement to violence. They

come looking for economic opportunities but in most cases all they find is odd jobs – such as shoe shining, loading and unloading, or minor construction – or no employment at all. They have little or no access to education; informal estimates are that only 15 per cent of youth in the region are enrolled in a secular school, most of them in relatively urban areas, and many schools are closing due to the drought. These factors deepen youth frustration and resentment at the lack of opportunity. With the time they have on their hands, youth increasingly engage in activities that generally negatively affect their outlook on life, such as whittling away the day chewing *khat* and joining groups watching violent and sometimes pornographic videos at night. Increasingly there are stories of youth engaging in petty crime, such as small-time looting, probably in part to pay for *khat* and for admission to the videos. In previous generations such behavior was almost entirely absent from Somali society.

The youths' outlook on their lives and prospects is cause for concern. "Youth are always looking towards the future" because their present prospects are so bleak, we were told. Youth are in increasingly dire straits, which leave them more inclined to accept support or employment from any source, even if it comes with ideological strings attached. Recognizing this, extremist elements often prey on youth vulnerability in various parts of the world. The Somali Region is a strong candidate for such predatory activity. As one informed observer told us, the youth situation is "a latent problem that could explode at any moment." The principal risk is that "a deprived, frustrated or traumatized youth cohort, if left without help, can continue to foment violent conflict for decades."[68]

Information and Misinformation

Despite limited access, Ethio-Somalis are remarkable consumers of information. A Somali saying asserts that "a man is a person with 100 camels, more than one wife, one gun and a radio." In towns and even small villages, activity often comes to a halt at 5 pm when the BBC Somali Service comes on the air and people old and young, primarily men, gather around a radio to listen. But this is virtually the only media outlet available beyond Jijiga and, consequently, many Ethio-Somalis have an impressive knowledge of world events but limited exposure to news of events closer to home. There is almost no access to newspapers beyond Jijiga and Gode, no radio stations other than the BBC (and very limited access to radio stations based in Somalia), and no television beyond Ethiopian state television (satellite dishes are the exclusive province of the elite, the UN and NGOs). This creates an information vacuum. That vacuum is filled, to some extent, by the highly social and oral nature of Somali society – men

spend hours every day drinking coffee or chewing *khat* while in long, winding conversations, frequently leaning in close to one another to whisper. Women surely maintain similar levels of conversation in other, less public venues.

Inevitably, much of the information traded is rumor, half-truths and blatant falsehoods, all of which can contribute to conflict. The dearth of media means that there is virtually no way to verify the accuracy of things heard through conversation, so there is a tendency for information acquired through word of mouth to be accepted as accurate. Combined with the almost automatic responses to certain actions prescribed by the clan system, rumors and falsehoods can quickly lead to conflict. Exacerbating the situation is limited or no information about the opposing side in a conflict; Gedi cites an instance of inter-clan conflict in which "either side never knew about the condition of the other and, as result, conflict ensued."[69] This information vacuum is not a primary driver of conflict, but it aggravates the situation and increases the likelihood both of conflict being triggered and violence quickly escalating.

VI. Available Conflict Management Resources

There is no shortage of conflict management resources available to Ethio-Somalis, including traditional conflict management mechanisms utilized for centuries and still quite effective in certain situations today. But complications arise with state intervention and efforts to formalize these mechanisms, as described below.

Traditional Conflict Management Mechanisms and Social Capital

Writing about Somalia, though quite applicable to the Somali Region, Menkhaus observes:

> Somali political culture features a very prominent and elaborate role for conflict management, in a large measure because pre-colonial Somalia was a stateless, decentralized, nomadic society in which conflict between clans over pasture and wells was endemic. Procedures for managing these conflicts were thus vital as a means of preventing chronic violence in this anarchic pastoral setting. Not surprisingly, conflict management and negotiation in Somalia remains a high art form.[70]

There is a well developed, relatively structured conflict management mechanism in place in the region (described in further detail above). The *guurti* elders are the judge and jury and their decisions are largely adhered to and respected. Ethio-Somalis understand from a young age how conflicts are *supposed* to be resolved, the various steps in the process and what can happen if those steps are not followed.

This widespread understanding of proper conflict management mechanisms is an example of *positive social capital*, as the "norms of reciprocity" among certain clans prescribe a certain sequence of conflict management mechanisms to be employed. Most people would not consider deviating from the prescribed mechanisms, largely because of the strong peer pressure in place and societal expectations inculcated in them. This positive social capital probably prevents a significant percentage of disputes from escalating into wider conflicts (a statement which, of course, is impossible to prove but would likely be supported by the majority of informed observers). This positive social capital can also be a useful tool in efforts to expand effective conflict management in the region by supporting traditional mechanisms.

As in any society, though, justice is not always blind to an individual's position and power. Wealthy pastoralists "can influence community leaders' political, economic and judicial decision making processes as well as decisions of waging war and management of conflicts," according to Gedi. "They initiate conflict resolution processes and reconciliation of conflicting parties. They voluntarily sponsor mediations and conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace-making efforts of the *Guurti* and the political leaders by covering all the expenses involved."[71] In all likelihood, these wealthy pastoralists, and wealthy agro-pastoralists and farmers as well, benefit from preferential treatment by the traditional conflict management mechanisms. This presents a challenge to the effectiveness of traditional conflict management mechanisms that must be considered.

The Role of Women in Conflict Management

It is critical to consider the role of women in traditional conflict management mechanisms. In Somali society that role is subtle, given its patriarchal nature and the generally deferential role women play. Interviewees in most communities visited say that women are members of the *guurti* councils and they most likely are, but the extent of their engagement and clout within those councils is uncertain. It is likely that they enjoy some influence but that decisions, especially important ones, rest with the men.

A key aspect of the changing nature of Somali society discussed above, however, is increasing involvement of and respect for women. This is a gradual process, but one that is likely irreversible and creates opportunities to support women in carving out a larger space for involvement in traditional conflict management mechanisms.

Unfortunately, women's role in conflict management is not always positive. Ethio-Somali women are known to "sing songs that talk ill of other sub-clans and the offended sub-clan retaliate by singing back" and to harshly ridicule men when they are perceived to be cowards.[72] In themselves these habits are not drivers of conflict, but they can contribute to rapid escalation.

State Conflict Management Mechanisms

In recent years the state has made a concerted effort to institutionalize traditional conflict management mechanisms by placing *guurti* elders on the government payroll.[73] The ostensible idea is for these *guurti* to "serve as a bridge between state and communities."[74] The process started in 1999 with a conference of 700 *guurti* elders, from which 100 were selected to be "government *guurti*."[75] This strategy may be backfiring though, as "local communities have no confidence in elders such as the *guurti* who are the government's advisors for resolving local conflicts… [each clan is] crowning a new *ugas* [similar to the *guurti*] and branding the former as a betrayer of the clan interest."[76] CHF heard similar sentiments in several communities, as there is general distrust for any people or policies associated with the government, including the regional government in Jijiga led by Ethio-Somalis.

This means that legitimacy remains with traditional mechanisms that end up being used to resolve the vast majority of conflicts. One informed observer who has studied Somali conflict resolution told CHF that 90 per cent of disputes are resolved on the first try with traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. In addition, the majority of the remaining 10 per cent, on which the state then uses its mechanisms, end up back in a traditional conflict management setting.

Another explanation for this may be that state interventions do not offer the *flexibility* and *familiarity* of traditional mechanisms. "Many consider modern institutions as rigid in nature,"[77] says Gedi. Ethio-Somalis are accustomed to and comfortable with traditional mechanisms; state interventions are a relatively new and foreign phenomenon. This is not to say that state interventions cannot take hold over the coming years, but for the moment traditional conflict management mechanisms remain widely preferred and utilized.

The Role of Religion and Shari'a

Conversations with Ethio-Somalis suggest that while religious institutions are second to traditional clan-based conflict management mechanisms among the majority of Ethio-Somalis, they are gaining in popularity and influence. Ethiopian Muslims "tend to identify first with their ethnic kin"[78] as opposed to their religious kin and traditional mechanisms accordingly trump religious mechanisms. Shari'a courts practicing traditional Islamic law generally maintain a limited purview, dealing primarily with family issues such a marriage, divorce, children's rights

and inheritance. (The latter is a particularly divisive and contested issue with male relatives traditionally inheriting most or all of a deceased person's assets. But wives and female relatives are increasingly advocating for greater inheritance rights). They tend not to get involved with land issues and inter- and intra-clan disputes, though there is some evidence that they are increasingly engaging in these issues. They also tend to be located in the urban centers and some of the larger villages, so residents of smaller villages have limited access to the courts. The Shari'a courts are widely regarded as a stabilizing influence. In the contest between tradition and modernity they are a strong force for the former and are viewed as a check against some of the perceived excesses of modernity. In neighboring Somalia "the courts can be considered a response by local communities to improve security conditions in the absence of state police forces."[79] If they are not already, in the near future they may take on more of a security function in the Somali Region as well.

Islam in general is growing in influence in the region. "Islam is an important part of the Ethiopian body politic and is likely to become more important in the years ahead,"[80] according to Shinn. The transition towards more sedentary agro-pastoral and farming activities contributes to this trend. Compared to nomadic pastoralists, it is generally easier for people settled in a particular place to learn about religion and access religious institutions, and they are an easier target for those looking to spread religion simply because they are not constantly on the move. Gedi points out that "with the expansion of settlements…pastoralists don't have to make long journeys any more to seek Islamic education."[81] It seems likely that people settled in a particular community tend, on the whole, to be more religiously-inclined than their nomadic counterparts. Of course, for those apprehensive about the spread of radical Islam this is a concern, as the trend towards settled lifestyles leaves people more easily targeted by religious extremists, who may simultaneously be funding and providing much-needed services in the community.

There is general uncertainty about the role and possible rise of radical Islam in the Somali Region and in the Horn of Africa in general. While Shinn notes that "Ethiopian Muslims have not been receptive to Islamic radicalism and they lack centralized power," he also acknowledges that "a senior Ethiopian academic recently commented that Ethiopia's religious equilibrium is collapsing and being replaced by a new militancy that is a threat to peace and stability."[82] Dickson argues that "Wahabism has had mixed success in radicalizing Muslims in the Horn. In Ethiopia, Wahabis have been connected to reported Mosque burnings, thereby introducing

intra-Islamic divisions into an already volatile ethno-religious mix."[83] It is difficult at the moment to see evidence of such intra-Islamic divisions in the Somali Region given the primacy of the clan system, but the concern of radical influences should not be overlooked.

VII. Regional Dynamics

To a large extent regional dynamics are beyond the scope of this report, so comments here are kept to a minimum. The key neighbor for the Somali Region is Somalia, which remains a failed state despite recent efforts by the National Transitional Government to advance the peace process and reconstitute the state. "Ethiopia prefers a weak and divided Somalia, especially if a united Somalia results in an unfriendly neighbor,"[84] according to Shinn. Many commentators have echoed this sentiment and it is true that with unified Somalia the chances of armed conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia increase. The Somali Region would be in the middle of any such conflict and it is unclear which side Ethio-Somalis would support.

A unified Somalia could have additional and substantial impact on the Somali Region. Trade between the Somali Region and Somalia would likely increase, which could be economically beneficial for both parties. There might be significant migration from the Somali Region to Somalia if there are indications that a Somali government might be a more effective service provider than the Ethiopian government (probably an unlikely scenario) or if there is substantial assistance from the international community within Somalia that attracts immigrants. There would likely be many families and clans maintaining a presence in each country, as some already do. There may be increased pressure for the creation of a "Greater Somalia" encompassing the Somali Region, which the Ethiopian government adamantly opposes. By the same token, though, a united Somalia might mean a tightening of the Ethiopia-Somalia border and curtailing of many of the illicit activities that involve Somalia, such as drugs and arms trading. Ethio-Somalis are undoubtedly involved in these activities and such a reduction in illicit activities would diminish their opportunities and income.

Djibouti, Somaliland and the Gulf States are also important to Somali Region, especially in trade. A lifting of the livestock ban by the Gulf states could be a tremendous boon for the Somali Region and pastoralist livelihoods. Djibouti and Somaliland are important intermediate points in this trade and there are ongoing efforts to develop feeding and testing facilities for livestock in these countries, which can significantly benefit pastoralists. Much financial and other forms of support come to the Somali Region from the Gulf States and many Ethio-Somali families extend

to these countries, meaning that the politics and economics of the Gulf significantly affect Ethio-Somalis.

VIII. Window of Vulnerability: Drought and Conflict

This section focuses on a specific window of vulnerability, the droughts that are so common in the Somali Region, and the relationship between rain cycles and conflict. An intriguing debate emerged during the research. Some interviewees assert that the potential for conflict is highest during droughts (or "stress periods"), when competition over scarce resources is at its height. "The dry season constitutes the most critical time," according to Hagmann, "as pastoralists need to move their herds in search of greener pastures and water, frequently clashing over scarce resources with farmers."[85] "Conflicts with neighbors usually become acute during droughts and when resources become scarce,"[86] writes Gedi. This makes intuitive sense, as one would expect that the struggle to survive in harsh conditions and the associated desperation can lead to extreme measures such as violent conflict.

However, others claim that the potential for conflict is highest during the rainy reason, when there are more resources over which to compete. "When the grass grows it is time to fight" according to one interviewee. Gebre-Mariam cites a raft of killings in the Gode Zone which took place during the *gu* rainy season to argue that it is during the heavy rains that the potential for violence is greatest.[87] This is quite plausible and should be kept in mind during the next rainy season, whether that comes in the near future or later on this year. Some also argue that during serious droughts and other periods of hardship "there is a tradition of cooperation and solidarity,"[88] rather than conflict, that does not exist during other non-critical periods. Obviously, such cooperation reduces the likelihood of conflict over scarce resources, but presumably this cooperation diminishes once the drought subsides.

A third scenario is that the risk of conflict is greatest immediately after a drought when people have to rebuild their lives and pastoralists and agro-pastoralists must restock their herds. Particularly after the recent drought, restocking is going to be a challenge because so many animals have died, leading to scarcity and likely competition.

There is no easy resolution to this debate and these three positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory. What is generally agreed upon is that the increasing frequency of

drought in the Somali Region in past two decades is closely connected to the increasing levels of violent conflict in the region, whether that conflict is most common during or after the drought.

IX. SWISS Mitigation Strategy

The findings here suggest several strategies for mitigating unintended consequences for CHF when implementing the Safe Water Intervention for Southern Somali region (SWISS) program. The overall goal of the SWISS program is to "respond to the emergency needs of the most vulnerable households through increased access to water, improved sanitation, and hygiene promotion and education."[89] To meet this goal the SWISS program focuses on three objectives: increased access to water by developing safe water channels; improved hygiene and sanitation practices at the household level; and increased awareness of technical water and sanitation procedures by ARRDO, Water Management Committees (WMCs) and local government. The mitigation strategy seeks to:

Engage Traditional Clan Mechanisms and Local Leaders

Any initiative hoping to have a chance of success must immediately engage traditional mechanisms and leaders – failure to do so can doom a program before it truly begins. Of course, this is true in many countries, especially in Africa. The particular challenge in Somali society is *how* to engage traditional mechanisms and leaders.

Emphasize Impartial and Secular Status

Somalis can be understandably circumspect, even skeptical, of non-Somalis and can assume affiliations on the part of outsiders that may or may not be accurate. In particular, there is a tendency to suspect that outside organizations have a religious agenda that can be perceived as anti-Muslim. This makes it critical to emphasize the secular nature of CHF as an organization and the work that it pursues. Religion is not a consideration in implementing that work, which needs to be clear from the outset. Otherwise there a risk of being demonized and debilitated because of inaccurate assumptions.

Seek to Carve Out a Robust Role for Women

Women are playing increasingly prominent roles in Somali society and the SWISS program offers an opportunity to build on that momentum. It is important that women are not only included in WMCs but *play an active role on those committees* and that their input and opinions are respected and considered. If this occurs, the WMCs could serve as a model for female involvement in other community decision-making mechanisms. This could also help spread understanding of the productive roles women can play in society beyond their traditional roles, which are so often restricted.

Work Within Sub-Clans, not Between Them

During the assessment several interviewees offered similar advice: work on wells geographically located *within* clans, not *between* them. This is sage advice given the inter-clan competition that could result from working between clans. Rehabilitating a well located between clans produces a new and valuable resource over which they may compete and generally creates additional opportunities for people from neighboring communities to interact. While such interaction is usually a positive development, in this instance, increased interaction means increased opportunities for incidents that trigger larger disputes and conflicts. In the combustible atmosphere of a sever drought, this is a risk that may be best to avoid.

Resist Efforts at Resource Co-option

There will be temptation and opportunity for certain groups and clans to try to co-opt resources brought to the region through SWISS, such as rehabilitated wells and various non-food items. This needs to be thwarted whenever possible. One strategy for doing so it to develop Resource Management Plans within communities (most likely developed by the WMCs, ideally with the approval of the *guurti* elders) that prescribe how resources are to be managed into the future once the project is complete. A related concern is that if resources are co-opted by particular clans, CHF may inaccurately be perceived to be favoring that clan over others, which can generate resentment and even insecurity.

X. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended primarily for organizations of the international community, including donors and implementing agencies. These recommendations are geared towards identifying long-term, sustainable strategies for minimizing instability and violent conflict in the region. Given the extreme humanitarian needs in Somali Region there is always a tension between short-term emergency assistance and longer-term, more "developmental" programming that seeks to move beyond the cycle of drought and resource competition. Both are essential, but it frequently seems that the former is prioritized over the latter (for quite legitimate reasons), which cripples efforts to break the cycle. A more even balance needs to be struck between the two if sustainable progress is to be achieved.

Focus on Youth

As detailed above, youth in Somali Region represent a classic disillusioned, disenchanted segment of society that is vulnerable to mobilization by various actors with various intentions. They see few strategies for escaping their situation in life and have little optimism for the future. Part of addressing this concern should involve programming that seeks to develop two essential needs: modest economic opportunities and role models. For example, a vocational training program based in one of the larger urban areas to which youth are flocking in search of opportunities could have immediate and sustained impact. Skills taught could include masonry, sewing, vehicle repair, electrical installation and repair, carpentry and other practical skills that are in demand in the region. This training would be interspersed with leadership development and goal-setting exercises that would help youth identify goals and formulate strategies for getting there.

Youth should also be provided opportunities to vent their frustrations and anger. Perhaps the best way to do so, especially for boys, is through sports. Daily, well-attended soccer games occur in larger towns but proper fields and equipment are scarce. Modest support simply to upgrade and expand these games and connect them with programs that support responsibility and positive, non-violent models for building dignified lives, could have a significant impact.

Initiate Income-Generating Activities to Manage Environmental Degradation

The type of environmental degradation described earlier, such as charcoal production, is a direct response to the lack of economic opportunities and viable livelihoods. People destroy the environment when they have few or nor other options for survival. There is nothing traditional about charcoal production nor is there stature to be gained through its production (given the minimal profits made by charcoal producers, it is simply a means of survival). Alternative means of survival would likely help charcoal producers quickly shift to other opportunities. The trick, of course, is identifying alternative income-generating activities in the conditions present in the Somali Region. If there were obvious opportunities or industries they would already have been identified. But there are possibilities that may catch on, such as fishing (fish are rarely eaten in the region and commercial fishing is unheard of, though the rivers are said to be stocked) or construction (there is a modest construction boom going on in the more urban areas, but skilled contractors are largely highlander firms that do not reinvest profits in the region). If such income-generating activities are effective in areas where desperate people are degrading the environment that trend could be reversed, and along with it the increase in conflict between those degrading the environment to survive and those who cannot survive without a healthy environment.

Seek to Improve Access to Reliable Information

The information vacuum in the Somali Region is dangerous because unfounded rumors can incite violence and because lack of information reduces market linkages (for example, people often have little or no pricing information). The obvious solution is the formation of local and regional media outlets.[90] Given high illiteracy levels, the dearth of televisions and relative prevalence of radios, radio stations are the best option. Community radio stations, based in an urban area and reaching even 20 kilometers outside the town, could have a substantial impact, and the wider the reach the greater the impact. Such stations have been established in dozens of African countries with great effect, especially when broadcasting in vernacular, which any station in Somali Region would (and the fact that a station would only need to broadcast in one language is an added advantage). Community radio can also be used to mitigate land disputes between pastoralists and agro-pastoralists/farmers; USAID cites a successful model of such an initiative in Mali.[91] The barriers to entry may be high, and negotiating government regulations may be particularly tricky. Any radio station would likely have to remain staunchly apolitical to

survive, which would have to be clearly understood by station staff and volunteers. Equipment, maintenance and technical capacity would also be significant but not insurmountable challenges. But in addition to the informational needs that would be met by radio stations, they could also provide something that can be in short supply in the region: entertainment and a break from the struggle to survive.

Support Transparent Land Management Mechanisms

What could, in the long-run, have the greatest impact on managing conflict in the Somali Region are more formalized, transparent and widely-accepted land management mechanisms. Such mechanisms would not be easy to install, however, because the current mechanisms have been in place for centuries and are ingrained in society. International assistance can be beneficial in this endeavor, but it will be essential that any mechanism be perceived by Ethio-Somalis as *legitimate* and *indigenous*, rather than imposed on them by foreigners or even non-Somali Ethiopians. Ethio-Somalis – particularly their leaders, including religious leaders – must demonstrate their buy-in to any land tenure mechanism employed. Another challenge will come from the fact that Ethio-Somalis who benefit from the vagaries of the current land tenure mechanisms would likely oppose adoption of a more formal, transparent system. They would have to be shown how the new system offers overall benefits to society and how those benefits would trickle down to them.

A potential first step is to share with Ethio-Somali leaders examples of how other land-tenure systems work in contexts roughly similar to that of the Somali Region, and how those systems have proved widely beneficial to society. Examples might include programs effectively implemented in Angola, Mexico, the Kyrgyz Republic and elsewhere.[92] It will also be important to keep expectations modest. Developing a formal system in which individual Ethio-Somalis hold titles to specific plots of land is unrealistic in light of cultural and political constraints. But a modified version of that, perhaps involving more formalized clan-based ownership of specific plots of land, may be more attainable.

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