

Helpdesk report, 20 June 2020

# Biodiversity in Somalia – assessment of challenges, needs and actors



*Yehab with nutritious food quality; an endangered species. Credit SATG.*

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## Submitted to:

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*Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change is a government agency collaboration between the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), University of Gothenburg (GU) and Sida to promote enhanced integration of environmental issues and perspectives in Swedish development cooperation.*

## Executive summary

Sida's Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change (hereafter the 'Helpdesk') was commissioned by Amanda Liedgren, Advisor, Environment and Climate Change, AFRIKA/HÅLLBAR, Sida, to review the possibilities for a Swedish contribution to sustainable management of biological diversity in Somalia. The request originated from the Somalia Unit of the Swedish Embassy in Kenya.

The review included assessments of i) Somalia's biodiversity status and threats; ii) on-site challenges for addressing biodiversity issues; and iii) ongoing biodiversity support and actors, gaps and possible areas that could be relevant for Swedish support. The assignment was carried out as a desk-study, comprised by a literature review complemented with interviews with selected professionals with knowledge of Somalia, its biodiversity and governance structures.

Among other references, a recent review of Somalia's progress towards SDG 15 of the 2030 Agenda was utilised to describe the status of biodiversity and overall threats to biodiversity loss in Somalia. The terrestrial vegetation is predominantly dry deciduous bushland and thicket, with semi-desert grasslands and deciduous shrubland in the north and along much of the coast. The Golis mountains region remains an important centre for biodiversity and species endemism. Since the 1980's Somalia has lost virtually all the floodplain forest that once existed along the Shabelle and Jubba rivers. The mangrove swamps that form part of the East African Coastal Biodiversity Hotspot in Southern Somalia are home a wide range of endemic flora and fauna. The high marine biodiversity is confirmed by Lezama-Ochoa, Murua et al. (2015) while relatively little is known about freshwater ecosystems in Somalia. The 2019 IUCN Red List data for Somalia shows a significant increase in biodiversity degradation occurring since the completion of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in 2015. The projected changes in climate by 2050 may lead to extinction of 15-52% of the 1,103 endemic species analysed and flagged in the INDC. (World Resources Institute, 2005). Reportedly, Somalia is far from achieving the protected area targets included in its 2015 National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBSAP) and is not on track to achieve Target 11 of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

Direct drivers commonly cited for Somalia include over-exploitation such as overfishing, hunting and poaching, overgrazing and deforestation for charcoal production and other uses. They also include habitat degradation through e.g. deforestation, invasive species, erosion and agricultural expansion. Urbanization and mining are other direct drivers mentioned (IPBES 2018, INDC 2018, NBSAP 2015). Important indirect drivers include the linkages between biodiversity and the conflict and post-conflict situation. The number of internally displaced people and the country's hosting of refugees present further pressure on resources and biodiversity. The institutional and legal frameworks for biodiversity / environmental management are summarised in the report with the overall conclusion that there is a great gap between legal frameworks and changes on the ground. At a national level the differences (socio-economic, environmental and political) between the federal member states pose a significant challenge for any efforts to uniformed approaches. Puntland and Somaliland are states that have experienced a period of relative stability and show greatest progress among the states concerning legislation and policy development, with the progress in Puntland regarded as greater than in Somalia as a whole (World Bank, 2020). Efforts are being made to align national policies, strategies and plans to Agenda 2030 and its SDGs and the many multilateral and regional

environmental agreements that the country has signed are seen as catalysts for national efforts and absorption into the national legislation efforts. An advantage of the signatures of the global/regional agreements is Somalia's access to worldwide networks and information exchange. Key references to Somalia's biodiversity targets and efforts are given, including the Ninth Somalia National Development Plan (NDP-9), The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, The National Adaption Programme of Action (NAPA), Somalia's intended National Determined contribution (INDC) and the UNFCCC National Communication.

There are considerable knowledge and awareness gaps, scarce financial means, weak infrastructure, prioritization of other issues and disconnections across the federal government and the member states.

Finance to biodiversity and ecosystem services rely on foreign donors and agencies, banks and others supporting Somalia, bilaterally or through multilateral organisations. The report provides description of the main donors identified (Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States, EU, the World Bank, GEF) and UN agencies (FAO, UNDP UNEP and others). Several agencies, donor governments and I/NGOs have merged their efforts into joint partnerships and programmes, such as the Somalia Resilience Consortium and Joint Programme for Sustainable Charcoal Reduction and Alternative Livelihoods (PROSCAL), which Sweden supports. The UN MPTF is the overall fund under the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility set up in 2012. The report includes a list of NGOs, women's groups and local organisations. The review identified entry points for biodiversity integration in the on-going collaborations in the Swedish portfolio.

To be able to turn support into results on biodiversity the many challenges, predominately security, conflict and institutional challenges need to be weighed in and risk management systems be developed. The most feasible approach seems to be to work with the approval from the central government, in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the regional governments. Moreover, to gain legitimacy among local communities, village/small town levels of governance need to be included in negotiations for biodiversity management.

In view of support to the challenges of biodiversity and ecosystem degradation and loss, Sweden is recommended to:

- 1) Put great emphasis on all the five Swedish perspectives for international collaboration when considering support to Somalia on biodiversity and ecosystems. The very weak human rights and gender equality status in Somalia, the high poverty rate and severe security situation call for a holistic approach, stressing on the interdependency among the perspectives, including environment and climate change.
- 2) Promote capacity building and awareness raising on the relevance of biodiversity and ecosystem services for the high priority sectors in Somalia.
- 3) Support the collection, analyses and sharing of information on biodiversity and ecosystem degradation due to the sparse data of causes, status and change. It will help selecting priority areas for support and more targeted interventions. It should be based on inclusiveness of community and grassroots levels and encompass indigenous and local knowledge from a poor

people's perspective. It will address the main priority of Somalia's NBSAP: "Creating understanding of the drivers of biodiversity degradation together with response measures."

- 4) Advocate and support inclusive conservation approaches by ensuring that project-affected indigenous and local people are involved from the onset of planning biodiversity management operations. It applies to any implementation partner in the pipeline. The challenge of insecurity refers to this recommendation, i.e. presence on the ground, preferably.
- 5) Overall, to apply Somalia's set of planning and action frameworks and the National Development Plan, which should guide support. They represent the wheel for Somalia to advance on biodiversity preservation and management.
- 6) The greatest chance of fruitful implementation given all challenges (section 3.2) is likely to collaborate with an established organisation with a long-term presence in Somalia, such as UN. Through such entry point, Sweden ought to follow the stakeholder engagement and gender equality efforts and how the civil society benefits from the support. In addition, that such collaboration carefully addresses the fragile relation between central government and regional governments, as well as local governance structures.

The humanitarian-peace-development nexus in Somalia will remain the platform for support for considerable time ahead.

## Acknowledgements

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Front photo: Yeheb (*Cordeauxia edulis*). Yeheb is an evergreen dry-land shrub that grows prolific bunches of pods that contain seeds of a nutritious food quality that local people prefer. It is listed as an endangered species by IUCN. Text and photo credit to Somali Agriculture Technical Group (SATG), <https://satg.org/environment-and-biodiversity/>