

# **RANCH ESTABLISHMENT AS A RESILIENCE TOOL TO MITIGATE EFFECTS OF DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION**



**HORN AFRICA  
CONSULTANTS FIRM**  
Rendering Innovative Solutions

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On the 27th June 2021, I was traveling to Baligubadle, Somaliland, which is on the outskirts of the capital city Hargeisa towards the border of Ethiopia. I encountered a rare sight on my way - a western man was guiding a donkey from one side of the road to the other. This was surprising as it was unusual in these parts of the world; it immediately triggered my curiosity about what activities this man was involved in. The road to Baligubadle was in a poor state and on a journey of 2 hours from Hargeisa, we stirred up large clouds of dust while we drove.

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Throughout the journey we observed different uses of land; some were used for farming, some for livestock keeping but the vast majority was empty and had no economic use. There were large herds of livestock, which included goats, sheep, and camels. Women mainly herded their goats and sheep and children, while the men reared the camels.

I had a chance to converse with some of the children and asked them “Do you go to school?”, most of them said that they do go to school but due to the COVID-19 pandemic schools were closed and that is why they were tending to the animals. The rest said “we do not go to school due to lack of fees, family duties amongst other reasons”. As a staunch believer in the education of children, I immediately started to think of ways to overcome the obstacle to education without compromising their source of livelihood

We began our trip back to Hargeisa having finished our assignment in Baligubadle. I came across the same western man I had seen earlier only now he was setting up fence posts.

I could not let the opportunity to find out what he was doing here pass me by; I got out of the car and went towards him. “Hello” I shouted from a distance, ‘Iska Waran’ he replied in Somali. I continued to walk towards him with my curiosity still nudging me on what it is he was up to. We exchanged pleasantries and my inquisitiveness got the better side of me. “What are you doing here?” I asked, hoping for a response that would open my eyes to unseen treasures within my country, “I am experimenting on a novel way of growing grass in Somaliland” he said. I wasn’t expecting such a response, I had hoped for something typical to do with minerals but I wanted to know more.



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He introduced himself as Elias Benjamin Sellé and he was quite friendly and communicated his initiative in Habaasweyn. He is trying to develop and adapt a model of regenerative herding where he uses livestock to fight desertification and restore the savannahs of Somaliland, for profit, as I observed closely there was indeed lush grass growing.

**This was a flagship project and it has the potential of upending the way of life in Somaliland and it can fundamentally lead to change in the norm of pastoralism and breathe life into pastures for the livestock within the area.**

Elias gave me a tour around the farm he had been managing for a bit over a year and I was impressed by the efficient use of land and the yield it was able to produce per acreage; this provided enough pastures for pastoralists whose lives were built on constant movement in search of pasture. We had a long insightful conversation on the methods he used to grow the grass, no chemical fertilizers, no organic fertilizers were used, only animal management. Elias said that it was a simple process altogether and again, no input from his side went into this process. He didn't plant any grass seeds, no irrigation was applied; rains received in the area watered it and the only controls he did was fencing. This technique he dubbed as **'Ultra High Non Selective Grazing'**, which is basically imitating the wild herds of herbivores who are packed together because of predation and roam large areas of land eating everything down, non selectively and giving the land a lot of time to rest. Using animal impact of hoof, trampling, and breaking the crust, making little holes that will catch rain and seed, dung and urine and long time off pasture creates conditions where the soil can come back to life and responds by growing healthier, denser grasses, new grasses (**5 new grasses have appeared this year**), life is coming back.

**They are only using a different type of management, using locally built technology and thus hopefully, reproducible.**

Elias also mentioned that one of the benefits was the grass created its own ecosystem and created an area in the catchment where the local wildlife could find pasture even during the 'drought'. He said that, this management applied at large scale would allow for a lot of life to come back. Healthier soils, healthier grasses, healthier animals, more animals... **As a matter of fact, while his neighbors this year, lost 50 to 80% of their livestock, not only did he not lose any animals to the drought, he got 80% of recon caption of rate for his sheep and 100% for his goats.** He claims we can to a large extent drought proof farms by better planning, as he claims that droughts like this year are essentially management induced.

I was very captivated with what I was hearing, how could such a small switch in management bring about numerous benefits. Seeing my fascination, he mentioned that this vegetation is not new to the area, and it was like this 100 years ago, he attributed its destruction to mismanagement, i.e., tree cutting and not replanting them and overgrazing. Changing the management, we can reverse the desertification and recreate the conditions for abundant grasslands.

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This pilot would have a real chance of success in Somalia and beyond and it localizes the availability of pasture to the pastoralists which in turn increases the survival rate of their livestock - which leads to improvement in standards of living and the ability to raise the funds for children to pursue education. This is an immense benefit for society as a whole where pastoralists are less mobile and will lead to the stability and thriving of their families establishing settlements that are near the sources for their livestock. More research needs to be done on the potential impact around 'Ranch Establishment for the provision of pasture'. From the research I was doing in the region, I had the chance to work with dairy farmers and pastoralists and the main challenge they had in common was access to pasture which was becoming rarer and it affected them negatively. However, with the inception of this technique resilience amongst them will consequently increase.

**For years donor funding has been channeled into many unsuccessful projects that have had no significant long-term impact compared to this simple yet effective input and have the potential of not only increasing the resilience of the people but also undoing years of soil erosion and deforestation. I call for a more comprehensive feasible study of Non- Selective Grassing and its potential impact on the livelihoods of the pastoralists - who make more than half of the population of Somaliland.**

There is no doubt that the benefits of this technique far outweigh any disadvantages, considering that this studies are being conducted in The Horn of Africa which is one of the challenging environment; prolong drought spell, locust invasion and continuous conflict that led to instability in the region. This is a long-term project that needs support from progressive minds who want to bring about knowledge and practices that can lead to more environmentally friendly and ecologically responsible decisions and lifestyles, and aren't afraid of the aftershocks of that change we yearn for. With the ongoing climate crisis being an ever-growing existential threat across the globe, this can be considered as an initiative for countries which are fighting desertification with the objective of **Going Green**.

### AUTHOR



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