In an environment where a serious information asymmetry exists on the skills of workers and the location of job vacancies, these social connections are crucial in linking job seekers and employers. Of course this is heavily biased towards youth with effective (and profitable) social connections that they can utilise when needs arise.

What next?

Looking at education and the labour market experiences, it is true that educated youth in Somaliland face many challenges. I would argue, however, that they equally have many opportunities. As Somaliland continues to develop and as the government takes steps to streamline the higher education sector and correct inefficiencies in the labour markets, youth employment outcomes will continue to improve. In addition, Somaliland youth in general are surrounded by very supportive social/clan structures that if pushed in certain directions could prove very beneficial for youth development. With the right incentives, clan efforts could be channelled towards youth-oriented activities such as creating youth trust funds for entrepreneurial ventures.

To really understand youth employment in Somaliland, we have to move away from categorizing youth as being employed and unemployed. Social/cultural understanding on what it means to be employed and unemployment is crucial for the creation of effective and targeted interventions. Equally important is an in-depth understanding of youth categories and how they interact with the labour markets. Understanding social processes within the labour markets is also vital given that labour markets are made up of people who reflect how society functions.

In addition, the government, with the help of development partners, youth organisations and higher education institutions, needs to launch awareness programmes that will work towards educating Somalilanders about their economy and the functions of and opportunities within labour markets. This could help young people form realistic expectations about the types of jobs they can secure. Youth and society’s perceptions about the economy and the labour markets in general are possibly one of the most powerful and effective tools to improve job allocation in the economy.

The fact that two-thirds of Somaliland’s population are young people means the country’s major strength lies in this demographic trend especially given the fact that Somaliland is in its early years of reconstruction and development. What is crucial for the Somaliland government is to ensure that the right policies and programmes are put in place to capture the energy and enthusiasm of youth especially in their efforts to access higher levels of education and employment. Somaliland youth exude confidence and need to be given an opportunity to rise to the challenge of helping Somaliland develop in spite of its lack of international recognition. Involving youth will not only give them a sense of pride and nationalism, but will also help reduce the large number of them leaving Somaliland every day, through dangerous means, hoping to find meaningful life elsewhere.

Finally, the Somaliland government, the Somalia government, the African Union and the international community need to make a decision on the status of Somaliland very soon. Transforming the Somaliland economy into one capable of generating the required levels of jobs, will require significant investment into sectors that are traditionally avoided by development agencies and small scale investors (i.e. large infrastructure projects). Postponing the outcome of recognition or some other type of legal status has crucial implications for the long-term development of the country and subsequently to the livelihood of a large percentage of the population; the youth. Although recognition arguments are usually formed on past grievances, current and future implications of lack of it need to be brought to the table and discussed openly and frankly. In my opinion, the Somaliland youth should hold responsible all the above named parties for helping them realize their right to decent livelihoods.

The Litigant

Ali Jimale Ahmed

He was frail, emaciated, and gaunt from years of harsh life that had made him trek the length and breadth of the Somali plains. It was a Friday morning when he came to visit us in our village, in one of the corners of the capital. We used to call our corner a dark alley, because all the surrounding, more affluent areas were lit, while our village, in the heart of the town, was thirsty for electricity. An older friend of mine used to call it Harlem. I didn’t understand his meaning at the time, but nevertheless it sounded exotic to me. Harlem. My friend had heard about Harlem from an old Mennonite teacher. A congenial old lady with freckles dotting the landscape of her still pretty face, my friend would reminisce. At times, he would flaunt a song or two he learned in her class. My favorite was “Old MacDonald had a farm,” which, to my utter surprise, my mother, through me, also liked. Tell your friend, she would say each time I did a rendition of the song, complete with gestures and onomatopoeic grunts, to sing to his teacher, a song of the Arlaadi. And without waiting for an answer, she, in her crooning voice would sing of the virtues of beans, and of the daunting task of warding off a neighbor’s cattle from scouring the field.

To us kids, an ode to beans was the furthest from our minds, as that did not ignite our imagination. I vaguely remember my older friend’s Mennonite teacher’s comment to my mother’s ode to beans: she described it, he said, as a kind of graffiti. That was a strange kind of comment, I thought, since graffiti was what I saw splashed on walls with cheuvaux de frise on top to discourage trespassers. (Cheval de frise was, I learned in high school, an ingenious idea to embed razor spikes into the top of the wall surrounding a house for protection. For some odd reason that I cannot explain, the spikes reminded me of my mother’s description of scarecrows.) My mother’s stories about beans and scarecrows did not appeal to me or my friends. We liked to hear stories spun about far away places. And Harlem was one such place. Sometimes, I pronounced it as Harram, the Arabic word for “sinful and forbidden.” Harram, excuse me Harlem, was in America and it sure sounded like a sinful place, a forbidden corner in the midst of the Big Apple. The Apple, according to my knowledgeable friend, was another name for New York City. Anyway, it intrigued me that our corner had similar characteristics with other corners of the world. After all, we weren’t alone living in the midst of darkness, squalor and filth. There was something about squalor and filth-dwelling, I reasoned.

Each Friday, well let me put it this way, every other Friday, my parents used to invite all, or almost all the elders of the village to a bun session. Coffee beans were cooked in seething hot sesame oil or butter ghee. The eldest man was to eat first. Most of the time it was Grandfather Madaq. Well, to be sure, he wasn’t my grandfather, but we were told to call him that out of respect. Grandfather Madaq was in his early 80s and childless. Actually, he never got married, which made most of the community; I mean those who were old enough to gossip and talk about certain stuff, either fear or pity him. It was also reported that he never lost his first baby teeth. Some kind of mystery was associated with that, but it was always beyond our youthful understanding. I personally liked Grandfather Madaq a lot, and that, I think, was why my mother always invited him to our house.
This particular Friday, though, Grandfather Madaq wasn’t anywhere to be seen. Perhaps, I thought, someone else had invited him to another house. He was such an affable and good-natured person that you couldn’t dislike him. This Friday, my mother told me to spread the praying mat for a new visitor. When he sat down, he told me to come close to him and he started patting my hair. At first it didn’t feel strange or funny, but after some time, I thought something wasn’t right. His hand would fall on two different parts of my head at the same time, or that was what I thought was happening. I wasn’t brave enough to look up as I didn’t want him to notice my unease. Then a cup of tea was brought to him, but for some strange reason my mother put the cup on the floor. That was very unlike my mother. At least, she never put the cup on the floor for Grandfather Madaq. Well, I thought, what’s in the grass will have to come into the open. Why don’t I wait and see. It was rude; at least that was what we were told, to make a visitor uncomfortable with either our words or our actions. The cup lay just where my mother had put it for a long time, which also was unusual. Grandfather Madaq and even the other visitors, and believe me there were many of them, didn’t let their tea cool off for so long. Grandfather Madaq would grasp his cup with both hands, taking it directly from my mother’s hands, and then hold it up to his temples. I thought our guest this Friday must either have had a cup of tea earlier or wasn’t an avid tea drinker. Again this was a strange thing to understand, because most people in my community, especially the elderly, drink many cups of tea each day with lots of sugar. Rag was shaah, dumarnaa was shaqo. (This was a kind of sententious saying each day with lots of sugar. Rag was shaah, dumarna was shaqo.)

About half an hour later, my mother brought the bun in a wooden kurbin dish with a wooden spoon. No sooner had she put it on the floor than our visitor held the wooden spoon in his right hand. So I was right. Awiyla Allah! He couldn’t hold on to the spoon. Each time he tried to dip it in the bowl, he made a mess. I was really terrified to watch him struggle with the spoon. I didn’t keep my gaze on him, as that would invite my mother’s disapproval. And you wouldn’t want my mother to be mad at you! She might even throw whatever is in her hands at you. Allah, how good she was at feinting with the left hand. Fear, however, didn’t make me stop looking at him with some sidelong glances. I couldn’t understand why my mother didn’t help him eat his food, or even let me help him eat. I thought my mother didn’t like our visitor this Friday. But then why invite him in the first place?

When he ate what he could, my mother gave him the bun in a wooden kurbin dish with a wooden spoon. No sooner had he put it on the floor than our visitor held the wooden spoon in his right hand. So I was right. Awiyla Allah! He couldn’t hold on to the spoon. Each time he tried to dip it in the bowl, he made a mess. I was really terrified to watch him struggle with the spoon. I didn’t keep my gaze on him, as that would invite my mother’s disapproval. And you wouldn’t want my mother to be mad at you! She might even throw whatever is in her hands at you. Allah, how good she was at feinting with the left hand. Fear, however, didn’t make me stop looking at him with some sidelong glances. I couldn’t understand why my mother didn’t help him eat his food, or even let me help him eat. I thought my mother didn’t like our visitor this Friday. But then why invite him in the first place?

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**Lettre ouverte de Médecins sans Frontières**

**Pourquoi MSF a décidé de quitter la Somalie**

**Dr. Unni Karunakara**

L e 14 août 2013, nous avons annoncé la ferme-
ture de l’ensemble de nos pro-
grammes médicaux en Somalie ce qui a provoqué une
onde de choc au sein des communautés politique et
humanitaire. C’est arrivé à un moment où les grands
directeurs, pour la première fois depuis plusieurs
décennies, commencèrent à émettre des signes d’apai-
sement vis-à-vis d’un pays en voie de reconstruction
da un gouvernement stable. Pour eux, le calendrier
de notre décision n’aurait pas pu être pire. Dans les
interviews accordées aux médias, il nous a été de-
mandé d’expliquer le décalage entre l’optimisme des
gouvernements et la sévérité de notre jugement qui
a mené à l’une des décisions les plus pénibles dans
l’histoire d’MSF.

Je vais tenter de vous l’expliquer. Tout d’abord,
MSF n’est pas une organisation qui se permet de com-
menter les évolutions politique ou économique. Nous
sommes d’abord et surtout concentrés sur la santé des
populations et leur possibilité d’accéder aux soins.
Dans cette optique, et en nous référant à nos activités
largement réparties dans le pays, les nouvelles ne sont
tout simplement pas bonnes. Une grande partie de
la population somalienne vit quotidiennement avec la
malnutrition, la maladie et la souffrance. Elle a peu
de chance de trouver des soins de qualité quand elle
e n’en a besoin. Nous nous sommes battus pour apporter
ces soins dans quasiment tout le pays, au prix de
nombreux compromis. Nous avons dû par exemple
engager des gardes armés pour protéger nos structures
de santé et notre personnel, un procédé auquel nous
n’avons recours nulle part ailleurs.

Malgré cette mesure exceptionnelle, nous avons
subi plusieurs attaques, dont des enlèvements et l’as-
sassinat de 16 de nos membres. Il y a eu aussi quantité
de menaces, de vols et d’intimidations en tout genre.

Il n’y a aucun pays au monde où les risques sont aussi éle-
vés. Les nombreux commen-
tateurs sur Twitter qui ont fait remarquer qu’MSF est
réticue pour sa persévérance à travailler même dans
les conditions les plus difficiles ont raison. Mais, MSF
aussi a ses limites. Et nous avons atteint nos limites
en Somalie avec l’enchaînement de meurtres et d’en-
lèvements au cours de ces cinq dernières années. En
décembre 2011, deux confrères ont été brutalement
abattus à Mogadiscio. Leur meurtre, qui avait été
poursuivi en justice, reconnu coupable et condamné
t à 30 ans de prison, a été libéré au bout de trois mois.

Deux autres collègues enlevées deux mois plus tôt à
Dadaab viennent à peine d’être libérées il y a de cela
quelques semaines. Elles ont été retenues en otage
pendant 21 mois dans le centre sud de la Somalie. Ces
deux événements nous ont assénés les derniers coups.

Mais la sécurité n’est pas à l’origine de notre départ,
ni la présence de criminels. Ce qui a anéanti notre der-
nière lueur d’espoir de pouvoir continuer à travailler
dans ce pays fut le fait que ce sont précisément ceux
avec qui nous avions négocié des garanties minimales
de sécurité qui ont toléré et admis les attaques contre
les travailleurs humanitaires. Dans certains cas, ils
ont même activement soutenu les actes criminels
commis contre nos employés. Dans beaucoup d’au-
tres cas, ces entités ont entretenu un environnement
qui a rendu ces attaques possibles. Personne n’a pris
la parole pour dire qu’il est intolérable de menacer,
envoyer ou tuer des médecins, des infirmiers ou tout
autre personne qui essaie simplement d’apporter
des soins de santé aux populations qui, sinon, en seraient
totalement privées.

Soyons clairs. L’expression « entités en Soma-
lie » ne renvoie pas seulement aux Shebab, bien
qu’ils aient pouvoir et autorité dans la plupart des