

Three measures to reverse the “alarming” land degradation in Somalia

Highlights:

- *Somalia faces an array of land degradation practices to which includes “deforestation for charcoal production” eroding critical ecosystems including the country’s dwindling forests and rangelands.*
- *Following years of disruptions, a set of structural failures and socio-economic hardships have aggravated the state of land degradation. These include weak regulatory frameworks, poor land-use planning, inadequate access to clean energy, extreme poverty and political instability.*
- *It’s crucial to form a federal regulatory body on environmental management coordinating effective implementation of approved policies and strategic frameworks on nature conservations for a greener, and sustainable progress in Somalia.*

Background

A greener environment is vital to fostering stable, inclusive and sustainable transition enhancing healthier and more resilient outcomes. Despite the outstanding progress being made in peace-building and economic recovery, Somalia has been grappling with devastating land degradation over the past decades, including deforestation. The most recent data shows the country has witnessed a surprising level of deforestation for charcoal production. As of 2018, UN notes that 8.2 million trees were cleared mainly for charcoal production between 2011 and 2017, in Somalia¹. A deep-rooted socio-economic disparity and regulatory barriers have eroded the state of the environment. These include weak statutory instruments, limited access to energy, abject poverty, and poor land-use

planning, to cite a few. These, therefore, have led to enormous loss of ecosystems including forests, rangelands and biodiversity deepening the state of vulnerability to climate change.

Key factors that have persisted the shocking rate of deforestation are summarized as follows:

Weak statutory instruments

Effective regulatory frameworks lay the basis which enables the conservation of natural ecosystems promoting a greener transition. However, conserving vulnerable ecosystems has been an arduous task for Somalia’s nascent institutions due to a myriad of governance and legislation impediments. These include limited technical capacity to develop coherent

instruments, ineffective regulatory implementation, and weak institutional coordination. Despite the newly-formed Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Somalia has not yet established a federal body that leads an effective implementation of approved regulatory frameworks safeguarding nature. Hence, this has not only made deforestation difficult to contain but resulted in a sharp loss of forest cover, wildlife and biodiversity.

Poor land-use planning

Smart land-use planning is critical to fostering sustainable environmental management enabling resilient and green outcomes. Somalia, however, faces deep-seated practices that destruct rangelands and forests including deforestations, and charcoal production. These have been motivated, very often, by poor legislation and governance coupled with long-standing socio-economic hardships. These include, among others, a lack of effective land-use policies and mechanisms that tackle the widespread land degradations. And extreme poverty, limited access to energy for household consumption, and informal urbanization. This, therefore, not only erodes the shrinking rangelands and forests but exacerbates the changing climate patterns that have frequently devastated Somalia's economic progress.

Limited access to energy

Affordable and clean energy is a key to promoting sustainable environmental conservation halting unsustainable utilization of forests' goods for energy. That said, an overwhelming majority of Somalia's population heavily relies on charcoal as a source of energy for cooking. This is due to a pervasive lack of efficient, clean and affordable energy for

household consumption. The USAID finds that close to 85 percent of the population in Somalia endures a lack of access to efficient electricity as of 2023². This, therefore, poses threats to the environment, biodiversity, and agro-pastoral communities' livelihoods.

Abject poverty

Eradicating extreme poverty is pivotal to halting and reversing land degradation accelerating a greener transition. However, this has been a daunting task for Somalia to make tangible progress due to political instability, frequent climate-related shocks and a high unemployment rate. The World Bank's newest data for 2022 shows, roughly 70 percent of Somalia's population live below the poverty line while 90 percent suffer multidimensional poverty in which the majority lack access to sanitation, water, education and energy³. This has been made worse by inadequate concrete measures and strategies that support the alleviation of poverty as an environmental crisis. This has, consequently, elevated environmental degradation making it, unsurprisingly, a stream of income to many whose livelihoods deeply rely on trading in charcoal production.

Political turmoil

A stable and thriving political environment builds the bedrock which helps promote sustainable environmental management. That said, rising to the challenges that political disruption presents has been an uphill struggle for Somalia, broadly, due to decades-long conflicts, contestation for power, mistrust among leaders, and fragile institutions. These have, undesirably, undermined national efforts toward halting environmental degradation

including practices on ending deforestation of dwindling forests and rangelands.

Policy responses:

This policy brief recommends the following policy considerations;

- It's imperative for Somalia to establish a national regulatory body on environmental management. This will support an effective coordination and implementation of approved national instruments on environmental conservation, including the protection of shrinking forests' goods and rangelands.
- The Federal Government of Somalia should adopt and implement coherent legislations and strategies on smart land-use planning that will abolish poor land-use practices including informal settlements on rangelands.
- It's of paramount importance for the Federal Government of Somalia to accelerate the use of non-firewood energy means including consumption of liquified petroleum gases (LPG) by relaxing tariffs on their importation. This practice will help tackle the heavy consumption of charcoal and firewood as means of energy enabling greener outcomes.

Endnotes

1. UN Environment Programme. (2018 May, 07). Somalia calls for international cooperation to stop illegal charcoal trade [press release]. <https://www.unep.org/news-andstories/press-release/somalia-callsinternational-cooperation-stop-illegalcharcoal-trade>
2. USAID. (2023 April, 15). Harnessing the Power of the Sun <https://www.usaid.gov/somalia/news/apr-15-2024-harnessing-power-sun>
3. The World Bank. (2022 November, 29). Somalia Economic Update: Investing in Social Protection to Boost Resilience for Economic Growth <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2022/11/29/somalia-economicupdate-investing-in-social-protectionto-boost-resilience-for-economicgrowth>

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Juba Institute for Climate Adaptation (Jica) is a Mogadishu-based, non-profit, and independent policy-focused research institute committed to promoting adaptation to climate change for a peaceful, and sustainable development in Somalia. To achieve its ambitious mission, Jica undertakes a rich blend of cutting-edge research, in-depth analyses, and frank dialogues on climate change, environmental sustainability, and food security.



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