

IPCS PAPER

Confronting Khat: Strategies for Social Change

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INTRODUCTION

The leaves of Khat, a narcotic and stimulant plant, are widely consumed by the populations of the countries in the eastern part of Africa, including the entire Somali-speaking region in the Horn of Africa. It is also used by the people of Yemen, the cradle of Khat, which is located at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.¹ The leaves are chewed for hours on end, usually in tea shops or in specially furnished mafrashes, and their juice is swallowed. What is left of the leaves is usually spit out at the end of the chewing session. The user gets a feeling of elation and false security comparable to that of marijuana, cocaine, and other habit-forming drugs. As its effect wears off, a painful hang-over usually sets in, an experience often accompanied by an intense hankering for more Khat. This highly addictive shrub poses what many people consider to be a major – if not the most serious – threat to the health, economy, and social values of those who chew it as well as the livelihoods of the many families whose members are living with the addicts.²

Though it is prevalent in other parts of the region, its effect on Somaliland is exceptionally damaging because of its proximity to Ethiopian growers and the ease with which massive amounts of it come into the country every day; the drug is a problem that endangers the economic and social survival of Somaliland because millions of dollars flow into Ethiopia as a direct result of its consumption and also because it causes other serious problems. Yet the Somaliland government has been either unable or unwilling to recognize the dangers of the drug let alone put in place a regulatory framework to avert those dangers. There is no government agency or any other type of body specifically empowered to regulate trade in this highly destructive commodity; nor has there been any attempt on the part of the government to come to terms with its social, cultural, or health challenges.³

Somaliland is the largest market for Khat.⁴ The high figure recorded by the Somaliland Department of Customs at the Ministry of Finance in 2015 regarding the volume of Khat imported into the country gives us an indication of how the Somaliland government, with all its institutions, has failed to tackle the problem; it has been unable to control, or at least

regulate, the flow of Khat into the country, thereby reducing its consumption and minimizing its negative impact on the people and the national economy. The high rate of unemployment and underemployment and the absence of strong law enforcement mechanisms make Somaliland people vulnerable⁵ to the intrusions of any foreign and local traders, particularly those that deal in Khat. Most of the foreign beneficiaries of the Khat transactions are Ethiopians, but other regional Khat traders - Kenyans for instance - have expressed their interest in exploiting the potential market in Somaliland, a development which could exacerbate the already worsening situation of Khat consumption in the country.⁶

The track record of the Khat trade shows its increase in volume year after year, with the last two decades or so being the worst. For instance, in 2015, Somaliland imported over 35 million kgs from Ethiopia, which makes Somaliland the leading market for Ethiopia's Khat. It is true that some Somalilanders derive income from the trade. According to a Somaliland Customs Report (2015)⁷ the Khat trade plays a significant role in the economy, providing employment for a substantial segment of the society; in addition, it brings in much-needed revenue to the government. However, these benefits are more than offset by the magnitude of its ill effects. It is worth noting that Khat, for example, has put a serious strain on the already scarce domestic incomes of families and the limited resources of this poor, unrecognized nation.

In pre-civil war times, the consumption of Khat was much more limited⁸ – in two ways: 1) the time allocated for chewing as much by the users themselves as by society at large was rarely more than two or three hours a day, usually between 2:00 and 5:00 in the afternoon; it was considered unseemly by most people to chew in the morning and during the night; 2) it was largely an urban phenomenon; that tacit understanding has changed over the past three decades. Currently chewing time is much more extended, covering both daylight and night-time hours. The stigma previously attached to the idea of being seen with Khat outside the afternoon is gone; in addition, its range has gone far beyond towns and currently covers the country as a whole. It is chewed

- mostly by men - on a more or less daily basis not only in major cities like Hargeisa, Berbera, Burao, Borama, Erigavo and Las Anod, but also in remote villages and in most parts of the countryside, a practice which has had an enormously negative impact on production of livestock, the backbone of Somaliland's economy. To be more precise, males in the rural areas, who would normally be obligated to take care of the livestock and look after other family members, are no longer taking these responsibilities seriously; instead, most of them are busy chewing Khat. Their daily activities revolve around travelling to and from one or another of the many small encampments which dot the countryside and sitting in shabby, makeshift huts for prolonged periods, chewing the drug and chatting with one another.⁹ In the meantime, the females and the children¹⁰ are left behind to take on the responsibility of herding nearly all the livestock and protecting it from predatory animals. For this reason, Khat is a major contributor to weakening of society's social, economic, and cultural structure and its stock of values in both rural areas and urban centers.¹¹

As is suggested above, the heavy burden of Khat consumption falls disproportionately on women. Indeed, women have always been vulnerable to any kind of exploitation and abuse by men because of the low social status accorded them – an inequality which is deeply rooted in the customs practiced by the society for centuries.¹² Somali society is known for its patriarchal nature, and a gender gap has always existed in it. The problem of Khat has greatly widened the gender gap and has exposed women to new challenges; they have become the primary victims of the ill effects of Khat use. The impact of Khat on society is, therefore, highly gendered: women and men are not equally affected.¹³ This emanates from the social roles given to the women, which are believed to be natural just like bearing children or breastfeeding. Hence women face gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities more acutely than do males.¹⁴ The men's abrogation of their traditional roles and responsibilities because of Khat consumption is giving greater weight to the argument that Somali society is profoundly biased against women.

The upshot of all this is that the problem of Khat trade and consumption is a multidimensional one with strong political, social, cultural, and economic components. Many social and economic crises in Somaliland are traceable to Khat as a causal and correlational variable. As a direct result of its use, there is a reduction in income, families are collapsing and cultural and social norms are eroding. The multidimensional impacts of Khat, however, are differently distributed among several registers in the socio-cultural structure, with age, class, income group, occupation, and gender factoring indifferently. The extent of the impact of Khat, therefore, depends on various socio-economic factors which are context specific. Some individuals or families can be more susceptible to the impact of Khat than others. The end-product of all this, though, is that the family structure is being greatly weakened, with many families either disintegrating or being on the verge of collapse; consequently the society's general health, cohesion, and stability – indeed Somaliland national

security – are at risk.

Given all these factors, Somaliland must come to terms with this national disaster. The government must design strategies, adopt policies, and enact laws to solve the problem. Such an initiative calls for stringent regulations and law-enforcement mechanisms; it also calls for a robust nation-wide awareness-raising campaign to inform the youth and the public at large of the dangers of Khat for the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the Somaliland people and the capacity of the state itself.¹⁵ Finally, it calls for a more even-keeled trade agreement between Somaliland and the neighboring countries, especially Ethiopia.

The problems of Khat are multifaceted, and there is no one single explanation and logical point of departure for its diagnostic analysis. While some view it as a source of state revenue and income for families, others characterize it as a disaster of enormous proportions. The views of the writers of this article are closer to the latter position than to the former. The central objective of this research, therefore, is to help devise the necessary state-led strategies and policies that are needed to stem, or at least minimize, the negative impacts of Khat both on the social and the economic well-being of this great nation. If due consideration is not given to the growing problem of Khat trade and consumption, the nation's future will remain uncertain, and the next generation will be at great risk.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study essentially and largely relied on qualitative methodology of data collection. The data was compiled from different sources representing various segments of both political and civil society: they included government officials, intellectuals, journalists, religious figures, the youth, women, Khat traders, mental health professionals, and mental rehabilitation care givers; the data was collected largely through the use of recorded interviews. The data collection project covered Hargeisa, Borama and Kala Baydh. The latter houses the second largest customs office after Berbera. The study relied on both primary and secondary data.

KHAT: CONSTRUCTING OR DECONSTRUCTING THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

Prior to the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, trading in and consuming Khat were banned from the entire Somali territory following a decree issued by the military government in Mogadishu in the 1980s. The decree stipulated that selling Khat or chewing it was an illegal activity and that the breach of this statute was a crime punishable by imprisonment. Law enforcement units were specifically mobilized to go after those who were selling or chewing Khat.¹⁶ Success was not always guaranteed – in fact it was at best patchy - but at least there was a recognition that this was a dangerous drug which had to be combated aggressively. However, in the post-civil-war period, Khat demand quadrupled in the Somali and Somaliland markets; it is true that the vast

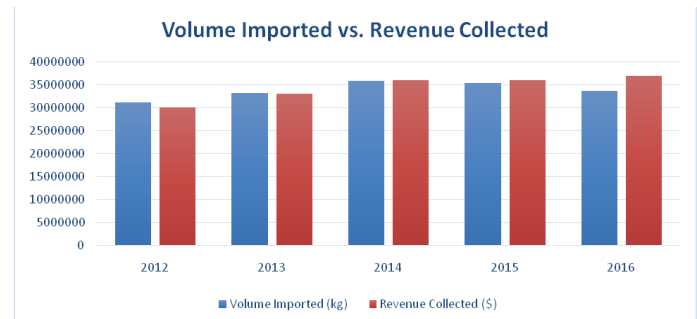
increase in volume was at least in part due to the chaotic state of affairs that obtained during the civil war years. But after the declaration of Somaliland as a sovereign state, no attempt was made by the new government to outlaw or criminalize the trade in Khat. Nor was there any indication that the successive Somaliland governments viewed Khat as a social, economic, or health problem. Consequently, although its volume has diminished somewhat in recent months as a result of the tensions between the Somalis and the Oromos in eastern Ethiopia, its consumption has been a fast-growing trend across the entire country. It must be asked why this has been the case.

The answer at least in part lies in the fact that the increase in volume generates some revenue for an internationally unrecognized state starved of hard currency. The Somaliland customs division in Borama has reported that, before the Somali-Oromo conflict, around 300–400 kgs of Khat used to get into Borama and the surrounding districts every day but that this figure has dropped to 200 kgs as a result of the conflict; that reduction in volume and revenue, however, is likely to be temporary. In the Borama area, the government normally secures around 33 million Somaliland shillings a day, which is equivalent to \$3,474.¹⁷ Similarly, at the Kala Baydh customs house, around 590 million Somaliland shillings, which is equivalent to \$65,000, is levied as tax on Khat every day.¹⁸ It is also the case that the trade and consumption of Khat play a significant role in the Somaliland economy by providing employment for many families. But these gains, which are a fraction of the total economy of Somaliland, come at an enormous cost to the economy as a whole. For instance, in 2012 and the four subsequent years, the Somaliland government secured revenues estimated at around 37 million US dollars. This figure is inversely proportional to the negative impact of the large volume imported into the country, with a vast amount of money spent on Khat by its consumers at home. That money goes directly to Ethiopia in the form of dollars, enormously weakening the fragile Somaliland economy. The volume of Khat imported has increased at an alarmingly high rate; in 2016 alone, for instance, the custom office recorded the importation of around 33 million kgs of Khat into Somaliland markets, and Somalilanders spent around \$620 million on Khat 2015 alone.¹⁹

The upshot of all this is that, considered from the economic point of view, before we even examine the social and health risks of this addictive drug, the impact of Khat trade and consumption is crippling. At the same time, the Ethiopian economy is greatly boosted by virtue of the export of Khat. The fact is that Khat is Ethiopia's third largest export product, after coffee and oil seeds, and Somaliland is its main consumer.²⁰ An indication of how much money is wasted on Khat by Somalilanders is given by the fact that the inhabitants of Burao alone spend the equivalent of around 54,500 US dollars on it every single day.²¹ This means that the amount of money spent on Khat by the residents of just one city is close to the annual revenue secured by the government through the taxation of Khat. This narcotic drug is draining the meager resources and poses one of the most

serious threats to the country's socio-economic wellbeing, impeding its progress. Therefore, it is imperative that the growing danger of Khat both for the economy and for the social cohesion of the Somaliland people be given the urgent attention it needs.

The following figure shows the volume and the amount of revenue collected from Khat import for five consecutive years (2012–2016).



Source: Customs Department, Ministry of Finance, 2017

The adverse effect of Khat on the economy takes a variety of forms, which include inflation, economic disparities, gender inequality, loss of productivity, and corruption. In some cases, the problem of Khat has deepened already existing socio-economic pathologies. The flight of dollars from Somaliland to Ethiopia has greatly weakened the Somaliland shilling, a development which has caused double-digit inflation.²² As a result, the price of food items and other necessities – most of which are imported like Khat itself – has soared; while the inflation has affected the country as a whole, the members of a large segment of society who are permanently stuck in the lowest economic bracket are finding it difficult to make ends meet. The hardest hit are the traditionally most vulnerable groups: the socially marginalized groups, the poor, and women. The contribution of males to their families' incomes has decreased dramatically. Consequently, many women find themselves in a situation where they have to generate income for the household through the creation of small businesses, selling milk, fruits, and even Khat itself.²³ Hence the exploitation of women has taken a new form. They continue to do the maternal and other types of domestic work normally reserved for women, but now a large number of them are forced to carry out the tasks that were traditionally done by men – all because of Khat. Indeed, the poor and the women absorb the earliest and most damaging impact of Khat.

The consumption of Khat has also led to a drastic reduction in productivity in both towns and rural areas, while also depleting the scarce resources in other ways; on the one hand, hard currency is spent on Khat; on the other hand, many man-hours that could have been invested in productive activity are wasted on chewing. In effect, the members of a large part of the national manpower – mostly males – that would normally constitute the mainstay of the economy no longer contribute to it but rather weaken it. In the countryside, this trend has caused a reduction of livestock and livestock products²⁴, and in towns Khat-chewing men are basically a burden on both their families and the economy.²⁵ For example,

chewers who work in the ministries and other government institutions continually underperform; among the most common effects of Khat chewing is insomnia, which prevents the Khat user from sleeping during the normal sleeping hours; it is only in the third quarter of the night that he/she doses off. Such a person tends to find it difficult to get up in the early morning to perform his/her official duties. Very often, if the person eventually musters enough energy to make it to the office, the typical addict's hang-over and inertia, as well as the desire to get hold of more Khat for the afternoon and night, further erode his/her capacity to work through the eight required hours. Thus Khat consumption is a critical factor in the inefficiency that is so prevalent in government institutions, inducing a very poor work ethic.²⁶

The most potentially insidious impact of Khat use on the economy – and ultimately on the political system – takes the form of rampant corruption.²⁷ The unchecked flow of Khat into the Somaliland markets has been at least in part due to fragile governance institutions. This fragility, combined with the absence of committed, visionary leaders, has bred pervasive dysfunctionality in the government and has in turn given elbowroom to unscrupulous individuals who are willing to exploit the situation and manipulate it for their own personal gain. In its most common form, the type of corruption involving Khat manifests itself as collusion between Khat dealers and government officials willing to look the other way while millions of kilograms of Khat are dumped on the country. That way, deals are cut and bribe money changes hands, but the state economy is crippled, and society at large pays a heavy price. In broad terms, the saturating presence of corruption is very well understood by the political and cultural elites of society, and it is a major issue in (largely informal) public debates that take place about Somaliland's socio-cultural decay and about the impediments to the country's progress. Yet most of the officials in successive governments have been reluctant to denounce it publicly or put in place stringent regulations against it - or even acknowledge its existence.

In fact, there is good reason to believe that most of the government officials themselves engage in improper conduct with respect to public property and are therefore perceived by the general public as being part of the problem rather than the solution.²⁸ Khat is, of course, not the only cause of corruption – other factors foster it too. But it is one of its most serious underlying causes²⁹, and fighting against corruption requires a concerted effort to understand and come to terms with these underlying causes. Hence, special attention needs to be given to the specific ways in which Khat contributes to this pathology. A necessary first step in that direction would be the reduction of the volume of Khat entering the country, but in order to succeed, that step needs to be taken in concert with others. The government must lay stress on accountability and transparency in public institutions, increase the benefits it offers to public servants, and provide incentives intended to reward good performance. In addition, any reform to be undertaken must be targeted at restoring trust between the government and its citizens, trust

which has been eroding for quite some time. Finally, it is absolutely imperative that a viable, comprehensive, mutually beneficial trade agreement between Somaliland and Ethiopia be negotiated.³⁰ Absent such an agreement, no amount of government intervention by way of regulation or law enforcement is going to have any appreciable effect on the flow of Khat into the country.³¹ In order for these measures to be taken, all the country's elites and professionals need to come together to tackle the problem of Khat.³²

DECAYING OR DECLINING SOCIETY: KHAT AS A KEY DRIVER

The Green Leaf: Source of Serious Health Problems

If the consequences of the use of Khat for the economy and the polity are disastrous, its immediate and long-term impact on the fabric of society is nothing short of catastrophic. Khat is gradually sapping society's collective energy and contributing to its decay, a process which, again, takes multiple forms. The most obvious and most alarming type of decay manifests itself as various types of ill health affecting the Khat chewers, including mental disorders. Khat is a drug that forms different habits, one of which is biological; another could best be described as being quasi-social in nature: like cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, and other narcotics, Khat is highly addictive. But unlike these drugs, which tend to be marginal phenomena affecting relatively isolated sub-cultural communities in the countries they affect (and fortunately Somaliland is not one of them), Khat has gone (in fact has always been) mainstream. The reason is that there isn't much of a stigma attached to its use, whereas, for example, drinking alcohol, which is strictly forbidden by the Islamic Shari'a, is greatly stigmatized. In the eyes of most people, especially the users, chewing Khat is as acceptable as drinking tea. Its malignancy is concealed deep inside the collective psyche of the nation; even those who denounce it and point to its socio-economic dangers are unlikely to condemn it on moral grounds.

Equally serious, it induces in the users other destructive habits; for example, groups of users can sit in the same place consuming the drug and chatting for hours on end – sometimes for twenty four hours or more – without ingesting any food. Inevitably, this practice brings about a deterioration of the user's health; besides poor hygiene and the nursing of unrealistic ambitions and desires, both of which are common to almost all drug users. The following types of physical and mental illness have been observed in Khat chewers: sleeplessness, constipation, aggressive behavior, depression, poor appetite, liver and kidney problems, tooth and gum decay, stomatitis (inflammation of the mouth), gingivitis, dental caries, damage to the esophagus, gastritis, and intestinal obstruction.³³ Furthermore and very importantly, when the toxic substances in Khat continuously seep into the circulatory system and build up in the body for a long time, more insidious diseases develop: heart disease, hypertension, and psychiatric illnesses.³⁴

Of these three diseases, mental illness is the most worrying: doctors at the Department of Mental Health at Hargeisa Group Hospital state that most of those who have been admitted into the hospital, including both men and women, have been chronic Khat chewers.³⁵ Indeed, after serious examination, a determination was made that there is a strong connection between mental disorders and the consumption of Khat.³⁶ Perhaps more alarming, many of those who have been in one way or another persuaded to quit the habit of chewing and subsequently nursed back to health through medical intervention and a long process of rehabilitation almost invariably experience a relapse shortly after the intervention is completed. Once they resume chewing, the mental disorders begin all over again.³⁷ Hence, the psychiatric problems resulting from Khat use are far more easily identifiable than those which have different causes.

Beyond its toll on the health of users, Khat inflicts serious damage on the socio-cultural structure and texture of the nation, its stabilizing core of norms and practices. And as such, it has a dimension which is wide and deep. Because a fairly large proportion of men and an increasing number of women have essentially become addicts³⁸, and because they of necessity interact with – or are connected to – an even larger segment of society, Khat directly or indirectly affects the fabric of society as a whole; this way, it is eroding our cultural values and loosening the cohesion of a young nation which hasn't yet fully recovered from the traumas of war. As we shall see in the next section, Khat consumption profoundly weakens the nuclear family, the building block of society, but one more health hazard that affects the user but also goes beyond him or her must be noted: Khat can damage the reproductive system of the human body.³⁹ Hence, it poses a direct threat to the survival of both the population and the state itself.

Khat: A Threat to the Survival of the Family

The nuclear family, the smallest and most important unit for the health and stability of any society, is under attack in Somaliland, and the greatest danger to it currently comes from Khat. To be sure, Khat consumption has not been the only challenge facing the family. Ever since the eruption of the Somali civil war in the mid-eighties and the mass displacement of Somaliland citizens from 1988 onwards, the family has been under great stress: hundreds of thousands of people from the urban centers were forced out of their homes; they had to travel (often on foot) for days and eventually found themselves herded into squalid refugee camps or else joined their already weakened relatives in the countryside; a slow process of disintegration started at that time, and it is still underway in one form or another. A large number of able-bodied men were killed or maimed in the war itself through direct combat; they became the first link in the family structure to be permanently broken or damaged; other links in the structure fell along the way, as more lives were claimed by gratuitous violence inflicted on non-combatants; still others were lost because of exhaustion, starvation, and disease. Many families collapsed altogether; others had to en-

sure long periods of separation, as members were scattered far and wide. This state of affairs had a profound impact on the people of Somaliland, including those who have since been able to immigrate to distant lands. The flood of Khat has compounded these daunting challenges, which have been confronting the family for the past thirty years or so.⁴⁰

The family is endangered by Khat use in two inter-related ways. One of them, which was already alluded to in an earlier section, is broadly economic and it affects society as a whole; but that impact is registered immediately in the family unit. The old saying that “what is good for the mother is also good for the child” is valid here. This means that what is good for the state economy is also great for the individuated family – it enhances its livelihoods. But the obverse is also true: if the economy is weak, the family suffers. It is well known that the vast majority of the men who chew Khat belong to a large group of relatively unskilled men, many of whom have come of age since the middle of the eighties – that is, during the war or in the subsequent years (most businessmen, religious men, and those men who have intellectual capital or technical skills generally stay away from Khat). And because of the scarcity of employment opportunities in the country, these men tend to be out of work most of the time. But when and if they earn some money, they spend most (or all) of it on their favorite drug: addiction directly leads to the neglect of the most important responsibility that a man is expected to have in a fundamentally patriarchal society. The families of such men become victims of Khat consumption.⁴¹ The fact that they have become less productive translates into loss of income for the family. In some cases, the Khat chewer ends up depleting the meager resources of the family, like the livestock raised almost exclusively by the women and children; he sells these assets in order to support his addictive habit.⁴²

A careful look through neutral lenses at the livelihood trends of families indicates that the problem of Khat can have disastrous consequences for assets, capital, and savings. It affects assets such as the livestock owned by pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, which normally serve families as a source of income and nutrition, as well as collateral for credit; these resources can also help meet the family's health and educational costs, while providing security in the event of crop failure for agro-pastoralists. Inevitably, the loss of these resources increases the vulnerability of families. Therefore, Khat creates a distinct threat to the livelihoods of many people.⁴³ As has already been noted above, this financial gap has had to be filled by the women.

But what is ultimately more destructive to the structure of the family is the erosion of its overall health and wellbeing. Hence, the socio-cultural consequences of these economic problems are also being felt directly in the family structure. The addicted man, who spends a good deal of time away from his family as he chews Khat with other addicted men, almost automatically loses his mantle of authority; if he is an able-bodied young man, he becomes a burden on his father and mother at an age during which he is expected to be independent.⁴⁴ If he is a father and a husband, the fact that

he is no longer the breadwinner of the family means that he no longer enjoys his traditional status; in effect, he ends up abrogating his role as the leader and role model for the other members of his family. As a result, tensions surge through the family: it falls apart in multiple ways: adolescent boys lose respect for their father; on other hand, the mother, though offering love and caring, cannot be the source of the disciplinary firmness associated with the male figure. The boys in the countryside usually drift to small encampments, neglecting the family's livestock.⁴⁵ In towns, boys often wind up in youth gangs which have formed in their neighborhoods, surrogate "families" in which they can find an alternative form of "support" and "guidance". Essentially they become truants, drop-outs, and delinquents at an early stage of their lives and in turn grow up into Khat-chewing young men, who continue to the already established trend. Many of them become thieves or muggers who use violence and intimidation as part of their predation on neighborhood communities.⁴⁶ A substantial number of these free-floating boys (and even girls) are allured into the traps of tahrrib, trying to flee a family and a country which have failed them.

The tension in the family also manifest themselves in other ways: in many cases, the addicted man is either unable or unwilling to face the facts: originally brought up in a fundamentally patriarchal society, the addict tries to hold on to the male's traditional authority and wield the power of masculinity in a situation where he no longer has any cultural legitimacy or financial clout, a situation in which the woman is the sole source of stability and security for the family, often with great difficulty. Hence quarrels between husband and wife have become increasingly frequent. Many of these men become abusive: wife beating is fairly common among wasteful addicts; some even blame their wives for the poverty and malnutrition that result from their drug use. The end-product of all this is that the family collapses altogether, either through divorce or through quasi-permanent separation; the following statement gives us an indication of the magnitude of the problem: a lawyer working at a district court in Hargeisa narrates his experience in the court as follows: "I have been working in the courthouse for about five years as a lawyer; most of the women who have come to us are usually complaining about a problem created by Khat. When the father or husband does not go to work and the mother is not able to provide for her children this might lead to a conflict between the husband and wife. This could result in a family problem. About 95% of the family problems are associated with Khat."⁴⁷ In an ominous sign of what is to come, even those families which have immigrated to Western Europe are being affected by the problems of Khat: the drug has for all practical purposes immigrated with them.⁴⁸ In effect, the chewer of Khat has become the instrument that wrecks his own family. The main lesson that can be learned from all this is that Khat is a contributor not only to the disintegration of the family but also to the decrease in the fertility⁴⁹ rate of the society, for both the poor and the rich; hence it is a threat to

the security and stability of state security.⁵⁰

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS OF KHAT: STRATEGIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Khat creates a terrible experience for those who chew and those whom they affect indirectly. It threatens the income of the families and the state economy. The most immediate victims of Khat are the nation's weak and poor, particularly the women, and the children, who constitute the most vulnerable section of the society. Tackling and overcoming the effects of Khat on society is the responsibility of those running the state, but it is not an option. Rather it is an imperative. A number of far-reaching measures must be taken by the government in consultation with the intellectual and cultural leaders. The measures are designed to confront the economic and socio-cultural problems caused by the consumption of Khat. The measures are given below in itemized form:

Policies and strategies designed to stem the flow of Khat; the government should:

- Set clear strategies and policies regarding the Khat trade in Somaliland, for instance, the delivery time needs to be strictly controlled to avoid disturbing the office working hours.
- Impose excessive tax on the Khat to discourage both those trading, selling and those buying.
- Define and demarcate selling centers for the Khat across the country and avoid it selling in the city centers.
- Impose policies or implement those in place which oblige the state employees to respect work ethics including respecting office hours. This could lead to the promotion of the employees based on their work performance.
- Revise the working hours of the public institutions.
- Revise and increase the payment and the salaries of the state employees who work the regular working hours.
- Explore other alternative sources of income for those engaged with the Khat sector to subsidize their families' income.
- Persuade the business people to establish both small and medium scale industries to create jobs for the youth graduates and the unemployed skilled and unskilled people.
- The government should introduce or at least incorporate courses in the existing curriculum that explains the social, economic and cultural problems of the Khat.
- Start nationwide aggressive campaign against this national scourge, through media and erecting more billboards across the cities and towns in the country.
- The government should commission a nationwide research that can inform the government. This research will study how many families are dependent on the Khat as their sources of income and how many jobs created by Khat traders to the people. Thus, take the research outcome as a benchmark to create jobs.

- 1 Ahmed YH, AS Elmi & MS Samater (1987). Experience in the Control of Khat-Chewing in Somalia, *Bulletin on Narcotics*, Vol. XXXIX, No 2, 39(2), pp. 51–7.
- 2 The Somali man is devoted for chewing Khat, for instance, there are fathers who don't know much about their children, because the children sleep while fathers are away and still chewing, and wake up early in the morning to go to schools while still fathers are in the bed. And, surprisingly, the fathers go out before the children come from the schools.
- 3 In every and each day, Khat traders collect the hard currency from the Somaliland exchange markets and send it to Ethiopia. This is one of the major drivers of the inflation which devaluated the Somaliland currency.
- 4 Peter Hansen (2009). *Governing Khat, Drugs and Democracy in Somaliland*. Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies.
- 5 The Khat vehicles don't have speed limit both in the cities and outside the towns. There is a growing concern about this point as there are accidents caused by those vehicles carry Khat which is rising, including loss of lives and properties. This needs serious law enforcement mechanism, particularly from the Traffic Police.
- 6 Kenyan Khat traders expressed their interest to expand their Khat businesses into Somaliland markets.
- 7 Somaliland Customs Department report of 2015, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 8 Prior to the state collapse, the man was chewing Khat in certain occasions and wasn't spending much time on it. For instance, the man was chewing it on weekends, wedding ceremonies, public holidays, and other certain events.
- 9 Neglecting the livestock and the roles and responsibilities at the family level are prevalent in the rural areas. The man spends the whole day in the villages by chewing Khat and chatting with his colleagues.
- 10 While the male are chewing Khat, children supposed to go to the schools dropped-out from the schools in order to keep livestock from the predatory animals. This is an indication how Khat affects the schooling system in the rural areas.
- 11 During the drought and the dry season, the rural families tackle with natural disasters by using their assets and savings. But, because of this social problem brought by Khat, there is no asset left behind. The man in the family spends Khat for the already scarce resources available for the families to survive during the dry season.
- 12 Retrieved from a DVD, about a speech addressed by Adar Ahmed, a renowned Somali singer, in Kansas, Missouri, in the United States of America.
- 13 Somali women are affected by negative consequences of Khat as seen in terms of negligence emanating from the male who tirelessly chews Khat without giving attention to their role and responsibilities towards the family. The man who is the head of the family spends the already small amount of money he earns from the causal work to Khat, except very few. While women face more burdens because of their roles in the society to subsidize the family and seek other means of income for the family.
- 14 Gardner, Judith & El Bushra, Judy (2004). *Somalia: The Untold Story the War Through the Eyes of Somali Women*. London: Pluto Press.
- 15 Discussions with a government official, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 17 Discussions with officials in the Somaliland Customs in Borama, Somaliland.
- 18 Discussions with a senior officer at Kala Baydh Custom, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 19 Discussions with Somaliland Customs, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 20 Though the Khat is the leading product which Ethiopia exports to Somaliland, there are other commodities which are imported from Ethiopia such as potato, onion, wheat, beans, mango, sorghum, banana, among other products.
- 21 Retrieved from a HCTV weekly Program on Togdheer region, the program was dealing with the impact of the Khat in Burao. Hargeisa, May 2013. In 2017, this amount could be higher than this number.
- 22 The Khat is not the only export of Ethiopia to Somaliland; there are other items such as potato, tomato, onion, wheat, sorghum, and cement, among others.
- 23 There are many mothers who generate family income from selling Khat. The Somaliland Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have had a program intended to train the female Khat sellers how to seek alternative sources of income.
- 24 In the rural areas, most of men spend their time in the villages by chewing Khat. There is well-known quote "Aabaa qaatay", means "The father took". The man always takes the Khat in credit and at the end gives sheep, goat or even camel to the Khat seller to settle the Khat he borrowed.
- 25 In the urban centers, women always have the responsibility of the family. For instance, they engage in small businesses or selling Khat itself to feed their families. While the men either engage in a casual work or is an unemployed. Surprisingly, both times, they chew Khat, and sometimes they ask their wives to give them money for Khat.
- 26 In Somaliland, there are mafrashes established by senior government officials including ministers and MPs which they chew Khat and always discuss the issues in the country. These include, but not limited to: Gargaar, Gaajo-ma-jirto, Galin Hore, Mirqaan Weyne, to name a few.
- 27 Nasir M. Ali (2014). *Somaliland: Curbing Corruption and the Quest for Effective Governance*, *Asian Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, Volume 02, Issue 1 (February, 2014), pp. 54–65.
- 28 When Mohamed Hashi Elmi was the Minister of Finance, the level of corruption within the ministry declined. Khat is the major driver of the corruption as many individuals have a link with government officials and get money either in the form of cash or Khat.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 27.
- 30 Discussions with a well-known intellectual in Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 31 Throughout the contemporary history of Somaliland, no single public institution managed to play its role, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Most of the ministers, if not all, are not selected by merit, but, they became ministers with the support of their traditional leaders. This kind of practice is the only, if not the major factor which crippled the state institutions and led the state's future remain in limbo.
- 32 Discussions with a senior officer at the Somaliland National Youth Organization, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 33 Interview with doctors at Somaliland Medical Doctors Association, and Somaliland Pharmaceutical Association, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 34 Interview with a senior doctor at Somaliland Medical Doctors Association, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 35 There are growing numbers of female women who chew Khat regularly. This is the negative impact of Khat on the family units, and is an indication how the culture and social norms of the Somali and Somaliland societies are changing or in other words, decaying.
- 36 Interview with a senior official at Hargeisa Group Hospital, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 37 Interview with a senior officer at Raywan Mental Advocacy Organization, a mental health rehabilitation center based in Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 40 Interview with a senior official at the Nagaad Network, Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 41 While the income of the family wholly or partially was spent on Khat, the family members most specifically the women and the children face malnutrition.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 2.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 44 Interview with a senior official at Somaliland National Women Organization, Hargeisa, Somaliland
- 45 *Ibid.*, 9.
- 46 There are organized crime groups and gangs across Hargeisa who fight each other, and these groups have different names such as Arsenal, Ciyaala Ciir, among other names. Others rob mobiles and other precious items from the aged people and the women both in the day and night times, while others stab the people in the night time.
- 47 Discussions with a lawyer at a district court in Hargeisa, Somaliland.
- 48 Though the American and Canadian governments prohibited Khat and regard it as a drug which leads the chewer or the seller spends years in jail. The European countries, most importantly UK has dealt with Khat as a commodity that can easily be accessed in the British Customs. However, in most recent years (2014), the UK has banned the Khat to enter into UK. The Khat led many Somali families in the UK to collapse.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 34.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 34.

About the paper

Khat, the silent killer, has not yet attracted public attention to the full extent that it deserves. It has not generated the kind or level of debate and discussion that would lead political leaders to formulate policies and craft strategies to tackle this social, cultural, and economic scourge. Khat, on which Somalilanders spend massive amounts of money per annum, has never been brought under the serious scrutiny of government officials, academicians, the national media, and other opinion makers, and no one has raised the question of why this impoverished nation should lose hundreds of millions of dollars every year, in effect wasting it on a highly addictive drug. Somaliland is the largest destination of a large volume of Khat exported by Ethiopia and imported by traders in Somaliland. In contrast, Somaliland's exports to Ethiopia are negligible. The decades-long imbalance in trade between the two countries benefits neither Somaliland's economy nor its business people and ultimately causes great harm to Somaliland citizens. That is to say, Ethiopia is the sole beneficiary from this commercial relationship. For instance, around 85,000 kgs of Khat come into Somaliland every day, from which Ethiopia earns millions of dollars annually. In essence, this imbalance in trade is due to the absence of mutually beneficial trade agreements between the two countries and to the failure of Somaliland's Ministry of Trade and Investment, which has been unable or unwilling to take the lead in managing the import-export activities of the nation. In addition, the flow of Khat into the country has had a devastating impact on the wellbeing of Somaliland society, causing serious problems in health and social relations. This study examines the impact of Khat on the national economy and the negative effects it has had on social fabric and cultural values, a problem which is slowly eroding Somaliland society's traditional norms and its dignity. The study underlines the extent to which a once-promising society in terms of cultural and social cohesion is in the grip of mass drug addiction without any accounting of its serious repercussions. The study proposes policies and strategies that could help Somaliland tackle the problem seriously or at least attempts to reduce the volume of Khat entering Somaliland.

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About the Institute

The Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) is a higher learning and research institution based in and operating within the institutional framework of the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland. The IPCS was established in February 2008 in response to the long-recognized call for an in-depth multidisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing the conflict and violence that has engulfed many parts of the Horn of Africa. The mission of the IPCS is to provide interested scholars, institute members and students with opportunities to engage in intensive study and research on Somaliland and Somali-inhabited regions in the Horn of Africa on an interdisciplinary basis.

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