

## The Idle Youth Labor Force in Somalia: A blow to the country's GDP

### KEY POLICY MESSAGES:

1. The Somali population is young; it is estimated that 70% of the population is under 30 year. If the youth are not engaged in productive enterprises, it will have a contrary lasting impact on socio-economic developmental of the country for generations to come.
2. Crime affects Somali youth in an intrinsic level. It is easy for a young impressionable youth with bright future to get entrapped in criminal activities when they are not empowered and engaged, socially, academically and economically.
3. Youth play a vital role in the development of the country, and represent the future of the country, thus there are serious social and economic consequences associated with not addressing the youth who is at the risk of negative circumstances that is detrimental to their future and in return the future of the country.
4. Youth employment can help reduce the rate of poverty to a significant level. When the youth are equipped with essential skills, they can be productive member of society, and be part of the future investment of the country, aiding the nation economically. This will in-turn contributes to the increase employment and productivity of the country and add to the GDP of the nation.
5. Given their high innovative potential, when youth are meaningfully engaged, they are creative, innovative and challenge the status quo and are more likely to find solutions needed to tackle social, environmental and economic challenges.



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#### Productive:

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#### Last Policy Brief:

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## BACKGROUND

### Critical Role:

Somali Youth have had critical and productive role in Somalia, both in public and private sectors, from the onset of founding the independent Somali State in 1960, throughout the successive regimes of both civilian and military governments.

### Violent Youth:

An idle youth with chronic unemployment is a ticking bomb and a danger to the nation as they are attracted to join dangerous groups to do harm, terrorist and violence acts.

The Somali youth have been a shining star throughout Somalia's history. They played a key role in Somalia's road to freedom struggle and independence during the 1950s and 1960s. The Somali Youth established the first political party on May 13, 1943, calling it Somali Youth Club (SYC), and on May 15, 1947 renamed it Somali Youth League (SYL) that fought for the independence of the country in 1960. The SYL are seen as true leaders that have saved the Somali nation from colonization. Their history is common with the youth of today who are always looking for heroes to emulate.

Somali Youth have had critical and productive role in Somalia, both in public and private sectors, from the onset of founding the independent Somali State in 1960, throughout the successive regimes of both civilian and military governments. In the first Somali parliamentary election after independence on 30 March 1964, the Somali Youth League (SYL) party won 56% of the vote, an absolute majority of the parliamentary seats. The Somali youth were also the cornerstone of Somalia's military regime that took power in October 21, 1969. The military regime established many youth organizations such as the Somali Youth Organization (Urukada Dahlinyada Soomaaliyeed), and The Flower of the Revolution (Ubaxa Kacaanka). These youth organizations were formidable force and a symbol of the progress in socio-economic development that was taking root in Somalia, such as access to education, employment and other social services and economic development, made by the Somali military government in 1970s.

Somali youth were also the powerhouse and the leading force of the massive literacy campaign undertak

en by the military regime on March 1974, after the Somali script was written and introduced as the official communication means in Somalia. The literacy campaign was geared toward the rural and Somali nomads, that made up about 80% of the population and later expanded to the illiterate adults in urban centers. It was reported that the literacy campaign was so successful and improved the literacy rate of the Somali people from 5% to over 40%.

However, history had not been kind to Somali youth after the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, the Somali youth have become both the face of the country's failures and its hope in resurrecting it. The opportunity to rescue, re-educate and reorient them to become agents of change is a paramount undertaking of critical importance that the Somali government, civil society and International community (ICs) must pursue collectively.

An idle youth with chronic unemployment is a ticking bomb and a danger to the nation as they are attracted to join dangerous groups to do harm, terrorist and violence acts. These dangerous groups exploit the youth to utilize them as means to kill, maim, rob and rape, and thus destroy the future of the next generation.

If given the right opportunity, Somali youth have the potential to reinvigorate and become the saving grace of the nation. Reeling from a battered self-defeat of war and its aftermath as a country embarking on restoring Somali youth to become productive citizens should be given a priority. There is the potential to inspire the Somali youth to pursue education, employment and creative means to contribute peace and security as well as the development of the country.

### LACK OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

#### **Un Engaged Youth:**

If the youth are not engaged in productive enterprises, they may become involved in crimes and nonproductive activities, contributing to vulnerability of peace and security of the country.

The prolonged conflict and political instability of Somalia have largely destroyed the country's public institutions and infrastructure. Somalia faces a daunting list of security and development challenges. However, the most pressing issue of all for Somalia is addressing the needs of its growing youth. The Somali population is young, where 70% of the population is under 30. Thus, if the youth are not engaged in productive enterprises, they may become involved in crimes and nonproductive activities, contributing to vulnerability of peace and security of the country. On the other hand, Somalia's greatest strength could be its young and growing population.

The post-conflict environment poses specific challenges for Somali youth. Many of the Somali youth have grown up after the collapse of Somalia's central government, for over a quarter of century, amid violence, civil and clan war, deprived from education and employment opportunities youth have been prey to potential terrorism and extremist activities.

The energy of Somali youth, their skills and aspirations are invaluable assets that Somalia cannot afford to squander and helping them to realize their full potential by gaining access to education and employment is a way forward for poverty eradication, sustainable peace, security and development. When youth are engaged and equipped with the necessary skill to sustain a livelihood, it will prevent them from adopting the path of crime, truancy and bad behavior and drug use. Empowerment enables youth to be mindful of bad choices and stay out of unsavory situations. With access to education and economic opportunities a young Somali person can have plenty of choices that lead to good outcomes.

#### **Equipping the Youth:**

When youth are engaged and equipped with the necessary skill to sustain a livelihood, it will prevent them from adopting the path of crime, truancy and bad behavior and drug use.

It can also lead to their improved social skills, good behavior, increased success, greater self-esteem, and powerful useful self-efficacy.

Education, employment and the creation of job opportunities for young people should therefore form a key component of any peace building processes by the Somali government.

The literacy rate for youth is shocking. Only 45% of youth (out of 2.5 Million) between the ages of 15 - 35 can read and write. Also, some of the challenges Somalia may face when it comes to empowering youth is the youth who are not enrolled in school. The figure stands at 69% of youth who are not enrolled in schools due to various challenges in their lives, according to UNFPA's 2016 The Somali Youth in Figures. Female youth may lose their shot for empowerment due to early marriage. 60 % of female youth are married between the ages of 15-35 compared to 45% of youth male, while female youth are married by age 22 compared to 25 years of the male.

These figures need to be taken to account when considering youth empowerment so as to be ready and learn how to engage and include them. Somali youth can contribute to the labor force in one way or another. Somali youth are involved and are already being introduced to the working environment in one or another. From those in rural areas as nomads who take part in animal rearing, to the youth girl who is a second mother in the household involved in rearing siblings, working as a salesperson at a parent's shop and doing household chores. These youth are ready to be involved and hone their everyday skills to a level that benefits individual youth, family and society as a whole.

### VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY

#### Motivating the Youth:

The youth who have nothing to belong to, whether educational institutions, or other motivating activities like sports and business are targeted and recruited and radicalized to kill and maim.

#### The Narratives:

The negative narrative produced specifically to radicalize youth and turn them into violent beings needs to be replaced with narratives that are positive, productive empowering and inclusive for youth.

Somali Youth are deprived from having a normal live due to the endless civil unrest and the absence of strong government institutions that lacks means to provide peace and security, social services, economic and development programs to better the lives of the youth. Many of these youth have also been turned into instruments of war by extremist who exploit them to join their violence and terrorism acts. The youth are vulnerable to various national problems (social ills), including violence and insecurity. In the past years, youth of all ages who are vulnerable and idle or jobless have been exposed to the insecurity of prolonged civil wars and exploitative exclusive clan politics as well as terrorist groups, to their detriment. The youth who have nothing to belong to, whether educational institutions, or other motivating activities like sports and business are targeted and recruited and radicalized to kill and maim. They are the easiest group to radicalize, due to their lack of enough education and void of mentorship programs and a system to deter them from getting involved with extremist groups.

These unsavory dangerous activities have stolen Somali youth from their dreams and opportunities to develop their full potential as productive youth who can become great change makers in the near future.

Somali youth fall prey to the breaking down of society and with the lack of a strong central state which enables extremist groups to recruit youth easier. Under-educated youth who are desperate and jobless may develop believes that extremist groups are selling using Somalia as a country under attack by foreign powers and foreign military such as AMISOM. Extremists promise youth a bright future while introducing extremist

ideology to eradicate the land from invaders. When Somalia's neighbors such as Kenya and Ethiopia send their Military to Somalia, the extremist groups win and flourish. Extremist groups and their recruiters are savvy with technology know-how and are sophisticated in using social media with the use of positive messaging built around a framework of providing an outlet for the romanticized and idealistic youth who is disenfranchised and desperate. These youth are often marginalized economically and educationally and are alienated with no stable income. They don't have access to any means or outlet to vent their frustrations; they also see their future as bleak and are attracted to the income provided by the extremist group. This income maybe the sole reason they join to provide for their family.

In order to overcome being radicalized into the violence of extremist ideology, Somali youth need counter narrative strategies that enhance the critical nature of understanding and questioning issues involving religion, history and politics. Youth also need more positive, inclusive open spaces where critical dialogue can develop. It's important to counter the extremist messages, but it's also imperative that the messaging originate from the communities where the youth are recruited from. Central to the eradication of extremist ideology towards youth is to find solutions that promote positive change through non-violent means, eradicating poverty, empowering youth learning and income generating ideas. The negative narrative produced specifically to radicalize youth and turn them into violent beings needs to be replaced with narratives that are positive, productive empowering and inclusive for youth.

### MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT

#### Opportunities for the Youth:

There are multiple opportunities to make an idle youth, a productive youth so they are not recruited by armed groups and are not a burden attracting multiple bad decision including getting involved in petty crime, rape and extremism.

#### Illegal Migration:

Tahriib in the Somali language means migration, and many youths look into migration as the only option to overcome their empty days of joblessness.

Migration is a dangerous perilous journey, and some end up dying from severe hunger, torture and murder.

Somalia is considered one of the poorest countries in the world with per capita income of only \$226. Its estimated 73% of the population are considered poor, and 43% are considered severely poor. Poverty is not the only challenge facing Somalia, there is also vulnerability due to the civil war and a protracted conflict due to weak political and social instability which remain a big threat for Somalia to reach any meaningful development. Somalia is also considered a young country, with at least 70% of the population under the age of 30.

Somali youth face surmountable challenges that include lack of employment opportunities, access to education and unpreparedness due to poor academic institutions in Somalia and looming poverty. Their skill set and education level isn't ready to help them enter the job market. Even if they were employable with their skill set and formal education, there are unfair employment culture, nepotism and corruption that constantly keep them out of the job market. The weak institutions of the government are unready often to absorb youth from the abyss of idleness. There are multiple opportunities to make an idle youth, a productive youth so they are not recruited by armed groups and are not a burden attracting multiple bad decision including getting involved in petty crime, rape and extremism.

Tahriib in the Somali language means migration, and many youths look into migration as the only option to overcome their empty days of joblessness. Migration is a dangerous perilous journey, and some end up dying from severe hunger, torture and murder. Female migrants face prostitution and sexual exploitation, but most Somali youth have found it to

be the only option to escape the never ending poverty in their lives. They are often blinded by desperation to take note of the multiple danger's migration offers. They are determined on their dream to join the lucky ones in Europe and America, they are blind to the horrific living conditions and the chaos involved. Sometimes they are the only person where all the family hope is placed, so migration is a way to escape endless poverty and for that reason they are willing to risk their lives.

This dangerous culture of youth disappearing only to call from Libya or Sudan has had a devastating effect in families who have often been forced to borrow large sums of money to bail them out of horrific situations. Often times the families are forced to sell their livestock and land or other properties to attempt to rescue their children from well-established human smuggling networks who have in recent years become a booming industry due to the high level of migrant youth from across Africa, Asia and Middle East attempting migration at any cost. Often the outcome is tragic when youth never reach their dream destination and instead face far more tragic situations ending in death in the desert from hunger, thirst, heat, killed by the criminal smuggling networks or when their boat capsizes.

The increasing number of unemployed youths in Somalia poses a potential threat to peace and security. The lack of opportunities in rural areas drives young people into urban centers in the hope of finding a job and a better life. As a result, urban centers are becoming overcrowded and young people are forced to accept low-wage employment or unemployed. To cope with the situations of protracted unemployment,

### Rural Urban Migration:

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### Youth Potential:

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the youth is attracted by to get involved with criminal and violence activists and migration.

Vulnerability linked to the lack of job opportunities can also increase the onset of youth being recruited by criminal networks. One way to overcome the ongoing chronic youth unemployment and idleness is for the government to improve youth access to education, establish vocational trainings and to identify sectors where labor needs are not being addressed, including those related innovation in agriculture, technology, climate change adaptation and sustainability and entrepreneurship.

## YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION

According to the ILO reports, Global youth unemployment is on the rise. Other UN reports also indicate the rise of youth unemployment, particularly during the last decade which is stated to amounts to about half the total unemployment in the world.

Somali youth are susceptible to negative consequences when they are unemployed. Long term unemployment severely affects the youth, with negative consequences on well-being and quality of life. Furthermore, being jobless undermines their trust in institutions and negatively affects their future perspectives of employment, increasing the risks of social exclusion and bad choices. Boosting a healthy innovative Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Somalia for young entrepreneur minded youth is one solution to curb the empty jobless youth.

The system is best done through learning processes based on cross-sector and best practices and peer learning environments. What is missing and is needed desperately

In this paper, SIDRA has conduct interviews with Somali youth, to study the underlining reasons for migration. It was evident from our interviews that employment opportunities, peer pressure and access to quality education as the main reasons of migration.

Economists have stated that because of demographics dividend, manly youth, and the economic growth potential that result from shifts in a population's age structure contributes to about 15% of the GDP. Thus, the brain drain due to the youth migration poses long lasting impact on the economic development of the country, Somalia.

are innovative, entrepreneurial, an innovative youth with originality and outside the box kind of thinking that are able to come up with ideas that are contextual in its originality.

It's also good practice to help idle youth with advising, coaching and mentoring. Exposing them to positive and inspiring examples of entrepreneurs and small businesses in the local business communities for good practices and lessons learned. To foster great entrepreneurship arena with success, access to credit, private capital through banks and other financing is a much needed aspect of empowering youth through creating their own business. Crowd funding is another way to raise capital for youth to enter the entrepreneurship environment.

Its best practice to create and involve key stakeholders to create a healthy, well-functioning entrepreneurial ecosystem. Given its high innovative potential, youth entrepreneurship may have multiple effects on the level of employment by creating additional

job opportunities other than merely the self-employment of the individual. Stakeholders that must engage youth from idleness to meaningful enterprises may include universities,

research centers, training providers, SMEs, large private companies, non-governmental organizations and the Government having youth and youth entrepreneurship as targets.

### EMPOWERING SOMALI YOUTH

The need to empower youth for a better tomorrow leads to financial elevation as well as positive gains in their standard of living. Awareness is a key factor in empowering Somali youth, with guidance towards developing a wholesome outlook in life.

Empowerment of Somali youth is a necessary part of a process of inclusion where youth could be strong voices and advocates of peace and prosperity of Somalia and could be a positive addition in accordance with the values and ideals of Somali society. Somali society and government must face to overcome and confront the challenges of the future of Somali youth in Somalia and youth must be seen as part of the long term solution of the future of Somalia.

Everyone from top government officials, politicians, community leaders, teachers and parents need to wear a fostering able mindset and give a sense of ownership and leadership to Somali youth. Youth must be allowed to express their ideas from small to large, from selling a few candies to starting a start-up company. Youth must be given the right resources to believe their voice matters and that they matter. We must allow them to have a sense of power and purpose to flourish and be ready to be the leaders of tomorrow.

Somalia being a country with such a youthful population, leaders must realize Somali youth are a critical mass where great change can occur when resources and support are effectively leveraged to target this population. Young Somalis are malleable and always enthusiastic to try new things and learn. They are ready to grow and adapt and develop new innovations that can move Somalia forward, but they must be given the opportunity and necessary tools to do so.

The future of Somalia's development is rooted in its youth; this is an untapped human resource that has potential to develop the country. It's of paramount importance to include youth and allow them to have their say at the decision-making power. Impactful and transformational development cannot occur if youth are not fully integrated and empowered as change agents in the development process of the country. Youth in Africa will be the leaders of the next Boom of the continent; Somalia needs to allow youth to be their own drivers of their own development. While empowering youth is paramount, the statistics about youth are staggering when it comes to educated youth who can lead the path to the right development.

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## CONCLUSION

### Youth Unemployment:

The lack of employment and economic opportunities both in rural and urban areas means that young people are facing desperate choices, leaving them prone to frustration, insecurity, and recruitment by armed groups of all types.

### Peer Pressure:

Youth vulnerability also leads to youth thinking to change their own circumstances by any means necessary, sometimes through peer pressure to migrate and find better life and prosperity abroad so they could live the lives they see on social media.

Youth are considered a vibrant and powerful potential human capital for social and economic changes. They are the main drivers of economic growth. The demographics of the world population is changing, today, there are more young people than ever before in the world. Thus, it's essential to take into account the youth perspective into the political and economic decision making to ensure that the needs of youth are effectively addressed.

The lack of employment and economic opportunities both in rural and urban areas means that young people are facing desperate choices, leaving them prone to frustration, insecurity, and recruitment by armed groups of all types and, increasingly, desperately seeking opportunities through migration to other countries through dangerous journey.

Somali youth are at crossroad with surviving their own existence in Somalia, the manner in which the Somali society deals with its youth has also been having a detrimental impact on youth and is in need of major overhaul. Somali youth believe or feel unimportant due to society that places great emphasis on age, the economically dependent youth command little respect and are seen as powerless. By empowering youth with education, employment, economic opportunities and systems of inclusion, youth are able to gain immediate respect and have access strengthening their sense of self-worth. The underlying root causes of youth vulnerability that could lead to radicalization, bad behavior and criminality is due to unemployment, illiteracy, and political/economical marginalization. As a result, youth are attracted to extremist organization using romanticized ideology that includes chang

ing their own conditions through violence and a promise to have strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging.

Youth vulnerability also leads to youth thinking to change their own circumstances by any means necessary, sometimes through peer pressure to migrate and find better life and prosperity abroad so they could live the lives they see on social media with people posing in big malls, with cars, nice cloths and great life style and to pursue a life free from violence and war in Somalia.

The main reasons for attempting dangerous migration or joining extremist groups are rooted in being neglected through, lack of opportunities to improve the quality of their lives, joblessness, no hope in improving their lot in society and being ignored by clan politics that has no space for youth voice. Similar to their counterparts across the world, Somali youth desire a different future for themselves, one in which they can make a decent living in peace and have decision making position in issues that matter to them and their families.

Private institutions, government miniseries, and all stakeholders involved in empowering youth need to respond to the needs of young people to better society as whole. Marginalizing youth further can exasperate the grave manner in which they can gravitate towards violence as a means to an end. Youth empowerment should be at the center of Somalia's national development agenda. The current clan-based electoral system must make room to include youth for any meaningful empowerment to occur.



### **International Partners:**

One way to achieve that is by the Somali Government, civil society, and international partners providing vocational training to youth at risk and equipping them with education, skills, and employment opportunities.

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Engaging youth with entrepreneurship and innovation is imperative not only as part of the national development plan of Somalia, but also for personal development on an individualistic level. Youth could be used as strong change agents if the right tools are utilized. The East Asian experience from the rapid economic growth of what is commonly referred to as The East Asian Miracle was attributed to its demographic dividend, in which youth was mainly credited for the economic boom.

Somali youth today could be a major resource for not only development of financial prosperity but for being an

impactful agent for social change. Although it's not fully realized, youth of Somalia today hold such an importance because these millennials are savvy, technologically capable, exposed to a wide range of technology that could become an asset, but they face hurdles on a daily basis, with their energy and know how not being fully utilized in the right direction.

Youth can be active participants of development goals of Somalia; to give them a chance to shine is to move the needle forward in an inclusive sustainable manner.

Somali leaders must learn how to harness the full potential of Somali youth to create hope and stability in youth. Somali leaders in all sectors must also bring innovative ways to channel youth dividends into economic gains and social transformation, Somalia's prosperity, stability and overall wellbeing significantly rests in its largely youth population.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Role of Parents & Community:**

The role of parents, religious leaders, clan leaders, media and civil society in promoting the importance of solving conflicts through negotiation and peaceful ways should be strengthened to dissuade youth joining extremist and violent group.

- The Government, community, and religious leaders, need to undertake awareness raising campaigns to create awareness against the dangers of violence extremism to promote peace, security and economic development to dissuade youth to join these extremist and violent groups;
- The role of parents, religious leaders, clan leaders, media and civil society in promoting the importance of solving conflicts through negotiation and peaceful ways should be strengthened to dissuade youth joining extremist and violent group;
- The Somali Governments should devote more resources to raise public awareness about the dangers of violent extremism and develop policies and plans against violence and extremist groups curbing youth to join them or through forced recruitments;
- Those youth that were ex-combatants seeking rehabilitation, must find a strong functioning programs that has the tools and means for socio-economic reintegration, to encourage those seeking sustainable reintegration into society and return to productive life;
- Using social media to produce counter-messaging and rehabilitation and re-education messaging;
- Strengthening poverty reduction programs to dissuade youth from falling to extremism due to poverty;
- Free technical and vocational training centers should be established for youth to teach soft skills that would enhance youth employment and economic opportunities;
- Creating youth centers such as youth forums, youth councils and organizations to put forward their ideas to strengthen and encourage the youth to participate and include in political and economic decision-making table and gives them influence;
- Building sports centers and involving youth in recreational activities such as sports, and
- Establishing innovation hubs and entrepreneurial clubs to encourage youth to put forward their creative ideas

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### About SIDRA

SIDRA is a registered independent, non-profit Research and Policy Analysis Think Tank based in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia.

### Our Vision

Somalia in which social justice prevails and inclusive economic growth benefits all and improves the well being of all people.

### Our Mission

A centre of development and research that generates relevant and original knowledge for dynamic policy environment support, institutional capacity development and alliance.

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