



MOHAMED ALI ADEN

Projekti

All in the name of “himilo”



Imagine living abroad longer than living in your home country. The majority of my life was spent looking at my country, Somalia, from afar. Still, in my heart, I never left. I rejoiced with Somalia's successes, and mourned its many tragedies.

As the civil war dragged on, I was plagued with the same worries that so many of us in the Diaspora struggle with; how can I help my people from thousands of kilometers away? Did I abandon my country? How do I reconcile myself to living in a peaceful country while my people are getting killed by the thousands? What's next for Somalia? How do we rebuild? I didn't have all the answers, but I knew one thing – I had to help.

To do so, I drew on my past.

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In 1986, after spending several years in Germany completing our Masters studies in agriculture, my wife and I moved our family back to Somalia. We started working at a poorly-run agriculture co-op. With the help of a few friends from Finland and Sweden, we were able to rebuild the organization from scratch to one of the most successful co-ops in the country.

I didn't know then, but my experience working at the co-op was the foundation for my philanthropic endeavors. What this experience gave me was a sense of accomplishment and proof that we can have a huge impact when we work together.

Many years later, I drew on that lesson.

The civil war had been going on for nearly two decades. I doubt anyone thought the war would last as long as it has. I realized that there is an entire generation that has been born during the conflict; thousands of children who would have never experienced peace, nor seen the inside of a classroom.

Who will lead the country? What experiences and education will shape the next chapter for Somalia?

Inspiration comes from education and the belief that the cycle of destruction can be stopped through books and knowledge. The schoolhouse could do what war cannot – give children hope.

Hope in Somali is *Himilo*. With the support of likeminded individuals in the Diaspora, we founded HIMILO International Civic Development Agency (HICDA), a Canadian charitable organization that focuses on building schools, caring for orphans, extending emergency relief and much more in the war-torn country.

Galkayo

We began work in Galkayo; a divided town in central Somalia. What's unique about Galkayo is that the city is divided into the South and the North. The South was classified as unsafe and dangerous, which resulted in its people being largely ignored by the international aid organizations.

After two years of fundraising and incredible support from Human Concern International, a Canadian charity, we built the first two-floor high school in south Galkayo called the Al-Sha'ab School. Al-Sha'ab translates to "the people's school" which is what we saw the building as.

The school's construction created over 100 jobs, and it educates local children from grade 1 through high school. At night, the building is used for continued adult education classes, teaching locals how to write, read and master basic math skills.

We quickly learned that while education is important, many children lacked access to the necessities of life. The area has hundreds of orphans who did not have places to sleep, nor did they know where their next meal would come from.

Himilo helps a nearby centre for orphans. We take care of the education fees for more than 180 orphans. In fact, Himilo covers more than 80 percent of the school fees for all of the 1,000 orphans and children from poor families currently attending the Al-Sha'ab school.

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AFRIKAN SARVI

on Somalian, Djiboutin, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Sudanin ja Etelä-Sudanin kehityksymyksiin keskittyvä verkkolehti. Lehteä julkaisee Suomen Somalia-verkosto ry. Afrikan Sarvessa julkaistaan sekä tutkimukseen että käytännön työhön perustuvia artikkeleita ja puheenvuoroja. Afrikan Sarvi on kolmikielinen (suomi, ruotsi, englanti) ja se ilmestyy kaksi kertaa vuodessa.

AFRIKAS HORN

är en nättidskrift som fokuserar på utvecklingsfrågor i Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Etiopien, Sudan och Södra Sudan. Tidsningen utges av Suomen Somalia-verkosto (Finlands Somalia-nätverk). Artiklarna och det övriga innehållet i Afrikas Horn baserar sig på både forskning och praktiskt arbete. Afrikas Horn är trespråkig (finska, svenska, engelska) och utkommer två gånger per år.

HORN OF AFRICA JOURNAL

is an electronic journal which focuses on developmental questions in Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. It is published by the Finnish Somalia Network. The articles and other materials are based both on research and practical work. Horn of Africa Journal is trilingual (Finnish, Swedish, English) and it is issued twice a year.

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As the graduates of the high school needed post secondary education Himilo and Mudug Foundation for Education & Development MUFED built the first university, Galkayo University, with the faculties of medicine, health science, computer science and education.

It was a huge accomplishment for us, especially since we were able to do our work from abroad. I hadn't seen the fruits of our labour with my own eyes; and it was time to do so.

Visiting Somalia

Against advices of my friends and family because of fear for my security, I and two Himilo board members decided to visit our projects in 2011. Landing in Galkayo will forever be one of the most touching moments of my life. We were greeted by dozens of students attending Al-Sha'ab, dressed in the school uniform.

The joy on their faces was all I needed to see. We had succeeded in what we set out to do – give young people “Himilo”; hope.

If I was determined before, I became doubly so after my visit. My batteries were recharged and I wanted to do even more. I know now that I will never stop because I have seen the progress we've made, and the positive ripple effects our small school has had on the entire region.

Before we worked in the region, there were about 380 children going to school. Today, more than 10,000 students attend school. Not just ours, of course, but the many other schools that have popped up on the region. You see, what I didn't expect was the “pay it forward” effect Al-Sha'ab would have – men who worked on building our school would build more schools after seeing the positive impact Sha'ab had in Galkayo.

Another incredible effect our combined efforts have had is that violence in the region has gone down dramatically. Locals report that murders, robberies and assaults have declined.

And, the area that hasn't seen any international aid, is catching up with its internationally-supported counterparts in Somalia. We are seeing buildings rebuilt, trees planted and businesses thriving.

Slowly, the people of southern Galkayo are awakening and rebuilding. All it took was a lot of work, and even more *himilo*.

Mohamed Ali Aden

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