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TACKLING THE ISSUE OF CHILD LABOR IN
SOMALIA

BİRCE ÖZDEMİR





Basic Overview of the Issue

Somalia, a country challenged by poverty, political instability, and decades of violence has one of the highest rates of child labor across the globe. According to UNICEF's data, approximately 49 percent of Somali children between the ages of 5-14 are forced to work, often

under dangerous conditions. (UNICEF, 2016) This is mostly due to the fact that they need to support their families. The lack of accessible education and the widespread poverty within the nation compels Somali children into labor-intensive fields. These fields include agriculture, infrastructure, domestic labor, and even armed warfare. Hence, Child labor in Somalia not only remains a single problem but also affects the well-being of citizens, education, economy, and most importantly, the future of millions of children.

This problem shares close ties with systematic and structural instabilities in the country that have plagued Somalia over the past decades. Including a very fragile economy and limited access to quality education, children have started to be perceived as the only feasible source for an additional income for families under the poverty line. Most rural regions in the nation completely lack educational institutions, whereas in urban areas, the cost of education is extremely high for low income families. Furthermore, as more families are displaced and social services become even more dismantling, the ongoing conflict aggravates child labor in Somalia. This generally leads children to be exposed to exploitation, and in some cases, children are used as soldiers in armed groups or forced to do any kind of hazardous jobs. On top of everything, the weak implementation of child protection law, limited government capacity, and the role of cultural values in the country all act as vessels to speed up the ramifications of child labor. Therefore, child labor in Somalia not only affects children physically but the issue as a whole has a physiological aspect as well. These interconnected factors highlight how extremely essential it is to break the cycle of poverty and guarantee long-term growth in Somalia. In addition, such factors underscore the urgency in addressing the issue at hand. Therefore, in order to tackle child labor in Somalia, this chair report provides a detailed analysis of the issue and ways to cope with it.

OF THE 152 MILLION CHILDREN IN CHILD LABOUR

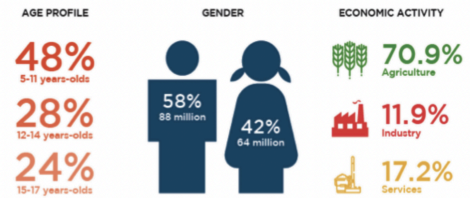


Figure 1: Age, gender, and economic activity profile of child labor in Somalia



Explanation of Important Terms

Child Labor

Any kind of forced work that is harmful to human health and prevents children from their education, childhood, future, and potential.

Hazardous Work

In simple terms, hazardous work refers to physical work that is extremely harmful to children's health, and safety and falls foul of ethics.

Poverty

Poverty refers to lacking enough resources and money to meet basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter.

Poverty Cycle

The poverty cycle refers to repeating patterns of poverty seen in families which is often transferred from one generation to another. The poverty cycle creates a poverty trap which is an economic mechanism that makes it very difficult for families and individuals to break free from it.

Education Access Gaps

Education access gaps often referred to as learning gaps are differences between a child's performance and their expected grade levels, which indicates a lack of proficiency.

Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a type of modern-day slavery and refers to the use of force to obtain physical labor.

Social Safety Nets

Social safety nets are policies or welfare programs that help families manage any kind of risk and help them escape from a poverty trap as well as prevent inequalities through providing economic opportunities.



Detailed Background of the Issue

Historical Background

The issue of child labor in Somalia ties back to the country's prolonged historical background of political, economic, and social instabilities. Starting from the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, Somalia has faced civil war for decades, resulting in the breakdown of the central government. As a result of this political instability, legislative frameworks and the power of the government have weakened, which has fostered an environment of exploitation including child labor and trafficking. Furthermore, the malfunctions in Somalia's education system have further exacerbated the problem, paving the way for an increase in child labor. This has left thousands of Somali children with very limited to almost no access to education. Considering that over 70% of the population lives much below the poverty line, (World Bank, 2022) most families have seen this destruction in education as an alternative income, forcing them to rely on child labor to cope with poverty. This caused children to be employed under hazardous conditions, affecting both their physical and mental health. Cultural values and societal norms also play a role in the high rates of child labor in Somalia, as children are often expected to help their household income as a part of the Somali traditions. In addition, some armed groups like Al-Shaabab have taken advantage of such instabilities and have exploited children for forced labor, hastening the crisis. Moreover, climate change and ongoing natural disasters also played some portions of the role such as droughts and floods in Somalia, causing further displacements.



Figure 2: A depiction of child labor in Somalia

Industries that Exploit Child Labour

For the most part, Somali children are employed in agriculture, construction, domestic work and sectors bolstering the informal economy. Amongst these sectors, agriculture plays the role of being the largest industry which includes children working on farms to harvest crops or doing work related to livestock. Likewise, the children working in the construction



sector are forced to carry heavy loads and be present in hazardous fields that are under construction. In urban areas for instance, children often engage in domestic servitude or become street vendors. Furthermore, Somalia's prolonged and unsolved conflict has led to the formation of an armed group formed by children soldiers, messengers and even spies. (UNSC, 2022) The inclusion of children in armed disputes both violates their basic human rights but also exposes them to physical and mental harm.

Factors Affecting the Issue

As mentioned earlier, there are various factors influencing the issue which range from cultural norms to the economic status of families. Though addressing child labor in Somalia requires so much effort, improvements in these factors would undoubtedly ensure a better future for Somali children.

Economic Factors

The most prominent economic factor aggravating child labor is indeed poverty. Most families who live under the poverty line struggle to meet their basic needs, which drives them to seek alternative resources for money. In such circumstances, children are forced to contribute to the household income, which is mostly done through working in agriculture, construction, or domestic jobs.

Social and Cultural Factors

Cultural norms also perpetuate child labor in Somalia. In the rural regions of the country, children are generally expected to help with familial responsibilities, especially by providing money or stock for their families. While some families perceive these tasks as a way to improve life skills, they mostly prevent educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Social norms therefore not only increase child labor but exacerbate gender inequality, as girls are more frequently expected to carry the burden of domestic roles and caregiving.

Challenges In Education and Infrastructure

The inaccessible education in Somalia, which can be depicted through the 30% rate of enrollment in primary school, is another factor that affects the issue. The lack of institutions, eligible teachers, and adequate tools discourages families from prioritizing



education over labor. Therefore, the opportunity cost, which is also an opportunity lost essentially, further increases the rate of child labor in the country.

Problems Arising From Child Labor

Child labor in Somalia not only affects the children exposed to hazardous work load individually, but also has severe ramifications for the society. As mentioned previously, children engaged in labor have no access to education and healthcare, as the harmful environment they work in frequently causes physical and mental illnesses, chronic problems and sometimes deaths. An example for that is when children working in the agriculture sector are exposed to harmful pesticides and work with heavy machinery. Another example is how children working in construction sites encounter serious physical injuries. Unfortunately, child labor in Somalia has many more examples for the consequences it brings along.

For instance, the economic dependency of some families on child labor, prevents economic development in Somalia altogether. It causes a decrease in the labor productivity especially by forming a generation in which each child is undereducated. Moreover, the spread of exploitation of children to a broader scale escalates social inequality and makes it almost impossible to escape from the poverty cycle. Therefore, the issue of child labor in Somalia will continue to plague the nation forever, if the root causes of it such as poverty, lack of accessible education and negative growth aren't fully understood and addressed.

In addition, tackling child labor in Somalia requires a collaborative effort especially to strengthen laws that protect the rights of children, to develop access to quality education and provide economic and social support to impoverished families. Thus, by addressing the relevant causes and outcomes of child labor, Somalia can eventually break free from the cycle of poverty and ensure a better future for its children.

Major Parties Involved

Somalia

As the key player in the issue, the Somali government has taken major steps in the ratification of global conventions and the implementation of laws to protect children's rights. Considering that the Somali government puts in its best efforts regardless of the limited



resources it possesses, its attempts are not enough to cope with the issue at hand. The other ongoing conflicts in the nation such as weak enactment of legislation, poverty, inequality, lack of accessible education, and overall corruption hinder the effectiveness of such actions. To further manage the ramifications of child labor, most local authorities and leaders also play a major role in the country through supporting awareness campaigns and small initiatives aiming at eliminating child labor.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)

Just like in most global issues regarding children's rights, UNICEF also plays a key role in combating child labor in Somalia. UNICEF mostly focuses on ameliorating access to high-quality education, especially through providing education to children who were displaced and supporting the enactment of frameworks for protecting children. Moreover, its attempts such as the "Education Cannot Wait" initiative, UNICEF works hard to ensure that each child affected by the dispute gets accessible schooling.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The ILO is another key player on the issue as it provides technical assistance to the government of Somalia to ensure the enforcement of international laws and reach global standards. The efforts of ILO mostly lead towards eliminating the worst forms of child labor within the country especially through raising awareness and establishing capacity-building initiatives.

The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)

Though the ICI was initially established to tackle child labor in the cocoa industry especially in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, the organization has faced criticism that highlight the initiative's inefficiency. The most recent reports of this organization also have shown that the efforts of the ICI is very insufficient in eliminating the widespread of child labor in West Africa, compared to the initiative's older reports. (ICI, 2021)



The African Union (AU)

The AU provides support for Somalia's attempts to tackle child labor, mostly through the regional initiatives on child rights implemented by the Union. The AU puts effort in regulating Somali policies such that they resonate with continental frameworks like the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The union also focuses on the education that is provided in Somalia.

Kenya

As an African Union (AU) country, Kenya hosts a significant number of Somali refugees, playing an important role in addressing child labor. The most popular refugee camps in Kenya such as Dadaab and Kakuma provide education and child protection services to thousands of Somali children, who are still at risk of exploitation. In order to achieve better housing for the refugees, Kenya collaborates with international organizations. However, limited resources and space for the refugees remain some of the significant challenges.

Ethiopia

As one of the founders of the African Union (AU), Ethiopia also hosts numerous Somali refugees and faces similar challenges as Kenya in doing so. The Ethiopian government is cooperating with UN agencies and working to address discrepancies in education. Furthermore, Ethiopia plays a prominent role in regional stability, making it a key player in fighting against the root causes of child labor.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America (USA) helps tackle child labor in Somalia primarily through financial aid, legal advocacy, and support to international organizations. An example is the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) which funds educational programs and initiatives aiming at the alleviation of poverty.



China

China also focuses on infrastructure development, but the growing impact of the country in the African region also provides indirect help to Somalia in terms of education and efforts to reduce poverty. Therefore, investments in local development projects in China still have a small portion on the issue of combating child labor in Somalia. However, China's investments in the African region might end up in carrying the dual potential to both decreasing and increasing child labor in the region, especially if new economic opportunities created by the Chinese government set the ground for new job opportunities for children, hence further mitigating educational development in Somalia. Therefore, the outcome of the investments done by China totally depends on the transparency of these projects and the strength of child protection laws and regulations.

United Arab Emirates (UAE)

The funds and economic support UAE provides have played an important role in the implementation of education projects and the distribution of humanitarian aid to low-income families. UAE mostly helps Somalia by investing in its infrastructure and fostering capacity-building initiatives in the region. Through these, the UAE aims to perpetuate child labor, and poverty and help increase access to education in the nation.

Turkey

Turkey has also been a prominent international partner, especially through its efforts in helping Somalia's reconstruction efforts such as initiatives to combat child labor. The Turkish government along with important Turkish NGOs has supported technical and infrastructure assistance for educational development, and economic growth projects. Such efforts are aimed to offer alternatives for child labor to Somali families and to ensure long-term development in the region.



Norway

Though it seems like the total opposite, Norway plays an active role in supporting education and growth in Somalia. The country specifically focuses on the rights of children and youth, and many programs funded by Norway prioritize girls' education, aiming for gender equality in the field of education. Through all these, Norway promotes peace and political stability, helping to tackle the root causes of the problem at hand.

Chronology of Important Events

Date	<i>Description of Event</i>
June 26, 1972	the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 138 has been approved by Somalia which set the minimum age for employment to 15.
August 20, 2012	The Provisional Constitution of Somalia is adopted which includes provisions that prevent child labor and forbid the hiring of child soldiers in armed disputes.
October 1, 2014	The US Department Bureau on Labor has issued the "2013 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor" report. The report revealed how dangerous the types of child labor Somali children are exposed to including armed conflict.
September 20, 2015	The "Decent Work Program" has been launched by ILO and The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in order to further address child labor.
June 12, 2017	The Somali government has restated its dedication to ending child labor in the country and improving children's rights on "World Day Against Child Labor".



August 30, 2019	The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has announced the implementation of a new, broad social protection program and approved a National Employment program.
June 12, 2021	The Federal Republic of Somalia's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ILO, and UNICEF have agreed upon strengthening efforts to eliminate child labor in honor of the 2021 World Day Against Child Labour.
September 15, 2021	The Federal Government of Somalia has attended a workshop to officially confirm the findings of an ILO report, setting the ground for a future “National Action Plan to Address the Worst Forms of Child Labor”.
March 10, 2022	The Somali police force collaborated with UNODC to train in preventing trafficking activities in the nation.
January 15, 2023	The Federal Government of Somalia and ILO have implemented Somalia's first-ever “Decent Work Country Program” to manage the enactment of legislation and activities that are relevant to the elimination of child labor in Somalia.

Relevant International Documents

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(resolution 44/25\)](#), adopted by the General Assembly, 20 November 1989
- ILO, [C138 - Minimum Age Convention](#), 1973 (No. 138)
- ILO, [C182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention](#), 1999 (No. 182)
- [Agenda item 66 \(a\)-Resolution](#) adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2019
- [Resolution 2427](#) Adopted by the Security Council at its 8305th meeting, on 9 July



2018

- [African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49](#), Nov. 29, 1999.

Past Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- [UNDP's Capacity-Building Initiatives](#): These were first implemented in 2008 in Somalia aiming to reestablish Somalia's political power and capability following decades of dispute. Mainly, these initiatives focused on strengthening the dominance of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and addressing societal issues like child labor and poverty. These initiatives have a very limited success. Despite the awareness they have raised on the issue, the lack of effective enforcement has hampered the initiatives' efficiency.
- [ILO-Supported Decent Work Programmes](#): First started in 2015, this project is an ongoing project that focuses on the creation of a "National Employment Policy" through fostering dialogue on a global scale and further promoting labor rights. These programs are moderately successful, as they have developed political communication on the issue of child labor. However, due to insufficient resources and some distress faced in terms of security, the implementation has struggled at times.
- [UN Security Council Action on Child Soldiers](#): In the year 2017, the UN SC has strengthened its efforts to address the employment of child soldiers in Somalia through a chain of actions including the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and the Secretary-General's reports on Children and Armed Conflict. These attempts were partially successful since such actions have raised global awareness and received attention from member states, but the remaining challenges in Somalia such as the limited resources and weak governance have yet again hindered the efficacy of the actions.



Solution Alternatives

The creation of local education programs

Due to the lack of resources, the number of big and inclusive educational institutions is no more than the fingers of a hand. In order to increase the accessibility of high-quality education, the resources could be allocated to the establishment of community-based programs. These programs could be personalized for each child's needs and psychological state. Such programs could also include training for children in areas affected by the conflict so that they can improve their both social and academic skills. These programs can be funded by NGOs and local organizations that will be in partnership. In regions having limited infrastructure, digital learning platforms can be utilized.

Establishing economic welfare programs for families

The Implementation of cash transfer programs or welfare programs in which families are subsidized in return for sending their children to school and not allowing them to be engaged in any kind of hazardous labor.

Collaboration with Private Sector

Partnering up with local businesses can help establish a child-free market which would encourage businesses to not support child labor in their supply chains and promote ethical outcomes. This solution could be supported by the ILO.

Useful Links

- <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-charter-rights-and-welfare-child>
- <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/un-debate-kenyan-vice-president-implores-security-council-take-somalia-situation-%E2%80%98seriously%E2%80%99>
- https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/somalia?utm_source
- <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/media/981/file/Somalia-situation-analysis-of-children-in-Somalia-2016-full.pdf>
- <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/>
- https://ilostat.ilo.org/?_afrLoop=1602896017898602&_afrWindowMode=0&_afrWindowId=null#!%40%40%3F_afrWindowId%3Dnull%26_afrLoop%3D1602896017898602%26_afrWindowMode%3D0%26_adf.ctrl-state%3Dmuag7515r_33



- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7U4zbz24HQ&ab_channel=UNICEFUSA
- https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/somalia?utm_source

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