



# Somali Peace and Security Depends on Rural Development

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*A blueprint for designing meaningful and sustainable development projects in rural Somalia*

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## **Introduction**

Unlike many African nations, Somalia is composed of a single, largely homogeneous ethnic group. Although Somalis may differ in nuances of local lifestyle, they share a uniform language, religion, and culture, and trace their heritage to a common ancestor. Somalia is mostly a rural population of herders and farmers. Many of the camel, cattle, or sheepherders are nomads. They lead their flocks and herds wherever water is found. Somali society is clan-based; oftentimes the clan leaders have greater authority than the national government.

It was clan animosities that tore the Somali government down and brought the troubled UN aid mission to a hasty end. It is clan warfare that has consumed countless lives and has ravaged Mogadishu, Somalia's once-beautiful capital by the sea. Clans have been the bedrock of Somali identity since the first bands of nomads fought over watering holes. Somali elders and clan leaders need to resolve this issue in order to build a sustainable peace in Somalia. We need to work together with the elders, listen to them, and invite them to be part of the solution. We need tribal leaders to help expand our grassroots efforts. Somali peace efforts and stability depends on the Somali people. Somalia has its own culture, values, and methods of solving problems through dialogue and

understanding between the elders and clan leaders of different tribes throughout the country.

The peace process has to start from the bottom up in order to sustain itself. Most of the Somali people tend to blame the international community for not doing enough for the peace process, but what we forget as Somali people is that peace ultimately depends on us, not the international community. When assessing blame for the failure of the Somali peace process, we should look to ourselves first and foremost. Unfortunately, the Somali government thinks that the international community has a solution to our problems, not acknowledging that the solution is truly in our own hands. We have to realize that the solution is within our grasp through tribe-by-tribe dialogue. Every village, town, district and region has to work among themselves with their common goodwill and to focus on what brings us together, not apart, as a nation.

War and conflict have destroyed traditional family-based social networks. The Somalia Strategy Forum is therefore taking a leading role in supporting action for children at risk (street children, exploitative child labor, child victims of war, etc.). Support is provided through counseling, medical care, protection, and reintegration into school. Persons with disabilities are assisted via community-based activities supporting income generation, training, job placement, and information on rights. SSF sustains its efforts and achievements to ensure social protection of highly vulnerable groups and persons. It is my humble opinion that without rural development there will never be peace and stability in Somalia. *The bottom line is that we should not continue to blame the world for our nation's failures, but work together to realize the Somalia that we need and the world wants to see.*

### **Somali Rural Development**

The Somali civil conflict, absence of government, continuing insecurity in many parts of the country, and inadequate access to basic services and infrastructure worsened welfare and poverty compared to pre-civil war times. The Somalia Strategy Forum is committed to reducing rural poverty, particularly in resource-poor, degraded, or remote environments. It is necessary to sustain a natural environment that can generate fresh water of sufficient quality to fill social needs for consumption and sanitation, as well as economic needs for agriculture, hydropower generator, and industrial usage. Integrated water resources development and management should be undertaken in a holistic and sustainable manner. Management and development of water resources should be done through participatory methods by stakeholders. The ultimate goal of a well-designed rural development strategy is management and

development of water resources and improved livelihood for present and future generations through:

- Access to safe drinking water supply;
- Food security through water security;
- Protection of income sources from negative impacts of droughts and floods;
- Access to hydro power in both rural and urban areas;
- Improved water supply and development of industries.

Programs typically link elements such as providing affordable and accessible boarding school facilities for nomadic children, drilling multiple wells every ten kilometers, nomadic clinical care systems, governmental offices in rural areas, police presence every ten kilometers, workshops for rural communities, promoting tribal tolerance, natural resource management, productive infrastructure development, increased agricultural productivity and human skills development with a central concern for community-level participation and decision-making. The ultimate goal is to enable Somali rural community members to make informed choices from a range of appropriate options for sustainable and reasonable development.

The Somalia Strategy Forum will create an institutional structure at the village level through which people can determine priority needs and decide how best to manage common resources in the interests of the rural community as a whole. These village, town, and regional organizations also serve to represent the community to the government and to other development partners, including NGOs.

SSF promotes rural poverty alleviation strategies and programs aimed at increasing people's access to goods, services, and opportunities; increasing people's ability to withstand the socio-economic shocks entailed in job loss, crop failure, and illness; and expanding the horizon of opportunities for improving the quality of life of the poor. SSF will provide a supportive environment for enlarging the economic assets of the rural Somali community and for harnessing individual self-interest to generate income growth in an unbiased and sustainable manner.

The low social and economic status of rural Somali women and their significant contribution to the household and village economies in most areas of Somalia are well known facts, though not as well documented. It is generally agreed that

their concerns and problems should be integrated into all rural development plans and programs.

Somali women play a key role in rural and urban communities. SSF will empower Somali women through microcredit, training of midwives, and education that will make a profound difference in the lives of Somali rural women.

### Action Plan

The SSF commits to:

- ☉ Design training programs supporting the effectiveness and sustainability of the Somali nomadic people;
- ☉ Develop village-level institutions by providing the management and technical skills needed to plan, implement and maintain local development activities, and
- ☉ Build the knowledge base in rural development through learning, analyzing, and disseminating lessons learned from field experience.