



RESEARCH PAPER

MOHAMED ABDIRAHMAN

ISIR THINK TANK | 2020

YOUTH ALIENATION IN SOMALILAND'S POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONSTRUCTS



October 2020

Summary

This paper constitutes independent research into the factors behind youth alienation in Somaliland. The research also examines the major challenges facing Somaliland youth as a result of economic, political and social exclusion. In addition to the country's poor economic standing and weak government institutions, the youth population in Somaliland keeps rising, as is the case with the rest of Africa. Often, the youth find themselves alienated from the political, economic and social systems, through public policies and other youth-exclusive structural systems. It is therefore prudent to address the underlying factors that promote youth alienation and marginalization.

This paper presents the findings of the research in two parts. The first part presents the factors that have led to youth alienation and marginalization in Somaliland, while the second part enumerates some policy recommendations of how to mitigate the situation. Some of these recommendations include offering constructive engagement and support to the youth to bridge the gap created by the current policies. This would essentially enhance youth participation in setting the agenda for social, political and economic inclusion. Moreover, the fact that Somaliland attracts foreign workers while there is such a high unemployment rate among the youth is evidence that the cause of unemployment is not only a scarcity of jobs but also a case of skills miss-match. This study therefore advocates for training in relevant and market driven skills.

Introduction:

Somaliland declared its independence from Somalia in 1991. However, it is yet to be recognized as a sovereign state by the international community. Somaliland claims that its legitimacy as a sovereign state dates back to the formation of the Somali Republic in 1960, which consisted of the unification of the two territories of Somalia, the former colony of Italy, and Somaliland, the former British colony. Since its declaration, Somaliland has undergone a developmental process, through relatively successful stages of nation and state building. Currently, Somaliland has a functioning government, a national army, a national currency, an elected president and a functional parliament. In addition, the country has an infrastructural presence in most of its territories.

In spite of these distinctive achievements, Somaliland is a young country with over 70% ¹of its population classified as youthful. In addition, political institutions are nascent and yet to develop their capacity in a thoroughly democratic manner. In terms of its economy, Somaliland's GDP was estimated at 2 Billion USD or 500 USD per capita in 2017² and is ranked as one of the poorest in the world. This overwhelms its weak government and ultimately leads to a scarcity of opportunities for the young generation, leading to poor or no education and skill development for youth groups. Consequently, the unemployment rate among the youth stands at 65%³.

Additionally, a significant number of studies have exposed how youth unemployment, alienation and violent conflict are interrelated. A study commissioned through Interpeace funding and implemented by the Somaliland National Youth Umbrella (SONYO) on youth violence in 2016 warns that “the country faces a high risk of youth violence, arguing that a deprived, frustrated, or traumatized youth, if not attended to, is likely to incite violent conflict.” The report goes on to conclude that “the surge in youth crime rates in major towns is as a result of high unemployment prevalent among youth groups”.

This paper is concerned with identifying the underlying factors that drive Somaliland youth into hopelessness and destitution and ultimately into violence and crime. These causal factors range from socio-cultural to economic and political, all of which have created an unfavorable environment for the youth population. The paper also offers insights into the meaningful inclusion of the young population across all sectors. The core argument advanced in this paper is that interconnected and multi-faceted approaches and programs designed to mitigate the risk of youth alienation and youth conflict are essential.

¹ Whilst Somaliland never conducted population census and no reliable data is ready to refer, UNFPA conducted a population estimation survey in 2012 and concluded that 81% of the population is under the age of 35 <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Population-Estimation-Survey-of-Somalia-PESS-2013-2014.pdf>

² New World Bank GDP and Poverty Estimates for Somaliland, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2014/01/29/new-world-bank-gdp-and-poverty-estimates-for-somaliland>

³ Youth Unemployment in Hargeisa (2017): Causes and Consequences by Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) available online at <http://ocvp.org/HQRS/internshipphase/HQRS%20Group%20B%20Research%20Report%20Youth%20Unemployement%202017%20%20FINAL.pdf>

Conceptualization of key terms

The definitions of the term 'youth' tend to vary from region to region and institution to institution, covering a wide spectrum of meanings to different actors. Though it is universally understood as the transition from adolescent age to adult life, the parameters set are contentious. The United Nations considers youth as those aged between 15 and 24 while the African Youth Charter regards it as the ages between 18–35 years. The Somalia Federal Government considers age groups between 15 and 40 years as the transition from childhood to adulthood⁴. Thus, the concept of youth is itself contested as it may vary based on factors stemming from biological to cultural markers.

The government of Somaliland stipulates in its National Youth Policy (2015) that youth are between the ages 15-35. In Somaliland, 44% of the population is younger than the age of 15 years.⁵ Built on this postulation, over 70% of the Somaliland population is considered youthful. According to a recent Employment and Labor Market Analysis (ELMA) study, Somaliland has one of the highest fertility rates in the world with a population growth rate of 3.1%. Likewise, according to a statistics survey, more than half of the global population is under the age of 30 with 87% of this figure coming from emerging economies (UNESCO, 2015).

'Youth alienation' is the situation in which the country's youth are withdrawn or separated from the values of their society or family as a result of combined factors, as can be observed in the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security in 2015. The resolution gives provisions to five key thematic areas: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships and reintegration. The independent progress study on Youth, Peace and Security report in April 2018 commissioned by the United Nations' Population fund (UNFPA) to assess the progress of United Nations' resolution 2250 on youth concluded that much still needs to be done to empower youth globally.⁶

⁷'Youth conflict' also has a number of definitions. The most commonly adopted one is from the World Health Organization (WHO) which defines it as:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, exerted by or against children, adolescents or young adults, which results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation.⁸

The progress study on Youth, Peace and Security commissioned by the United Nations in 2018 uncovered experiences of exclusion by the world's youth population and concluded that exclusion

⁴ The National Youth Policy of The Federal Government of Somalia available online at <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Somalia%20National%20Youth%20Policy%20Eng%20fa.pdf>

⁵ Somaliland National Youth Policy 2015

⁶ The Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security was requested by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in response to Security Council resolution 2250 (2015).

⁷ The Missing Peace Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security available online at file:///C:/Personal/Policy%20Institutes/GHHF/youth-web-english.pdf

⁸ World report on violence and health: (WHO 2002) Available online at:- https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/summary_en.pdf

particularly in the areas of politics, economics, education and gender have direct consequences that create mistrust in young people toward the governing systems of their respective countries.

Youth Alienation in Somaliland

1.1. Lack of Economic Participation:

According to a World Bank study published in 2015, poverty rates in Somaliland are as high as 37% and 30% in rural and urban areas respectively (World Bank 2015, p. 16). Furthermore, Somaliland does not get access to international credits since it is not recognized as a state. Delving further into statistics, a 2015 Labor Force Survey sponsored by the World Bank and implemented in three major cities in Somaliland found the rate of youth unemployment to be an alarming 73%⁹.

Young people in Somaliland struggle to find work for a number of reasons, not least of which are the country's ailing economy and poor education. There are also a number of other reasons for unemployment¹⁰, for example, in situations where job opportunities are awarded based on clan and group affiliations. The majority of Somaliland's work force go through these networks to find employment. There is also the question of market driven jobs and relevance of education. In the focus group discussions held during the course of this study, some of the young people interviewed indicated that the education offered in the schools and universities is not relevant in the current job market. Universities and secondary schools produce thousands of graduates every year but seem unable to equip them with the specific skills demanded by the market. This accounts for the high number of economic migrants from Ethiopia, Yemen, Kenya and Bangladesh to fill these jobs, particularly in the construction, education and decoration industries. Occasionally, ¹¹major cities including Hargeisa and Berbera witness small scale xenophobic attacks directed towards these migrant workers.¹²

Through various surveys conducted, Somaliland youth have expressed their lack of confidence in the economic governance of the country. The UNDP Somalia's 2013 Human Development Report captured survey results from Somaliland in which youth indicated that they feel "disempowered" and that they "lack the skills required to obtain job opportunities". In addition to this attestation, it is also a widely perceived phenomenon in Somaliland that systemic flaws persist in recruitment processes in both the private and public sectors.

Literature reviewed during the course of the study pointed to economic exclusion as one of the major factors contributing to youth dissatisfaction and frustration with the current governance

⁹ World Bank 2015a, p. 3; "Somaliland" Ministry of Labour, 2012, p. 49).

¹⁰ Observatory of Conflict and Violence prevention research on "Youth Unemployment in Hargeisa: Causes and Consequences" in 2017

¹¹ Key Informant Interview with Abdirahman, the Manager of Najah Construction Company shared he went to Bangladesh to hire highly skilled and low paid laborers to meet the demands of the market which cannot be available locally.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LdlymOs9Mw>

system. The Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) has precisely elaborated the existence of corruption that directly disadvantages the youth.¹³ Scholarships and other opportunities are rarely awarded through an open, accountable and transparent competition. This, combined with nepotism and favoritism, become an aggravating factor, playing a key role in secluding the youth from the economic systems.

Consequently, youth in Somaliland have expressed their dissatisfaction in part due to economic exclusion, and many of them resort to undertaking desperate and dangerous journeys through deserts and across oceans in search of better opportunities outside the country as revealed in the 2015 World Bank study on poverty indicators in Somaliland. Occasionally, these journeys prove to be fatal. Most youths who undertake these journeys do so in attempts to find a sense of purpose in life. Another direct correlation can be made between youth alienation and marginalization and the recent surge in violent crimes and theft of mobile phones in cities¹⁴. The lack of confidence in the current governance system is evident even among youth who are highly educated, owing to the realization that employment opportunities are scarce.

The high unemployment rate among youth groups also leads them to alcohol and drug abuse, and makes them more vulnerable to radicalization. Khat chewing, for example, is prevalent among youth groups in Somaliland.¹⁵ This habit further alienates the young people and detaches them from the rest of the society. Additionally, Khat chewing contributes to high cases of school drop-outs and makes many young people disinterested in participating in economic activities. The domino effect of unemployment and drug abuse is violent conflicts. In December 2019, Somaliland Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs reported a record 450 violent conflicts,¹⁶ with human rights' organizations believing that there are a significant number of unreported cases.

Unemployment among youth populations also negatively impacts young women and girls. Young women find it more difficult to secure employment opportunities as a result of cultural biases directed toward them, which labels them as inept. According to the Gender Report by UNDP in 2015, only 30% of civil service employees in Somaliland are women. Worse still, most of them hold subordinate functions requiring low education levels such as cleaners and administrative staff.¹⁷

¹³ OCVP Research in 2017 available online at http://ocvp.org/HQRS/internshipphase/HQRS%20Group%20B%20Research%20Report%20Youth%20Unemployment%202017%20_%20FINAL.pdf

¹⁴ Somaliland: Youth Unemployment and Security in Hargeisa February 12, 2019

¹⁵ Somaliland Ministry of Finance released figures suggest in the first six months of 2019 alone Somaliland imported 190 million worth of Khat from Ethiopia.

¹⁶ Director General Mr. Abdirashid disclosed the figures in an event held to discuss the challenges facing the rape act.

¹⁷ Gender in Somalia Brief 2015, United Nations Development program (2015) p 8-9

1.2. Political Exclusion:

The youth population is underrepresented within the national political decision-making structures. Somaliland Parliament, both in its Upper House and House of Representatives, functions with a total of 164 seats. The entry age is 45 years for the Upper House and 35 years for the House of Representatives,¹⁸ which makes it hardly possible for youth aspirants to fill any seats. Similarly, age barriers are tied to cabinet and other government agencies and commissions, where the minimum age is set between 35 and 40 for most public positions. The only exception is municipal councils whereby the law was amended in 2011 to allow age groups from 25 and above to contest for seats.¹⁹ However, the experience of the 2012 elections²⁰ came short of the expectations of the general public. Perceivably, the 2012 elections did not give enough room for youth aspirants, owing to the fact that the candidates were given party tickets on clan basis. The few young councilors who made it to political offices through this clan selection process were also under qualified, and there were widespread corruption allegations. Furthermore their claim to represent youth while maintaining such poor records have negatively affected the public perception of youth participation in politics.

The Somali Socio-political sphere is governed by the Somali customary laws and practice of²¹ traditional norms (Accord 2011). According to these traditions, being an elder is synonymous with being a leader. This means that there is a direct correlation between age and leadership. This can be considered as one of the major stumbling blocks hindering the community from putting their confidence in the youth. The negative perception of youth and the low premium placed on their contributions in the decision-making processes has created an inferiority complex among the young population. Milton M (2007²²) contends that a lack of political participation from the youth is one of the contributing factors leading them to indulging in illegal activities.

In addition to age limit barriers, the youth continue to face other challenges. Running for public offices, for instance, involves spending inordinate amounts of money.²³ Other issues include youth inclusion and participation in politics. Politicians often claim that the youth are included in the political decision-making process of the country. However, that has turned out to be a mere lip service. The presence of youth in political forums, some of them un-democratic, does not mean youth are participating fully or making their voices heard. Political parties also occasionally engage with the youth, exhorting them to participate in mass gatherings. It could be argued that this is the only political participation available for them.

¹⁸ ¹⁸ Somaliland Electoral Laws & Codes available at http://www.somalilandlaw.com/electoral_laws.html

¹⁹ The subsequent electoral law passed in September 2020 has once more rescinded the age limit from 25 to 30 for Municipal councils

²⁰ As a result of lifting minimum age eligibility in 2012 for the municipal elections, vast number of young and un educated councilors were elected who in turn failed the image of youth

²¹ Somaliland is considered more cultural when compared to the other Somalis, this can be reflected in the unique form of governance of Somaliland that mixes Somali customary law with modern governance typically known as Hybrid governance. In the courts, there are three sources of reference i.e. the Islamic, the customary and the Penal code

²² The youth of Africa: A Threat to Security or a Force for Peace?

²³ The Economics of Elections in Somaliland: The financing of political parties and candidates

Young women experience far more political marginalization compared to their male counterparts²⁴. The Somali population is largely governed by traditional customary laws. Owing to the socio-cultural practices of Somali society²⁵ which are strongly embedded in the traditions, women are stuck battling clan lineage structures that favor male representatives²⁶. The resultant exclusion is evident in the following figures: Out of 164 MPs²⁷ only one is a woman. In the municipal and district councils consisting of 353²⁸ positions nationwide, women occupy only two positions. The cabinet of ministers for the new administrations saw only 2 women ministers and one deputy out of a total of 32 ministers and deputies.

The youth are often pushed to embrace undesirable options as a result of political marginalization that offers little or no consideration of their demands. The absence of inclusive politics and the reality of one-sided participation have consequently driven away the young population.

Socio cultural factors:

Art and culture are an integral part of the traditions of Somali society, serving as the central forms of social expression²⁹. Poems and folksongs known³⁰ as “Gabay and Geeraar” respectively, play an important role in motivating people during times of both war and peace³¹. Young Somali folklore dancers were famous across the African stage, winning awards during an era when the country produced some of its all-time adored musicians. Art and cultural activities were practiced across poetry, fiction, drama³², textbooks and various studies in almost every discipline. This is established evidence of the influence of culture within the Somali society.

Furthermore, Youth at the time developed a sense of pride and belonging towards their country. Somali cinema emerged as a powerful force in the 70s and 80s. Plays were performed in theatres across the country. While no data was available for Somaliland, a UNISECO study on the Culture Sector in Somalia in 2013 includes Sections covering Somaliland. According to the study, there were over 120 cinemas across the country where nearly every Somali attended. Young talent and potential song writers used to partake in a competition program famously known as *Heesaha*

²⁴ UNDP “ Gender in Somalia Brief” 2015

²⁵ Gardner, Judith (2006). A Gender Profile for Somalia (draft), p. 19. NORAD & the EC Somalia Unit publication.

²⁶ Dr Michael Walls, Malou Schueller & Amina-Bahja Ekman presented preliminary findings ‘Political Settlement in Somaliland: A gendered perspective’ available online at <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dpublog/2017/02/20/womens-political-participation-somaliland/>

²⁷ Members of Parliament.

²⁸ UNDP Gender Brief 2015-Somaliland Section

²⁹ British explorer Richard Burton, who was one of the first westerners to put foot on Somali soil described Somalis as a "nation of poets"

³¹ War and Peace: An anthology of Somali literature by Rashid Haji Abdillahi Gadhwayne

³² On stage Dramas also known as ruwaayada where on the stage men and women present Shakespeare like fiction stories

Hirgalay (successful songs) and would graduate from level to level as promoted by the government of the day³³. Popular Musicians used to make cross-country tours from one town to the other.

At present, there are no functioning theatres, cinemas, national libraries, art institutions, or cultural industries, as posited in the same cultural study commissioned by UNESCO in 2013. In the public budget allocations, the young population's needs are not given serious consideration. For instance, in 2019, the Somaliland Ministry of Youth and Sports received 0.6% of the National Budget while the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs got 0.45%³⁴. The budgetary allocation is mainly used on salaries and operational costs. The budget of these two ministries together accounts for just 1% of the national budget. Youth development programs are not promoted as a national priority which ultimately contributes to a young population that experiences social and cultural estrangement.

Wrongful interpretation of religion also has a role to play in the demise of arts and sports where recreational activities are restricted and music is considered provocative. This makes them to be perceived as obscene and “religiously not allowed.” In the main cities, there are self-appointed groups of elderly men by the name of Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV), tasking themselves with going after youth with “demeanor actions” for organizing music events. One of the reasons given by the CPVPV for going after such youth groups is to uphold the decency of the Somali culture. Whereas Somalis widely practiced the traditional Sufi³⁵ Islam for centuries, the Saudi-inspired Wahhabi school³⁶ has become the dominant group since 1991. Wahhabism is a version of Islam that is embraced by hardliners and radical groups. This new denomination restricts the young population's desire to exercise their freedom, often questioning their way of thinking, dressing, gathering and even praying³⁷.

On 31 August 2019, Somaliland police shutdown a restaurant in Burao and arrested some of the staff. The restaurant used to serve Ethiopian recipes by Ethiopian female workers and was mainly patronized by younger generations. The business was founded by a young female entrepreneur from Burao³⁸. A non-state religious committee based in Burao “to demote prohibited behaviors” was alleged to have pressured the police forces to take action. The chairman of that committee Sh. Abdirahman Ahmed spoke to the media afterwards and confessed to influencing the police to shut it down following what they cited as dissatisfaction with the business³⁹ and claiming that the business owners promoted practices that were against the culture of Islam. A few days later, the

³³ Omar Serbia interviewed Abdikarim M Jiir, former Somali Musician and Radio host at the 70s and 80s Video is available on YouTube

³⁴ SIR Budget Brief 2019 available in the internet at <http://www.isirthinktank.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Somaliland-2019-Budget-Breif-ISIR.pdf>

³⁵ Sufism is mystical practice of Islam, that arrived Somali peninsula in the 18th century that was largely embraced. Sufis are generally moderating who embrace art culture such as musical songs and dancing

³⁶ As Samuel Huntington claims, (1993) the Saudi government exported Salafism from Indonesia to Kosovo, seeding itself into the Muslim population by investing millions of dollars.

³⁷ Over the last three decades with the arrival of salafi/Wahhabi adherents, disputes often occur on how a regular prayer would be administered

³⁸ https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2019/aug/wararka_maanta31-161654.htm

³⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MX4lI0mfiZc>

whole business caught on fire⁴⁰. These practices of the government and religious groups joining forces against the youth sends signals of rejection leading to the youth revolting against the two social systems.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

This paper presents an examination of the challenges faced by Somaliland's youth as a result of alienation and marginalization from the political, economic and social systems in the country. These challenges include drug abuse, violent conflict and the undertaking of dangerous, and sometimes fatal journeys through deserts in hopes of discovering their purpose in life. These challenges are fueled by factors such as high levels of unemployment, the death of the arts and other cultural channels of expression, exclusion from policy making processes and alienation from political and civic positions and opportunities.

The paper also delves into the phenomenon of Somaliland being a destination for foreigners in search of jobs, clearly indicating that the high levels of unemployment among the country's youth is not only a function of scarcity of employment opportunities, but also a critical miss-match between skills and job market demands. It is therefore paramount for policy makers to act immediately with bottom-up engagement that includes the input of the country's young population. The government of Somaliland, along with its development partners, should undertake research to enhance understanding about market needs, and to ensuring TVET schools and universities are developing training programs that meet those market needs.

In order to mitigate the risk of further youth alienation, this paper suggests the adoption of inclusive policies to tackle the root causes of youth conflicts in Somaliland. This will provide policy options to the stakeholders involved for the attainment of a conducive and enabling environment for youth to overcome the challenges of exclusion. It will also enhance the youth's participation in setting their own agenda for social, political and economic development in contrast to the traditional perspective of seeking employment when the economy cannot absorb extra labor force.

Additionally, to effectively overcome the current challenges of youth alienation and conflict, the government and its development partners can constructively engage and support youth in a number of program options:

- 1. Empower youth with new skills that are market-driven.** In order to enhance opportunities for youth employment, the question of education relevance has to be addressed by reviewing the current education systems. For the long term, there should be a review and revision of the current school curriculums, while the shorter term priority could be skills development and after-school programs designed to equip the youth with relevant skills to facilitate their entry into the marketplace. This will also improve Somaliland's youths' competitiveness with foreigners who come to the country in search of employment opportunities. The government of Somaliland should embark on

⁴⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVengOoryS8>

immediate prioritizations and allocations of significant resources⁴¹ towards increasing the number of TVET centers across the country.

2. **Micro finance credit schemes to youth organizations and businesses.** This is another way of meaningfully addressing the question of youth economic inclusion that incentivizes the young generation to establish inventive startups and MSMEs. According to a study conducted by the World Bank in 2017, Somaliland has the opportunity to advance its private sector in part due to the entrepreneurial nature of its population. The economy of Somaliland relies heavily on trade which accounts for over 90% of its GDP.”⁴²
3. **Capacity development of existing youth-led enterprises** in the areas of financial management, marketing and value chains.⁴³ Trainings to develop youth skills in operating small and medium businesses may require budgetary allocation from the government and other stakeholders. Given the high risk of violent conflicts emerging from alienation, the government has an obligation to prioritize the youth and put their economic inclusion at the forefront of all policy discussions.
4. **Meaningful civic engagement programs intended to address youth political participation.** In order to enhance constructive civic inclusion of youth, legal frameworks need revisiting. For example, the lifting of the minimum-age of eligibility for MPs should be a priority. Meaningful political participation of youth not only requires setting legal frameworks that are youth friendly; the youth also need to be equipped to engage productively in the civic process. Against this backdrop, the youth should be trained and empowered in civic responsibilities, skills in civic dialogue and in issues related to the transition toward democracy
5. **Expansion of the National Service Program.** The recently rolled out National Service Program is a noble endeavor spearheaded by President Muse Bihi⁴⁴. The concept has appealed to mostly young men and women leaving universities and willing to do volunteer work. The government should expand this program beyond university graduates and target at-risk youths, mainly disgruntled teenagers. With respect to the huge youth demographic, these kinds of programs demand adequate funding, hence government should seek further funding
6. **Develop youth leadership skills by strengthening youth networks and Civil Society Organizations**⁴⁵ through youth led advocacies, media programs, public speaking, debates and capacity building initiatives. These could lead to the emergence of capable youth leaders who can actively participate in policy formulation processes and advance youth-related issues. Youth driven political participation should in turn translate into political

⁴¹ SOMALILAND 2019 BUDGET BRIEF- ISIR Thin tank available online at <http://isirthinktank.org/stories/somaliland-2019-budget-brief/>

⁴² New World Bank GDP and Poverty Estimates for Somaliland January 2014

⁴³ Small business grants help people reach their dreams- UNDP 2013 Report

⁴⁴ <https://www.somaliland.com/news/national-service-trainees-returned/>

⁴⁵ Civil society Organization in Somaliland have taken numerous roles in the past three decades and have contributed to the peacebuilding and democratization process in Somaliland but have since seen their roles depleted

action programs⁴⁶ and initiate meaningful change by devoting resources to sectors relevant to youth agendas.

As the government works on addressing the concerns raised by the youth, it is recommended for policy makers to constructively engage youth in helping them set goals, develop skills and prepare them to face challenges that are unique to their lives. Counseling, nurturing, hope-inspiring, changes in attitude and meeting successful role models will unlock their potentials. This will help the youth feel supported, find platforms to incubate futuristic ideas and engage among themselves.

- 7. Sports, recreational and cultural activities.** The Government should embark on large campaigns through sporting activities to address the risk of youth conflict. Organizing regular tournaments at all levels from school-based to nation leagues has the potential to largely dominate the spotlights. Such competitions could be activities such as; athletics, basketball, swimming, and volley ball. This requires allocating more funds to the ministry of youth and sports to build sports facilities and also organize tournaments. In cities like Hargeisa, young boys often play in the streets due to lack of play grounds. Participation in sports activities has the potential to reduce youth conflict when coordinated properly⁴⁷. Tournaments draw large crowds for entertainment, ensuring that they are constructively occupied instead of being involved in inter group conflicts. Supporting youth in sports events also builds youth leadership skills.
- 8. Revitalization of the entertainment sector** (Art and culture i.e. poems, song and play writings, on stage dramas) In spite of the aforementioned cultural-religious shift, the burgeoning youth population cannot be repressed. The young populace need to express themselves openly to exert their natural energies which otherwise might be expressed through violence. Signs of generational consciousness are emerging. Youth groups are desperate for open platforms to exercise their freedom. Cultural venues have to be explored, for example the infamous Hargeisa city theatre, to unleash the talents of the large number of young men and women. These activities once again⁴⁸ put the youth at the forefront and have economic potential.
- 9. Enhancing the role of young women.** The role of young women should be explored in any youth development programs. Cultural myths have to be addressed. This can be achieved through advocacy of swift structural changes within the Somali culture. This allows women to have a say in the political, social and economic decision-making circles.

Secondly, there is need to enhance women's social and economic participation through empowering local young women. This can be achieved by strengthening women's rights organizations and engaging women to counter the conservative narrative that considers inclusion of women and young girls to be a western phenomenon.

⁴⁶ UNDP Report on "Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the electoral cycle" available online at https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Democratic%20Governance/Electoral%20Systems%20and%20Processes/ENG_UN-Youth_Guide-LR.pdf

⁴⁷ Key informant Interview with Abdi Aziz Mohamed, chairperson of Somaliland National Youth Umbrella (SONYO)

⁴⁸ Somalia: Language & Culture 2012




NYS Statewide Language Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBE-RN) at New York University



About ISIR Think Tank

The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) is an independent not-for-profit think tank dedicated to contributing to the building of democratic, pluralistic societies and effective public institutions in the Horn of Africa through research and policy analysis.

Contact

-  +252 (0) 636226667
-  info@isirthinktank.org
-  [@IsirThinktank](https://twitter.com/IsirThinktank)
-  Hargeisa, Somaliland
-  www.isirthinktank.org