Fighting for the plenty – The banana trade in southern Somalia

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This paper argues that economic interests by both multinational corporations and local businessmen are significant in the perpetuation of civil violence in Somalia. This study examines the banana trade regime in southern Somalia in relation to conflict over export levies at the national level and farm land and water at the regional level. Small but influential groups come to have an economic interest in prolonged conflict. This viewpoint affirms that it can be misleading to associate war with complete collapse or breakdown of an economy – although it may certainly skew the development of an economy. Two further points arise in respect of such analyses. Firstly, are the initial causes of violent conflict necessarily the same as the factors which perpetuate it. And secondly, to what extent are more conventional explanations of conflict in Africa, such as ethnicity, religion and economic inequality of relevance in this case.

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1. Background

In January 1991 when Siyad Barre fled the Somali capital Mogadishu there was hope for restoring a society without oppression and clan patronage, and reversing economic decline. Instead, the government collapsed; civil strife combined with severe droughts resulted in starvation and up to 200,000 to 300,000 deaths. Twelve years after this tragedy, violent conflict is still evident in contemporary Somalia, and we are left with the question of why a ‘nation of poets’ embedded in traditional egalitarian and religious institutions turned to one of banditry and civil strife causing the Somali calamity. Africanists have asked whether Somalia constitutes yet another layer of the continent’s worsening social, political and economic plight.\(^1\) Somalia’s population is more homogeneous than those of most contemporary African states and ethnicity, so commonly invoked as an explanation of conflict, seemed less relevant here. The following paper suggests that multinational corporations involved in the Somali banana economy have financed political factions thus contributing to the continuation of conflict in southern Somalia in the early 1990s. However, if effective, efficient and accountable institutions develop in Somalia and political elites engage in the fair redistribution of power and wealth, multinational corporations (MNCs) could play a more constructive role in promoting peace and security.

My analysis starts when the banana trading regime was still intact before the collapse of Barre’s regime. My argument is that high profit margins on the retail level and potentially high tax returns led to armed conflict between militias supporting one of the two multinational corporations that were involved in marketing and selling agricultural produce in the world market. But mounting insecurity, as well as other factors, pushed both competing foreign companies out of southern Somalia, leading to an agricultural crisis in the banana
sector. On the regional level, armed conflict had adverse effects on ‘high potential’ farming 
areas in the Shabelle valley leading to scarcity of natural resources, such as precious farm 
land and irrigation water. As a consequence, conflict developed on the local level over issues 
of access to, and fair distribution of these resources.

The following study is based on a historical survey and on interviews in Mogadishu and 
in Shalambood area, a resource rich agricultural region 110 kilometres south of Mogadishu 
and 13 kilometres inland from the district capital of Lower Shabelle, Merka. The Shabelle 
and Juba valleys together with Bay and Bakol region are considered the bread basket of the 
country. The study site comprises three villages, Deg Jannaay, Jaanjow and Shalambood. In 
this area, smallholder farmers grow largely maize (Zea mays) and sesame (Sesamum 
indicum), whereas large-scale farmers cultivate bananas on plantations. The availability of 
water and fertile land has attracted both Somali migrants and foreigners.

Before the colonial era, communities in the Shabelle valley had long-standing traditions 
(dexda) and local knowledge about soils, irrigation, agriculture and land measurement (jibaal, 
darab and moos). Somali farmers owned land collectively. All members of the community 
belonging to the same clan, sub-clan or lineage were entitled to usufruct rights to land. 
Respected leaders were responsible for the distribution of land and inter-clan bargaining 
mechanisms were employed to negotiate land rights. Land transactions were approved by 
traditional judges (qaaddi). The indigenous farming population who have been cultivating the

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Scarcity and Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa’s Conflicts, eds. Lind, Jeremy and Kathryn Sturman (Pretoria: 
Institute for Security Studies).
land for centuries established a sophisticated system of resource sharing based on customary codes of practice and exchange relationships with pastoral communities.4

During the colonial period, especially during the 1930s, irrigation schemes were extended and developed by the Italians. It was one of the few areas in Somalia with fertile land and water from the river. The coastal hinterland of southern Somalia is unique within East Africa in having the only fertile riverbed situated parallel to the coastline. Large farms, or so called aziendas, were established on the fertile land between the river and the primary canals. The colonial state promoted the establishment of commercial plantations rather than smallholder agriculture. After independence, the Italians faced increasing opposition from Somalis who were claiming their fair share of the lucrative banana trade. Many Italian settlers left their aziendas after independence.5 Subsequently, the socialist government attempted to expropriate unclassified and communal land in declaring it ‘state land’. This was made possible through provisions of the 1975 land reform. In particular in the 1980s, elites connected to the government of Siyad Barre participated in land-grabbing, largely by the Marehan and Dulbahante of the Darod clan family.

In 1987, the density of the small-scale farming population was high leaving approximately 0.3 hectares of land per person. Arable land was a precious good and smallholder producers owned farm land of an average size of 2.24 hectares.6 Smallholder subsistence farmers accounted for 60% of land use in the study area.7 It is believed that this figure has increased in recent years, since export markets for cash crops collapsed.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
The allocation of irrigation water was based on complex exchange relationships and related to off-farm activities. Even before the war, it was reported that there was strong competition between large-scale plantation owners and small-scale farmers.\(^8\) The deterioration of the irrigation infrastructure began with the departure of the Italian settlers. During and after the civil war, the irrigation system was further damaged and as a consequence, large areas of fertile land became fallow, and irrigated land scarce. In the absence of a functioning government, farmers started using violent strategies to extract water for their farms.

Today, large areas of fertile land, which used to be covered by large banana plantations, lie idle or have been converted into maize and sorghum fields. The area where Unruh gathered data in the 1980s, including my study site, covers some 8,500 hectares of variably irrigated land.\(^9\) It is estimated that only 20 to 30 per cent of the area is still used for irrigation agriculture. Newcomers from the central regions occupied plantation farms and expelled their owners but because they lack expertise to grow cash crops, land suited for irrigation was left uncultivated.

Further, demand from the European Union (EU) for bananas decreased dramatically due to the liberalisation of import markets and the repeal of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States import quotas set for the year 2008. In parallel, conflict arose on two levels: firstly, between small-scale farmers and plantation owners over water and irrigation infrastructure on the regional level, and secondly over securing export markets on the international level leading to clashes known as the ‘banana war’ in 1995/6. The banana war was caused by the desire of powerful faction leaders to secure supremacy, in the export

\(^8\) Ibid.
markets rather than over land. In the following, the focus is on the banana economy dating from pre-independence period until today.

2. The Somali banana economy

Throughout the colonial period, the banana economy was dominated by Italian settlers. In 1919, the Italians selected the Shabelle valley for plantations and started building irrigation infrastructure. The arrival of Prince Luigi Amedeo of Savoy, Duke of Abruzzi, and the technical assistance of the fascist administration under Governor Cesare Maria de Vecchi de Val Cismon underpinned political support. The Shabelle valley was chosen by the Italian administration as the river had sufficient water and was suited for gravitation irrigation throughout the year. In 1924, local elders and Italian officers negotiated and signed 50-year leasehold agreements.10 The Italian intention in signing the treaties was to contain the residents’ struggle against subjugation. The first export crop was cotton, whereas bananas and sugar were produced for local consumption.

Banana production for export was first introduced in Janale area in 1926 by Italian settlers.11 In this period, the first large irrigation canals (kel) were constructed: the primary, such as kel Asayle, kel Dawlaaddeed and secondary canals, such as kel Shiikhaal, kel Afraad. These days are remembered by Somalis for atrocities committed by the colonial power. It has been reported that many Somalis died while digging the main canals, especially kel Asayle.12 When the world market for cotton collapsed in 1929, the export of bananas gained importance. In 1927 and 1930, the Italian Parliament passed laws imposing tariffs on all non-

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Somali bananas. Somali bananas were not competitive in price and quality compared to those being imported from the Canary Islands and in the following decades, Somali bananas never became competitive on international markets. The protected Italian market guaranteed Somali producers a steady income but did not encourage them to increase quality.

In order to overcome shortages in labour, the Italians employed coercive measures guaranteeing the provision of cheap and sufficient manpower since ethnic Somalis refused to work on the plantations for wages. This was because during colonialism land was relatively abundant in the riverine areas and therefore, the local population had the choice either to work on the plantations for wage labour or to continue smallholder farming. In fact, it has been argued that the population of the riverine areas did not experience extensive land alienation during the colonial era in contrast to some other arable and fertile agricultural areas in Africa. At the beginning, the colonial powers did not extent their influence beyond the coastal settlements, and even though the banana plantations expanded from the 1930s, the actual hectarage involved was relatively small. The refusal of ethnic Somalis to work on plantations led to the development of coercive measures of involuntary conscription of villagers, largely Bantu people, to labour on the farms in order to overcome shortages of labour. Some of the ethnic Somali clans, such as the Bimal, cooperated with the Italians enabling them to conscript Jareer (Bantu), descendants of former slaves who lived as adopted members among the Bimal, for their plantations. Systems of bonded labour were abandoned when the British expelled the Italians from southern Somalia after their defeat in World War II.

14 Ibid.
15 Interview in Merka on 22 September 2002.
After World War II, and under Italian UN trusteeship, banana production grew from 3,975 hectares in 1936 to 7,400 hectares in 1955 producing 94,000 MT of bananas. Bananas still accounted for only 16 per cent of total Italian land concessions comprising 45,300 hectares in 1955. The remaining land was partly used for cotton and sugarcane. Later, Somalis were given quotas in the banana trade. In Lower Shabelle, Societa Azionaria Concessionari Agricoli, a joint enterprise, was responsible for external marketing of the crops holding a de facto monopoly.

Shortly after Siyad Barre established his regime, banana production and the export trade was nationalised. This included export companies owned by Somalis and foreigners such as Societa Azionaria Concessionari Agricoli in Shalambood. Barre created the National Banana Board, when banana production increased steadily from 145,000 MT in 1970 to 168,000 MT in 1973, while the area under cultivation grew from 6,500 ha to 9,500 ha. From 1973 onwards however, the area under banana cultivation fell so that by 1981 it was less than 50 per cent of its peak in 1973 only amounting to 3,600 ha. Production dropped sharply, too. The drastic decrease in production can be attributed to several factors: lack of professional expertise due to the departure of Italian settlers, soil salinity due to inefficient drainage systems and low fertiliser application.

In 1981, in response to structural adjustment policies, the Somali parastatal and the Italian De Nadai group merged in a joint venture called Somalfruit which replaced the dysfunctional National Banana Agency. The liberalisation of the economy had a positive impact on the agricultural sector, especially the banana economy. But it led to corrupt

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17 Ibid.  
practices when public assets were transferred to private hands – as Mohamood Abdi Noor, a Senior Agricultural Specialist of the World Bank, explains:

And the West, the IMF, the World Bank, said you should liberalise the economy. We liberalised the economy, this brought lots of positive and negative things. Among the positive things are, liberalised green marketing, or lots of farmers could sell their goods in the market. These are positive things. But then, here you have a government which controls everything from utilities, to banks, to factories, to property, to export, everything. [...] You liberalise these public assets, the private sector can compete with them and they will die on their own. But if you transfer public assets to the private sector, what happens? Insiders take over. And this was a very bad [...] effect. So, people become over night rich because of public assets, this caused nepotism, this caused corruption, it caused that ‘it’s ok to take public assets’ and outsiders want to [benefit and] came and fought.  

Nevertheless, through improved services, such as the provision of fuel at reasonable prices, the means of transport and productivity improved. Besides, Somalfruit offered credit schemes for producers to enable them to afford the necessary inputs. Each producer was assigned a specific quantity of bananas by Somalfruit. The government’s share in Somalfruit was reduced from 40 per cent in 1983 to 20 per cent in 1989. It has been suggested that the 20 per cent share is held by the President Barre himself, even beyond state-collapse in 1991. Plantation owners could become partners holding a joint total of 29 per cent share of the firm’s equity. The remaining 51 per cent was held by De Nadai. This was possible as the military government was under increasing pressure to liberalise its markets.

The structural adjustment policies had a positive impact on banana production. While production fell sharply in the mid-1970s under the National Banana Board, export figures for bananas grew again from 34,256 MT per year in 1981 to 75,631 MT per year in 1990 accounting for 6 and 26 million US$ respectively in export earnings. According to pre-war government figures between 1981 and 1990, bananas accounted for the second highest figure in export earnings after livestock (see table 1).

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20 Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 27 November 2002.
In 1990 and at the peak of productivity, banana exports of 25.6 million US$ accounted for 30 per cent of export earnings and De Nadai’s turnover was estimated as substantially larger. The banana industry not only supplied the country with hard currency, it secured the livelihoods of many people, too. It is estimated that some 10,000 people were employed in banana production and related activities.\textsuperscript{22} An increase in banana exports was important to compensate for the sharp decline of livestock export from 1983 to 1984 (see table 1).

In the 1980s, stiff competition from Australia and other countries for the market in the Gulf States, mainly Saudi Arabia, reduced the volume of Somali total livestock exports over the years. Moreover in 1983, Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on Somali cattle in response to unwarranted concerns about rinderpest in southern Somalia.\textsuperscript{23}

### Table 1. Agricultural exports by commodity in Somalia 1980-1990\textsuperscript{1}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Banana export\textsuperscript{2} (MT)</th>
<th>Bananas (million US$)</th>
<th>Live animals (million US$)</th>
<th>fish products (million US$)</th>
<th>Total exports (million US$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>34,256</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>98.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>114.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>52,646</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>105.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>136.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>57,448</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>100.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>48,702</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>33.10</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>45,321</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>66.00</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>92.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>57,942</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>62.40</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>64,004</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>73.20</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>104.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>73,368</td>
<td>23.50</td>
<td>43.80</td>
<td>7.80</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>68,516</td>
<td>22.80</td>
<td>43.50</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>75,631</td>
<td>25.60</td>
<td>39.50</td>
<td>11.50</td>
<td>85.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{1} Sources: data prior to 1986, World Bank Agricultural Sector Review, 1987. Data after 1987, FAO Agrostat database estimates. \textsuperscript{2} Banana exports data from Somalfruit. Inconsistencies are numerous but the trend is the same.
The consequences were dramatic, and livestock export figures plunged from 72.0 million US dollars in 1983 to 33.1 million US dollars in 1984. The cattle sector was worst affected, showing a dramatic annual decline in cattle exports from 157,000 in 1982 to less than 8,000 in 1984.24 The regions of Lower Shabelle and Lower Juba were particularly affected as cattle in these areas outnumber camels, goats or sheep.

3. Somalia’s ‘banana war’ and the collapse of the banana economy

The civil war had a deep impact on the banana sector in various ways: first, property changed hands during the civil war; second, taxes were collected by General Aideed’s government; third, there was unprecedented competition between Somalis and the two foreign corporations; and finally, the ACP-EU agreement faced strong opposition from the US and the private sector.

When the civil war broke out banana production was suspended. Most banana growers abandoned their farms and as a consequence, the plantations and the irrigation infrastructure deteriorated. Besides, irrigation infrastructure, such as pumps and tractors, were looted by advancing militias. Extortion, forceful expropriation of land and insecurity became common in southern Somalia after 1991. Land was confiscated without fair compensation for the original owners, mainly former government officials and foreigners. Farms were occupied by newcomers largely from the central regions, who lacked both the skills and expertise both to produce or to market their produce. As a consequence, some of the new farmers ruined the plantations and returned back to the cities or their home areas.

24 Ibid.
A prominent Bimal woman describes the post-war situation in Lower Shabelle: “in the past, land was seized with the pen, today, land is seized by gunpoint.” This notion is reiterated by a Somali employed by the World Bank. He states that “the last ten years of the military government, injustice was done using the pen, using government machinery. But in the last twelve years, injustice was done using guns.” He believes that “the key to conflict is injustice. And inequitable, non merit based use of resources.” Accordingly, he argues that “injustice was the main accentuating [force] but now appears as if it is a resource conflict.”

Another Bimal politician from the Shabelle region argues that unjust practices of land tenure and unequal resource distribution were rooted in the colonial regime:

After independence, the Italians have tried their best to introduce the element of [...] giving [people from the central regions] land titles. The colonial settlement policy was substituted by another national settlement policy followed by the administrations which have succeeded the Italian colonial administration. The local populations have been deprived from everything, their have been deprived of their political representation through electoral fraught, they have been deprived from having any access to any economic resources of the nation. There was a policy specifically engineered for their marginalisation. After 1969, the socialist regime also followed the same path covering itself with ideological colours. And when that period was over at the beginning of the 1990s, the Hawiye invasion took place spearheaded specifically by the Haber Gedir had led to the deprivation of the local population both in the Lower Shabelle region as well as in the Juba regions.

In 1994, when banana production resumed in Lower Shabelle, the American firm Dole challenged De Nadai’s near monopoly; the latter’s banana plantations covered some 6,000 hectares. With two multinational corporations operating, both through local subsidiaries, Dole-Sombana and De Nadai-Somalfruit, banana production recovered. Somalia’s banana production reached 80 per cent of the pre-war production in 1997, with an estimated 9,000

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25 Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 9 November 2002.
26 Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 27 November 2002.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Interview in Baidoa, southern Somalia, on 9 February 2002.
32 Once Somalfruit, a corporation owned by an Italian family who held a 51 per cent share of the firm’s equity, the remaining capital was split 29 per cent for Somali producers and 20 per cent for the Barre’s family. ION (1995): "Now They're Shooting for Bananas,” The Indian Ocean Newsletter. 658.
people benefiting financially from the crops.\textsuperscript{33} But this resurgence was accompanied by intensified conflict. Linked to distribution was the second key development in the post-war era of the banana economy, the contentious issue of taxation. General Aideed, who had agreements with Dole, received approximately 5 US cents per 12.5 kg packed and exported bananas when the trade resumed after the war and 4 US cents in 1996 when Dole shut down its activities.\textsuperscript{34} The same source estimated the monthly amount raised by banana taxation at US$ 150,000 excluding the months of July and August when beach ports such as in Merka were inoperable.\textsuperscript{35} Another source estimates that Aideed received a tax of 4 US cents for each crate of bananas shipped abroad and 3 US cents from the banana growers themselves.\textsuperscript{36}

The overall impact of such levies are difficult to judge as Somali businessmen sought to escape the imposition, and Aideed’s capacity to impose a levy was probably uneven. Nevertheless, it is no secret that Aideed was able to finance his powerful militia through the export of bananas; and they certainly contributed to the intensified conflict over transport and export. The Norfolk Education and Action for Development Centre estimates a figure of US$ 40,000 that the General allegedly spent per week to maintain his militia.\textsuperscript{37} Aideed’s Somali National Alliance (SNA), had military supremacy in Lower Shabelle during the years of the ‘banana war’. He authorised agreements for foreign companies to operate in the riverine areas. Foreign firms which cooperated with Aideed, for example Dole-Sombana, had to pay for protection in addition to the export levy. Sombana director Ahmed Duale Haaf is believed to have paid General Aideed at least US$ 8,000 from his private accounts for dinners and the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.: p. 48.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} ION (1995): "Aideed Tops up the Kitty," \textit{The Indian Ocean Newsletter}. 688.
renovation of the “House of Peace” where the SNA was holding meetings. Here, a direct link between agricultural production and conflict can be established.

Since margins were highest at the export level, however, it seems understandable that warlords tried to monopolise the export trade rather than controlling land. This view is shared by Ali Mahdi who was a powerful business figure in Mogadishu:

Somalia – even though our country is listed one of the poorest countries in the world – has resources, natural resources; in agriculture we are very rich, we have livestock, we have 3,333 kilometres marine coast. If we develop only all three of them, it is more than enough for Somalis. Besides that, we know, we have minerals, we have petrol in the country, we have gold, we have a lot of minerals in the north, even though they are not [...] we know and every country [...] everybody wants to monopolise this wealth for tomorrow.

In Merka town, where a large proportion of the produce was exported, the indigenous Bimal clan were pushed out of the profitable export trade by the more powerful Haber Gedir/Saad clan. Competition within the Hawiye clan then spilled over to conflict when Aideed’s Haber Gedir clan fought with the Hawadle over the issue of taxation with the Hawadle loosing.

Further, there was tough competition between the two Somali counterparts of the new competitor US subsidiary Dole and the old Italo-Somali De Nadai group, Sombana and Somalfruit. When Sombana came to southern Somalia in 1994, they made exclusive contracts with local farmers prohibiting them from selling their produce to any other company. Somalfruit followed and contested the agreement. According to one Mogadishu-based business man, the trade conflict intensified when Somalfruit raised the price per box of an average twelve bananas from US$ 2 to US$ 4. Aideed’s central role in benefiting from the

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39 On 29 January 1991, he was announced ‘interim president’ by the first reconciliation conference after the ousting of the Siyad Barre.
40 Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 8 November 2002.
42 Ibid.
43 Interview in Mogadishu on 19 December 2002.
situation, rather than arbitrating tensions between the two competitors, became obvious.

When a decree was signed on 13 October 1994 in his own hand decontrolling both the market and the price, in order to ease tensions between the two firms, he undermined Sombana’s case. Yet, the decree stated that any commercial contract would be subject to Aideed’s approval and any conflict would be arbitrated and enforced by Aideed’s SNA. In addition, all banana plantations formerly belonging to Barre would be available to Somali banana producers. Somalfruit protested and persuaded local producers to break their contracts with Sombana on 9 November 1994. Mohamed Hussein Guarre, Secretary of the Banana Producers’ Committee, justified the producers’ position that “Dole’s procedures are dishonest [and] the promised investments never materialised”. Then on 3 December 1994, the SNA suddenly declared Somalfruit’s competition ‘illegal’, declaring that compensation had to be paid to Sombana. Finally, 37 producers exported 185,000 boxes of bananas in December 1994, worth of US$ 1 million. The trade dispute between the two companies led to serious divisions within the Haber Gedir clan, largely between the Saad and the Ayr.

Consequently, clashes between the companies’ militias developed over production and marketing. Local conflicts were replicated in Mogadishu in what was called Somalia’s ‘banana war’. Both companies accused each other of recruiting and arming militia men in order to block off access to the deep-sea port in Mogadishu. On 10 January 1995, a small group of militia men on armed ‘technicals’ drove past Dole’s lodgings of their Filipino employees in Mogadishu, opened fire and left one guard dead. Later on 2 February, fighting

45 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Technicals are pick-up vehicles with mounted machine guns. The word ‘technical’ allegedly derives from ‘technical assistance’ as aid agencies operating in Somalia accounted costs for security as ‘technical assistance’.
broke out between the companies’ militia in the port area.\textsuperscript{50} One UNOSOM commander confirmed that militia close to Dole blocked off access to the port to prevent its rival company De Nadai from unloading their trucks. Several people were injured in this incident. Later on the same day, heavy machine-gun fire from the city was directed at a Dole freighter anchored in the port.\textsuperscript{51} On 9 February, an Italian journalist, Marcello Palmisano, was shot dead when De Nadai’s convoy was attacked by militia men close to Dole-Sombana director Ahmed Duale Haaf.

Eventually in 1996, Dole scaled down their activities and by late 1996 they shut down when their Somali counterpart left the joint-venture due to disagreements over the payment of militias.\textsuperscript{52} In an interview, Ali Mahdi confirmed this view that it was the cost of security that were to blame for the departure of the two foreign companies:

\begin{quote}
The banana is there, even the past three, four years, bananas are not exported to outside because there were new companies, one Italian, one American, they stopped the exportation. Because there is no peace. They have to pay a lot of money for the guards. So they stopped. But in the future, they can export the bananas any time if they can find some peace.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

In reality, Mahdi opposed the ‘taxation’ of the banana trade as he could not get his share while its profits strengthened militias close to his rival Aideed. Mahdi and Aideed well knew how to increase profits by inducing conflict in areas they controlled. Reno argues that Ali Mahdi owed his position and influence to his well established connections with Italian diplomats and international business and not to his Abgal clan.\textsuperscript{54} Insecurity forced foreign companies to pay protection fees and enabled warlords to maintain large militias. Accordingly, Marchal argues that Mahdi had tried to damage Aideed’s business ambitions by

\begin{footnotes}
\item[53] Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 8 November 2002.
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provoking the closure of Mogadishu port in 1995. Problems at the port made it more
difficult to export the delicate fruits to Europe and the Middle East since there was not
another suitable deep sea port equipped with storage facilities. Subsequently, the willingness
of the two MNCs to pay for protection fees decreased.

Lastly, the disagreement of the two companies, Dole being an American multinational
corporation and De Nadai being an Italian, also reflected the trade war between the US and
Europe over import quotas. When the EU was forced to reduce ACP import quotas in 1997,
foreign investors stopped their activities in the region. Before 1996, the EU banana regime
was fragmented. National trade systems favoured former colonies of some EU countries – for
example Italy imported bananas from Somalia. In order to harmonise national trade regimes
under a common EU agricultural and commercial policy, a new banana regime was created.
This new regime introduced three types of licences: 65% of licences were allocated to
traditional operators involved in dollar bananas ('A' licences), 30% of licences were allocated
to traditional importers of EU and ACP bananas ('B' licences) and the balance was allocated
to newcomers. This formula discriminated against some Latin American countries. First, the
size of the low tariff quota was smaller than their former exports to the EU and second,
Germany applied import tariffs for the first time. In response, Ecuador, Guatemala,
Honduras, Mexico and the United States handed in a complaint under the rules of the World
Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1996. It is surprising that the US supported the complaint since
America does not produce bananas. The US action was allegedly based on potential
discrimination against US national companies, such as Dole. In fact, Dole lobbied in Brussels
against discriminatory restrictions enabling it to secure a 5,000 tonne quota for Somali

House) p. 21.
Development Office for Somalia) p. 49.
bananas over three months in March 1994. In September 1997, the WTO Dispute Settlement Body ruled that the EU was violating WTO rules, particularly on import licensing procedures. The WTO ruling authorised the US to suspend concessions it offered to the EU. Temporary sanctions were initiated to the value of US$ 191 million. In the long term, the European Union had to phase out the tariff quota regime favouring Somali bananas under the ACP-EU Lome Convention in the year 2006.

Moreover between October and November 1997, severe floods destroyed large parts of the remaining 3,500 hectares cultivated agricultural areas and the road network in Lower Shabelle region further deteriorated. Deyr rains started excessively in October, continuing until the beginning of January. Flood control systems, such as reservoirs and dams further upstream were dysfunctional allowing an unhindered flow of water. Since many floodgates are broken or poorly maintained, canals got silted and crops were destroyed through excessive flooding (see chart 1). This is why the irrigation system must be managed on the regional level rather leaving it to smaller communities. Consequently, approximately 700 ha or 20 per cent of the cultivated land was destroyed.

The floods had serious repercussions on food security and availability. People who were working on the farms lost their income, consequently leading to low purchasing power and higher malnutrition rates. After the floods destroyed much of the farmland and in combination with the Geneva WTO ruling, foreign firms hesitated to re-start their investments, above all within an insecure environment. As a result in 2002 there were no large-scale commercial banana exports; a senior business man in Mogadishu explains:

Today, 70 per cent of the banana trade collapsed. Small amounts are exported to Dubai or Djibouti. There are two problems: the lack of markets and the lack of investment. Bananas have to harvested every fifteen days since there are no facilities for cooling. There is demand but the quality of bananas is poor, this needs investment. Demand is there, from the Arab countries and European countries.

Consumers in Dubai or Djibouti are more concerned with taste than with appearance. In terms of investment, a good road network is needed. The banana business is a sophisticated one, for example, the banana plants have to be inspected every day. The business community tried to open the port but some of the faction leaders resisted.\textsuperscript{57}

Bananas, are still produced but largely serve the regional market. They are trucked to Somaliland and Puntland. Many people whose life depended on the banana trade lost their income. The banana sector employed people in production, transport, marketing and export. In Lower Shabelle, Merka town has been severely affected by the collapse of the banana export business as most of the bananas were exported through Merka port when the main port in Mogadishu closed in 1995.\textsuperscript{58} Alternative income opportunities are limited. Seasonal workers suffered most by the collapse of the banana industry. Though Libya signalled interest in importing bananas, there are no international investors who would take the risk of engaging in a capital intensive industry.\textsuperscript{59}

In this insecure business environment, Somali traders resorted to increased export of charcoal in order to compensate for the loss in foreign exchange. In a parallel development, the decrease in banana plantations has brought some benefits to small-scale farmers. They were able to move on to former plantation land where they are now able to grow cereals, such as maize and sesame. In 2002, Lower Shabelle’s maize output accounted for 72 per cent of the overall regional \textit{Gu} maize production.\textsuperscript{60} Sesame emerged as a new cash crop, substituting for bananas and opening a window of opportunity for small-scale farmers since the production of sesame is less capital intensive than bananas. Besides, the domestic market for bananas remained limited, and the international market was difficult to penetrate.

\textsuperscript{57} Interview in Mogadishu on 19 December 2002.
\textsuperscript{58} Interview in Merka, southern Somalia, on 30 August 2002.
\textsuperscript{59} According to a Somali Member of Parliament, there was one shipment to Libya in 2002. Interview in Eldoret, Kenya, on 17 November 2002.
\textsuperscript{60} Food Security and Assessment Unit (November 2002): \textit{2002 Gu Season and Food Security Implications for Somalia in the Coming Year} (Nairobi: FSAU, Somalia).
In sum, the civil war and the following period of insecurity contributed to the destruction of the plenty and to mounting conflict between stakeholders of the region, although there have been some beneficiaries.

4. The consequences of diminished production

After 1997 banana production declined significantly. This section discusses some of the consequences in relation to land and conflict in the banana growing areas. In the context of declining production and resources, disputes over land have played a more significant role in the continuation of political instability, particularly in southern Somalia. In particular the relationship between older farming communities, plantation owners and newcomers who settled in the region after the collapse of the former regime will be examined.

The issue of land tenure and access to resources have continued to be of great significance in this region. In Lower Shabelle, there exist multiple claims over land. Farmers’ lack of legitimate ownership means that they have neither the means nor the incentive to invest and to improve irrigable land. The issue of land tenure is interrelated with the banana economy, the relationship between small-scale and large-scale farmers and their exchange relationships with pastoralists. It also affects marginalised groups in the riverine areas, such as the Bantu or Jareer.

The period of the civil war created a further change to the tenure system when state farms and land owned by foreigners was occupied. These changes over time created three categories of people who have competing claims over land: the indigenous riverine farming population (‘farmers’), those who obtained landholdings mainly for commercial use
(‘landowners’), and parties of the competing military groups that forcibly seized land in the early 1990s (self-styled ‘liberators’).\[61\]

The first group of farmers lived in the periphery of the canal system who own small plots. They produce for the local market or engage in subsistence farming. Their crops include maize, accounting for about 50 per cent of land use, fruits, vegetables, sorghum, bananas and sesame accounting for most of the rest.\[62\] The second group of landowners used to have large plantation farms in the vicinity of the main canals, the primary and the secondary canals, in particular around the primary canal Dawlaaddeed of the study area. In a third wave of events, those farms in the hands of foreigners and former government officials were ‘liberated’ by forces of the United Somali Congress (USC). Clans opposing the government believed that they were being denied their fair share of the national resources.

In 1991, Hawiye clan militia ‘liberated’ farms previously ‘owned’ by Darod clan families. Although the majority of landowners were from these two sub-clans, some landowners were also Majerten, business men from all clans, and even minority clans, such as the Bantu, were represented in the class of landowners.\[63\] Besides, foreigners, chiefly Italians and Yemenis, owned plantations. Indigenous farmers including Bantus and ethnic Somalis supported the USC in the hope to regain control over their farmland.\[64\] This was especially the case of the Digil and Mirifle clans who suffered from land-grabbing and therefore, considered an alliance with the advancing USC as an opportunity to fight Darod


\[64\] Ibid.
supremacy. Some of the newcomers returned to their homelands or to the cities when they realised that were not able to cultivate the land, particularly the banana plantations. It requires sophisticated techniques, including field levelling, irrigation, drainage, application of pesticides, careful selection and controlled density of seedlings, in order to sustain banana production.

To understand the dynamics of the banana economy on the local level it is important to disaggregate the multiple causes of conflict over access to land and water apart from identifying the constituencies involved. In September 2001, farmers in various villages including Deg Jannaay, Jaanjow and Shalambood were asked by the Somalia European Committee for Agricultural Training (CEFA) to raise problems and their possible causes related to agriculture. Data was collected by CEFA staff from farmers during three consecutive meetings in the study area. Using cards written in Somali, the participants of the workshop constructed a problem tree, which was then presented to representatives of all farmers who benefit from canal Shiikhaal in a fourth consultative meeting in Shalambood (see chart 1). The problems were raised in brainstorming sessions, collected and put in order. The problem tree is a tool to identify and visualise the main problems of farmers, and gives an indication of possible causes. This Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise had the purpose to “show once again, the cause and effect relationship, of the farmers’ problems and to further discuss their solutions, including the fact that with intervention at the ‘root cause

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66 In this context in September 2002, CEFA organised a fourteen-day long PRA workshop in Merka town. The workshop consisted of theoretical and practical sessions. For the practical sessions, staff travelled to various villages including Deg Jannaay, Jaanjow and Shalambood. There, workshop participants facilitated discussions with farmers.
level’ and with maintenance of the outcomes of such interventions, the other problems – effects – would resolve themselves.  

Two main problems are worth noting, flooding and the lack of irrigation water. Participants of the Participatory Rural Appraisal exercise identified silted canals and broken flood gates as immediate problems causing the above mentioned. In both ranking exercises, farmers ranked silted canals first and broken flood gates second (see table 2 & 3). Both problems are interrelated. In the rainy season, water from Ethiopian catchments carries large amounts of sediment which silt up canals fairly quickly when floodgates are dysfunctional in preventing the sediment to enter canals.

According to the problem tree, lack of community organisation, the lack of training and knowledge of canal management and lack of capital were considered as direct causes. Since the collapse of the government canals were rehabilitated and excavated only on a case-by-case basis by international agencies as forms of emergency humanitarian assistance. Underlying causes are lack of trust among farmers of various villages and lack of markets to sell their agricultural produce. Poorly maintained roads and lack of transport were seen as equally important.

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Chart 1. Problem tree

In the brain-storming session, the deteriorating security situation was mentioned, too. But insecurity was not ranked as a concern of prime importance (rank 9) in the pair-wise ranking exercise (see table 2). The result differed significantly (rank 3) when problems were ranked according to the proportional ranking method (see table 3). This result reveals that affected farmers do not feel free to express their security concerns in an open debate. Often, farmers told me about violent forms of water extraction and forced ‘taxation’ personally but they did not raise the issue in general discussions. This attitude can partly be explained with the dominance of Haber Gedir clansmen represented in CEFA which was seen by the indigenous population to promote the interest of the occupying Haber Gedir clans.

Further, participants of the workshop mentioned the lack of a central organisation that could manage the rehabilitation of canals or controlling river levels keeping agricultural productivity low. Before the war, it was the government which excavated canals and maintained the infrastructure.\textsuperscript{68} Since the canal system is not managed on a regional level anymore, many canals – even some of the primary ones – got silted. As a consequence, water to irrigate farms became scarce, and conflict arose over accessing it.

In addition, several interviewees stated that there was very little cooperation between small-scale and plantation farmers within the region to solve the stated problems. This was the case in Jaanjow village which depends on irrigation water from canal Shiikhaal that runs in parallel to the primary canal Dawlaaddeed. Canal Shiikhaal is used by 90 per cent of small-scale farmers.\textsuperscript{69} Smallholder farmers signalled their interest in rehabilitating those canals which bypass the primary canals in order to become less dependent on large-scale farmers, through whose land some of their water runs.

\textsuperscript{68} Personal communication with farmers in Shalambood in September 2002.
\textsuperscript{69} Author’s fieldwork in Lower Shabelle in September 2002.
Table 2. Pair-wise ranking of problems (voting by consensus)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Poor community organisation</th>
<th>Silted canals</th>
<th>Broken gates</th>
<th>Poor roads</th>
<th>Lack of pumps</th>
<th>High cost of inputs</th>
<th>Lack of crop diversification</th>
<th>Marketing problems</th>
<th>Hunger</th>
<th>Insecurity</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor community organisation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silted canals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken gates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor roads</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of water pumps</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>High cost of inputs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of crop diversification</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food shortage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Moreover, villagers accused banana growers of deliberately blocking water from reaching the secondary canals.\(^{70}\) They complained that a short canal passing through a banana plantation providing water for canal Shiikhahaal and connecting it with the main canal Dawlaaddheed had very limited water flow. Other farmers complained they had to pay a levy to armed militia for the extraction of water. In order to prevent armed militias from controlling irrigation water, farmers deliberately destroyed floodgates. This in turn led to further destruction of the existing infrastructure. Then, farmers themselves resort to the use of arms to extract water for irrigating their fields. Although violence constituted a day-to-day experience, hardly any farmer who participated in the PRA exercise mentioned the specifics of the conflict. This could be largely due to the lack of trust within the wider community. A

\(^{70}\) Field visit to Jaanjow village, Lower Shabelle, on 23 September 2002.
local Garre from the Digil clan family who works as an agricultural extension officer commented: “the nature of the civil war is to be silent.”71

Table 3. Ranking of problems using the proportional piling method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Size of pile (based on number of votes)</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor community organisation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silted canals</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken gates</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor roads</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of water pumps</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High cost of inputs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of crop diversification</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing problems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food shortage</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In addition, livestock herders cross and damage canal and river embankments without sanctions. This is because water reservoirs designed for watering livestock have been converted into farms. Today, herders cannot not be fined or punished if they are armed. Above all, high taxes collected at numerous checkpoints, unusable roads and high transaction costs inhibit traders from reaching markets for their produce. Rice and sugar, once locally produced, have to be imported at high costs. In an environment where the rule of force has become common, conflict and war destroyed the plenty of these ‘high potential’ areas leading to environmental scarcity. Only improved security, infrastructure and marketing on the village level can help smallholders to increase productivity.

Although there was a lack of community organisation, farmers from Shalambood had formed a farmers’ association of 3,000 members named Somali-TACAB72 in order to

71 Interview in Merka, southern Somalia, on 18 September 2002.
72 The full text of TACAB was not available.
overcome their organisational problems. In one group discussion, a member of TACAB claimed that about 80 per cent of the farmers in the region are willing to participate in an organisation if the conditions improve. What was lacking is the organisational strength of MNCs or a government to rehabilitate canals, level fields and market the produce including appropriate storage and port facilities.

Large-scale farmers, whose plantations are in the vicinity of the main canals are not represented in this association, and see no moral obligation to co-operate with smallholders who live at the periphery of the irrigation system. Plantation farmers cultivate land between the river and the primary canals. Since ownership over land is often disputed plantation farmers hardly find it worthwhile to invest in capital intensive activities, such as excavating canals. Uncertainty diminishes the incentive to cooperate with smallholders. Further, violence became a means to pursue business interests. It is common in Lower Shabelle that large-scale plantation farmers maintain their own militia to protect their property and business activities.

Though the banana growing industry remains economically beneficial for a small urban-based elite, it has adverse social consequences. Two social implications that are worth noting. Firstly, large farms rely on wage labourers who often live in villages close to the plantations or onsite. The work on the plantations is highly labour intensive. The cultivation of bananas requires several different tasks ranging from levelling the fields, planting of seedlings, controlling density of the seedlings, trimming and watering to harvesting. According to Samatar, the majority of these tasks are done by female children aged between eight and

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73 Author’s fieldwork in Lower Shabelle, September 2002.
74 Interview with local small-scale farmers in Shalambood, southern Somalia, on 19 September 2002.
75 Interview near Deg Jannaay village, Merka district, with plantation owner on 18 September 2002.
The wages are so low that most males are unwilling to work. Average wages are believed to be as low as US$ 0.10 per day with average working hours beginning at 7:30 in the morning until 8:00 in the evening. But since unemployment is extremely high, plantation owners can hire hungry children. Besides children, the landless class of Bantu people work in the plantations for a dollar per day. One source estimated their daily income ranges between one and four US dollars when Dole and de Nadai had contracts with plantation owners in the mid-1990s. It is probable that competition between the two international corporations led to an increase of wages. However, due to the collapse of the banana economy, wages have fallen and a large proportion of the Bantu population lost their income and subsequently increasing their social vulnerability.

Secondly, banana plantations exclude hundred per cent of the transhumant livestock. In the dry season, pastoralists are able to obtain freely crop residuals from farmers. Where maize and sesame is grown, land is available to transhumant herders on a seasonal basis. In exchange, farmers obtain milk, meat and skins from pastoral communities. According to Unruh’s research findings, owners of large farms hold a smaller percentage of fodder-producing land available to transhumant herders. He explains this with large-scale farmers being ‘outsiders’ to the region without the longstanding knowledge of smallholder farmers about the reciprocal exchange relationships that had bound farmers and herders. Besides, owners of large farms, such as banana plantations, are more likely to produce for the export and urban market, and hence are less dependent on local consumers to sell their produce.

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77 Ibid.: p. 84.
Since there is no organised group today, which can manage transhumant populations, permission to access land is given on an individual basis.

5. Concluding remarks

In the past, the overall problem of the banana sector was not stagnation. The sector grew steadily until the beginning of the civil war. Instead, the critical question remains, in which way the scarce and precious land is used and how economic benefits are distributed among traders, farmers and workers. Here, a stronger state based on efficiency and accountability, could act as a coordinator and facilitator. Bringing back multinational corporations cannot alone solve the Somali agricultural crisis since most of the export earnings remain in the foreign hands and as a result, the net economic impact on the accumulation of national capital remains limited. Benefits from growth are more likely to enrich those who are already well-off, urban nationals and international traders, limiting welfare effects for the region and the country as a whole. Although the banana sector employed several thousands of people, it is unlikely that its development and expansion would alone improve the workers well-being. Margins at the production level used to be less than two per cent of the overall retail unit price and therefore, it is unlikely that the material situation of wage labourers will improve.

However, a healthier banana sector would improve the overall export position and bring in the capital investment to help restore the infrastructure. Agricultural development should focus equally on sectors in which smallholders have a greater stake, producing for both the domestic and the export market, such as sugar cane, rice and sesame. The provision of water

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81 Ibid.: p. 86.
on the peripheries of irrigated farm blocks is also important both for transhumant pastoralists and for the farmers whose land they now traverse.

It seems that conflict during the years of Somalia’s ‘banana war’ did not directly arise over land ownership. Moreover, conflict was related to distributional issues in terms of taxation and marketing by political factions and traders respectively. This supports one of the argument that violent conflict is rarely linked to absolute scarcity or abundance of resources. Rather, it is linked to the distribution of these valuable assets. Homer-Dixon defines this phenomenon as structural scarcity.\(^{82}\) In terms of distribution of land, elders of the farming communities traditionally allocated land to young men or newcomers. Over time elders became landowners themselves, undermining their neutral role as peace brokers. Often the more powerful clans in southern Somalia did not use to cultivate land and hence, do not represent the constituencies of smallholder farmers. They may have their own vested interests in restoring their title deeds they were able to obtain during the Barre regime.

What is more, lack of foreign direct investment and government involvement, changes in the international trade regime, coupled with natural disasters have resulted in the collapse of the banana trade. The collapse of the banana sector freed numerous labourers who had to look for alternatives. The charcoal production opened new forms of income. Though the long term costs may be great, the pursuit of immediate benefits prevails. Environmental problems such as tree cutting, sand due encroachment and the loss of grazing areas are consequences of the charcoal boom. Furthermore, the local population feels excluded from the business activities surrounding the trade. Armed conflict arose over unjust distribution of potential high margins of the lucrative export trade. In addition, formerly sophisticated systems of resource-sharing between smallholder farmers and large-scale farmers as well as between nomadic people and

sedentary farmers have become dysfunctional. This led to an intensification of already existing tensions between transhumant nomadic pastoralists and farmers.

In sum, this paper demonstrates that in the rich agricultural areas in the Shabelle valley, taxation of export trade of cash crops and the distribution of water and land became the bone of contention and triggering violent conflict. Clearly, taxes collected from MNCs involved in the banana sector financed militias of various factions, particularly USC forces. In the absence of law and order, land and property changed hands through forceful means over the past twelve years. This assumption has been considered at the ongoing peace talks in Kenya led by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. A formal system of land tenure issuing title deeds as being practised in Somaliland would be less desirable in the Shabelle valley as individual ownership of land hardly exists and would disrupt the historical reciprocal exchange relationships between pastoralists and farmers. The issue of “land disputes, return of property and modalities for settlement of past abuses” have to be addressed in a meaningful and constructive way if peace should prevail. Above all, addressing land tenure would improve social resilience as Omaar and de Waal argue: “the traditional foundation of communal solidarity and the institution of the elders is land holding and allocation. Hence, addressing the land tenure issue is likely to have a positive impact on other elements of social rehabilitation.”

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References


