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## Clearing Safe Spaces for Drought Affected Communities in Somaliland

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## Field Notes

# Clearing Safe Spaces for Drought Affected Communities in Somaliland

by Ed Lajoie and Megan Dwyer [ The HALO Trust ]

Governments and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) working in the Horn of Africa consistently identify conflict and climate change as two primary drivers of insecurity in the region. The HALO Trust's landmine and explosive remnants of war (ERW) clearance in the Republic of Somaliland over the last 19 years has been at the intersection of these two issues.

## History of Conflict in Modern Somaliland

Somaliland is a self-declared independent republic but is not recognized by the United Nations and its member states. Located in the northwest region of Somalia, Somaliland borders the semi-autonomous region of Puntland to the east, Ethiopia to the south and southwest, Djibouti to the northwest, and the Gulf of Aden to the north. The region that now comprises Somaliland was home to various sultanates until becoming a British protectorate from 1884 until independence on 26 June 1960. On 1 July 1960, Somaliland reunited with the successor state of Italy's protectorate in the south to form the Somali Republic. On 18 May 1991 with the Somali Republic crumbling, the Republic of Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence and maintains a de facto state to this day.

The majority of the landmine and ERW contamination in Somaliland is the result of three periods of major conflict. In 1977, Somali President Siad Barre launched the Ogaden War against regional rival Ethiopia, ostensibly to regain the Ogaden territory of eastern Ethiopia regarded by the Somali government as rightfully part of a "greater Somalia." In order

to secure the border and establish forward logistics bases for resupplying troops in Ethiopia, the Somali National Army (SNA) established a series of military installations ringed by anti-personnel and anti-tank mines on the border between Somaliland and Ethiopia. During this time, large amounts of weapons, ammunition, and military equipment were brought into the country. Both Somalia and Ethiopia had been Soviet client states and received large amounts of military assistance; however, with the start of the Ogaden War, the Soviets were forced to choose sides and decided to back Ethiopia. Eager to seize the opportunity to win an ally in the region, the United States stepped in and began supplying war material to Somalia. This infusion of armaments helped fuel the next stage of conflict in the country.

By the 1980s, Somaliland was growing disillusioned with the Somali Democratic Republic as it was called after Siad Barre's 1969 takeover. Power and resources were held disproportionately by those in the south, while the north was bearing the burden of the aftereffects of the Ogaden War including an influx of Somali refugees from the disputed region. The Somali National Movement (SNM) was founded in 1981 as an organization advocating political redress of northern grievances but morphed into an all-out revolutionary independence movement by the mid-'80s as the Somali government sought to eliminate all resistance with increasingly harsh methods.

During this time, which is generally considered part of the Somali Civil War, the SNA continued laying mines to protect its bases and infrastructure from SNM attacks, while the SNM used landmines to ambush SNA patrols and logistics

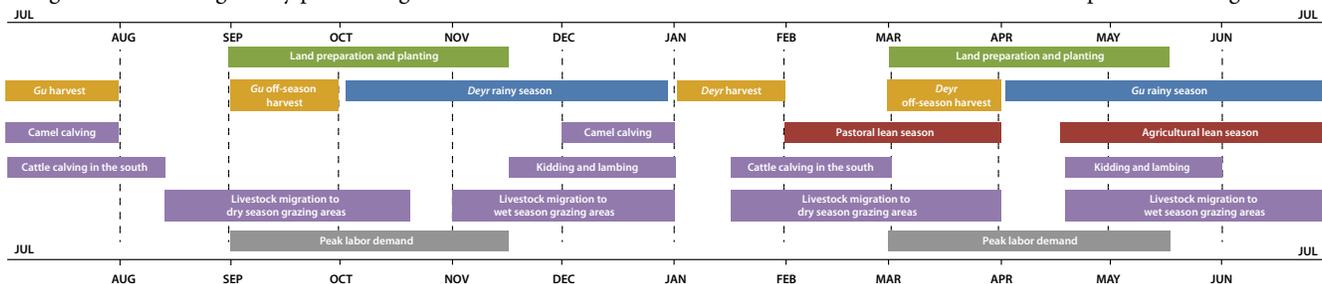


Figure 1. Somaliland seasonal calendar showing the two rainy seasons. Figure courtesy of Famine Early Warning Systems.

convoys. Massive amounts of ordnance were deployed by the SNA on the civilian population of Somaliland, most notably during the aerial bombing and artillery bombardments of the cities of Hargeisa and Burao, both of which were almost completely destroyed. When the regime of Siad Barre collapsed in 1991, SNM fighters were able to gain the upper hand as SNA forces pulled back.

Subsequent to independence, large scale interfactional clashes occurred in Somaliland as different groups vied for political power. These clashes included small-scale mine laying, as armed groups sought to establish control of land by denying other groups' access. The large amounts of weapons and ammunition remaining from the civil war added to the volatility of an already unstable region.

### *HALO's Work in Somaliland*

The HALO Trust began operations in Somaliland in 1999, conducting manual and mechanical mine clearance, battle area clearance (BAC), explosive ordnance disposal (EOD), physical security and stockpile management (PSSM), and mine risk education (MRE). HALO is active in all regions of Somaliland and, from 1999 to January 2018, has cleared 2,340 hectares of land, removing 3,560 anti-personnel mines, 1,348 anti-tank mines, 101,413 items of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and stray ammunition, and 150,372 rounds of small arms ammunition. After almost twenty years of clearance in Somaliland, HALO is now focusing on finishing the final large high-priority tasks in the country, mainly former SNA positions on the border with Ethiopia. If funding levels remain constant and the severity of the drought does not return to its pre-2018 levels, the clearance of these tasks should be completed by mid-to-late 2019. During the next year, HALO will also focus on raising the capacity of the national authorities to deal with the remaining small, low, and medium priority tasks, which mainly consist of isolated roads as well as the continuing threat posed by UXO and stray ammunition.

HALO's work in Somaliland is currently funded by generous support from the United Kingdom (DFID), the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), Germany (German Federal Foreign Office), Ireland (Irish Aid), Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and the Netherlands (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Previous donors include the Norwegian government (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Switzerland (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs/Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)), Belgium (Federal Government of Belgium), and Canada (Canada International Development Agency).

### *Climate Change and Drought*

HALO's clearance work in Somaliland and the overall development of the country have been heavily impacted by one of the worst droughts to hit the region in recent history. Somaliland usually experiences rainfall in two seasons every year: the Gu rainy season from April to July and the Deyr rainy season from October to January.<sup>1</sup> Beginning in 2016 and continuing into 2017, Somaliland experienced a drought caused by lower than average rainfalls for four consecutive seasons. Throughout October 2017, when seasonal rains are usually heaviest, rainfall was 50 percent below average.<sup>1</sup> Extremely poor harvests caused by this lack of rainfall along with the death of up to 80 percent of the country's livestock has plunged the region into crisis conditions as families across the Horn of Africa struggled to survive.<sup>2</sup> The loss of livelihoods and lack of food security displaced many rural families, pushing them toward populated areas in search of a support system. In 2017, using data from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) reported over 242,000 internally displaced persons (IDP) within Somaliland.<sup>3</sup> However, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that the true number of IDPs in Somaliland may be as high as 1,004,400.<sup>4</sup> Although the Famine Early Warning System reports that the situation has slightly improved in 2018, much of Somaliland is predicted to have crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity between February and May 2018.<sup>5</sup>

### *Demining and ERW Clearance Opens Humanitarian Space*

In the first half of 2017, HALO's operations were heavily affected by the drought as teams could not obtain enough water to supply remote camps without harming already struggling communities. Minefields in the worst affected areas were suspended as the teams had to relocate to other tasks closer to areas with consistent water sources. In the second half of the year, HALO was able to return to tasks on the border with Ethiopia and prioritized tasks to include assistance to persons displaced by the drought. As has been observed in many other countries, as IDPs move into new and unfamiliar areas that have mine and ERW risks, they are often at a greater risk of being injured or killed, especially if they come from an area without such threats.

In July 2017, an eight-year-old girl in an IDP camp near the town of Adhi-Adeeye in Sool region found a stray hand grenade in an area adjacent to the camp, which was the scene of fighting between Puntland and Somaliland forces between

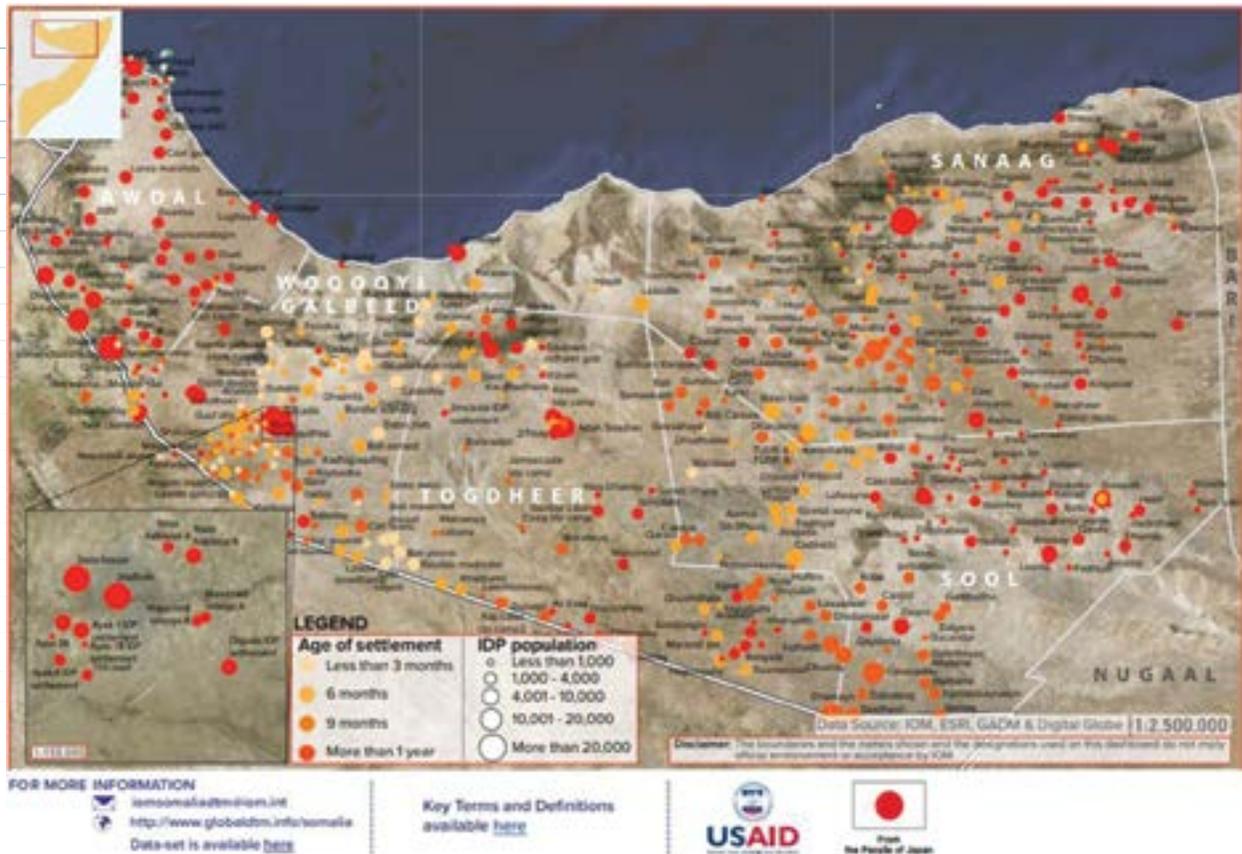


Figure 2. A map of IDP camp locations in Somaliland as of November 2017 produced by IOM.  
 Figure courtesy of IOM.

2004 and 2008. The girl brought the grenade into her family's cooking area in front of their house and pulled the pin unaware of the danger of the item. The resulting explosion killed the girl and wounded 17 others as they were preparing food. HALO immediately sent a team to the area to conduct BAC and EOD activities, as well as the MRE team to conduct education seminars with the civilians. HALO found and destroyed 23 items of UXO and stray ammunition, while six additional UXO items were handed over by the surrounding community.

As refugees move toward populated areas, land previously cleared by HALO has been repurposed to serve IDPs as a safe area to set up camp, as was the case near the village of Khaatumo. Khaatumo village is located on the border with Ethiopia and was heavily mined during both the Ogaden War (1977–1978) and Somali Civil War (1988–1991) to protect military camps and prevent road access. HALO cleared over 750,000 sq m (896,992.5 sq yd) of ground around a former military camp between 2014 and 2015, finding and destroying 57 anti-personnel and four anti-tank mines. The area now houses two IDP camps for people displaced by drought.

The arrival of IDPs in Khaatumo has increased the pressure on local water sources. The villagers in Khaatumo rely on limited water supplies from local wells, while the IDPs must

travel to the nearby village of Jeenyo Laaye to use wells there. However, these wells are swiftly running dry and causing water prices to increase from US\$2 a barrel in late December to \$2.50 a barrel in January 2018, an enormous sum in a country where the average income per person is less than \$1 per day.

HALO's current task in Khaatumo is to clear the road between Khaatumo and Jeenyo Laaye, freeing up access for IDPs and villagers alike. Clearing the 18 km (11.2 mi) route will save beneficiaries a significant amount of time and effort in accessing the water source at Jeenyo Laaye, as they are currently forced to travel 38 km (23.6 mi) through detours and side roads.

HALO's work to open roads is also important to the safety of economic migrants as was recently demonstrated by an accident in the Lughaya area. On 21 January 2018, a dual-wheel flatbed truck carrying approximately 30 people detonated an anti-tank mine on a track 12 km (7.5 mi) south of Lughaya, a town of 14,000 inhabitants in Northwest Somaliland. The passengers in the vehicle were economic migrants trying to reach a boat in Lughaya town in order to travel abroad in search of work. Fortunately, due to the mine's depth and standoff provided by boxes that the passengers were standing on, only two people were slightly injured. With ever-growing numbers of displaced persons passing through Somaliland from Ethiopia

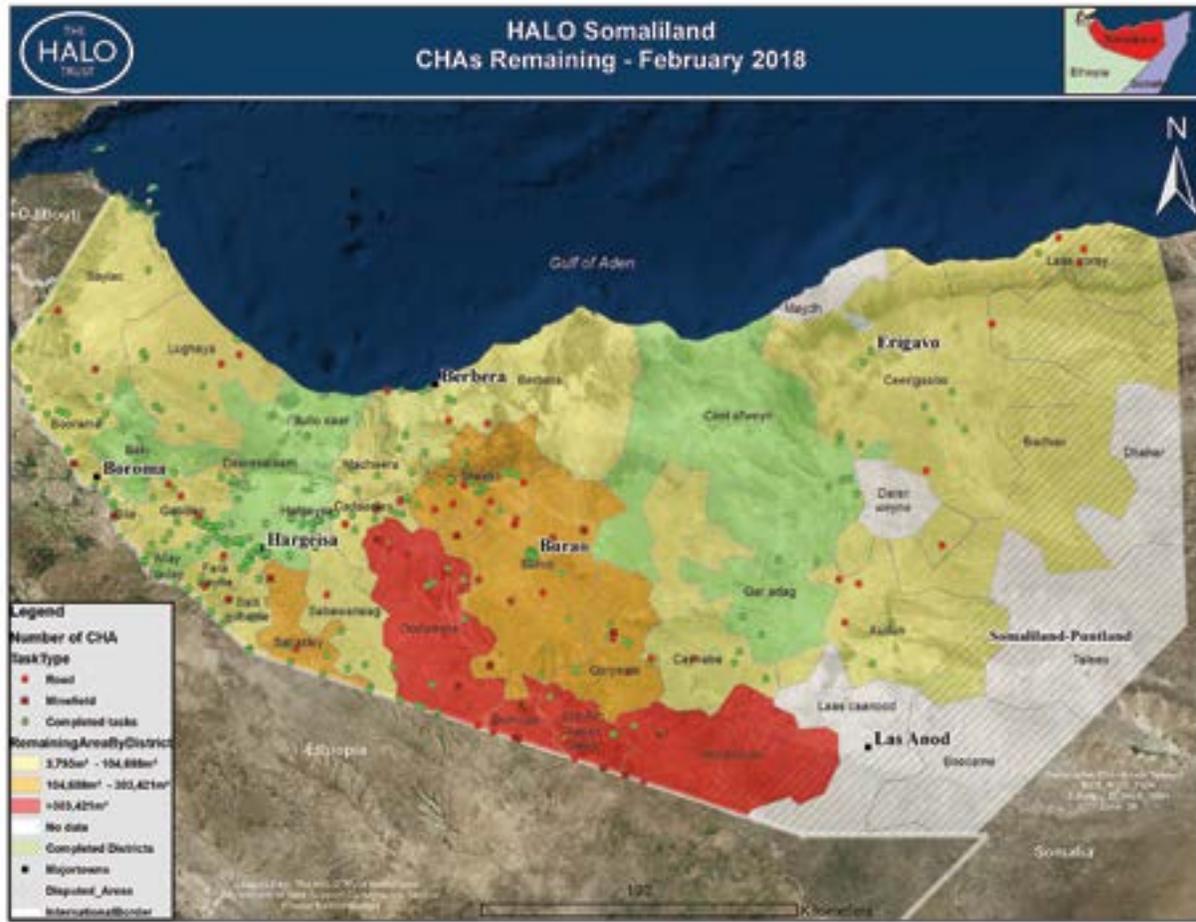


Figure 3. The green circles on the map indicate minefields cleared by The HALO Trust. The red circles depict remaining road tasks, while the squares represent former military camp positions. Note the significant overlap with the IDP camp map. Figure courtesy of The HALO Trust.

to access the coast for the purpose of economic migration, the threat of landmines is a daily hazard and one that carries significant impacts.

### Conclusion

Since the beginning of the drought in 2016, HALO's clearance teams have released 134,000 sq m (160,262.7 sq yd) of land for agricultural use such as growing fruit, vegetables, and cereal as well as grazing land for livestock. In addition, 156,000 sq m (186,574.4 sq yd) of land has been cleared for community development, and 986,000 sq m (1,179,256.2 sq yd) of land has been cleared to allow access for water collection, health facilities, schools, markets, and other aspects of livelihood previously cut off by the threat of landmines.

The activities conducted by HALO provide support to urban and rural communities that have a history of conflict or that have been severely impacted by the drought. Clan disputes in Somaliland are often centered on agricultural land and access to resources such as water. By clearing mined land, HALO improves access to these resources, reducing the likelihood of disputes arising, which in turn has a stabilizing effect on the region and the country.

Nearly 60 percent of deprived households in Somaliland rely on livestock to sustain their livelihoods.<sup>6</sup> Somalis are famously adept pastoralists and rely heavily on livestock not only for their milk and meat, but also as an investment. In an environment where banking and savings facilities are limited, livestock, particularly camels, represent a key alternative. The loss of camels, when one steps on an anti-tank mine and kills several in a herd, can destroy the wealth of not only



Locals returning from a watering point pass by the Jeenyo Laaye minefield in Somaliland. Photo courtesy of The HALO Trust.

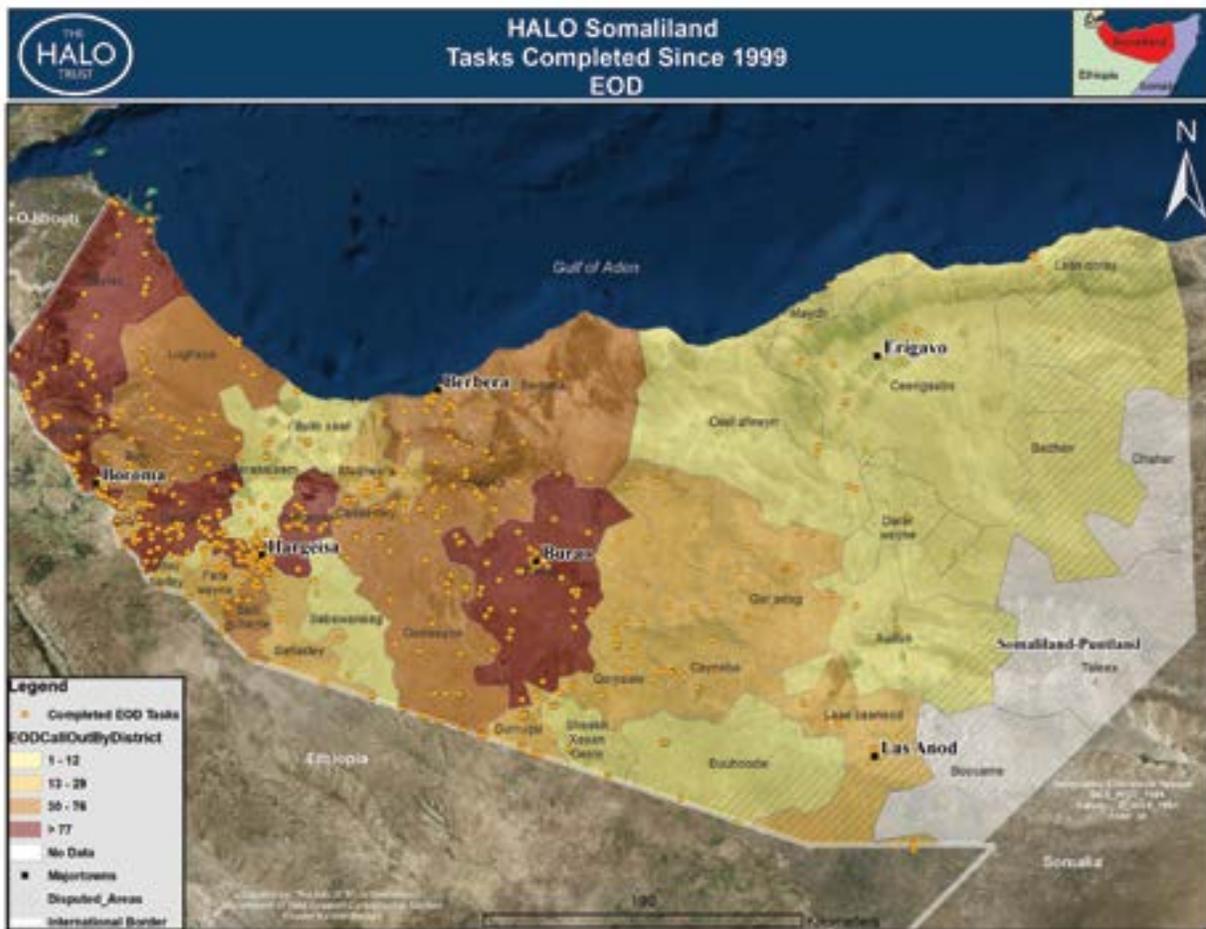


Figure 4. HALO completed EOD tasks in Somaliland.  
Figure courtesy of The HALO Trust.

single families but often the wider community. In addition to the prevention of accidents to people, the prevention of accidents to livestock is also an important outcome.

HALO also recruits staff from local communities, and with over 500 local nationals employed in Somaliland, the injection of money into local economies through salaries is significant. In areas where there are few other income alternatives, this approach has a proven stabilization effect on the entire country.

The humanitarian situation in Somaliland significantly deteriorated in 2017, as several seasons of poor and below-average rainfall impacted food security and livelihoods, and the situation is expected to deteriorate further in 2018. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) stated that rural livelihoods are people's best defence against famine, and HALO intends to continue supporting these livelihoods through opening access to resources and protecting lives and property.<sup>7</sup>

*See endnotes page 63*

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Ed Lajoie is Somaliland Deputy Program Manager at The HALO Trust. Ed joined HALO in November 2013 as a projects officer working in Mozambique until 2015. He received operations training in Cambodia and Afghanistan before running operations in Zimbabwe in April 2016 and his current position in July 2017. Prior to HALO, Ed worked with the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery. Ed is IMAS Level 3 EOD qualified, and holds a Bachelor of Arts in international affairs with a concentration in Middle East studies from James Madison University.

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