

Somali Pirates: You're Hired!

While the world's media splashes stories of Somalia's pirates and international rescue attempts in the Gulf of Aden, attention is turning more and more to the place these pirates come from, why they turn to piracy and what can be done to deter them on land.

After 18 years of civil war and state collapse, Somalia's youth face chronic unemployment, clan conflict and warlordism, and a lack of prospects. The risk of taking your chances on the Indian Ocean, or fighting for a warlord or an extremist group, must seem well worth taking if the future offers no chance of making a secure living. A history of over fishing by European countries and the dumping of toxic waste off Somalia's coast has reduced livelihood opportunities and increased Somali's sense of injustice.

Whilst the Royal Navy is a major part of international efforts to counter piracy around the Horn of Africa, DFID's £3m contribution to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) employment-intensive job creation programme helps address these issues at their roots. Immediate temporary employment – such as small scale work on road construction and environmental conservation to increase agricultural productivity - has already created over 90,000 working days across Somalia, whilst at the same time rebuilding vital infrastructure to promote local economic recovery. Journey times linking the Allula and Baargaal districts around the Puntland coast (where most pirates operate from) are said to have recently been cut from 24 hours to 2 hours, thanks to the roads created through the scheme. The ILO say: "jobs created in various localities in Eyl district provide an important earning opportunity for young people, who with few other options are readily drawn into piracy and other divisive ways to earn their keep".

The Secretary of State has recently agreed the way forward for the DFID Somalia programme in 2009-10, in support of current hopes for wider peace and reconciliation in Somalia. The focus will be on new commitments to support stabilisation, through work on security and governance, whilst maintaining a high level of spending on humanitarian relief and service delivery. We are currently finalising contributions to a UN-led Early Recovery Plan to support the new Government in recognition of the renewed hope that it brings to Somalia. This will include support to employment generation across Somalia, particularly in the areas around the capital Mogadishu, where the Government is keenest to show that there are viable prospects for peaceful employment.

DFID's programme in Somalia has increased from £3m in 2002/03 to around £35m in 2008/9. For more information on the work we are doing in Somalia please visit our website and check out the latest facts and case studies.

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