



An Interview with Bancroft Global Development

By WardheerNews
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Editor's note: Bancroft's story has been featured in many notable publications including The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, and The New York Times. This is the first time their story has been covered by Somali Media. Thus, WDN brings you this exclusive interview. Mohamed Osman and Abdelkarim Hassan have conducted the interview for WardheerNews.com

WardheerNews (WDN): We are delighted to welcome you to WardheerNews.com, before we delve into the bulk of the interview, could you please share with us a brief background history about Bancroft?

Bancroft: Thank you. I am pleased that a serious news outlet has an interest in Bancroft and the work we do.

Bancroft's roots go back more than a century, to relief efforts during World War I and to a team of financiers who helped dozens of countries to prosper in the decades following the war. Many of these countries are terrific successes especially when compared to the situation that existed before Bancroft's predecessors became involved. Example client partner countries include Austria, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Japan, Peru, the Philippines and Mexico. After the end of the Cold War, Bancroft set out specifically to modernize and revive its successful model.



Bancroft is composed of two separate organizations. Bancroft Global Development is a non-profit, charitable NGO that improves stability in conflict zones through education and mentoring. Bancroft Global Investments finances projects in places that Bancroft Global Development is working. The relationship between the two organizations is the true key to Bancroft's success and what makes us unique. Our investments only succeed when our education and aid work

make a real difference. If Bancroft helps improve local people's lives, the investments produce returns. Both parts of Bancroft have a long-term vision and real incentives to maximize results with the least possible friction with local institutions and actors.

In Somalia, for example, Bancroft Global Development has donated its personnel to be a part of the African Union Mission (AMISOM). Of course AMISOM is well known for the military campaign against al Shabaab. Some of your readers may not be aware that AMISOM's mandate also includes helping to build Somalia's government agencies and security forces. This is one of the most important tasks for our people serving in AMISOM. We contribute specialists from about 20 different countries to serve AMISOM in a particular kind of civilian position called Experts on Mission. Within AMISOM, our people's main job is to train the Somali and AMISOM personnel on technical functions like trauma surgery, bomb disposal, and crime scene investigations. We run mobile medical clinics that offer free medical care to civilians in rural areas throughout the south-central Somalia. At the same time, Bancroft Global Investments has invested nearly \$50 million dollars in Somali enterprises and we are looking closely at another major round of investment. At their peak, Bancroft-funded projects have employed more than 1,200 Somali people in skilled and unskilled positions. We hope to expand significantly in the coming years.



Mohamed (from left), Marc, Michael and Abdelkarim

WDN: What attracted Bancroft to Somalia and how different is Bancroft's business model from other foreign entities operating in fragile countries?

Bancroft: Bancroft is the only organization I'm aware of that applies this dual model of investment and development work in conflict zones to create a virtuous cycle: our aid work improves security, which makes our investments successful; our investments create opportunity and prosperity for Somalis, which enhances our aid work.

Bancroft is also different in that we do not chase government contracts. In fact, Bancroft funded its own work in Somalia from 2007 to 2009, with no outside support. Of course, we are grateful to receive grant funding from important members of the international community who share our values, including the US and several European Governments as well as UN agencies. We will usually accept outside funding only to support work we had intended to do or actually started on

our own. That way we do not become distracted from our long-term view and strategy. It is extremely important to us that we try never to make decisions based on arbitrary timelines or the ebb and flow of donor attention and finances.



Bancroft International Campus (IC), Mogadishu, Somalia

Somalia was a good fit for Bancroft in late 2007 because, at the time we arrived, the conflict was very severe yet Somalia's investment potential was and has always been very special. In addition to the obvious advantages, like Somalia's strategic location in the Indian Ocean, the country has an enormously valuable resource that is often underappreciated: the Somali diaspora community. We knew there were educated, successful Somali people around the world who felt a very strong connection to their mother country. So we came to Somalia intending to play a role in creating a safer environment and build opportunities for Somali people living in places like Australia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, the UK and US to invest in promising enterprises. We believe there is huge, untapped potential.

When AMISOM was formed, we knew we would have serious, legitimate partners since we had had a relationship with other countries in the region for more than 10 years by that time, over 15 years by now.

WDN: Since Bancroft Development's objectives include the demilitarizing of civilians and reducing the influence of non-official armed groups, what can you tell us about the work

Bancroft Development is performing in this area? Can you share any success stories and the challenges with regard to the aforementioned objectives?

Bancroft: First, I have to emphasize that Bancroft's success in Somalia was achieved in our supporting role to AMISOM and Somali government security forces. They deserve the credit. Worldwide, Bancroft aims to reduce the use of violence as a means of influencing politics. This means we aim to reduce people's reasons for arming non-official or anti-government groups. Obviously, in Somalia this primarily means fighting al Shabaab. One of the key paths to defeating al Shabaab is to reduce the need for Somali civil society to depend on armed militia and other self-defense mechanisms. This does not mean that it is wise to go around disarming law-abiding citizens. Instead, it calls for Bancroft to play a role in building capable and responsible national and regional security forces, especially the police and Army. Since militias are expensive to maintain, our goal is to give civilians reason to trust their safety to government forces to the point that there is no longer a reason for any civilian group to keep significant numbers of armed people. Demilitarizing civil society will make it much more difficult for al Shabaab to operate.

This is an important goal, and the indirect strategy is working. Over the past several years, Shabaab's capacity to confront Somali Army and AMISOM troops has been reduced to near zero. The continued reliance on suicide attacks and bombings is unfortunate and will be stopped, but it is a sign that al Shabaab is struggling and cannot control territory anymore. Also al Shabaab access to funding has been reduced sharply as Somali forces, with AMISOM support, reestablished control of key transport routes and the port towns that were used to import weapons and generate illicit revenues.

WDN: Bancroft has substantial experience operating in high risk fragile countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. What lessons learned from previous experience has Bancroft applied to its current operation in Somalia?

Bancroft: Actually, Bancroft has done almost no work in Iraq. We certainly worked in Afghanistan, but never based our strategy on working for the coalition forces. From the perspective of our work in Somalia this is a good thing. Although many well-meaning people made extraordinary efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, those campaigns have not had good results. In particular, the situation in Syria and Iraq today is very troubling. Since we are not burdened by habits formed during those other conflicts, we have been able to learn a lot about what not to do, by looking closely at what went poorly in those other places.

The most crucial lesson we have drawn from its work in dangerous places is that it is actually far more effective to live and work among the people than to wall ourselves off in fortified compounds. There are risks to that approach, of course, but Somalia is fighting an enemy that moves through and remains among local communities. To be effective, we must work with the people; we must become a part of the community. In Somalia, the Turkish government in particular has understood this phenomenon very well. We have a good deal of respect for the Turkish Government's ability to apply these important lessons on the large scale that only a sovereign state can do.

WDN: Al Shabaab was able to infiltrate the green zone on Dec 25, 2014. How did that happen and what security measures were implemented to prevent further security breaches in the future?

Bancroft: As you know, both Bancroft and Uganda lost friends and colleagues that day. Since then, coordination and cooperation among AMISOM, the United Nations, and the Somali security agencies has improved. We have made ourselves available in Bancroft's usual supporting role, as a resource to these organizations. It would be inappropriate to describe the security upgrades in detail, but, as I said, there is a great deal more collaboration from all parties that should enable security personnel to do their jobs better.

WDN: Somalia is host to AMISOM's 20,000 strong contingent of troops. To build sustainable peace and security, it's critical for Somalia to have its own national army as it can't outsource its military needs to the African Union. Thus, since Bancroft Development trains and advises both AMISOM soldiers as well as the Somali military; are there any plans and time lines to build Somalia's national army to assume the responsibility of its security to serve its people and protect its borders?

Bancroft: It is essential to remember that Somalia is an important member of the African Union, so AMISOM cannot be seen as a foreign force over which Somalia has no influence. Also, I realize that some of your readers might think of Bancroft as an organization that mainly trains militaries or security forces. I have tried to correct that perception earlier in this conversation, but I can reinforce it here. Some people may be surprised to learn that Bancroft



almost always argues in favor of small armies, particularly in places facing challenges like Somalia's. A nation must calibrate the size and composition of its Armed Forces to the tasks at hand. There are a number of unfortunate examples around the world in which governments have tried to create large militaries as a framework to create an orderly social structure for young men; these turn out to be prohibitively expensive and ultimately destabilizing. The Somali national Armed Forces must be designed to act on behalf of Somalia's people, not the other way around.

By contrast, Bancroft is focused on helping the Somali Armed Forces build units that exemplify the Somali people's values by ensuring they can deny sanctuary to al Shabaab, while protecting human rights and civilian property. Somalia's Chief of Defense Forces has entitled the first of these units *Danab*, meaning lightning. That name sums up the unit's operating principles nicely: it will be rapidly deployable and highly effective. This battalion is intended to set a standard for the Armed Forces overall. For example, this is the first mixed clan unit in the Somali Armed

Forces. The recruits come from all over Somalia, rejecting the idea that soldiers must be organized or promoted based on anything other than merit and individual achievement.

There is no question that in the middle to long-term security responsibility in Somalia must be delivered by exclusively Somali institutions, including the National Army. In the interim, we think most people would agree it is most important to maintain or increase the pressure on al Shabaab while there is momentum. Since there are limited resources for any stabilization campaign, it is necessary to find an appropriate balance between fighting the current war and preparing for the future. We believe that Somali government and its allies in the international community are generally doing well at balancing those competing needs. We know capacity building is receiving enough emphasis when our capacity to train Somali soldiers, doctors, nurses or engineers meets or exceeds the availability of qualified candidates, as is presently the case.

WDN: [Human Rights Watch](#) recently put out a detailed report on sexual exploitation and abuse of Somali women and girls by AMISOM soldiers. As various reports of sexual allegations have since surfaced and have come to light, how prevalent is this issue among the soldiers Bancroft trains? Does Bancroft's training include a military code of conduct?

Bancroft: As a general matter I have to stress that sexual exploitation of any kind cannot be tolerated. Not only this kind of behavior immoral, it undermines whatever legitimate mission the perpetrators were sent to do. For both reasons, Bancroft training and mentorship always advocates for strong measures to prevent and address that kind of behavior.

The allegations published by Human Rights Watch are undoubtedly disturbing. Bancroft had seen reports that suggested AMISOM troops had patronized organized rings of Somali civilians that were trafficking Somali women. With assistance from Bancroft, the AMISOM Troop Contributing Countries investigated the allegations aggressively; several soldiers were charged and convicted by formal courts martial. These were reported in newspapers as far back as 2012. It is not clear why Human Rights Watch did not describe the remedial actions in their report. Also, as troubling as the the report is, it did not conclude there is systemic abuse or claim that AMISOM turned a blind eye to the allegations. We have found that AMISOM troops are well aware that such conduct is prohibited. We would not work so closely with AMISOM if we had any doubt on this point. Since the Human Rights Watch report, AMISOM has asked Bancroft to help the Mission improve its monitoring and enforcement capacity to better detect abuses, investigate allegations, and enforce the existing zero tolerance policies for abuse or exploitation.

WDN: Investors are swarming into the region in search of the enormous returns that ultra-early stage investments can bring, particularly in the hospitality industry. Among those are SKA and AIM which have fairly recently set up lodging operations within the green zone, similar to Bancroft. How are you able to maintain high occupancy rates amid increasing competition?

Bancroft: As I mentioned, SKA and AIM are fundamentally different organizations from Bancroft. They are strictly contractors and commercial enterprises; they do not provide the related development and stabilization component that makes Bancroft unique. To the extent other companies offer services similar to ours, maybe it is best just to say that imitation is the

sincerest form of flattery. Of course, we are pleased to see that other businesses are now coming to Somalia because it means that stability is improving which also means that our model is working. Perhaps the best measure of the improving business climate is that demand is sufficient to support a daily Turkish Airline flight to Mogadishu and service from both Qatar and Ethiopian Airlines is expected to begin soon. These developments would have been inconceivable just a few short years ago.

WDN: How involved are local contractors in the procurement process? How has Bancroft contributed to the local economy? Given Bancroft's proximity to Mogadishu International Airport (MIA) and given the Green Zone's security protocol, is it sometimes more convenient to have perishable and non-perishable items flown in from Dubai or Nairobi?

Bancroft: Bancroft's projects in Somalia have provided jobs to thousands of local workers and spent nearly \$25,000,000 on the local economy, with Somali firms, to purchase everything from fruit and vegetables to construction equipment, vehicles and computer-aided designs from a Mogadishu-based civil engineer. Not only does this contribute to the local economy; it is also far cheaper and faster to obtain needed items inside Somalia than importing them. Most often, we find that this is the case, even considering the security protocols at the airport. Perishable items are a perfect example of our approach. Bancroft has recently invested in the development of a School of Agriculture to assist Somali farmers to produce perishable goods using reliable, sanitary methods that meet international standards. Some of the produce will be consumed at our facilities and we will help connect the farmers with other domestic consumers and the international markets. This is win-win-win, benefitting the local population, Bancroft, and the members of the international community we accommodate.

WDN: It's often said that there are two worlds in Mogadishu, those behind the massively fortified green zone and the rest of the ordinary Somali citizens. Do you think the heavily fortified wall, although necessary for security reasons, is creating a wedge and distrust between Somalis and expats? What is your opinion on the subject matter?

Bancroft: You raise an important point. The physical security measures like walls are unfortunate on many levels. Bancroft leads the way in working on both sides of the wall, because we hope to use our relationships of mutual trust with all sides to bridge the divides that can develop between local people and the international organizations that have come to help. However, it is important to understand the true cause of any distance or distrust between the real Mogadishu city and the fortified compounds in the airport: al Shabaab. A key part of its strategy is to isolate the Somali people, to drive a wedge between Somalis and the international community. We believe that distrust from either side, international or local, is a success only for al Shabaab and a loss for everyone else.

Earlier in this interview you mentioned the December 2014 attack on the airport. This is just one of several tragic incidents inside AMISOM bases. I am reminded of an incident in the latter part of 2011, in which the AMISOM Force Headquarters and other buildings inside the airport were badly damaged. The AMISOM Deputy Force Commander was killed that day. When these attacks happen, we find almost always that al Shabaab had gained entry by manipulating local civilians who had access to the base. The al Shabaab tactic of impersonating Somali soldiers,

police, or trustworthy Somali workers is a calculated way to attack the working relationship between the international community and the Somali people. Big walls and other security measures are a by-product. It is important for all sides to remember the real reason that there is a secured enclave in Mogadishu - this is not the desire of the honorable and hard-working Somali people, nor the Somali government and it is definitely not helpful to the foreign Embassies or international agencies. The best way to prevent al Shabaab from succeeding in creating discord is for both sides to understand that reasonable security measures are actually a foundation for improving mutual trust rather than the opposite.

WDN: Thank you for your time.

Bancroft: Thank you for the opportunity.