



Centre for Policy Analysis

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Cycle of droughts: natural disaster or manmade catastrophe?

Somaliland, located in the Horn of Africa, is a semi-desert land with minimum rainfall in two rainy seasons, Dayr and Gua. The latter is expected to give more water in March to May every year. Majority of Somaliland people live in rural areas¹ with livestock, and few with farms, particularly in the western regions and Sanaag region. Livestock export is the main source of income². Tax collected from Berbera Port is 70% of government budget. The population of Somaliland is roughly 3.5 million.³

Livestock is crucial for the economy, security and state functioning. Any problem that negatively affects at the rural life impacts directly to the whole nation. That is why drought is felt immediately at urban areas as well. Although there is no censor carried out in Somaliland, it is believed that majority of Somaliland population are rural. Somali culture is based on collective sharing and family relations. Therefore, before drought becomes economic problem, it touches families and clans, creating social problems and burdens.

In this year (2016) Somaliland experiences severe drought and many people are in need of urgent food and water assistance. The government and local and Diaspora people are cooperating to collect fund to help drought affected people.⁴

Since immemorial Somalilanders adapted the hard environment and lived accordingly. Their lives, mode of production and culture were shaped by the climate and environment. Shortage of water has been a reality. Nevertheless, in every decade, at least once the rainfall prolonged, and created a drought which in turn devastated the society. Well-known droughts were given names such as

¹ <http://unpo.org/members/7916> last retrieved 6th November 2015

² <http://www.doingbusiness.org/Reports/Subnational-Reports/hargeisa>

³ <http://unpo.org/members/7916> last retrieved 6th November 2015

⁴ <http://waaheen.com/?p=51365>

Siigo-dheer (1954) and Dabo-dheer (1974). Many people lost their lives and other more were impoverished and displaced.

But in recent years, drought is no longer a matter of decade away. Almost in every year, drought rages. A question that should be answered is why one month or two months delay of rainfall is so catastrophic?

There is no easy response, and putting forward one is naïve because it requires tough research. Nevertheless, there are visible reasons that at least facilitate the destruction prolonged rainfall causes to Somaliland and other Horn of African countries. These grounds persisted over decades.

Food insecurity

Food insecurity is a factor that is always overlooked. Heavy dependency of imported food and absence of enough local food production sparks food crisis that leads to famine. Strategies and policies are not put in place to tackle the food insecurity. Recurrences of drought quickly affects availability of food when livestock become too weak to be sold out or perish.

Government capacity

The government lacks proper and effective capacity to forecast and manage disasters. Drought and its effects surprise the authorities. Disaster responses are unorganized and uncoordinated. Ad hoc committee is established every year to try to deal with the matter. Such committee ceases to exist the first day raid drops. The absence of preparedness also complicates fundraising.

Climate change and environmental degradation

Global climate change is impacting to Horn of Africa. Rainy seasons are disrupted and no longer reliable. Somaliland people who knew when to expect rain or dry season are faced by huge change of climate behavior. Additionally, deforestation and soil erosion deteriorate the environment. Charcoal production and other unwise and unregulated consumptions of the environment ruin the environment and contribute to climate change.

Water shortage or water loss?

In every rainy season dry rivers flood to the Red Sea. Water is lost taking away fertile soil and leaving the land dry again within weeks. Somaliland lacks water management schemes and infrastructure.

Rural people: forgotten but needed

Despite being the backbone of the economy, rural areas are marginalized. Basic services, such as health care, are not available at the countryside. The government services are concentrated at urban areas. Hence rural life is so weak and totally relied on nature and its generosity.

Recommendations

To the government of Somaliland:

- The National Environment Research and Disaster-preparedness (NERAD) shall be replaced by fully functioning, equipped and financed agency responsible on prevention and management of disasters including droughts. Such agency should have all legal, human resources and facilities that are necessary for performance of its tasks.
- Put in place strategies and policies that are inclusive to cover prevention and disaster management. These policies shall address root causes and bring about solutions;
- Establish fund for disaster response and preparedness.

To the civil society, businesses and international community

- Support Somaliland government in developing strategies and policies and its implementations;
- Support Somaliland government in establishing effective and efficient government agency responsible on prevention and management of disasters;
- Support establishment of fund for disaster response and preparedness.

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About Centre for Policy Analysis

Centre for Policy Analysis (CPA) is non-governmental, nonpartisan & non-profit centre. Its vision is to help the countries in the region of Horn of Africa to achieve democratic, peaceful and good governance systems. The headquarters of CPA is Hargeisa, Somaliland.