

Kenya Somalis: The Shift from "Greater Somalia" to Integration with Kenya

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This paper will not go into details about the history of the coming of Somalis into Kenya.¹ It suffices here to mention that the seventh Region of independent Kenya was named in 1963 the North Eastern Region and was inhabited mainly by Somali pastoralists. The Somalis lived on animal products, mainly camels, which they used not only for transport but for its meat and milk.

The North-Eastern Province is 127,470 sq.km. in size and is considered to be the third largest in Kenya. Administratively, the North-Eastern region is divided into three districts with a total of 21 Divisions, 53 locations and 110 sub-locations. The population of the region is estimated at 600,000 persons, giving a population density of 5 per sq.mile (Farah 1993: 40). The main urban centres of the province are Garissa, Wajir and Mandera.

One of the main reasons why the former NFD Somalis struggled to join "Greater Somalia" on the eve of Kenya's independence was the total dissatisfaction with their socio-economic position since the establishment of the British administration in Kenya in 1895. The policy pursued towards the Somalis of the NFD was to "leave them alone" and not to bother so much about their welfare. After World War I it was discovered that in order to pacify the Somalis, the British administration in Kenya had to reconsider their pre-War policy and adopt a more forward-looking one for the period 1916-1925.

One of the most effective means by which the pastoral Somalis could have been brought to order was by the adoption of peaceful measures which in essence meant a reconsideration of their economic and social needs. Most urgent of these was the provision of adequate water supplies for their stock. The administration efforts in this direction amounted to sending first J.H. Parkinson and H.E. Evans to undertake a four months, survey in Jubaland and the NFD, and then later, in March 1919, Major P.J. Jennings to report on the Afmadu wells and well-boring in Jubaland.

Jennings pointed out a no serious development from a tribal, commercial, or agricultural standpoint is possible in the area without also a solution to the problem of water supply. He was, further, of the opinion that a great deal could be done by dams and reservoirs and the erection of breakwaters in dried water courses that flood in the rain season (Al-Safi 1972: 78). He ended his report with a plea: "I

¹ This is covered by the different contributions by I.M. Lewis (1965; 1960). Also see Mahasin A.G.H. Al-Safi (1972).

described the Somali as a hard worker for Africa. He is perhaps too intelligent but show him a course which benefits his purse and his race and he will never leave it. It must not be lost sight of that before any marked progress can be effected the government must assist..."(Al-Safi 1972: 79).

But despite his efforts, neither Nairobi nor the Colonial office responded. The failure to provide enough water for the Somali stock was a major fact in the economic stagnation of the Somali countryside. In addition, the Kenya administration of the day had equally failed to provide routes and markets for an essentially stock-trading community. The Somalis possessed considerable potential wealth in cattle, camel, goats, sheep and donkeys which needed special attention regarding markets and supervision. It was usually argued that Jubaland and the NFD were simply a drain on the economy of the country and therefore, investment in the region was not worthwhile.

Another area where the Kenya government failed to satisfy the Somalis was in the field of education. Major Hasting Horne, who increasingly advocated a forward-looking policy for the Somalis after his appointment as acting senior commissioner in 1920, did not hesitate to state his opinion on the issue of the education of Somalis:

...the Somali is anxious to be instructed, can we assist him?

Again he did not receive a positive reply from Nairobi, firstly because of a lack of funds and secondly because the fate of Jubaland had not been decided at that time. But in 1925 Jubaland was ceded to Italy. On the eve of cession Major Horne emphatically stated that "the chief reason why we have never really gained the hearts of the Jubaland Somali was because of our inability to help him in that direction" (Al-Safi 1972: 85).

It was obvious, then, that the British administration in Kenya had failed to pursue a positive policy of economic and social development for the Somali-inhabited region of Kenya in the post-World War I period.

This failure can be traced not only in economic and social matters but also in the area of political administration. In 1909 the Somalis were divided between two administrative constituents: the NFD, in which the Mandera, Garissa and Wajir were part, and Tanaland province. By 1918 Jubaland was established. Then by 1924 Tanaland province ceased to exist and Garissa subsequently became part of the NFD. In 1925, following agreement between Britain and Italy, Jubaland was ceded to Italy. In 1933 Turkaua became part of the NFD. These areas inhabited by Somali pastoralists continued to be part of the NFD until new changes came about in Kenya in 1962 (Farah 1993: 96).

In addition to continuous changes in the NFD, there was very little in the way of civil authority in the area. The Somali pastoralists were not effectively enough penetrated by the central institutional system to warrant any change in the existing forms of their social structures. As Farah states, the area lacked modern education and opportunities to be influenced by modern features of political development which might have been introduced through the local native councils, and hence the

penetration of the area was weak, resulting in a strengthening of ethnicity among the Somalis (Farah 1993: 57).

When, after World War II, a development plan for the colony was drawn up, the administration was obliged to reconsider the positions of Somalis: "unless adequate attention is given to the NFD Somalis it will become a menace - or at least a serious nuisance to the southern half of Kenya" (KNA/PC/NFD 2/1/3 cof., p. 1).

Efforts to solve the problems of water supply, grazing and marketing and the provision of medical facilities did not materialize. The Somalis were very disappointed with the outcome of the post-World War II development plan. Moreover, the promise by the Governor of the colony, Sir Philip Mitchel, that the war efforts of the tribesmen of the NFD were to be followed by substantial works, including expenditure of \$5,000,000 on water supplies, medical and educational services, and trade facilities,² proved a dream that had never come true.

The existing state of affairs resulting from the lack of political, social and economic cohesion with the rest of the country made the Somalis think seriously about seceding from Kenya to join the newly-independent Somali Republic in 1960. The possibility, therefore, of the integration of the Somalis within Kenya, on the eve of its independence, looked rather remote. This was affirmed by the formation in Mogadishu on 15th May, 1943, of the Somali Youth League (SYL), whose professed aim was to unite all the Somalis living in the Horn of Africa:

As soon as it comes into power there will be no intertribal boundaries but all Somalis will live together happily and wander at will through the Horn of Africa (KNA/PC 1/1/9 Annual Report 1947).

The period 1960-1962 witnessed continued efforts by Somalis to gain recognition of a separate identity for the territory which they inhabited in Kenya. The NFD commission, the Regional Boundaries commission and the Constituencies Delimitation Commission visited the area. Despite the efforts made by Somalis both in Kenya and in the Somali Republic to press Britain for action in their favour, they did not succeed. Duncan Sandys, the commonwealth and colonial secretary, announced in Nairobi on 8th March, 1963, that the predominantly Somali-inhabited area of the NFD should not secede but should become Kenya's seventh region.

The Somalis both in Kenya and the Republic reacted vigorously, and diplomatic relations between Britain and Somalia were severed on 14th March, 1963. In Britain, Sandys's statement did not pass unnoticed. M.A. Bottomely (Middlesbrough East) told the Commons:

It will be most unfortunate if the government leaves the situation where it is, to be settled between Kenya and Somalia at the time when Kenya becomes independent. This will be a very heavy burden on two developing countries, and I would have thought the last thing we wanted to do was to make it difficult for them to look after their internal affairs (**The Times** 13/3/1963).

² **East African Standard**. The governor's visit to NFD and Turkana, 28-2-1947.

At this stage it became obvious that a border dispute between the neighbouring countries was inevitable and it was at this juncture that the question assumed more importance in the general African scene, though attempts by the Somali government to bring the issue before the African states started well before this (Drysdale n.d., pp. 146-153; Lewis 1965: 195-199).

The Somalis were persistent in presenting the issue to the African world. On 8th February, 1963, Muhamed Aden Muro, leading a delegation of political representatives at the Afro-Asian Conference in Moshi Tanganyika, referred to the NFD secessionist demands as follows:

...We hope that this conference will impress upon our brothers from Kenya the danger of maintaining artificial colonial boundaries... (**Somali News** 8/2/1963; **The Times** 8/2/1963).

This insistence on secession on the part of the Somalis in the period immediately following Kenya's independence did not continue for long. With the adoption by the Somali government in Mogadishu of a policy of peaceful co-existence with its neighbours, the cooling down of armed resistance and the increasing orientation of the territory as part of Kenya, the attitude of Somalis in the North-Eastern Region of Kenya was gradually changing. As M.I. Farah has rightly observed, articulation of Somali political ethnicity has weakened. This weakness, as he suggests, could be attributed firstly to the weakening of support from the Somali Republic, and secondly to the fact that the fighting force of the secessionist movement had been brought under control by the Somali Republic. Farah has also attributed this to the change of attitude of influential figures such as chiefs, members of parliament, traders and representatives of local authorities (Farah 1993: 92). These groups, by virtue of their position, were also able to influence others in favour of their views against the demand for secession.

At an official level the authorities in Nairobi since the independence of Kenya have also made headway in their attempt to penetrate administratively the pastoralist Somali community of the North-Eastern province by spreading further the foundations of centralized institutions through the provincial administration. The government has a strong interest in ensuring that economic development affects all parts of the country and is not unduly concentrated in Nairobi and Mombasa. This need for a regional policy was stressed in the second plan for the country of 1970-74.

At the economic level, the Kenya Official Publication, in discussing the development of the pastoral areas of the country, admits that:

For a long time Kenya's dry range country was regarded as being more of a liability than an asset. Outside the commercially developed large-scale ranches, there was little social or technological progress... They received little or no development assistance. In fact, this entire population was isolated from the rest of country in "closed districts" (East Africa Publishing House 1973: 57).

The North-Eastern Province is the third largest of Kenya's provinces, and is the greatest problem area of the country. It offers few prospects of any kind for further development. Unlike the other provinces, the whole area is made up of low potential land unsuitable for cultivation. Natural resources have not yet been discovered (East Africa Publishing House 1973: 59).

One of the concerns of the post-independence period has been the rectification of imbalance in the standard of living between the pastoral areas and the rest of the country. Plans were drawn up for a major programme of development, both social and economic. A livestock development and a range management division were set up within the Ministry of Agriculture (Meck 1971 pp. 197-198). The importance of creating state routes and improving water supplies was considered the key to improving the well-being of the people.

But the problem has been that the mean annual rainfall of 230mm in Mendera, 256 mm in Wajir, and 300mm in Garissa leaves no hope for developing agriculture. In this difficult environment, migration to advanced areas seems to be the only means of improving living conditions, which means that the population of the province is gradually decreasing. In addition, the Somalis themselves prefer not to cultivate at all, relying entirely on livestock products for their livelihood. The pastoral nature of Somali agricultural production has limited their output for the most part to animal products. Milk is the primary food, supplemented by occasional meat, grains and fruits. The bartering of sheep and goats, and the trading of various foods with neighbouring peoples and the coastal towns has constituted an important activity in the province (Talbot n.d.).

It is obvious that, in contrast to political and administrative changes, the economic changes introduced into the area in the post-independence period in an attempt to develop pastoral resources has been far below expectations. The state has failed to organize the territory in order to pattern changes based on the social composition of the various groups. In other words, it has failed to mobilize the traditional Somali units of social organization for the purpose of economic development. Farah concludes that:

even though attempts were made to develop the major constituents of the central institutional system i.e. economic institutions through which resources such as water, pasture, health and marketing facilities were channelled to the area, commitments were not sustained by the state to warrant widely-spread forms of appreciation for the state economic activities in the area, with the rate of appreciation among the camel pastoralists perhaps reaching the lowest form (Farah 1993: 147).

As far as education is concerned there was a spurt in the number of children attending primary school immediately after independence, but fees were still required, and growth in enrolment was not as great as might have been. When fees for the first four years were abolished enrolment grew in 1979. Nevertheless, the Somali North-Eastern Province still figured lowest for all children receiving primary education.

In 1967 the North-Eastern Province was lagging behind in education, ranking eighth in primary education and also ranking eighth in secondary education compared to the rest of the Provinces. The per capita recurrent expenditure on education in the province in 1973/74 was 0.87, ranking fifth, i.e. the lowest of all the provinces (Bigsten 1980).

Bigsten has, in consequence, pointed out that educational benefits are being distributed in favour of the economically and politically powerful districts (Bigsten 1980: 151) and provinces in the country to the detriment of the underprivileged, such as those in the North-Eastern Province.

Meck, discussing the state of education in the North-Eastern Province, has pointed out that the local authorities have lacked the necessary income to improve these disadvantageous conditions. He adds that, compared to other provinces, the situation of the NFD has become deplorable. In addition, in the few years following independence the security situation in the NFD of Kenya has certainly had a negative impact on school attendance, while long walking distances and high school fees have continued to be the main reason hindering satisfactory enrolment figures. Meck points also to the extremely high average of untrained teachers in the whole Province, amounting to 38% (Meck 1971: 140-41).

Given such a situation, Meck is of the opinion that it is unlikely that in the next twelve years this backward province will reach the level of development projected for the whole of Kenya under optimal conditions (Meck 1971: 142).

The situation has been by no means different with regard to health services in the North-Eastern Region in the period following independence. The province received relatively few resources. As in the case of the education and health services, resources have been concentrated in the more developed areas (Bigsten 1980: 151). The province had the lowest hospital bed population rates within Kenya (0.4). It is as low as 0.2 in Mandera, 0.4 in Garissa, and rises to 0.7 in Wajir. In 1968/69 there was a bed deficit of 88, rising to about 178 in 1980.

However, the Area Handbook series of Kenya gives a slightly better picture in 1987, stating that in 1980 about 57 per cent of the 254 rural health units had a rural health centre at their headquarters. Roughly 23 per cent had hospitals and about 20.5 per cent had dispensaries. Yet, as Meck has rightly concluded, the special economic and demographic nature of the NFD Province requires special governmental measures to improve the overall conditions.

Despite the slow rate of development in the Somali-inhabited region of the North-Eastern Province compared to the conditions in the rest of Kenya's provinces, no doubt the Kenya-Somalis have fared a lot better than their counterparts in the Somali Republic. In the 1960's when Somalia became independent, followed shortly by Kenya, the rate of political, economic and social development in the two countries was by no means equal.

Since independence Somalia has been constantly affected by the aftermath of border conflicts with its neighbours as a result of its dream of a "Greater Somalia". This has acted negatively in the area of economic and political development. Its clashes with Ethiopia in the period 1960-64, culminating in the Ogaden crisis of

1977/78, the influx of refugees as a result of these wars, and the incidence of political instability since Siad Barre's regime, have all greatly shaken up Somalia.

In Kenya, on the other hand, Somalis have found themselves far more secure economically, socially and politically. The Kenya-Somali attitude towards secession has gradually been changing. Prospects for education, health services and economic development, though slow as we have pointed out, are more promising in Kenya than in Somalia. In addition, the political instability which has prevailed in Somalia in recent years, has not only made further prospects of the integration of Somalis within Kenya more feasible but also allowed a further influx of Somalis into Kenyan territory.

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