

# 'WE HAVE NOT SEEN SOMETHING LIKE THIS BEFORE': CYCLONE SAGAR AND ITS IMPACT ON LIVELIHOODS IN NORTHWESTERN SOMALILAND

Moustafa Ahmad



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MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

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## DESIGN

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# CONTENTS

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<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Research methods: data collection and analysis	8
Organization of this paper	9
<hr/>	
<b>Overview of discourses on climate-related crises in Somaliland</b>	<b>10</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Analysis and discussion</b>	<b>12</b>
Pre-cyclone situation	12
Onset of the cyclone	14
Post-Cyclone Period	18
<hr/>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>21</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>22</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cyclone Sagar is arguably the most devastating climate-related crisis to have hit Somaliland in contemporary history. Dominant literature to date lays the emphasis on recurring droughts in the region, since drought is the most prevalent natural hazard. However, there is a need to draw scholarly attention to tropical cyclones—and specifically to Cyclone Sagar, which ravaged northwestern Somaliland in May 2018. There is also reason to draw attention to its impact on the people affected by it and the response mechanisms needed to support affected populations. Drawing upon fieldwork conducted in the Awdal region of northwestern Somaliland between October and December 2023, and on analysis of secondary data, this paper explores the perceptions communities have of Cyclone Sagar, the impact of the cyclone on the livelihoods of affected communities, and responses by different stakeholders in the aftermath of the cyclone. The paper's findings suggest Cyclone Sagar's impact was large-scale and destructive, warranting the use of a response mechanism different from the ones applied in the aftermath of droughts.

# INTRODUCTION

Climate-related crises have been a recurring issue in the Horn of Africa, leading to massive destruction and the loss of livelihoods. The scale of the crises brought about by climate change is aggravating other factors, including the displacement of people from their homes to other locations, even those with poor socio-economic conditions. Despite contributing to less than 1 per cent of global emissions, people in the region face acute climate-related crises that threaten their lives. In sub-Saharan Africa, 2.6 million people were displaced in the aftermath of climate disasters in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

Climate change is projected to reduce agricultural productivity in continents such as Africa, where more than half of the population practices rainfed agriculture. Cyclones occur seasonally in the Indian Ocean, at times affecting Indian Ocean islands and continental Africa. In 2018, Cyclone Sagar displaced over 1,700 families in northwestern Somaliland, with the storm ravaging their settlements and livelihoods, according to the Humanitarian Coalition.<sup>2</sup>

Geographically, Somaliland lies in an arid and semi-arid environment and is prone to droughts and other hazards. It has been affected by regular cycles of drought for at least two decades, with a noticeable intensification of them in the past five years.<sup>3</sup> Drought and other variable and extreme weather, intersecting with intensified conflicts over land and resources, as well as changing mobility patterns and limited governance outreach, have severely affected Somaliland, particularly its borderlands. Climate change has had a severe impact on its agro-pastoral economy, with women and children facing disproportionate consequences of climate change shocks such as droughts.<sup>4</sup>

Somaliland is a topographically and meteorologically diverse region. There are four main

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- 1 Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo 'East Africa and the Horn Light the Way for Climate Migrants', Institute for Security Studies, September 2012. Accessed 14 November 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/east-africa-and-the-horn-light-the-way-for-climate-migrants#:~:text=The%202021%20South%20Sudan%20floods,the%20worst%20in%2060%20years.&text=In%20April%20last%20year%20C%20Burundi,due%20to%20climate%2Drelated%20disasters.>
  - 2 'Cyclone Sagar Somaliland,' Humanitarian Coalition. Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://www.humanitariancoalition.ca/cyclone-sagar-somaliland.>
  - 3 Mohamed Fadal and Louise Wiuff Moe, 'Collaboration, Conflict and Mobility: Local Responses to Climate Change in Somaliland', Policy Brief, Toda Peace Institute, 2021. Accessed 28 November 2023, <https://toda.org/policy-briefs-and-resources/policy-briefs/collaboration-conflict-and-mobility-local-responses-to-climate-change-in-somalilan.>
  - 4 Maria Abdillahi Gaheir, 'Effects of Droughts on Pastoralist and Agro-Pastoralist Women in Somaliland,' *Somaliland Peace and Development Journal* 3/1 (2019): 62-69.

seasonal patterns of critical importance to the pastoralist communities, who comprise the majority of the population.<sup>5</sup> The *Gu*, which is the major rainy season, falls within the months of April to June. During these months, pastoralists breed their livestock, primarily camels and goats. The *Xagaa*, the shorter dry season of the year, occurs during the months of July to September, though some rains do occur in the Golis Mountain range. The second rainy season, the *Deyr*, is the shorter rainy season. It falls between the months of October and November. The final season is the *Jiilaal*, which is the dry season; it exhibits extreme temperatures and occurs from December to March. During this season, pastoralists are most vulnerable to loss of livestock and scarcity of resources.

Similar to other Somali communities in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland's pastoralists have been suffering from recurrent droughts and other climate-related crises. At times of drought or change in the patterns of rainfall, they opt to move from one area to another in search of enough water and pasture. The amount of rainfall received annually declines farther to the north, except for areas around Sheikh, Hargeisa and Borama, which receive between 500 mm and 600 mm per year. The area around Erigavo receives up to 400 mm annually.<sup>6</sup> The country's northern coastline is characterized by low rainfall of less than 100 mm per year.<sup>7</sup> The rest of Somaliland receives an annual rainfall of 200 to 300 mm. In addition to this, variations in temperature have been noted in the area, with the higher altitudes of the mountains and plateau areas having a mean annual temperature of 20 to 24°C, while the coastal region has mean annual temperatures of 28- to 32°C.

Drought differs from other natural hazards in that it develops slowly, sometimes over years, and its onset can be masked by a number of factors.<sup>8</sup> Severe drought can be devastating; water supplies dry up, crops, grass and fodder fail to grow, animals die, and malnutrition and ill health become widespread. Rural populations and their livestock are the major victims of drought.

Since cyclones occur less frequently than droughts in the Somali regions, tropical cyclones, such as Cyclone Sagar, have not yet received scholarly attention. This paper explores community perceptions of Cyclone Sagar<sup>9</sup>, and its impacts on the livelihoods of affected communities in northwestern Somaliland, as well as response mechanisms by different stakeholders in the

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- 5 Abdirahman Ahmed et.al., 'Bridging the gap: Environmental change, mobility and policy in Ethiopia's Somali Region and Somaliland', EU Research and Evidence Facility Report, January 2023. Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2023/02/bridging-the-gap.pdf>.
  - 6 G. Abdulkadir, 'Assessment of Drought Recurrence in Somaliland: Causes, Impacts and Mitigations', *Journal of Climatology & Weather Forecasting* 5/2 (2017): 2
  - 7 Abdulkadir, 'Assessment of Drought Recurrence in Somaliland', 3
  - 8 Nasir Mohamed Ali and Kedir Jamal, 'Mitigating Natural Disasters in Somaliland: Policy Options and Strategies', IPCS Paper, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2007. Accessed 15 December 2024, <https://instituteforpeace.org/publications/ipcs-papers/Mitigating-Natural-Disasters-in-Somaliland-Policy-Options-and-Strategies.pdf>.
  - 9 Ahmed A. Sheikh, Funke F. Fakunle and Adebayo A. Fashina, 'The status quo of building codes and construction practices in Somaliland: Practitioners' perceptions', *SPC Journal of Environmental Sciences* 2/1 (2020): 4-11.

aftermath.

According to meteorological definitions, a cyclone is a large air mass that rotates around a strong centre of low atmospheric pressure, moving counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere, if viewed from above (the opposite is an anticyclone).<sup>10</sup> Tropical cyclones make up the most devastating among the four types of cyclones, namely hurricanes, typhoons and tornados, and normally develop over very warm tropical waters, where the sea surface temperature is greater than 26°C and the wind speed has a high of 180 km/hour.<sup>11</sup> In the focus area of study, principally the coastal towns of the Awdal region of Somaliland, the wind speed was above 96 Km/h and there was heavy rain.<sup>12</sup>

## RESEARCH METHODS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this paper, qualitative research methods were used to collect data from a variety of sources. The author conducted 13 key informant interviews in Lughaya and Baki districts of the Awdal region, northwestern Somaliland, in October 2023. The interviewees included local administrators, women, men and the youth affected by Cyclone Sagar in 2018. Additional interviews were conducted in Hargeisa with an official from the National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority (NADFOR) and a researcher from BBC Media Action. Field observation was also employed to document the effects of the cyclone on land and agriculture. Apart from primary data, the author consulted secondary sources, including reports from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic publications, video, photography and media coverage of the cyclone. All these sources have provided informative insights on the impact of Cyclone Sagar and the magnitude of the devastation it caused, as well as on the response mechanisms used in the aftermath of the crisis.

The paper employs a sustainable livelihood framework to explain the severity of the impact of Cyclone Sagar. Developed by the Department for International Development (DFID), sustainable livelihood frameworks assess how capital assets are affected by the 'vulnerability context' from which they are derived, as well as by 'transforming structures and processes' (alternatively labeled policies, institutions and processes) to form 'livelihood strategies' that lead to varied outcomes.<sup>13</sup> It is relevant to use this framework in this study since it helps to discern factors that constrain or enhance livelihood, such as climate shocks or opportunities, and shows how they relate to one another. This framework has proven useful in contexts such

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10 Shweta Chand and D.K. Awasthi, 'Cyclone a Natural Calamity- Impact and Management', *International Journal of Current Science* 13/3 (2023): 471-476.

11 Chand and Awasthi, 'Cyclone a Natural Calamity- Impact and Management', 2

12 'Sagar Pounds Somalia; New Cyclone May Threaten Oman', Weather Underground. Accessed 17 November 2023, <https://www.wunderground.com/cat6/sagar-pounds-somalia-new-cyclone-may-threaten-oman>.

13 Nithya Natarajan et.al, 'A Sustainable Livelihoods Framework for the 21st Century', *World Development* 155 (2022): 1-15



as Somaliland, where the context of vulnerability is very relevant.<sup>14</sup> The vulnerability context refers to unforeseeable events that can undermine livelihoods and cause households to fall into poverty.

Given this context, this paper focuses on four elements that sustainable livelihood frameworks set out to address, namely:

- **Human capital:** Health, nutrition, education, knowledge and skills, capacity to work, capacity to adapt
- **Social capital:** Networks and connections (patronage, neighborhoods, kinship), relations of trust and mutual understanding and support, formal and informal groups, shared values and behaviours, common rules and sanctions, collective representation, mechanisms for participation in decision making, leadership
- **Natural capital:** This includes land and produce, water and aquatic resources, trees and forest products, wildlife, wild foods and fibers, biodiversity, environmental services
- **Physical capital:** Infrastructure (transport, roads, vehicles, secure shelter and buildings, water supply and sanitation, energy, communications).

## ORGANIZATION OF THIS PAPER

The next section of this paper provides an overview of discourses on climate-related crises in Somaliland, and highlights the inadequate attention to tropical cyclones, such as Sagar. The paper then turns to analysis and discussion of research findings, which include the pre-cyclone situation, the onset of the cyclone, and the post-cyclone phase. The paper then concludes with a summary of the research findings and implications for policy and further research.

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14 Mohamed Abdullahi Omer, 'Climate variability and livelihood in Somaliland: A review of the impacts, gaps, and ways forward', *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10/1 (2024) 1-14

# OVERVIEW OF DISCOURSES ON CLIMATE-RELATED CRISES IN SOMALILAND

Understanding the impact of cyclones on the livelihoods of people in Somaliland is crucial for developing effective disaster management strategies and improving the resilience of communities. Climate related crises are a recurrent issue in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland included. Previous studies have examined the impact of drought on various aspects of life in Somaliland, including environmental degradation and the impact of climate-related patterns in the pastoral life of the Somali people. Nasir Mohamed Ali and Khedir Jamal discuss the recurrence of drought in Somaliland, with a special focus on mitigating the effects of natural disasters. They put forward policy frameworks to address this issue.<sup>15</sup> For them, a critical element of any disaster management and prevention activity, or intervention, is an effective and responsive early warning system, which they say is missing in Somaliland. They lay out the problems of the lack of coordination among government agencies, the absence of effective early warning mechanisms and the overall lack of prioritization of climate change mitigation by government and national institutions.

Emma Fanning approaches the issue of climate change, particularly drought, from a gender perspective.<sup>16</sup> Fanning argues that climate change impacts men and women differently, due to their distinct roles, responsibilities and societal norms.<sup>17</sup> In a patriarchal culture, where gender relations are being strained by the impact of drought and conflict, women are particularly vulnerable, not only to threats of losing protection but to other forms of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation as well.<sup>18</sup> She makes the case for an urgent need for coherent laws, policies and practices around protecting women displaced by drought. Maria Gaheir highlights how droughts affect pastoralist and agro-pastoralist women in Somaliland by looking into how the former affects the economic production of women.<sup>19</sup>

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15 Ali and Jamal, 'Mitigating Natural Disasters in Somaliland' 3.

16 Emma Fanning, 'Drought, Displacement and Livelihoods in Somalia/Somaliland: Time for Gender-Sensitive and Protection-Focused Approaches', Joint Agency Briefing Note, Oxfam International, June 2018. Accessed 16 November 2023, <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/620503>.

17 Fanning, 'Drought, Displacement and Livelihoods.'

18 Fanning, 'Drought, Displacement and Livelihoods.'

19 Gaheir, 'Effects of Droughts', 65.

A joint report by Candlelight for Health, Education and the Environment and Amoud University is perhaps the most comprehensive work on the impact of climate change on pastoral societies of Somaliland.<sup>20</sup> The report discusses community perceptions of climate change, which are centered on the belief that climate change and drought are happening as 'God's punishment'. This not only complicates common understanding about the severity of the climate crisis, but also makes efforts to tackle the problem more problematic. The report discusses the impact of climate change on the indigenous knowledge of Somali communities and their adaptation strategies, which can be employed to lessen the impact on them of some extreme weather events. It calls for a community-based approach to deal with climate change problems in Somaliland by taking into account various contextual and social realities.

Meanwhile, Mohamed Fadal and Louise Wiuff Moe situate their analysis of climate change and conflict in Somaliland in wider debates on the climate–security nexus, especially in contexts affected by conflict and institutional fragility.<sup>21</sup> The authors highlight the history of conflict, mobility and governance fatigue in Somaliland as a result of the destructive civil wars and massive displacement that have occurred. Recurrent drought often results in adaptation mechanisms, including moving from one locality to another, thus creating tensions between different communities as to who has the right to lay claim to local resources.

This paper focuses on Cyclone Sagar, which occurred in May 2018 in northwestern Somaliland. The paper aims to broaden understanding and the literature around the climate crisis beyond droughts, which is the climate crisis typically witnessed in the Horn of Africa.

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20 Ingrid Hartmann, Ahmed J. Sugulle and Ahmed Ibrahim Awale, 'The Impact of Climate Change on Pastoral Societies of Somaliland', Report, Candlelight for Health, Education and Environment, 2009. Accessed 14 November 2023, [https://www.unisdr.org/files/13863\\_FinaldraftEffectsofclimatechangeonp.pdf](https://www.unisdr.org/files/13863_FinaldraftEffectsofclimatechangeonp.pdf).

21 Fadal and Louise Moe, 'Collaboration, Conflict and Mobility,' 11

# ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

For better organization of the paper and themes emerging from the discussion, this section is divided into three parts: Pre-cyclone situation, onset of the cyclone situation and the post-cyclone situation. These sections highlight the situation of the affected communities before and after the cyclone, in terms of their perceptions of the cyclone, its impacts, and responses by various actors. This classification is by no means fixed but it helps in shaping the paper's discussion in a systematic manner.

## PRE-CYCLONE SITUATION

Community perceptions influence the way a certain community or government prepares and responds to a crisis. In the Somali community, religious and cultural factors shape people's understanding and engagement with crises or events. As devout Muslims, Somalis refer matters of climate, rain and disasters to Allah and to the belief that only He can decide what and when, how and why something will happen.<sup>22</sup> It has been observed in Northern Kenya too how the religious perceptions of the Borana and Gabra communities on climate change shape their engagement with the environment.<sup>23</sup> There are many other examples, however, where religious values have contributed positively to addressing climate change.

Religious explanations were given by the study's respondents on their understanding of the severity of Cyclone Sagar in Somaliland. Communities who lived in the Lughaya and Baki districts had expressed how they dismissed the early warning messages they received either by radios<sup>24</sup> or in person, reasoning that only Allah knows these matters. To them, no one can predict what will happen to them. Even officials from the regional administration in Baki and Lughaya shared how people were not keen to listen to the early warning messages they were receiving.<sup>25</sup> One respondent, a religious imam<sup>26</sup> and government official for climate change in Lughaya, explained the region had not experienced a cyclone before, so people had no idea

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22 Hartmann, Sugulle and Awale, 'The Impact of Climate Change on Pastoral Societies of Somaliland.'

23 E Elizabeth E. Watson and Hassan Hussein Kochore, 'Religion and Climate Change in Northern Kenya: New Moral Frameworks for New Environmental Challenges?', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 6/3 (2012): 319-43.

24 The importance of radios in raising awareness regarding climate change will be discussed in the coming sections.

25 Interview with government official, Baki, 18 October 2023; Interview with government official, Lughaya, 17 October 2023.

26 Imam is a religious figure who leads the prayer in the mosque.

what to expect from the warnings they were receiving. This caused him too not to listen to the awareness messages.<sup>27</sup> He added he even rejected the early warning messages he had heard from someone. As he said, 'I strongly argued with him, disagreeing and saying to him, "We cannot go against Allah's plan" ... because I [had] never experienced devastation like this before.'<sup>28</sup> He built his argument on his religious teachings: Even though he works with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, his religious perceptions shaped his understanding of the early warning system.

It has been observed there is a broad disconnect between local communities in the Horn of Africa and meteorological or climate change professionals.<sup>29</sup> This is due to the fact that information about climate change is not distributed to rural communities, which have less access to modern technology. In the context of Somaliland, however, radios serve as an important tool for people to follow news and regular updates about socio-economic and political developments. With the predominantly oral Somali society, the transmission of messages through radios is still prevalent, particularly in the rural areas where access to smartphones and the internet is limited.

The majority of the residents of the districts of Baki and Lughaya who were interviewed claimed to have learned about Cyclone Sagar from the radio. Some interviewees stated they learned about Cyclone Sagar through word-of-mouth—that is, from someone calling them from major cities, such as Hargeisa and Borama. The official interviewed from the National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority (NADFOR) mentioned using radio as a way of reaching people in rural areas who would not otherwise be able to read or follow updates via traditional or social media.<sup>30</sup>

Media coverage of climate change is anyway generally lacking in Somaliland. This results from the incomplete familiarity members of media and radio organizations have concepts and jargon related to climate change. Religious groups who are influential in changing community perceptions are not engaged by media organizations, according to one researcher.<sup>31</sup> The absence of collaboration between media organizations, climate experts and religious and cultural elders leads to poor awareness among the community regarding climate issues.

Nonetheless, BBC Media Action<sup>32</sup> has been very active in raising awareness on issues relating to climate change in Somaliland. One researcher working for it, who was interviewed in

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27 Interview with resident, Lughaya, 17 October 2023.

28 Interview with resident, Lughaya, 17 October 2023.

29 'How Local Radio Boosts Climate Change Adaptation - Somalia', Relief Web. Accessed 16 January 2023 <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/how-local-radio-boosts-climate-change-adaptation>.

30 Interview with an official from NADFOR, Hargeisa, 29 October 2023.

31 Interview with researcher from BBC Media Action, Hargeisa, 13 December 2023.

32 BBC Media Action is part of BBC but operates distinctly different from other branches of BBC News broadcasts (print, audio and visual content) on issues such as governance, health, building resilience and response to humanitarian crises, according to their website.

Hargeisa, reported that it operates in the belief that 'radios are still a very fundamental source of information for the Somali people'.<sup>33</sup> He explained it realized that local media in the country are not equipped with the knowledge and the support to produce content relating to weather and climate change.<sup>34</sup>

BBC Media Action has started a project called 'Down2Earth' targeting local media operators and supports them in creating awareness around climate change.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, it has launched another project on El Nino awareness, using theatrical performance, capitalizing on the rich storytelling tradition of Somali people. Intimate discussions on current climate events are depicted in the drama between a well-known character, named Kabtan Sulaymaan, and another individual. This strategy works effectively to explain a complex topic to a group of people who are not extremely informed or aware of climate change-related occurrences in the world.

The media's efforts at creating awareness on hazards, such as Cyclone Sagar, are, however, undermined by some of the religious beliefs highlighted above and by poor early warning mechanisms from the government. Most respondents said they received minimal early warning communication from the government. The inadequate early warning system was attributed to the absence of meteorological tools and expertise in the country, inability to use the data available for forecasting, and inadequate coordination by government agencies.<sup>36</sup>

## ONSET OF THE CYCLONE

The onset of Cyclone Sagar led to many deaths, the displacement of populations and its associated social impact, and economic and infrastructure losses, as demonstrated below.

### *Deaths*

The cyclone hit Lughaya district and Baki district at night on 15 May 2018. It was the Ramadan period, when Muslims observe the holy month with fasting and prayer. Mohamed, a resident of Lughaya who has spent nearly his whole 70 years living in the coastal town, saw the rain and strong winds as he prepared to head to the mosque for dawn prayers. Scared, he ran back to his house and suddenly heard the loud noise of winds destroying houses, shops and even the mosque he wanted to go to—literally everything. What unfolded in those few hours was something that will be remembered by the residents forever. 'We have not seen something like this before',<sup>37</sup> added Mohamed, as he showed the author of this paper the areas the cyclone had destroyed, now rebuilt by the community, government, and international organizations.

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33 Interview with researcher from BBC Media Action, Hargeisa, 13 December 2023.

34 Interview with researcher from BBC Media Action, Hargeisa, 13 December 2023.

35 Interview with researcher from BBC Media Action, Hargeisa, 13 December 2023.

36 Ali and Jamal, 'Mitigating Natural Disasters in Somaliland', 4.

37 Interview with resident, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

According to a Somaliland government report, Cyclone Sagar affected 900,000 people, with 53 deaths and enormous injuries.<sup>38</sup> Most of these deaths occurred in Baki and Lughaya districts, particularly in the villages of Gargaara, Abdi-gedi, Tuurka, and Hadeyta village. The storm carried 300 mm of rain per hour and pounded the coastline with winds reaching up to 120 km/h.<sup>39</sup>

### **Displacement and Social Impact**

Cyclone Sagar displaced thousands of people in northwestern regions of Somaliland, according to a government report. The report mentions that:

900,000 persons were affected by the cyclone, including 53 deaths and enormous injuries, and about 168,000 people harshly affected by the cyclone through destruction of their livelihood assets, environmental resources, and infrastructure, which forced them towards displacement.<sup>40</sup>

The cyclone has disrupted the community's way of living and its social relations in immense ways. In Lughaya and Baki, for instance, more people have become displaced since losing their livestock, farms and other means of living, including their small shops. People were resettled in areas on the outskirts of the town of Lughaya, and the distance isolated them from the rest of their community and affected their social connections.

Somali society, similar to other African societies, centres social life around the spirit of communalism. Communalism is rooted in an individual's relationship with his or her community.<sup>41</sup> There is strong emphasis on collective responsibility and doing good for the greater collective. A crisis such as the cyclone changed that social system because people were displaced and their social spaces, such as mosques, livestock markets and businesses were destroyed. One respondent mentioned how everyone became preoccupied with how to leave the areas affected by the cyclone and started moving to places such as Borama city.<sup>42</sup>

Social interdependence became challenging for some people after Cyclone Sagar. More people became dependent on others for support as their livestock and economic sources had been destroyed by the storm. One respondent used the Somali proverb *Baahi badan, baryo badan, iyo bukaan badanba waa laysku nacaa* ('excessive neediness, too much begging, and chronic ill-health

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38 National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 'Sagar Cyclone in Somaliland: Damage, Economic Loss, Necessary Interventions and Financial Needs', Sagar Cyclone Final Report, August 2018. Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://www.nadfor.govsomaliland.org/article/sagar-cyclone-somaliland-damage-economic-loss-necessary-inte>.

39 Humanitarian Coalition, 'Cyclone Sagar Somaliland'.

40 National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 'Sagar Cyclone in Somaliland', 14.

41 Ahmed Ali Ilmi, 'Somali Dhaqan Philosophies and the Power of African Ancestral Wisdom', *African Identities* 13/2 (2015): 97-110.

42 Interview with Lughaya resident, Lughaya, 17 October 2023.

can create undue resentment in others').<sup>43</sup> He said many people felt the burden of supporting others, particularly with increasing inflation and high standards of living.<sup>44</sup> According to the Mayor of Lughaya, many of the families who started living in the new Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) centres, created for the people displaced by the cyclone, established a new way of coping with the loss of their properties, creating their own social spaces.<sup>45</sup>

### **Economic and infrastructure losses**

The cyclone was the most devastating natural disaster in the history of Somaliland, not only in terms of the magnitude of the destruction but also in terms of economic impact. A report by the Somaliland government documented the losses and their monetary value.<sup>46</sup> While the numbers provided by the report are very detailed, this paper highlights the economic losses of livestock, agriculture and fishing since they comprise the most important economic activities in Somaliland. The livestock sector makes up 90 per cent of Somaliland's exports and, together with agriculture, 70 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), even though this is slowly changing as services increase their contribution to GDP.<sup>47</sup> The main customers for Somali livestock are Arab countries in the Gulf, especially during the Hajj. Trade in livestock shapes the relationship between Somaliland and Gulf states.

As was covered in earlier sections, a framework for sustainable livelihoods outlines the many pillars of physical, social, natural and human capital. This framework aids our understanding of how individuals depend on a variety of resources both to establish and sustain their livelihoods. Since agriculture, fishing and cattle comprise the majority of Somaliland's sources of income, this paper examines the effects that Cyclone Sagar had on these sectors, as highlighted below:

**Livestock:** The storm killed 310,000 heads of livestock of which 2.3 per cent were camels and cattle, mostly in Baki, Lughaya and Zeila towns. The livestock losses (within a year of the cyclone) amounted to \$30 million, based on the end-user market price, including \$150 per export head, \$70 per slaughter shoat (goats and sheep), and \$1 per kilogram of milk.<sup>48</sup> Respondents from Lughaya described how they found their livestock dead by the beach the next day after the storm and heavy rains. Many people who used to rear livestock and sell it during the Hajj season are now jobless and poor.

**Agriculture:** According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Sagar affected 8,823 farms with 17,646 hectares of cultivated land, 1,720 irrigation engines and 5,160 meters of irrigation

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43 Interview with resident, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

44 Interview with resident, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

45 Interview with the Mayor, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

46 National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 'Sagar Cyclone in Somaliland', 19.

47 Republic of Somaliland, 'National Development Plan (NDP III, 2023-2027)', 2023. Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://slmof.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/NDP-III.pdf>.

48 National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 'Sagar Cyclone in Somaliland', 19.



pipes and canals.<sup>49</sup> In production terms, about 123,000 metric tons of crop was lost, which cost Somaliland about \$187 million that year and \$937 million for the five years after the storm. Among the places the author observed, during fieldwork, were farms in Baki and Ruqi, where farm owners showed us land that used to be farmed but was entirely wiped out by the storm. In 2023—five years after the cyclone—they were still struggling to make use of the land, as the storm had washed away the fertile soil, making the land less arable. A farmer in Baki showed the author his farm, which had turned into a small valley after the storm destroyed his watermelon plants. It was a huge economic loss for him since the storm had coincided with the Holy Month of Ramadan, when most people eat fruit, such as watermelon, which have a great market.

**Fishing:** The cyclone hit the Somaliland coastline, which is 850 km long, and destroyed many fishing boats, damaging the fishing sector in coastal districts of the Awdal region. It has been reported that 3,500 fishermen became jobless in its aftermath.<sup>50</sup> Below is a table highlighting the cyclone’s damage to fishing boats, jetties and fishing gear, and their monetary value.

NO	DAMAGE IN NATURAL UNITS	UNITS	UNIT COST IN USD	TOTAL COST
1	Supplying fishing boats 10	10	35,000	350,000
2	Providing fishing gears	10	10,000	100,000
3	Repairing fishing jetties 5	5	3,000,000	15,000,000
<i>Total</i>				15,450,000

Source: National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 2018.

According to the Mayor of Lughaya, the fishing sector was entirely devastated by the cyclone. It had destroyed not just fishing boats but the shops that used to store and sell the fish.<sup>51</sup> The fishing sector is poorly developed, with the government just beginning to put forward the legal framework to support fishing. The Somaliland Fisheries Law was introduced in 2018 and adopted by the government. Institutions such as the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are supporting fishermen with training and developing fish markets in different parts

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49 Republic of Somaliland, ‘Agricultural Damage Assessment by Cyclone Sagar’, May 2018. Accessed 19 November 2023, <https://www.eutm-somalia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Agricultural-Damage-Assessment-by-Sagar-Storm-1.pdf>.

50 ‘Somaliland Fishermen out of Work after Cyclone Sagar Destroyed Boats and Cold Stores,’ Radio Ergo. Accessed 19 November 2023, <https://radioergo.org/en/2018/06/somaliland-fishermen-out-of-work-after-cyclone-sagar-destroyed-boats-and-cold-stores/>.

51 Interview with the Mayor of Lughaya, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

of Somaliland.<sup>52</sup> Respondents in Lughaya reflected on the challenge of not having accessible, affordable electricity to store large quantities of fish in their stores.

## **POST-CYCLONE PERIOD**

Immediately after the cyclone, the residents of Lughaya and Baki received an emergency response. There were also recovery interventions, including cash transfers, issued by NGOs, that unwittingly encouraged a culture of dependency and laziness by a section of society.

### ***Early response measures***

Soon after the cyclone, communities in the affected areas received support from the government, as well as from international and national NGOs and countries such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Djibouti.<sup>53</sup> Most respondents stressed that the response was quick, helpful and coordinated. The Mayor of Lughaya district said people received humanitarian aid from the government but also as charity from people from big cities such as Hargeisa and Borama. An official from NADFOR explained the response was a coordinated and united effort because the government appointed a committee under the vice-president to coordinate both local and international support. Respondents in Baki district said it was hard to access the town after the cyclone, with all the roads blocked. It was opened when government tractors cleared the road and emergency support was able to pass through. In the following months, the government and NGOs planned interventions to support the recovery of people from the impact of the cyclone. The following section discusses this in detail.

### ***Recovery Interventions***

One of the most interesting insights came from what people thought of the recovery programs in the aftermath of Cyclone Sagar. The government assessed the losses caused by the cyclone and estimated that, in monetary value, the total damage was \$785.4 million of which \$714 million was environmental destruction, followed by \$60 million worth of losses in the livestock, crop production, and fishing sectors.<sup>54</sup> Here both the government and NGOs established that the community needed urgent, systematic recovery. An official from NADFOR explained they delivered less than 10 per cent of the interventions, however, due to the staggering number of losses.<sup>55</sup> He mentioned the government had made short-term and long-term plans to help the community recover but unfortunately it could not deliver as it was busy with other priorities.

Interventions by international organizations were dedicated to rehabilitating the community. Organizations such as Save the Children, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and others, supported

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52 Republic of Somaliland, 'National Development Plan (NDP III, 2023-2027)', 9

53 'UAE, Djibouti Send Rescue and Medical Team to Cyclone Hit Somaliland', Radio Dalsan. Accessed 29 October 2023, <https://www.radiodalsan.com/uae-djibouti-send-rescue-medical-team-to-cyclone-hit-somaliland/>.

54 National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority, 'Sagar Cyclone in Somaliland', 7.

55 Interview with government official, Hargeisa, 29 October 2023.

projects to restore some of the destroyed health, education and community services, according to the reports and communications they shared online.<sup>56</sup> Some organizations provided livelihood support in the form of a number of cash transfers per household to help recovery from the devastating cyclone. One of the major themes that came out of the interviews with community members on the cash transfer programme was that it unwittingly encouraged a culture of dependency and laziness, the '33 phenomenon'.

### **The '33' phenomenon**

The '33' phenomenon was named after the first digits of the phone numbers that community members received cash transfers on through their mobile money service provider, Zaad. Mobile money transfers have become extremely popular in Somaliland and other Somali-inhabited regions, where they are essential to carrying out commercial and financial transactions.<sup>57</sup> Aid organizations provided cash assistance through mobile money services in Somaliland and Somalia after Cyclone Sagar, through two working groups:

- The Cash Consortium managed by Concern Worldwide, which had six member INGOs. In 2018, it distributed unrestricted transfers, mostly via mobile money, to 50,000 households.
- Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS), led by the NRC had five member INGOs (including Concern Worldwide) that implemented cash assistance across central and south-central Somalia.

While it is important for the communities to receive cash assistance and support during harsh times, in order to recover from natural disasters, the practice created a culture of dependency and discouraged meaningful work. Most respondents voiced how people became dependent on the '33' cash assistance program, which they said caused laziness among a section of society. One respondent from Lughaya said 'young boys are not attending the schools, and the rise of khat chewing increased since they receive money through their phones, and they do not have much else to do'.<sup>58</sup> Another respondent, this time in Baki, reiterated this was an existing norm (with humanitarian organizations' interventions) but that it increased in intensity after Cyclone Sagar.

This is not to say, however, that providing cash assistance is a bad thing. In fact, cash-based interventions are proven to be a helpful way to encourage poor families to address their immediate needs such as food and water.<sup>59</sup> Hanna Mattinen and Kate Ogden, writing about a

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56 'Restoring Hope to Recover after Cyclone Sagar', Norwegian Refugee Council. Accessed 12 November 2023 <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/december/restoring-hope-to-recover-after-cyclone-sagar/>.

57 Gianluca Lazzolino, 'Following Mobile Money in Somaliland', Research Paper, Rift Valley Institute, 2015, Accessed 15 November 2023, <https://riftvalley.net/publication/following-mobile-money-somaliland>.

58 Interview with a Lughaya teacher, Lughaya, 17 October 2023.

59 Hanna Mattinen and Kate Ogden, 'Cash-based interventions: Lessons from southern Somalia', *Disasters* 30/3 (2006): 297-315.

cash-based intervention delivered in Somalia, observed there were some reasons why they were important; lack of purchasing power at the household level; the variety of needs that needed cash to address them; the existence of a functional market, which makes important items available for purchase, and a monetized economy.<sup>60</sup> The government official from NADFOR said that people do not have purchasing power any more as their livestock and farms were destroyed by the storm. Hence cash-based interventions are important.

Nonetheless, the idea that cash-based interventions unwittingly encourage a culture of dependency and laziness resonates. One respondent went as far as to suggest that the '33' cash assistance programme contributed to divorce in some families because of arguments related to shifting gender roles.<sup>61</sup> He reasoned that some males, who are the traditional heads of households, neglected their duties in farming and rearing livestock, and resorted to chewing khat because they received the cash assistance. The Mayor of Lughaya related an encounter he had with a group of men who refused to engage in the business activity of transporting goods because, according to him, they were busy chewing khat and spending their time in chewing places.<sup>62</sup> For him, this was something new, brought about by the impact of the cyclone, which made them very dependent on external assistance and led them to neglect their means of production.

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60 Mattinen and Ogden, 'Cash-based interventions.'

61 Interview with Lughaya resident, 17 October 2023.

62 Interview with government official, Lughaya, 18 October 2023.

# CONCLUSION

This paper set out to discuss community perceptions of Cyclone Sagar, the impact of the cyclone on the livelihoods of people in parts of northwestern Somaliland, and the response mechanisms of different stakeholders. Mainstream literature on climate-related disasters in the Somali Horn predominantly focus on the droughts that devastate the livelihoods of Somali people. However, this paper has attempted to go beyond the droughts and study one of the most devastating climate-related crises to have happened in Somali territory in recorded history—Cyclone Sagar. It exposes the vulnerability and unpreparedness of government in the face of such a devastating crisis.

Furthermore, the paper discusses how religious and cultural beliefs influence people's perceptions of climate-related issues and stresses the significance of using radio widely available in remote areas—to spread knowledge. Undoubtedly, early response to the cyclone was quick and coordinated and helped victims relocate from areas of great destruction. However, the undeniable reality is that there is a need for comprehensive recovery plans, backed with a strong budget, to help people recover fully.

The paper also highlights that the cash assistance provided by international NGOs, although well-intentioned, creates a culture of dependency that is discouraging meaningful community work in areas where populations affected by the cyclone live. This phenomenon warrants further research as to how non-governmental actors plan and execute recovery projects, in order to inform policy change and contribute to the well-being of the community.

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