

Land deforestation problems in Somalia



1.



Introduction

Land deforestation in Somalia is a serious environmental challenge that threatens natural resources, biodiversity, rural livelihoods and climate resilience. It involves the removal of trees and woodland vegetation, often for charcoal production, fuelwood, settlement expansion and other land uses.

Somalia's dryland ecosystems are particularly vulnerable because of limited rainfall, recurrent droughts, land degradation and pressure on vegetation. The loss of trees can accelerate soil erosion, reduce natural regeneration and worsen desertification.

Deforestation is closely connected to forest degradation. While deforestation refers to the permanent conversion or loss of forest cover, forest degradation occurs when woodland loses its ecological quality, productivity or capacity to support wildlife and livelihoods.

2. Major causes of deforestation in Somalia



1. Charcoal production

Cutting trees to produce charcoal for household energy and commercial markets is an important driver of woodland loss in affected areas. Unsustainable harvesting can prevent trees from regenerating and degrade surrounding ecosystems.



2. Fuelwood collection

Many households depend on wood for cooking and heating. When harvesting exceeds the natural regeneration of trees, woodland cover gradually declines.



3. Overgrazing and livestock pressure

Heavy grazing can damage seedlings, reduce ground vegetation and prevent the recovery of degraded woodland, particularly around settlements and water points.



4. Agricultural expansion and settlement growth



Clearing trees for cultivation, housing, roads and other infrastructure can reduce natural vegetation where land-use planning and environmental safeguards are inadequate.

5. Drought and climate change

Repeated droughts and extreme heat can weaken or kill trees and reduce seedling survival. These pressures interact with human activities, making vegetation recovery more difficult.

Other contributing factors include poverty, limited access to affordable alternative energy, weak enforcement of environmental regulations and insufficient investment in sustainable land management. These factors often reinforce one another.

3. Environmental and socioeconomic impacts

Land degradation and desertification

Loss of tree cover exposes soil to wind and water erosion, reduces soil fertility and can accelerate the expansion of degraded land.

Climate change

Fewer trees mean less carbon stored in vegetation and soils, while tree removal and burning can release additional greenhouse gases.

Biodiversity loss

The destruction of woodland habitats threatens native plants, birds, insects and wildlife that depend on healthy ecosystems.

Food insecurity and livelihood losses

Degraded land and reduced vegetation affect crop production, livestock feed, household income and the availability of natural resources.

Resource-related conflict

Competition for grazing land, water, fuelwood and other natural resources can intensify tensions between communities.

These impacts are consistent with the Food and Agriculture Organization's analysis of deforestation and forest degradation.

4. Proposed solutions to deforestation in Somalia



1. Reforestation and afforestation

Plant native, drought-tolerant trees, restore degraded woodland and protect naturally regenerating seedlings. Select species appropriate to local soils, rainfall and water availability.



2. Promote alternative energy

Expand access to solar energy, efficient cookstoves and other locally appropriate energy options to reduce dependence on charcoal and fuelwood.



3. Sustainable land and rangeland management

Introduce rotational grazing, controlled harvesting, rainwater harvesting, erosion-control structures and community-managed restoration areas.



4. Community participation and alternative livelihoods

Support tree nurseries, beekeeping, sustainable agriculture and other income-generating activities. Involve women, youth, pastoralists and local communities in decision-making.



5. Strengthen environmental governance

Improve implementation of forest protection measures, monitor charcoal supply chains, clarify land-use rights and develop locally agreed woodland management plans.

FAO recommends combining forest protection, restoration, sustainable production, improved governance and livelihood support rather than relying on tree planting alone.

5. Proposed project framework

The following framework could guide an environmental conservation programme in Somalia.

Project component	Illustrative activities	Provisional 12-month target
Woodland restoration	Plant native trees and support natural regeneration	100,000 seedlings planted
Community nurseries	Establish and support local nurseries	5 nurseries established
Alternative energy	Distribute efficient cookstoves and promote solar options	1,000 households reached
Community	Conduct training and environmental	20 community awareness events

awareness	campaigns	
Sustainable land management	Restore degraded sites and introduce grazing plans	5 sites under restoration or improved management
Monitoring and evaluation	Establish baseline and track vegetation survival	Baseline and endline assessments completed

All figures are illustrative planning targets, not verified national statistics or commitments. They should be revised following baseline assessments, community consultations, site selection and budget validation.

6. Recommended implementation approach

A practical programme should proceed in four phases:

1. Months 1–2: Assessment and planning. Map deforestation hotspots, assess woodland conditions, identify local drivers and consult communities.
2. Months 3–4: Preparation. Establish nurseries, train community groups, agree on restoration sites and prepare land-management plans.
3. Months 5–10: Implementation. Restore priority sites, promote alternative energy, strengthen community management and deliver awareness campaigns.
4. Months 11–12: Monitoring and sustainability. Measure seedling survival, assess changes in vegetation and household practices, document results and prepare follow-up plans.

Implementation should be adapted to local rainfall, planting seasons, security conditions, land tenure and the availability of water.

7. Conclusion

Deforestation in Somalia is not simply the loss of trees; it is a wider environmental and development challenge affecting land productivity, food security, biodiversity, climate resilience and livelihoods. Effective solutions require an integrated approach that addresses the underlying causes of tree loss while restoring degraded ecosystems and supporting communities that depend on natural resources.

Recommended priority: Develop a community-based National or Regional Woodland Restoration and Anti-Deforestation Programme combining native tree restoration, sustainable charcoal reduction, alternative energy, rangeland management and stronger environmental governance.

References and further reading

- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations — [Reducing deforestation](#)

- FAO — [Solutions for halting deforestation](#)
- United Nations Climate Security Mechanism — [Climate, Peace and Security in Somalia](#)

The African Environmental Conservation and Blue Economy Development (AECBED) Organization can also transform this plan into a project proposal ready for submission to donors, focusing on reducing deforestation and restoring forests in Somalia.

If you are willing to contribute to efforts to reduce deforestation and restore forests in Somalia, please contact info@aecbed.org.