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The 2011 Somalia Famine

Cover Page Footnote

Aya Ahmed, who is an undergraduate electronics and engineering student at the American University in Cairo. The author wish to thank Dr. Doris Jones from the Research and writing department because this research was conducted under her supervision.

The 2011 Somali Famine

Aya Ahmed¹

Abstract

In early 2011, the citizens of Somalia became unable to access basic human necessities such as food and water until the situation changed dramatically, leading to the daily death of thousands of human beings. This research paper tackles the negative consequences resulting from the Al-Shabaab movement, a movement who has the belief that applying the Sharia (Islamic Law) is the only valid solution to any issue as it is supported by the Sunni Islam, political issues, and the delay of the famine's declaration. This research begs several questions which are: what were the factors which led to Somalia's famine in 2011? was bad governance to blame for the death of so many people? and was the drought the only reason leading to the passing of thousands? The paper argues that the substandard governance and the corruptive movements, which rule most of the country, were to blame for being the most factor that catastrophize Somalia's situation, not the natural causes.

Keywords: Al-Shabab; Famine; Food Aid and International Health Crisis; and Food Security

Somalia was victimized by drought, famine, and military conflicts, which led to the deterioration of the nation's situation from a strong country to one whose residents suffer from fatal conditions. The Somali-Ethiopian war from 1977 until 1978 drained Somalia's coffers which eventually led to the collapse of Siad Barre's government in January 1991, ushering in the civil war between competitive clan-based political cliques (Abdi, 2017). The 1992 Somalia famine was caused by a severe drought and worsened mainly by the disputes between the rival groups (Al-Shabab and other groups who share the same interests) fighting for power, leading to the death of about 220,000 human beings (BBC News, 2013). The international aid for this famine was helpful since President George H.W. Bush sent 25,000 American troops to Somalia, permitting food deliveries to continue, and prohibiting 200,000 additional deaths (Paarlberg, 2011). When comparing the 1992 and 2011 Somalia famines, noticing that the 1992 famine resulted in fewer human deaths, the situation was not as severe as the 2011 famine because of international aid. Although Somalia faced many droughts and consecutive failed rainy seasons during different periods, 1992, 2011, and 2017, the drought of 2011 is said to be the worst of its kind in 60 years (Paarlberg, 2011). This harsh, severe drought was one of the reasons that contributed to the occurrence of the famine, but it is not the only cause of the 2011 dilemma. To understand the hidden reasons behind the famine, this paper seeks to identify the factors that led to the 2011 Somalia Famine. Adding to the natural disaster, the preliminary research shows that there must be many hidden and complicated reasons for this issue because of how efficacious the images are.

The Main Reasons Behind the 2011 Somalia Famine

Does the famine occur only because of climate change, drought, and these natural

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disasters or there were some man-made issues beyond this dilemma. Beyond extensive research, it is found that there were some political disputes between the Prime Minister and the president, and the Al-Shabaab refusal of foreign aid and not allowing the residents to leave Somalia, which negatively influenced the nation's economy. On the other side, the United Nations (UN) delayed the declaration of the famine because it cannot declare a famine's existence until the country exceeds a specific number of deaths and deteriorations (UN News, 2011). Moreover, Somalia depends on agriculture for about 80% of its whole economy; therefore, when the country faced a water crisis, its economy and food were extremely threatened (World Bank Group, 2018). When taken together, Somalia's 2011 famine was partly caused by a harsh drought that crippled the nation's agricultural production; however, Al-Shabab's bad governance, corruption, and rejection of foreign aid resulted in an unresolved humanitarian crisis.

Somalia's Dependence on Agriculture

The dominant explanatory narrative of the 2011 Somalia famine has been based on drought and climate change, and the limited access to the needed support from the international communities because of the extremist group, Al-Shabab. The poor Somalian groups only depend on agriculture and/or urban-based labor, which was severely affected during the famine. In 2011, studies show that most of Somalia's population worked in agriculture, which emphasizes their main dependence on agriculture and its huge impact on worsening the nation's situation (Trading Economics, 2021). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, (FAO, 2011), Somali agriculture and farming communities rely heavily on rain-fed production systems. Since there was a total failure of the October-December 2010 and the April-June 2011 rains (Dollen, 2011), Somalia's agriculture was negatively influenced by the famine because the country's farmers depend on the water resource from the collected rainwater. Moreover, the failure of the Somalian's rainy seasons resulted in "the worst annual crop production in 17 years, excess animal mortality, and very high food prices" (Dollen, 2011, p. 7), threatening the survival of Somalia's population. The water scarcity and the high animal mortality rate led to the global food cost increasing dramatically, and the deaths of tens of thousands of people who could not survive in these severe conditions (Prunier, 1995). However, there are controversial and opposite perspectives about whether Somalia's main agricultural dependence was a critical reason for worsening the situation.

Al-Shabaab's Actions Worsened the 2011 Somalia Famine

Many believe that it is wrong to consider agricultural main dependence as a major reason for the famine to worsen. Without good governance, Somalia's circumstances would not have been complicated to this severe level. For instance, during the severe 1973–75 drought, Somalia had a powerful central government and institutions that dealt with the natural disaster and minimized its influences and international assistance was sought quickly (Abdi, 2017). This shows that even if the country depended completely on agriculture for their living, strong governance would have assisted in improving the situation. Although the agricultural dependence impacted the 2011 famine, there was also an extremist group, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM), whose actions also complicated the situation. This group had many tactics that aimed at solidifying their presence; for instance, one of those was that the Al-Shabaab constructed canals to make local farmers less dependent on rainfall, resulting in cultivating goodwill and getting recruits (Abdi, 2017). Combining these aspects together, it is demonstrated that it was not about the principal agricultural dependence of Somalia, but there were some other contributors, such as

the extremist group, HSM, who attempted to worsen the nation's situation just for the sake of exploitation.

The late declaration of the 2011 Somalia Famine by the United Nations (UN) and the Negative Consequences of Averting the Early Warning Systems

International aid is one of several measures used to help countries like Somalia address natural disasters such as droughts; however, due to Al-Shabab's governmental corruption, international communities are reluctant to offer aid because they fear it will not reach the people whom they intended to send the supplies for. The Al-Shabaab in Somalia exploited aid agencies during the 2011 famine as reported in 2013 by the humanitarian policy group of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), that the relief groups were crippled by counter-terrorism legislation in the United States that had a severe impact on their aid efforts (Tran, 2013). These relief groups were put in a complicated position because the legislation threatened the groups with imprisonment if they assisted the extremist movement of Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabab further negatively influenced the country by refusing to accept foreign aid. For example, in late November of 2011, they forced assistance agencies to leave Somalia and not help the residents to survive this issue (Prunier, 1995). Also, the Al-Shabaab movement prevented the Somalians from leaving their nation and going to Kenya and Ethiopia to search for assistance, and they set up many camps to imprison the residents who were found to be trying to escape from their country (Paarlberg, 2011). Although many Somalians escaped to Kenya searching for their survival, Kenya was concerned about the residents and the country's security. It "sent troops into Somalia and closed the border to Somali arrivals" (Brookings Institution, 2011). Therefore, it is a must to think of the hidden reason that made Al-Shabab restrict the movement of Somalians to other countries, and even in their small nation, the movements were so limited.

The Reasons Behind the Al-Shabab Actions of Worsening Somalia's Famine

Taking these points together, the evidence shows that the increase in food prices, and the scarcity of food has been a boon that was exploited by al-Shabaab for their recruitment campaign (Abdi, 2017). Al-Shabab exploited the hunger crisis because many citizens were on the verge of death, and those people had to find a way to survive, so Al-Shabab encouraged them to be recruited. Al-Qaeda, AQIM, Boko Haram, Hizbul Islam, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant movements are supporters of Al-Shabab because they have the same belief: controlling myriad countries to apply the Islamic Sharia laws because these movements consider that the Sunni-Islamic laws are the only valid manner. Although Sufism is the most popular Islamic religion in Somalia, Al-Shabab did not consider the population's freedom to choose their religion and they fought for the sake of applying the Sunni-Islamic laws (Nag, 2018). Consequently, the main reason which caused this extremist movement to worsen Somalia's situation was "to get new recruits and solidify its presence" (Abdi, 2017).

The Negative Consequences Resulted from the Delay of Somalia's Famine Declaration

On 20 July 2011, the United Nations (UN) declared the Somalia famine; however, there was already more than a quarter of a million people had died with half of them children under five years old, which caused the UN to admit that a delay in declaring a famine in Somalia in 2011 cost additional lives (Hodan, 2011). The UN contends that by declaring the famine and starting to trigger the international reaction, 30,000 citizens were already dying monthly, which emphasizes

Lazzarini's phrase, suffering played out like a drama without witnesses (Howden, 2013). The UN agencies and Famine Early Warning Systems Network identified the risk of famine occurrence in 2011, but timely action to prevent the dilemma did not occur, which resulted in the deaths of about five percent of Somalia's population (BBC News, 2013). The ignorance of the identified risk by the early warning systems to prevent the onset of the 2011 famine resulted in negative consequences, such as large-scale mortality, morbidity, and population displacement (BBC News, 2013). Also, the delay of famine declaration and the averting of the early warning systems, resulted in a more complicated situation, which induced the UN to modify its policies and take some earlier actions (Abdi, 2017). Despite these severe, negative outcomes, some opponents see that the United Nations (UN) has to "limit distributions" (Awadh, 2020) and declare the famines after achieving some specific conditions.

Conclusion

The research has revealed some of the natural and the hidden causes of the 2011 Somalia famine which are the severe drought which influenced agriculture, Al-Shabab's malignant governance with their rejection of any international assistance, some internal political issues, and the late famine declaration by the United Nations. Therefore, one of those political issues which resulted in worsening the famine is the corrupt and unstable governmental system that refused to implement sustainable measures for the country to offset this humanitarian crisis. Besides the corruption methodologies made by Al-Shabab, the late declaration of the 2011 Somalia famine by the United Nations (UN) and the negative consequences of averting the early warning systems' alerts affected the situation extremely. Even more, by comparing the two Somalia famines of 1992 and 2011, the 2011 famine was more severe which appeared in the number of deaths that was higher in 2011 than that in 1992. To understand why more negative consequences resulted from the 2011 Somalia famine than that of the 1992 famine, the research question asked: what did Al-Shabab do to worsen the situation in this brutal way? And what are their main reasons for destroying Somalia? Based on the preliminary research, the Al-Shabab stopped accepting international aid, exploited hunger to recruit the citizens, and prevented the Somalians from leaving the country to survive. From 2011 till nowadays, there is no direct answer for the reason behind these cruel actions; however, research has found that the motive for worsening the situation may be due to recruiting many human beings to spread their ideas easily. Moreover, additional research allowed the researcher to critically consider another point that needs more research: if the Al-Shabab movement let the Somalians accept foreign aid for food, water, and even educated people, would help a stateless country or not. Combining these points together, two questions are still in need of being answered which are: the main motives for Al-Shabab's destruction of Somalia and if the money, food, and educators sent to Somalia will help the nation to survive even without a state.

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