

# The role of the Somali National University and its international inter-university relations in the scientific, economic, and legal development of Somali society

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## Abstract

It has been 11 years since the reopening of the Somali National University (SNU) in Mogadishu, following a 23-year interruption due to the civil war. This article reviews the milestones achieved since the university's revival in 2014, assessing the fulfillment of its initial expectations and outlining future achievable objectives. Following the government's strategic decision in 2012, the first Rector was appointed to guide the university's revival; this initiative marked the beginning of the relaunch and the enrollment of the first group of students in the post-conflict context. Key developments include establishing robust partnerships with universities across North America, Europe, and Africa, helping to reconnect the Somali academic diaspora, as evidenced by international confer-

ences held in Mogadishu in 2016 and 2018. Additionally, the re-establishment of historical and academic ties with Italian universities initiated a bilateral collaboration program aimed at reintegrating SNU into the global academic community. Adapting SNU's academic structure to align with the global system of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral (PhD) programs is a vital step towards strengthening its position as a catalyst for Somalia's socio-economic development. The article also examines ongoing constitutional and legal reforms in Somalia, which aim to align the country's legal framework with international standards, and highlights the complementary roles of higher education and legal development in the nation's reconstruction. Despite the progress made, the path to achieving a full reorganization is not yet complete, and the cooperation program with Italian and international universities will provide further scientific, technical, and financial support to fully enable the SNU to become the engine of development for Somali society.

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## Introduction to the history of the Somali National University

Now that more than 10 years have passed since the reopening of the Somali National University (SNU) in Mogadishu, it seems appropriate to take stock of what has been achieved, what expectations have been met, and what future objectives are feasible.

Tracing briefly the milestones that led to the various components over time that contributed to the formation of SNU's structural framework, it is possible to identify, as a starting point, the period of the Italian Trusteeship Administration of Somalia (AFIS) in the years 1950-1960, on mandate from the United Nations. In detail, the Political-Administrative School, which provided the diploma in legal and economic disciplines and social sciences, was established on September 6, 1950; it has been transformed firstly into a Higher Institute of Legal, Economic and Social Disciplines on May 25, 1956 and then into a University Institute of Legal and Economic Disciplines in 1964, with two specializations in legal sciences and economic sciences. The school served as the first nucleus of what would become the SNU on December 1, 1969, through a legislative and administrative act of the President of the Supreme Revolutionary Council, General Siad Barre.

In the following years, the number of faculties has expanded, increasing the variety of study areas offered by SNU. In particular, in the early 1970s, the Faculties of Agriculture (1971), Industrial Chemistry (1971), and Education (1972) were established, followed by other important faculties, namely, Medicine and Surgery, Geology, Veterinary Medicine, and Engineering in 1973. Finally, the Faculties of Islamic Sciences, Languages, and Journalism were instituted in 1979, and Political Sciences in 1981. Subsequently, a Graduate School was activated for the awarding of postgraduate

master's degrees and research doctorates (PhD). During this period, as part of the Italian-Somali University Cooperation Protocol signed on July 18, 1979, Italian universities provided over 200 teachers every six months for residential courses taught in Italian. For many Italian teachers, this experience was their first teaching opportunity in a Sub-Saharan African country. The organization of these faculties and the construction of the university buildings and the Rectorate on the Gahyer Campus represented the most important cooperation program for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This university experience, which nevertheless made it possible to train over 15,000 Somali students and 700 Somali teaching and technical staff<sup>a</sup>, ended due to the civil war of 1991.

It will only be on November 14, 2013, that the Council of Ministers of Somalia will decree the reopening of the SNU, made operational by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, in his role as Chancellor of the SNU, by convening the Council Superior (Board) of the SNU for the first time after 23 years on July 6, 2014. The first choice made by the Somali Government to open the door to the reinstatement of the SNU was the nomination of the first Rector after the civil war, Prof. Mohamed Jimale. The concerted efforts undertaken by the Somali Council of Ministers, the Board of Directors of SNU, and the Rector have made it possible to relaunch the SNU in August 2014. Subsequently, the inaugural group of students, following the Somali civil war, was officially enrolled at the university.

Immediately after the revival, the Rector and the Academic Senate of the SNU hurried to establish close relationships with other universities in North America, Europe, and Africa to leverage the Somali university diaspora, as certified by the two international conferences in Mogadishu (2016 and 2018) on the role of SNU in the post-conflict period. The second choice made has been to re-establish the historical, personal, and scientific relationships between SNU and the Italian universities by launching a bilateral collaboration program. On December 9, 2020, the Development Cooperation Framework between Italy and Somalia was signed in Mogadishu to pursue development programs in Somalia and define their implementation methodologies. In particular, the following interventions have been considered to be implemented: i) humanitarian and/or emergency aid; ii) projects promoted by Italian local entities and authorities or Italian civil society organizations; iii) resources for joint ventures; iv) debt swaps or cancellation; v) awards of scholarships for studies or research; and vi) interventions granted through special funding committed by the Italian Government.

### Activities, successes, and failures of the Italy-Somalia bilateral university program from 2014 to 2023

The collective effort of both SNU and Italian university leadership has facilitated SNU's return to the global scientific community of universities.

In 2014, the first cooperative program was realized by Dr. Pierluigi Malesani from the Italian Cooperation General Directorate and Dr. Guglielmo Giordano from the Italian Development Cooperation Agency (AICS) with a large involve-

ment of Italian universities with different faculties, namely Florence (Agriculture), Rome Tre (Law), Pavia (Medicine and Surgery), Trieste (Economy), and Bari (Veterinary).

The Italian-Somali Joint Scientific and Technical Committee has been reconstituted, chaired by Prof. Mohamed Jimale and Dr. Malesani and, following Dr. Malesani's passing, by Prof. Vittorio Colizzi (University of Rome Tor Vergata and Italian Geographical Society). One of the first activities has been the reorganization of the academic system based on the first 3-year cycle (bachelor)<sup>b</sup>, followed by a second 2-year cycle (master), and finally the third cycle of the PhD. This type of higher education system, already in place in Europe and most African countries, is now becoming global; therefore, it would be beneficial for SNU to adopt it as well. The path to this kind of reorganization is not yet complete, and the cooperation program with Italian and international universities provides further scientific, technical, and financial support actions to fully enable the SNU to become the engine of development for Somali society. During the last 11 years, the following activities have been implemented by the Italian-Somali Joint Committee with the financial support of AICS:

- 2014-2016: first program for the reconstitution of the SNU by the Sapienza University of Rome;
- 2016-2018: program for the training of the deans of the SNU by the University of Rome Tre;
- 2018-2021: first scholarship program for a 2-year master's degree for 16 Somali students in several Italian universities;
- 2021-2023: second scholarship program for a 2-year master's degree for 16 Somali students from the faculties of Engineering, Medicine, Veterinary, Economy, and Law in several Italian universities.

During these 10 years of the Italian-Somali interuniversity cooperation, with the financial and operational activities by the Italian Cooperation Agency, additional activities have been carried out:

- The support to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2018) to build the border wall to delimit the Gahyer Campus (not yet accomplished due to the partial occupation of the university campus by displaced families).
- The plan of the reconstruction of the Gahyer Campus by the Polytechnic of Milan (the plan, presented in 2022, has not yet started).
- The collaborative online training plan for Somali physicians has been carried out by 4 Italian universities (Rome Tor Vergata, Brescia, Naples, and Pavia) during the COVID-19 pandemic. More than 70 physicians from all states of Somalia have been trained, allowing them to better understand the pathogenesis and treatment of the disease.
- The registration in Somalia of the non-profit scientific association European Group of Biotechnology Science Park Tor Vergata (Eurobiopark) as a non-governmental organization (n. NGOD/Molfa033/23), under the legal responsibility of Prof. Mohamed Jimale. Eurobiopark-Somalia aims to promote and consolidate science and technology transfer and its extension in Somalia. The first activity carried out by Eurobiopark in Somalia has been the launch of the multidisciplinary *Somali Journal of Science, Technology and Society* (SJSTS). At the moment, no scientific and technological journals are edited in Somalia; this journal represents an editorial initiative based on a network of public and private universities, research institu-

<sup>a</sup>Before its closure, the SNU was composed of 14 faculties with 15,600 students registered and around 760 Somali employees, among them academic, administrative, and service staff.

<sup>b</sup>From 2019 to 2023, there were 1,821 graduates, including 544 females and 1,277 males.

tions, and governmental bodies involved in the dissemination of sciences and technologies (hospitals, industries, *etc.*), also with the approach of Science Diplomacy to contribute to the rebuilding of the Somali State Academic and research community after 30 years of civil war.

- The PhD School, tasked with training future teachers across various sectors (medicine, veterinary medicine, engineering, science and technology, human and social sciences, *etc.*), has been approved by the Academic Senate, but is not yet operational. Various co-tutorship agreements are underway with Italian universities that are ready to enroll SNU doctoral students in their schools, even offering a double diploma. The doctoral schools are structured over 3 years, of which at least one is expected to be carried out in Italy and the other two in Somalia in structures capable of carrying out scientific research across the various sectors. To facilitate this process, both national and European scholarships and research grants will be identified by the SNU in collaboration with partner universities. Research laboratories are being activated in the SNU as they are necessary for carrying out the research activities of doctoral students. Similarly, the Academic Senate of the SNU, under the proposal of the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, has declared the Institution of the “Medical School of Specialities”, which is not yet operational. The Faculty of Medicine annually educates numerous students specialized in various fields of medicine and surgery. In Europe and North America, 52% of the total number of doctors are family physicians, and 48% are specialists in other disciplines; the Somali hospitals require specialists in different sectors. The Faculty of Medicine will prepare a specific document listing the specialization classes identified for the first 5 years of the institution, which include Pediatrics and Neonatology, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Orthopedics, General Surgery, Internal Medicine, Radiology, *etc.* The document for the activation will describe the course methodologies and teaching organization in terms of years of course, hours of each discipline, the practical working activities in hospitals, and the expected results from this educational training on medical specialties. As job efficiency is directly proportional to work satisfaction, the personality traits of students applying to the Specialization School will be evaluated in selecting a medical specialty. National and international partnerships and co-tutorials will be established by the “Medical School of Specialities” with national and international medical schools and teaching hospitals to allow the students to acquire practical experiences in the specific sectors. A specialist bursary will be granted to each student from the Ministry of Health or from other qualified international institutions. Finally, technical and financial support will be provided to the De Martino Hospital, with the aim that it may serve as the teaching hospital of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery.

## Ongoing reflections on the teaching hospital of the Faculty of Medicine and the development of a state university system in the Federal Republic of Somalia

### University Teaching Hospital

The University Teaching Hospital is a project discussed during the Conference on Healthcare in Somalia, held in Mogadishu on

December 11-12, 2017. Subsequently, it was discussed again by Prof. Colizzi directly with the Prime Minister of the Somali Government in a conversation held on July 26, 2018, on the occasion of the 2nd Conference on Higher Education in post-conflict societies. The fact that, on the occasion of the ceremony for the delivery of the first diplomas to SNU students (2019), the Minister of Health and the Rector confirmed their determination to make the De Martino Hospital a university polyclinic is an acquired political choice that was not obvious, but which has not yet been achieved, with serious repercussions on the training of Somali doctors. The concerns regarding the current state of De Martino Hospital are clear to all stakeholders. It is evident that there is a need to enhance management and the quality and quantity of human resources and equipment. However, what is primarily lacking is a clear vision and strategy, and this issue is comparatively underrecognized. Hospitals are complex structures, and the local situation is delicate, not only for security reasons (which exist but are manageable) or for interpersonal and role relationships (between the minister, the DG of the ministry, the rector, *etc.*), but mainly because of the absence of leadership within the hospital. Until now, AICS Mogadishu has used the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which, like all United Nations organizations, acts to solve specific problems at the De Martino Hospital, but without developing the medium- to long-term strategies essential for the birth and growth of complex structures. The concern is that a lot of money and human resources are being invested, but in the end, they may not lead to the result we want to achieve, *i.e.*, making the De Martino Hospital a University Polyclinic.

### University system of state universities in the Federal Republic of Somalia

The Joint Scientific Committee has long been urged to develop a feasibility study for activating the Somali university system at both the federal and federal member state levels. The Federal Republic of Somalia is in a developing phase of its political and civil society, which needs the scientific and technological contributions of all its human resources (students, teachers, scientists, technicians, *etc.*) and institutions, particularly public and private universities, hospitals, and industrial research centers.

Moreover, the new organization of the Federal Republic in the higher education and technological development sectors will be based at both the federal and federal member state levels, requiring dissemination and communication of scientific and technological advances, best practices, and policies. The SNU alone cannot respond to the number of students leaving high school in different territories, with varying cultural, technical, professional, and motivational levels, due to the absence of professional-technical schools. On the other hand, universities are also the engine of the socio-economic development of the territory in which they are located. Therefore, local universities must participate in this development, which Mogadishu and SNU cannot ensure. In fact, the constitution of a federal state requires that each Federal Member State have its own university or polytechnic. This also helps students from less wealthy families in other federal states access higher education without needing to move to Mogadishu, where the cost of living is rising and not affordable for everyone. The Ministry of Education, the University of Somalia, and the SNU are attentive to the process of developing a federal university system, but they need a study that collects sectoral-professional skills, local economies, and available human resources to create a feasible and sustainable development plan. The experiences of the Italian uni-

versity system, born in the municipalities and territories, could be extremely useful. On the other hand, the option to pursue two- and 3-year professional-technical-scientific courses also opens the way to offering six-month industrial internships in Italy, thereby allowing the combination of essential entrepreneurial knowledge of the Italian system with the Somali region. This would facilitate Italian-Somali industrial relations and, in turn, the country's economic development. However, it is essential to develop a feasibility project involving the Federal Member States of Somalia. This project should identify the sectors most important for the territory's socio-economic development, design various curricula and activation procedures, evaluate the available local human resources, and strengthen the training of new teachers at the SNU to prepare them for the establishment of federal member state universities or polytechnics.

## Points of the five-year plan currently being developed (2025-2029)

### Training officials of the Federal Republic of Somalia and the Federated States in the sectors of justice and health

Already discussed and approved by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), this project aims to develop the skills and capabilities of Somali public officials through an intensive training program, thereby strengthening public administration in Somalia.

Considering the ongoing challenges in Somalia's justice and health sectors, the project objective is to fill these critical gaps; training public officials is seen as a fundamental pillar for reconstruction and institutional strengthening in a post-conflict context, where needs are urgent and resources are often limited. With the collaboration of Italian and Somali institutions, the aim is to establish an Executive Master's in Public Administration Governance and Management with a specific focus on the sectors of justice and health; the main goal is to provide officials with the necessary tools to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of public services, while promoting transparency and reducing corruption. The project was presented by the University of Palermo in partnership with SNU and Eurobiopark; the Somali Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs and the Somali Ministry of Health (both at the central and federated states level) will collaborate in the preparation of training programs, specifying the needs for improving the competencies of Somali public officials. The Somali Ministry of Higher Education will ensure the official recognition of the training course.

Each partner has a well-defined role: AICS provides financial support and strategic oversight, while the involved universities contribute academic expertise and educational resources; Eurobiopark handles the logistical and managerial aspects of the program in Somalia, providing all necessary on-site support to ensure the correct and effective execution of the project. Moreover, the direct involvement of Somali ministries ensures that the training programs are tailored to address current needs.

The initiative, developed within the context of AICS's planning in Nairobi, fits into the broader design of Italian Government assistance and cooperation with African countries known as the "Mattei Plan for Africa", namely the strategic project of diplomacy, development cooperation, and investment by Italy to strengthen

and renew ties with the African continent, and follows the motivations that led to the establishment of the Fund for Peace and Stability in Somalia on September 13, 2023. The project also aligns with the Operational Guidelines of Italian Cooperation for Development in East Africa from 2014, which indicate among the priority sectors the strengthening of education quality, resilience, and the counteraction of migration phenomena, goals that would greatly benefit from the presence of a stronger and more efficient Somali state.

The Executive Master's degree is specifically designed for public officials and is structured into a standard course that will later be divided into two distinct curricula focused on the areas of justice and health. This intensive course aims to provide both theoretical and practical training, including internships and applied research projects, as well as the preparation of a research thesis that will enable students to directly apply what they have learned and contribute to improving administrative practices within their organizations. Through the specialized first-level master, two training cycles will be organized and executed, forming a total of 120 student-officials (60 in the Legal Curriculum, 60 in the Health Curriculum); a "train-the-trainers" course will also take place, involving a selected group of Somali and foreign teachers who can continue to offer the master in the coming years, thus ensuring the sustainability of the training program. Finally, high-quality educational materials tailored to the specific needs of the Somali context are planned to be developed to support the learning process and provide ongoing resources for future training.

In the justice sector, the aim is to develop new administrative procedures at both the central and peripheral levels based on case studies, practical internships, and master's thesis projects. These elements are intended to provide a robust theoretical and practical foundation that enables participants to directly apply what they have learned to improve current administrative practices. This approach aims not only to improve individual capabilities but also to modernize and make the administrative structures more effective within the legal sector in Somalia, thus contributing to a lasting and sustainable impact on the entire Somali society.

In the health sector, the focus is on improving the organization and services to users of state and federal member states hospitals; in particular, through the health curriculum of the Executive Master in Public Administration Governance and Management, the goal is to better organize the entire administrative process, starting from the central Ministry of Health, to those of the federated States to the general directors of the hospitals. This curriculum is aimed at improving relations between the central Ministry of Health and the ministries of each Federal Member State and reorganizing the administrative structures of hospitals, including collaboration between Ministries and SNU for the management of university polyclinics. It is expected that the improvement of public officials' skills will lead to increased efficiency and transparency in public institutions, thereby strengthening citizens' trust and promoting greater social and political stability. The project relies on a methodology that integrates theoretical and practical training with field application through internships and work cycles. This approach aims to maximize the effectiveness of learning and ensure that public officials are well-prepared to face real challenges in their work environments. The training of local trainers and the establishment of a master's program within the SNU ensure the sustainability of the project, allowing for the continuous transfer of knowledge and the updating of skills that will result in tangible improvements in the management of the justice and health sectors, thus contributing to sustainable and long-term development outcomes for the country. The established collaborations with

local and international universities, along with the involvement of Somali governmental entities, strengthen the project and ensure alignment with national policies and objectives. Additionally, the project includes a rigorous evaluation plan with regular feedback from participants and medium/long-term impact analyses to ensure that the training objectives are continuously updated and responsive to the evolving dynamics of the Somali context. To ensure the program's sustainability, a mechanism for continuous training and updating of trainers will be established, allowing the training's benefits to be extended to an increasing number of officials and to adapt the content to future needs.

In conclusion, the project aims not only to address immediate professional training needs but also to establish a system of continuous training that can adapt and evolve to meet the country's future needs.

The project was officially inaugurated in Mogadishu on July 15, 2025, in the presence of ministers and ambassadors. The training activities are scheduled to start in November 2025.

### University training for employment, entrepreneurship, and start-up promotion in Somalia

Within the framework of future cooperation initiatives, one relevant concept focuses on university training for employment, entrepreneurship, and start-up promotion in Somalia. This initiative would be developed in the context of support for the socio-economic renewal and development of Somalia, aiming to transform the SNU into a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Conceived as a model for future programs supporting innovation, entrepreneurship, and cooperation between academic and industrial actors, the initiative may involve the Municipality of Palermo, the University of Palermo, SNU, and Eurobiopark. It seeks to improve local living conditions and stimulate Somali industrial development. As the leading entity, the Municipality of Palermo would play a fundamental role in the coordination and strategic direction of the project, defining the objectives and ensuring that the activities are aligned with local needs and with broader development goals related to the relationships between Italy and Somalia. The University of Palermo would contribute academic expertise and be involved in the project's educational and research components, enhancing its academic grounding and outreach. The SNU would be a direct beneficiary and a key local partner, providing local insights and facilitating on-ground activities to ensure that the project meets the specific educational and developmental needs of the Somali context. Finally, Eurobiopark would serve as a non-profit, non-governmental organization registered in Somalia, playing a crucial role in the project's technological and scientific development aspects by providing specialized expertise and technical support.

This initiative is intended to integrate professional training with the creation of a start-up incubator at SNU, offering new opportunities for growth and employment, especially for youth and vulnerable groups. It aims to create a dynamic, sustainable environment that fosters innovation and the creation of new enterprises, thereby supporting the Somali economy and reducing unemployment. These goals are expected to be achieved through three main tools:

*Development of training courses in management and entrepreneurship:* this involves implementing a training program at SNU and creating a postgraduate diploma. In more detail, an initial phase would focus on training trainers, followed by a second phase that would launch the postgraduate diploma, with courses delivered by the trained instructors.

In the first phase, a selected group of 10 SNU teachers would participate in an intensive training program in Italy, developed through the collaboration of different stakeholders, split between Milan, Rome, and Palermo, including visits and meetings where they would have the opportunity to see successful business incubators by engaging with experts in the fields of economics and international trade as well as with Italian entrepreneurs and investors. Over a 3-year project period, two editions of the postgraduate diploma would be organized, open also to Somali students from other universities (for a total of 200 participants). The postgraduate diploma would cover key aspects of entrepreneurship, such as business management, financial planning, marketing, and technological innovation, aiming to equip participants with the skills needed to start and manage successful businesses, promote self-employment, and contribute to local economic growth.

The course would take place at the Innovation Hub at SNU and would be conducted by the group of instructors who participated in the intensive training in Italy, with the scientific supervision and collaboration of the partners from the University of Palermo and a training company (to be identified), who would provide teaching materials, data, and smart methodologies.

Specific objectives of the training program include addressing the critical issue of high youth unemployment, especially among young women, aiming to reduce it significantly by equipping participants with essential business management and entrepreneurship skills; it is expected that the trained individuals will create viable businesses or obtain quality employment, significantly impacting the local economy.

*Creation of a start-up incubator:* the establishment of a start-up incubator within SNU would act as a catalyst for young Somali entrepreneurs. The incubator would be equipped with the necessary resources to develop entrepreneurial ideas, providing co-working spaces, conference rooms, and networking areas. This space would be dedicated to the elaboration and maturation of innovative projects, facilitating access to technical and consultancy support.

The hub would be equipped with technological infrastructure and multifunctional spaces designed to foster creativity and innovation; it would provide mentoring and consultancy from experienced entrepreneurs and industry experts to guide young entrepreneurs through their initial stages of business development. An annual monetary prize would be awarded to the five most promising start-ups, selected through specific challenge initiatives, together with annual co-financing (for up to two years) for three selected start-ups to help them overcome initial market challenges and achieve long-term sustainability.

*Preparation of legislative proposal for the regulation of technological start-ups:* a working group would be established to draft a legislative text to frame, regulate, and protect the creation of start-ups in Somalia. This phase of the project would involve active interaction with local stakeholders and the formulation of a legislative proposal that would be presented to the competent authorities for approval. The legislative proposal would aim to create a more business-friendly environment by simplifying regulations and encouraging innovation; the collaboration with local government entities and international legal experts would be made to ensure that the proposed laws support sustainable business practices and economic growth.

A comprehensive monitoring system would be implemented to track the effectiveness and impact of the training and incubation programs, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation to local needs. Collaboration among local entities, as well as between Somali and Italian universities, would ensure that the project not

only achieves its immediate objectives but also establishes a platform for continuous growth that can adapt and evolve to meet the country's future needs. In this way, the project commits not only to solving current issues but also to building the ground for a more prosperous and stable future for Somalia.

### The One Health Institute

The One Health Institute is a project that SNU and Eurobiopark-Somalia have been discussing and elaborating on in the last year. Approximately 65-70% of the Somali population relies on livestock as their primary livelihood due to their nomadic lifestyle; on the other hand, urban populations are dependent on rural areas for essential supplies such as food, meat, milk, fruits, and vegetables. For that reason, the introduction and development of the One Health program practicum and policies are vital for the Somali population in both rural and urban centers.

Eurobiopark will work in the following areas of action: i) supervision, monitoring, and evaluating the One Health programs in Somalia; ii) fostering awareness of One Health competencies and capacities (working together for the betterment of the human, animal, plant, and environment health) through workshops, pamphlets, seminars, and trainings; iii) promoting the reinforcing of the veterinary health control system and community health, particularly highly pathogenic, emerging, and re-emerging zoonotic epidemics and pandemics; iv) advocating for the national policies and sanitary and phytosanitary legislation and its enforcement mechanisms; and v) encouraging and facilitating the research and publications regarding the One Health approach.

### Legal and constitutional development

Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 and the fall of Siad Barre's regime, Somalia has been engaged in a long and difficult process of legal and institutional reconstruction. Before the 2012 Provisional Constitution and in the absence of a central government, the social order was mainly regulated by multiple legal orders<sup>1,2</sup> based on traditional law (*xeer*) and religious (*sharia*) sys-

tems; in addition, various forms of "subnational governance"<sup>3</sup> emerged organically across the country<sup>4</sup>. For more than two decades, the country became an emblematic case of "governance without government", where social cohesion and basic regulation depended on community-based mechanisms rather than formal state institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The legacy of the Siad Barre regime helps explain the instability that characterized the period leading up to the entry into force of the Provisional Constitution of 2012. Since 1969, the military regime centralized power<sup>d</sup> and introduced "scientific socialism" (*Hantiwadaag Cilmiga ku Dhisan*) as the ideological foundation of law and governance, placing the judiciary under military control and subordinating it to political authority.<sup>4,5</sup> During the 1980s, repression, corruption, and divide-and-rule tactics eroded public trust and exacerbated clan antagonisms.<sup>3</sup> After 1991, this legacy of authoritarian centralization produced widespread distrust toward state institutions, contributing to the long period of institutional paralysis that followed.<sup>3</sup>

The adoption of the Provisional Constitution in 2012 marked a turning point by formally recognizing Somalia as a federal,<sup>4,8</sup> sovereign, and democratic republic<sup>e</sup> based on principles of power-sharing and multiparty democracy<sup>f</sup>; the constitutional text also provides for cooperation between the Federal Government and the Federal Member States<sup>g</sup>. Nevertheless, it remained provisional and incomplete, leaving significant gaps regarding the division of competences, the status of Mogadishu, and the harmonization of legal institutions across the federation<sup>h,9,10</sup>. The Somali judiciary remains fragmented<sup>i</sup> and uneven across federal and regional levels, requiring systemic transformation to re-establish an independent and coordinated judicial branch.<sup>10</sup>

The constitutional review process has been described as "never-ending and expensive",<sup>11</sup> producing conflicting recommendations in each review cycle. The absence of political consensus has effectively stalled the process, leaving the Constitution provisional. According to recent developments reported by the Ministry of Justice of the Federal Government of Somalia, the draft of the final constitutional text, which is expected to maintain the federal structure, has now reached an advanced stage. This step is expected to mark the end of more than a decade of constitutional transi-

<sup>c</sup>"At a more local level, coalitions of business leaders, clan elders, and religious figures established sharia courts to provide basic security and justice. The business community, in particular, played a crucial role by financing these local security arrangements to create a predictable environment for commerce, thereby sidelining the warlords who had previously thrived on chaos" (Menkhaus, 2006).

<sup>d</sup>For a deeper analysis of the characteristics of Siad Barre's socialism, particularly its creation of a centralized legal order, the nationalization of land, and the introduction of legal codes, see Sacco R. *Le grandi linee del sistema giuridico somalo*. Giuffrè; 1985, p. 65-86 and Mancuso S. *La via somala al federalismo. Sfide e prospettive*. In: *Studi in memoria di Beniamino Caravita*. Editoriale Scientifica; 2024, p. 2058-2060.

<sup>e</sup>According to Article 1 of the Federal Republic of Somalia, "(1) Somalia is a federal, sovereign, and democratic republic founded on inclusive representation of the people, a multiparty system and social justice. (2) After Allah the Almighty, all power is vested in the people and can only be exercised in accordance with the Constitution and the law and through the relevant institutions. It is prohibited for a person or a section of the public to claim the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia, or to use it or their personal interest. (3) The sovereignty and unity of the Federal Republic of Somalia is inviolable."

<sup>f</sup>The "4.5 formula" is still in force as the mechanism for allocating seats in the House of the People; it is based on clan representation among the four major clans (Hawiye, Darod, Dir, Rahanweyn) and a half-share for minorities. While the Upper House, which represents the Federal Member States, is not elected through this system, the 4.5 principle continues de facto to shape executive appointments and institutional balance. Recent political agreements, including those of the National Consultative Council (2023-2024), have declared the intention to replace the clan-based model with universal suffrage starting from the 2026 elections. For further information, see: <https://www.theafricareport.com/312155/somalia-announces-universal-suffrage-to-replace-clan-based-system/>; <https://acleddata.com/report/controversy-over-electoral-reform-sparks-debate-somalia-amid-al-shabaab-operation-october/>; <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/somalia/b208-electoral-showdown-somalia-averting-another-round-turmoil>.

<sup>g</sup>Articles 50-52 of the 2012 Provisional Constitution set out the foundations of Somalia's cooperative federalism: power must be exercised at the most effective level (subsidiarity), relations between the federal and state governments are to be based on cooperation and equity, and disputes resolved through dialogue (Art. 50); mechanisms for coordination and annual federal-state conferences are established (Art. 51); Federal Member States may cooperate among themselves or with the Federal Government on shared matters such as development and services (Art. 52).

<sup>h</sup>According to Article 9 of the Provisional Constitution, "the capital city of the Federal Republic of Somalia is Mogadishu. The status of the capital city of Somalia shall be determined in the constitutional review process, and the two houses of the Somali Federal Parliament shall enact a special law with regard to this issue."

<sup>i</sup>As stated by Mancuso in *La via somala al federalismo. Sfide e prospettive*. In: *Studi in memoria di Beniamino Caravita* (2024), there are several contradictions between Somalia's Provisional Federal Constitution and the constitutions of its Federal Member States. This has led to a confused power-sharing model, which often results in political crises between the Central Government and the Federal Member States. A clear example of this is the conduct of foreign relations. Although the Provisional Constitution reserves this power exclusively for the Federal Government, Federal Member States have often conducted their foreign relations independently. See Mohamed AA. *Constitutional Architecture of Federalism and National Stability—the Case of Somalia 2012-2020* [dissertation]. University of Nairobi; 2023;60: "[...] pluralism has manifested in which the national and all regional governments have their own.

tion and to provide a definitive legal framework for Somalia's reconstruction. Parallel to the constitutional review, a broad reform program has been launched to align the legal system with international standards. Somalia's current legal framework still reflects the codes and administrative structures of the socialist period – such as the 1960s Penal and Criminal Procedure codes and the 1970s Civil and Civil Procedure codes – which are now under revision to enhance judicial independence, transparency, and efficiency, and to ensure consistency with the principles of the forthcoming Constitution.

International partners, including Italian universities, continue to provide technical and academic support to these initiatives.

The modernization of Somalia's legal system represents a cornerstone of the broader state-building process. It is not merely a technical or bureaucratic reform but a crucial step toward restoring citizens' trust in public institutions, ensuring equal access to justice, and consolidating the country's transition from institutional fragility toward a cohesive and functional federal system.

### Final considerations

The SNU stands as a symbol of resilience and hope for the future of public and quality higher education in Somalia. Since its foundation in 1950, the SNU has played a crucial role in Somalia's intellectual, scientific, technological, and economic development, shaping the brightest minds in the country. With 13 active faculties offering 45 undergraduate degrees and 8 postgraduate degrees, along with 4 postgraduate diplomas across five campuses, SNU today has a student population of over 11,000 and 470 employees, including academic, administrative, and service staff. Re-established after 23 years of closure due to the civil war, the SNU has not only resumed its academic activities but has become the first choice for university studies in Somalia, with graduates pursuing postgraduate studies worldwide and finding employment in both the public and private sectors. However, despite being the main university in Somalia, there is still much work to be done to improve the practical aspects of its academic programs in order to rank among the top African universities, as it did before the civil war. In this context of rebirth and challenge, this article has explored the vital role that SNU and its international inter-university collaborations play in Somalia's development. Considering the points discussed, the future of SNU is bright, but it requires sustained effort to overcome current and future challenges, ensuring that the university remains a pillar of the country's reconstruction

and development. In conclusion, SNU's journey is emblematic of the broader process of transformation and development underway in Somalia. The determination and hard work of all members of the SNU community are essential to ensure that the university can continue to serve not only as an educational institution but also as a fundamental engine of social and economic development for the country.

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