



From land degradation to land rehabilitation in Somaliland. Is it possible?

The question asked in this feature article is *‘Why, with so much effort and research devoted to land degradation problems, are we still so far from real solutions? Are we misunderstanding the processes involved, and where are we missing the mark in applying the correct solutions?’*

Simply put, land degradation is the loss of the original capacity of land to serve human activities and environmental processes. Nowadays, this subject is in the arena because it is linked to climate change and subsequent negative environmental changes.

Different organizations dealing with agriculture and environment such as FAO and UNEP are working to produce tools that can help in the assessment of land degradation processes, especially in dryland areas of the world. Other networks like WOCAT are documenting soil and water conservation practices around the world to highlight successes and share experiences in combating loss of the natural potentials of precious land resources.

SWALIM, as part of its mandate to collect land-related information to facilitate intervention activities in Somalia, carried out pilot fieldwork on land degradation assessment in Somaliland. As part of this exercise, a framework for assessing land degradation at the national level was designed. The experiences of others have shown that land rehabilitation and land reclamation must be both on-site and off-site; as - for example - soil erosion can occur upstream as well as generating negative impacts downstream. This was the motivation to apply a world-standard framework incorporating both aspects.

Combining different modern tools such as GIS, remote sensing, pedometrics and frameworks like LADA/WOCAT and, most importantly, fieldwork and local knowledge, we entered into an exercise of assessing forms and the extent of land degradation in Somaliland. We also gathered information on whether residents are aware of this negative process and if they are doing anything about it.

Spatial modelling results showed that the extent and severity of land degradation is high, which is something that is quite evident in the field. However, remote sensing tools and spatial analysis did not detect that there are efforts underway

to combat this negative process. Many other workers and institutions have previously highlighted land degradation in Somaliland as a reality. It is however, not well known what measures are being taking to tackle this negative process.

Many different examples of land degradation and efforts to combat it were shown to us. See the pictures below.



Plate 1 (left) depicts a badland while plate 2 (right) depicts a gully control measure (check dam implemented by IFAD)



Plate 3 (left) depicts an agriculture field without any conservation measure. Plates 4 (right) shows an improved soil bund the purpose of which is to stop soil erosion and mainly hold moisture in the soil (implemented by IFAD)

As stated earlier, while it’s very easy to determine a problem and even outline the causes, the challenge lies in finding a suitable solution. Even more challenging is the implementation of the proposed solution. Efforts to find and implement lasting solutions are further complicated by land degradation being an integrated problem combining biophysical aspects, socioeconomic and cultural issues.

However, all hope is not lost; it is definitely possible to combat land degradation and improve the productivity of land as a main source of livelihood for different communities in Somaliland. Finding this lasting solution calls for the integration of the efforts of all stakeholders. The aim is, to preserve lands that are not yet degraded while rehabilitating those that have been severely degraded, such as badlands.

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