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PAPER

1. Introduction on Somali Agriculture

Somalia has got potential agricultural resources that can feed its people (10.8m) and even produce surplus for export. It consists of agricultural land (44mha), forestry land (6.7mha), surface water (179.8km³/annum) and potential underground water unidentified, livestock population (→36m heads), sea and inland fishery resources (3333km long coast) and forestry sectors. Gross Agricultural Products, GAP, contributed in average 62% to the national GDP for the period of 1977-1987. 25% of the GAP is of plant origin whilst 75% comes from the livestock sector. Agriculture commodities represent the only exports for Somali economy. Nearly 70% of the people live in rural areas, being agriculture their main source of livelihood. This statistics clearly indicates how important the agricultural sector is to the national economy. According to the data from the Ministry of Agriculture in 1989, prior to the outbreak of the civil conflict, the tilled area distributed as 564,600ha of rain-fed and 113,000ha of irrigated land; and around 360,300ha was under fallow. Crop production in Somalia is dependent mainly on the rain-fed system while the irrigated area reached at its best 200,000ha. Thus, adoption of water harvesting techniques in rain-fed agriculture, efficient use of the available water for irrigation, delivery of proper agricultural services and availability of farm labor constitute the major determinant factors for the success of crop production.

Upon the outbreak of civil conflicts in the capital and its surroundings in late 1990, wild destruction and looting of public properties including factories, premises, vehicles, machineries, utilities and the like has happened. Looting of heavy and light arms, weapon and ammunition from the military camps is considered the major reason for the continuous civil conflicts. It encouraged the criminals to rob mercilessly the public and private belongings. As a result, the delivery of all social services including education, health and security suspended. The unemployment rate reached its peak due to release of tens of thousands of public employees. During this period, the contribution of the private sector to the national economy was negligible. Consequently, the living condition of the people was badly affected. The impacts of the conflict on the different agricultural sectors will be discussed in the following sections.

2. Methodology

There is no official statistics on the related issues available; but, as secondary data, we reviewed contents of the websites of FAO, IDP, WB, and UNHCR; and fortunately we received the last technical report from the Ministry of Agriculture in 1989. In addition, we organized a discussion with a selected focus group of 13 farmers who have practiced farming before and after the outbreak of the civil conflict. During the meeting, we have discussed all possible conflict factors impacted on crop production; and the results are shown below.

3. Impacts of the conflict on crop production activities

Displacement and migration trend

One of the worst consequences of the civil conflict is the fearful dilemma it created in the people. When killings, robbery, and thievery rates increased, as a coping mechanism, millions of people resorted to flee from their homes to relatively peaceful places in the country; and the number of displaced people reached 1.1m people in 2013 with a distribution pattern of 893,000 in South and Central Somalia, 129,000 in Puntland and 84,000 in Somaliland. Based on the size of support they expect from the relief agencies or their relatives and friends, some people have migrated to abroad. They have been mainly located in the neighboring countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen; while the others are scattered all over the world. According to World Bank report, the number of Somali refugees also reached 1.1 million people in 2013. The absence of the IDPs and the migrants from their families can not only be regarded as a loss since they have significantly supported their families back, few received high degrees, gained experience and/or earned money from self-employment or employment from other institutions. But, out of that number, 2.2m of IDP and migrants, they compose of a workforce of 1.2m people (56% of 2.2m, ILO model). Being agriculture the major source of employment for the Somali people, in their presence in the country, sizable proportion of that number could have joined to the ongoing agricultural activities in the country.

Increased use of drugs (Qat)

Qat (*Catha edulis*) is a drug plant grown in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen. It was medically proved that it is harmful to human health. This drug is believed to have been introduced to Somalia from the neighboring countries, the producers, for decades back. The annual imports of this poisonous plant cost hundreds millions of dollars. In the past, the government banned Qat twice but failed due to the evasive tactics used by the black marketers. In response, the government imposed heavy taxes on the imports to minimize the quantity and the number of chewers. Now Qat is very cheap, available and widely consumed. Nearly all of the chewers are men; and under the influence of the drug, they always have problems with themselves, their families and environments. Due to income constraints, chewers sometimes beg and skimp on their family needs. During the civil conflicts, Qat chewing reached to the farming areas; and since the addicts hardly abstain from consuming, they resorted to sell their assets, farms, animals. Their productivity and their health status declined. Farmers believe that the absence of effective government is the main factor behind the widespread of Qat chewing habits. There is a widely accepted perception that Qat is incentive for on-going fighting.

Untimely food aid distributions

Prior to the outbreak of the civil conflict, there has been large number of refugee population. They were supported by the government with the support from UN agencies such as WFP. Food commodities were distributed properly to the needy people. In addition, sometimes when seasons fail and the expected harvests fall short, the deficit was filled from commercial imports and food aid. In the economic language when the supply of a product increases, the prices decline. So, the government, by protecting the local producers, set food distribution timing strategy; and taxes were imposed on the cheap imports for price adjusting. Marginal profit was allowed for the farmers' encouragement. But currently agriculture is not the priority area of the government; and farmers are at loss in bumper seasons due to purposeful coincidence of food aid distribution at harvesting time. It is worth-mentioning that the farmers gain profits during poor seasons because there is no food aid distributed and the food prices soar. This does not mean that farmers are happy with the hunger of their people, but the relief agencies concerned are dormant during his period and there is no effective government institutions that can communicate effectively with the concerned partners to purchase the surplus of the harvests in some regions for the benefit of the others. In case the local supply could not meet the gap, food aid imports should be sought from abroad. This could have encouraged and motivated the local producers.

Loss of banana export markets

Somalia is known to produce good quality banana which has been exported to Europe and Gulf markets for nearly a century. It is the only crop exported to abroad; and it constituted 20% of the GAP. Banana production which is a very lucrative industry is considered as one of the most labor intensive agricultural projects. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war, there was a strong banana business run by Somalifruit Company which was shared by Italian Businessman (51%) and Somalia (49%). The company managed about 7000 hectares, thousands of skilled and non-skilled labor force, large network of transportation vehicles, refrigerated marine fleet, substantial agriculture supporting services, banana processing facilities, packaging factory among others. Suspension of such project has caused the release of thousands of technicians and farm labor. Nearly the entire banana industry collapsed. As a result, the unemployment rate of the farming communities rose. Reopening of this business has been tried in 1994, but aggressive competition between farmers of Somalifruit and Sombana (Dole Food Companies) has ended up to the closure of this business. In light of FAO data 2013, the area of the banana shrank from 6000ha to 1900 ha which is equivalent to 216% whilst there was light yield improvement of 15.8% which moved from 17.7t/ha to reach 20.5t/ha for the average years of 1986/90 to 2010/2013 respectively. The area shrinkage can be attributed to lack of export markets, high wages from farm labor shortages, high transportation cost from rough roads, road blocks and the like.

Lack of agriculture supporting services

Crop production practices and civil war incidences are only confined in the southern regions of Somalia. The farming communities are peaceful and unarmed; but competition of the resources by the rival groups is considered the main reason for the concentration of the incidences in these zones. In Somalia, small farmers produce nearly all types of the crops, except the fruit crops which are grown by the commercial farmers. Their production system is traditional with less improved seeds, no use of fertilizers, chemicals and other inputs. During the government period, farmers paid reduced fees for land preparation services to ONAT, the government agency. Currently all of the machinery services are offered by the private sector for profit basis. Prior to the outbreak of the civil conflict, government institutions offered extension services to all farmers. For instance, they were told when to irrigate their farms to avoid water salinity, trained animal power were sometimes freely distributed, competitions for crop productivity were organized annually, for the sake of farmers, market price was controlled properly for the protection of the farmers. Due to the developments on the ground, all of the said services are currently lacking.

Weak judiciary system

On the other hand, in the past, when animals grazed farms accidentally or purposefully, the crop farmers received legal support from the police forces against the owners of the herd; and they got compensations commensurate with the damages incurred; but currently irresponsible herders with guns attack farms; and there is no reliable security forces to seek support. These incidences often happen when some neighboring farms harvested and the remaining others postpone harvesting till the crops dry very well for economic reasons. Thus, the latter groups are often attacked by livestock herders; and consequently clashes often erupt. It is worth mentioning that in the past, farmers grew tillering sorghum varieties in the first season, Gu'; and at harvest they did not raze the plants at soil level, but left 10-20cm above the soil in an effort to ratoon in the next rains, the second season. New earlier crop with less input facilities have been harvested next. But, in light of the recurrent clashes with the livestock herders, that agronomic package cannot be adopted.

Lack of quality control institutions

The world is full of unethical people who always run after their interests. They do not care of the crimes they commit. This kind of people is found anywhere in the world including Somalia. Those people can only be managed by strong government institutions. We, in Somalia, during the chaos period, have suffered a lot from this kind of mischievous acts. Those criminals imported poor quality/expired food commodities, fake medicines, poor agrochemicals and fertilizers, machineries, electronics and the like; and large number of people suffered from their evil acts. Lack of such institutions has lead to emergence of such gangs. These harmful products are quite cheap, and the poor has no choice since his purchasing power is very limited. On the other hand, the local production is uncompetitive with the price of the alternative cheap/low quality food imported from abroad. Thus, the local producer and the citizens as a whole are at loss without the government protection.

4. Conclusion

Despite the fact that getting solutions to the problems mentioned by the farmers come under the government responsibilities, but since we have been out of the scene for more than quarter of a century and the challenges are too complex, getting back to the normal track will not be easy. At this end, we call for the global partners to feel sympathy for the suffering Somali people and extend them the maximum technical and financial support they can to restore peace; otherwise, nothing can be achieved.

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