



YOUTH DERADICALIZATION THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

Summary

Youth unemployment is a widely acknowledged trigger for radicalization, as the hopelessness it engenders increases youths' vulnerability to exploitation, ideological manipulation and extremism. In Somalia, employment opportunities in both urban and rural areas are scarce, and lack of employment, combined with limited educational opportunities, renders Somali youths susceptible to indoctrination by ideologically extremist groups, such as Al-Shabab and ISIS. Unemployed young people comprise the majority in Al-Shabab, violent clans, militia groups, and other criminal syndicate groups within and beyond Somalia's borders. To overcome the challenges young people face, and to enable them to meet their immediate needs and fulfil their long-term aspirations, it is necessary to improve access to education and employment. This policy brief examines the conditions currently contributing to youth unemployment and provides workable recommendations with which to develop a formidable framework, to allow the government and other actors to implement policies and interventions to disrupt the link between youth unemployment and radicalization in Somalia.

Key Messages

- Unemployment increases youths' vulnerabilities to exploitation, ideological manipulation and extremism.
- Emergency work programmes can be an effective way to ensure young people earn a good income.
- Initiatives designed to support youths must be contextualized to suit local environments.
- Strategic partnerships and coordination are essential when addressing youth unemployment issues.
- Managing expectations must be a core priority.

Introduction

Over 70% of the Somali population is aged under 30.¹ Unemployment increases youths' vulnerability to exploitation, ideological manipulation and extremism. Indeed, parents and young people themselves have raised concerns about this rapidly expanding problem, stressing the need to address this issue. It is agreed that preventative interventions are necessary to ensure that this generation can attain their full potential and benefit the nation as a whole. This brief explores the major issues surrounding youth employment and recommends actionable policies. The findings reported were drawn from questionnaire data collected from Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Bosaso between December 2016 and February 2017.

Current Youth Unemployment Trends

Although it is subject to fluctuation, estimates rank the unemployment rate in Somalia as one of the highest worldwide. The unemployment rate in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, is estimated to be as high as 66%.² The estimated overall unemployment rate for Somali youths nationally is the highest in the world, with more than 80% listed as having no form of employment.³ Moreover, alarmingly, only 30 per cent of school-aged children in Somalia have access to education,⁴ posing a real and imminent threat to the nation's future. Barriers such as a lack of information, experience, and networking skills have further

worsened the unemployment burden. Similarly, the government (both at national and state level) lacks the ability and technical aptitude to initiate the necessary labour market reforms. Moreover, its capacity to absorb a considerable proportion of the population into public service is questionable.

Perceptions of the Youth on Employment

Participation in the labour market is the single most important means of securing young people's social integration and discouraging criminal involvement.⁵ Employment provides youths with social skills and raises self-esteem, positively influencing their psychological makeup and channelling their energy in productive ways.⁶ In contrast, unemployed youths are statistically more likely to become marginalized. Consequently, the vast majority of young Somalis agree that employment is a prerequisite for security and stability in the war-torn country.⁷ Correspondingly, Somali youths remark that improvements to the security situation nationally would bring about an environment more conducive to job creation. At present, few young people can earn a reasonable income when employed, and generally only those from well-off families, or those with relatives abroad can afford to pay the tuition fees to receive an education.

With regard to the link between employment and governance, young people in Somalia have established a strong correlation between effective governance and good policies on one side and employment creation on the other. They argue that effective governance and reputable employment policies are an important precondition for the creation of sustainable and valuable employment opportunities. Conversely, youths highlight ineffective governance and policies characterized by corruption, nepotism and poor leadership; they observe that these realities hinder job creation, even in stable regions such as Somaliland and Puntland. This has led them to point out that governmental policies, as well as security, need to be implemented simultaneously to forge a new era of prosperity.

Weaknesses in employment policies were mentioned in reference to the recruitment process, as the vast majority of Somali youths stated that public jobs are typically secured via favouritism and nepotism. In addition, job offers are rarely advertised, since employers favour the selection of relatives, clan members or friends over more skilled candidates. This confirms findings in recent studies that have reported that nepotism in the selection process will probably continue if security conditions do not improve and distrust remains⁸.

Likely Outcomes of Youth Unemployment.

Prolonged unemployment among the Somali youth potentially increases their risk of developing mental health issues, and ingrained resentment for the established government, as well as a higher incidence of youths resorting to criminality, and abject poverty. The single greatest barrier preventing young Somalis from reaching their full potential is the high level of unemployment, combined with economic disenfranchisement resulting from prolonged civil unrest and its subsequent impact on the fabric of Somali society. This has exposed young Somali men and women to the possibility of involvement in violence. Unemployment and economic deprivation often leads to further marginalization of youths, characterized by high levels of disillusionment, hopelessness, and eventually extreme radicalization. This situation has created a haven for extremist groups, such as Al-Shabaab and ISIS, who have reportedly found it relatively easy to recruit unemployed young people on the promise of as little income as \$50 per month.

Additionally, joblessness encourages young people to engage in antisocial activities, such as drug use and distribution, as well as leading to the formation of criminal syndicates and networks in Somalia's bigger cities. Moreover, Somali youths, particularly young men, often resort to violent crimes as a direct result of their perceived humiliation, marginalization and the

denial of access to employment and educational opportunities. Unemployment elicits an extreme sense of demoralization, bleakness and disconnection among young people. Isolating them from their families, other people, and their nation, ultimately leading many to leave Somalia. Interestingly, the young people interviewed from peaceful Somaliland argue that if the current youth unemployment trend is allowed to continue, there could be a return to instability and fighting there.

Certainly, the Somaliland and Puntland Governments (the most stable regions in Somalia) argue that unemployment was and still is the key driver of Tahriib (illegal migration). It is therefore unsurprising that unemployed youths constitute the group most prepared to pursue illegal migration, taking the perilous journey across land and sea to the West; a journey which has claimed thousands of lives.⁹



Recommendations

1. Improve Wellbeing Immediately

Creating immediate sources of income for young people has high potential to scaffold peace building efforts. Alternative sources of income, such as temporary jobs or cash-for-work schemes targeting youths are some of the temporary measures that can be introduced to ensure young people remain productively engaged in society. Emergency work programmes can effectively support young people wishing to earn a decent income, while the government strives to establish a more permanent and viable employment sector. Moreover, such programmes can help individuals engage and reconnect with their friends, families and wider society more positively. Since public and private sector bodies are the largest employers, affording young people equal opportunities to join public and private service programmes will allow them access to further employment and valuable experience. This will then strengthen national and social values, giving youths a sense of pride and belonging, as they will be contributing not only to improving their own and their families lives, but also to the Somali nation as a whole.

Further, it is recommended that local and foreign industries, and national and international organizations lend first priority to trained and competent locals in employment positions. Policies and regulations should also

be enacted and fully implemented to guide this framework. Employment of foreigners to complete tasks/jobs that could be done by locals must be carefully controlled if the country is to take full advantage of its sons and daughters. Training and development programmes are anticipated to have a direct and positive impact on the sustainability of the peace building process.

For those who might not otherwise be in a position to pursue a formal employment route, assistance can be given to explore the potential of self-employment. To support them, the government should create an enabling environment through the enactment and implementation of important policies and regulations, to ensure young people in the entrepreneurial sector can thrive. Undeniably, whether youths are employed or self-employed, it is important to allow them to strengthen their technical skills, to enable them to fulfil their personal aspirations and those of the nation.

2. Contextualization of the Support Systems

Somalia is a federation, and each federal member state has its own unique socioeconomic and political dynamics. It is therefore crucial that any programmes, policies and economic stimulus initiatives supporting youths be contextualized to suit the local environments, to receive local acceptance, as well as to achieve a wider reach and direct long-term impact. The role of public bodies within

these programmes needs to be clearly defined and understood to facilitate the construction of state-society contracts. Emergency employment efforts need to be gradually transitioned to create sustainable employment initiatives that will enable young people to develop long lasting commitments and partnerships locally within society.

3. Coordinate Strategies and Efforts

Strategies aimed at creating jobs for youths are developed in a de-fragmented manner. Without aligned policies, strategies and planning, programme duplication will remain the norm, leaving the genuine needs of youths unaddressed. Neither government bodies (national and sub national), nor NGOs have the capacity to address youth unemployment in isolation. Undoubtedly, strategic partnerships and coordination are the most sustainable ways of enhancing peace building efforts and addressing the youth unemployment issue. Coordination is not only required between humanitarian/development actors and the public authorities but is also desperately needed between different levels of government, both at

the national and state level, as well as involving direct engagement from the local population.

4. Manage Expectations

Employment programmes tend to generate positive results when measured over the long term (2 years or more).¹⁰ However, in post-conflict situations, politicians and communities are focusing on short-term goals, making managing expectations a core priority. Unrealistic expectations will make it difficult to build trust to allow the government to reconnect with the youth. Undoubtedly, the best way to balance expectations is to constantly engage with young people so that they feel this is an inclusive programme, aimed at supporting them, rather than directed at them. Additionally, the returning educated, and unemployed diaspora youths must be made aware of the realities on the ground in terms of the availability of employment opportunities for them and local youths. This would serve to mitigate any future disagreements directly resulting from false promises and the pursuit of unrealistic aims.

SIPAM is a non-partisan, independent, not-for-profit organisation focusing on public governance, policies and implementation to develop the capabilities of public officials to competently deal with major governance challenges.

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