



Governance Brief 01

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Summary

Somalia has a very youthful population. Fragile and weak public institutions, insecurity, poor infrastructure and lack of decent employment opportunities has left many youths unemployed, underemployed or working in vulnerable conditions. Employment opportunities are limited, and selection is often not competitive. This governance brief is based on discussions with youth in Mogadishu. It examines the causes of and consequences of the youth employment crisis. It concludes with a number of policy options and recommendations.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a non-profit public policy and administration research organization based in Mogadishu. Its aim is to advance understanding and improvement of public administration and public services in Somalia through evidence-based research and analysis.

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Somali youth employment crisis

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Introduction

The population of Sub-Saharan Africa is growing faster compared to other regions, and the majority of the working age population in the region is young (McArthur, 2014). Around half of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa is under 25 years of age (Filmer & Fox, 2014). While regional GDP has been growing steadily in recent years, many youths in Africa are dissatisfied with the economic progress because the growth in many counties are primarily from oil, gas and mineral extractions and not from labor intensive sectors leaving many youths unemployed (Filmer & Fox, 2014).

Somalia is among those African countries where youth form the majority of the population. According to the latest population estimate survey by the Ministry of Planning and the United Nations Population Fund (2014), 75 percent of the population of Somalia are below the age of 30. Further, more than half of the population (an estimated 6.3 million, or 52.4 percent) is of working age (that is, they are between the ages of 15-64 which is usually considered to be the age range within which people are willing and eligible to work). The biggest group (43.7 percent) live in urban areas (United Nations Population Fund, 2016).

Like most Sub-Saharan Africa countries, the lack of employment opportunities is one of the most pressing challenges in Somalia. Most of those affected are the youth population. To understand employment processes and the challenges young people encounter, we talked to 18 youth (of both genders) including journalists, doctors, university students, researchers, lawyers as well as unemployed youth in Mogadishu in January and February 2019.

Employment challenges

There are numerous factors that contribute to mass unemployment and underemployment in Somalia. The continued absence of a properly functioning government is likely the main cause. In the last three decades, and arguably even before, state institutions have been weak or non-existent. The capacity of the government to build legal and physical infrastructure for investment and job creation has been badly damaged by the state collapse and subsequent protracted conflicts. Further, insecurity in parts of Somalia is another main contributor to unemployment and underemployment (i.e. working fewer hours, for less pay, or in a role that is not adequately reflective of a person's capabilities and qualifications), especially among the young population.

The country's natural endowments including agriculture, fisheries, and livestock sectors are characterized by primary production (that is, a production which requires little skill) and low productivity. Most of the goods consumed domestically, many of which could have been produced in the country, are imported. This has limited employment opportunities. Further, public private partnership ventures that could have enabled the government to create more opportunities for employment are at a rudimentary stage.

Notwithstanding the limited employment opportunities in Somalia, there are other factors that exacerbated the youth employment crisis. These factors include a mismatch between existing educational opportunities and the skills required in the job market, flawed recruitment processes, and the concentration of job opportunities in some locations.

The number of universities in the country has increased in the past decade. Mogadishu alone hosts over 60 universities. But these higher education institutions do not produce many qualified students with a broad range of relevant skills. What the youth are taught in universities does not match the skills required by the labor market. For example, graduates often lack a good command of working languages and marketable skills. Privatization, insignificant regulation, insecurity and the frequent movement of students have all contributed to poor-quality education.

A sizable number of the unemployed in Somalia do not get the opportunity to go to formal schools or access skills training. Many youths lack basic skills which could help them find employment in occupations such as plumbing, electricians, and construction because acquiring such skills require apprentices. As a result, foreigners, mostly from neighboring countries, are doing jobs in Somalia that require relatively basic technical skills.

Lack of transparency in recruitment is another factor that has contributed to the employment crisis among Somali youth. For young graduates to get a job in the public sector, they need to ask members of their clan assist them in getting the job. Politicians represent clans, and when one requires employment in the public sector, one's clan identity is the most significant resource that youth can draw on to get the job. Members of the parliament and ministers are asked to employ relatives in the public sector. This is a result of lack of effective civil service institutions that hire public servants in a transparent and formal process.

The business and the non-profit sector also lack transparency in their recruitment policies. For many positions advertised a candidate has already been chosen. As such, many youths have been discouraged from applying for advertised positions.

Most employment opportunities are concentrated in Mogadishu because it is the seat of the federal government and most of the international organizations operating in Somalia. Further, most of the social services such as education and healthcare are concentrated in Mogadishu. This has prompted migration from the regions to Mogadishu. Many young people who moved to Mogadishu to study are subsequently not willing to look for work elsewhere.

Finally, while many young Somalis may have innovative business ideas, they lack financial resources, or access to commercial banks, credit facilities or government subsidies to invest in them.

Consequences of the employment crisis

In Somalia, the unemployment crisis among the youth has caused some serious problems. First, protracted unemployment among the youth in Somalia has left many with low self-esteem, which has left them vulnerable to recruitment by criminal gangs and armed groups.

Second, many unemployed youths, including university graduates, make the difficult decision to leave Somalia, often risking their lives to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Third, some youth are involved in the use of drugs due to unemployment. The use of drugs is seen as a way to ease the problems encountered by the youth. Addiction to khat has certainly been a contributing factor to unemployment and an underperforming economy. The use of Indian tobacco known as 'tabuu' is also increasing among the youth in Mogadishu.

Fourth, although the number of female graduates in high schools and universities have been increasing in recent years, unemployment among the young population has prompted many female graduates to arrange an early or instant marriage. The more female graduates stay at home without jobs, the higher the pressure from parents and relatives to get married.

Finally, education is seen as a channel through which a 'better life' can be attained. But the high level of unemployment and underemployment in Somalia has discouraged many from pursuing higher

education as they see university graduates without jobs. Some youth are getting disappointed with the notion of going to school or college as their older brothers or friends are jobless for a number of years with little hope of getting decent employment. Thus, they are buying into the idea that education will not help them obtain decent employment or work towards better lives. This mentality is likely to have a negative impact on the country in the long term as Somalia's human resources will continue to be underdeveloped.

Policy options and recommendations

Tackling the unemployment challenges is an issue that needs collective work and cooperation among the different levels of government, the private sector and society at large. Reducing unemployment among young people will likely be one of the main challenges Somalia faces over the next few decades if it is not made an immediate priority. There are no quick solutions. Rather, a multi-pronged, long-term approach is necessary.

Unemployment is a symptom of a dysfunctional system, state failure, insecurity, and corruption. Improving governance, strengthening state capability, and creating a conducive environment for employment creation can mitigate the high level of unemployment in Somalia. But this is a complicated and long-term process that cannot produce quick wins in the short-term. However, there are certain things that can be prioritized.

1. Education: improving the quality of education is a collective effort from all education stakeholders. However, it should start with a unified curriculum at primary and secondary schools and government oversight of the capacity and work of the higher education institutions. Improving the quality of formal education would mean producing competitive and qualified labor force. Further, diversification of what is being taught in the universities is required. Livestock, crops, forestry, and fishery subsectors constitute about 75% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (World Bank, 2018). Universities should establish important faculties and specializations that Somalia needs including in agriculture, animal husbandry, and fisheries sciences.

Further, Somalia needs more vocational schools that produce skilled labor force in a short period of time. Putting more emphasis on vocational training schools can play a pivotal role in improving the employability of the youth. Skills are considered intrinsic to social inclusion as those without skill are

marginalized from work, experience depression, and have less capacity to shape the major developments in their lives. However, while there is general agreement that skills are important, there is less clarity on nature and the kinds of skills needed and how these skills are developed. Therefore, it is necessary that the government regulate technical and vocational education and training (TVET) centers as well as prepare a guide curriculum for TVET centers.

2. Labor information: employment related data is scarce in Somalia. The government should build its own capacity to conduct labor market surveys. Understanding the skills gap in the labor market and the rate of unemployment could help stakeholders take sound decisions regarding youth employment. Equally important is the enactment of a set of legislations that are necessary for employment and can attract investors. These include the investment law, national youth policy, the employment policy, and labor law among others.

3. Transparency in recruitment: the recruitment process of available opportunities for the youth as well as youth-related interventions should be transparent and free from nepotism and cronyism. Talented youth who studied hard in a complex and difficult environment deserve transparent and merit-based recruitment processes. The government should start with itself and reform the informal recruitment that is prevalent in the public sector. It should also establish a strategy that encourages transparent recruitment in both the not-for-profit and private sectors.

4. Boosting local production: livestock, agriculture and crop production remain the dominant domestic production in Somalia, and the public and private sectors can strategize ways to boost these sectors. However, environment shocks such as famine and floods are the main challenges the sectors encounter. On the other hand, most of Somalia's 18 regions share a coastline. There are also two rivers in Somalia that cross many regions. More jobs can be created in investing in the fisheries sector. Environmental shocks negligibly affect the fishing sector, and Somalia has the longest coast in mainland Africa. Public awareness of the benefits of fish is needed to encourage more people to catch and consume fish. Equally important is proper licensing and protecting the fishermen that are being pushed out by the sale of licenses to the larger trawlers and multi-national fishing companies.

Somalia remains one of the countries that is difficult to start a business. The government should reduce the costs and bureaucracy of registering companies

In order to advance the understanding and improvement of public services and governance in Somalia, Somali Public Agenda applies policy-oriented and evidence-based research. We intend to design public programs and projects at both the service delivery and policy-making levels. We also expect to conduct practical and sustainable training on governance and service delivery.



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and startups. This will encourage the entrepreneurship spirit and the establishment of small business enterprises.

5. Youth support fund: The federal government together with the business community and the international donors could designate a trust fund for the youth. This should not be a program but a window for funding. Youth with ideas can apply to the fund. This fund should sponsor youth startups that are innovative and cost-effective as well as networking and socialization among the youth, and it should be managed and overseen by an independent committee that is credible, inclusive and with relevant experience in public financial management.

6. Technology and innovation: in today's world, technology impacts how people work, jobs and human behavior. Technology and innovation can create more job opportunities for Somali youth. More innovation centers are needed that work genuinely and give Somali youth space for innovation and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, websites dedicated to advertising youth employment opportunities could be created.

7. Networking and associations: The youth should start a peer to peer networking. There are many freelancers working individually in Somalia. Creating freelancers' network and creating youth entrepreneurs' associations (perhaps with help from mechanisms such as the youth support fund described above) could strengthen professional networks and cooperation among the youth. The youth and especially fresh graduates should start searching for internships as it would help

them be connected with professional networks. It also provides important professional experience for fresh graduates.

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