



The State of the Environment in

Somalia

A Desk Study

United Nations Environment Programme



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A NOTE ON DATA SOURCES, NOMENCLATURE AND MAPS

This Desk Study used the term “Somalia” to describe the official, internationally recognized country. “Somaliland” and “Puntland”, although self-declared states, are not currently recognized by the international community. Note, however, that the designation of geographical entities in this report does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the publisher or the participating organizations concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The term “Somali” is used equally to denote the people of this country as well as the predominant language spoken.

It is not uncommon to discover several permutations of the spelling of a place name, establishment or feature in Somalia. Every effort has been made in this Desk Study to be consistent with such spellings but, again, attention is drawn to the fact that these should not be taken as the definitive description.

Because Somalia has been in a state of instability since the fall of the regime of Mohamed Siyad Barre in January 1991 – and, actually, to a considerable degree since the outbreak of civil war in the late 1980s – the lack of functioning government institutions has meant that statistics tend to be unreliable or non-existent. Despite best efforts to verify data, statistics cited in the text or tables should be viewed with caution.

Executive Summary

The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 26 December 2004 affected part of Somalia, with most of the damage experienced in the north-east along a 650 km coastline stretching from Xafuun in the Bari region, to Garacad in the Mudug region. About 44,000 people are believed to have been affected by the tsunami.

As part of its response to the Indian Ocean tsunami, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) conducted a short study on tsunami-affected areas of Somalia in February 2005 to identify possible environmental impacts of this natural disaster which might have posed a threat to human health and livelihoods. Two main issues of concern were highlighted:

- the possible existence of tsunami-related hazardous and other waste that might pose a health hazard to the population and a threat to the environment; and
- the lack of up-to-date information on the state of the environment in Somalia, including lack of accurate data on the impact of the tsunami on the people.

Following the release of these preliminary findings during UNEP's Governing Council (20 February 2005), UNEP was requested by the Somalia Transitional Federal Government to conduct a detailed Desk Study on the state of the environment in Somalia. It is against this background that this Desk Study has been prepared.

Findings of the Desk Study indicate that not much information is available with regard to many aspects of natural resources management, although there is still sufficient evidence to highlight a number of concerns over recent and current patterns of natural resources use. On the one hand Somalia is experiencing significant environmental problems, including deforestation, overfishing, overgrazing and soil erosion, while on the other it lacks both human and financial resources as well as a political structure and stability sufficient to allow these issues to be addressed at even the most basic level.

These problems have been compounded by a series of droughts over much of the country. Large numbers of people have died as a result of drought and starvation, and many livelihoods have been undermined as livestock herds succumbed to drought and food shortages. Heavy rains and flooding typically follow periods of drought, only adding to the burden which people may have already experienced.

The study makes three key overall recommendations that should form the centre of the recovery programme in Somalia:

- strengthening environmental governance to ensure the sustainable management of the country's natural resource base;
- conducting environmental assessments to guide the setting of priorities for environmental recovery, resource management and development planning; and
- revitalising environmental co-operation with neighbouring countries and within the region, in order to support peace building, enhance important environmental initiatives, and share knowledge and information.

In addition, the study recommends specific interventions for immediate action. They include:

- proper management of waste, including effective containment and/or clean-up of all remaining stocks of pesticides in the country;
- institutional development and strengthening;

- control of soil erosion;
- fisheries management including taking measures against illegal fishing by foreign vessels;
- improved and controlled charcoal production;
- conducting field-based environmental assessments to inform future decision making; and
- improving national disaster preparedness and response capacity.

Recommended interventions for medium-term action include:

- reclaiming the protected area network;
- protection of marine resources;
- sustainable management of forest and woodland resources; and
- development of an adequate policy and legal framework for environmental management.

Rebuilding Somalia will take time and a huge, concerted and sustained effort by the international community as well the country itself. The formation of a Transitional Federal Government, and its installation in Somalia in June 2005, offer the first glimmer of hope that the situation might be improved.

Introduction

Somalia occupies much of the 'Horn of Africa', so it has long coasts on both the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It is a large, relatively flat country, with an arid or semi-arid climate and prone to severe droughts and floods. Its ten million or so people mostly support themselves through nomadic pastoralism and agriculture. They are among the poorest in the world, and although too few data are available to allow the country to be ranked relative to others according to the Human Development Index (HDI), it is believed to score very poorly on all HDI indicators.

This is very largely the result of internal conflict, which began in the late 1980s and intensified following the fall of the Siyad Barre government in 1991. There has been no functioning national government since then, leaving the country open to fragmentation among competing local interest groups, and its natural resources vulnerable to theft by foreign interests and over-exploitation by local ones. There is a self-declared state calling itself "Somaliland" in the north-west, and a self-declared autonomous region calling itself "Puntland" in the north-east, while various warlords in "Jubbaland" continue to vie for control over Mogadishu and the southern regions. Meanwhile, Somalia's rich fishery resources are being systematically looted by unlicensed foreign-flagged fishing boats, and its forests stripped for export-oriented charcoal production.

Steps towards repairing Somalia began with a National Reconciliation Conference, hosted by the Government of Kenya in 2002 under the auspices of the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). This resulted in a 275-member parliament being selected, which elected a speaker in September 2004 and President



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