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# Lasanood Town Urban Vulnerability Update

FEWS NET FAMINE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM NETWORK

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**FEWS NET**

Famine Early Warning System Network

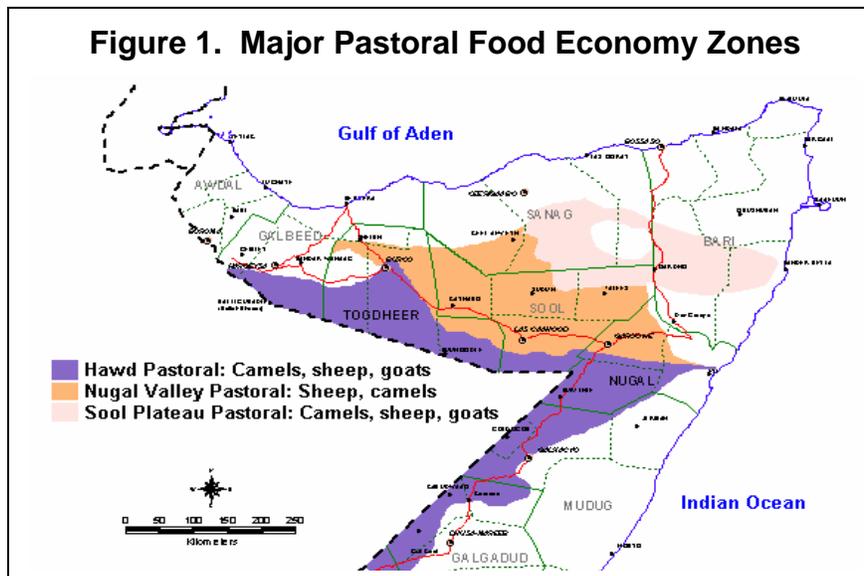
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**Background**

Lasanood has been the capital of Sool Region since 1984, as well as capital of Lasanood District. Sool Region has other three districts, Ainabo, Taleh and Hudun (Ceynabo, Taleex and Xuddun, respectively) as shown on the Map. Geographically, Lasanood is located at the centre of a prime grazing area known as the Nugal Valley. The town is also close to the other high potential grazing areas of Hawd and Sool plateaus. Thus, Lasanood’s location gives the town a unique characteristic of strong urban-pastoral linkage

Before the collapse of the government in 1990, Lasanood was a small town with a population of about 20,000. However, within one decade, the population skyrocketed to 60,000 by 2001 (WHO, 2001).



A study conducted by SC-UK in 1998 on IDP and returnee population in Somaliland revealed that 73% of the population in the town were returnees from other parts of the country. Of the returnees, most came from other parts of Somaliland, especially Sanaag Region as well as Hargeisa, Burao and Berbera towns. These households had been displaced by 1988-1992 civil war and armed clan conflicts in those areas. However, many others in Lasanood have returned from the main towns in the south due ethnic tensions and clan affiliation. Others still are internally displaced people (IDPs) from the inter-riverine area in the south who were forced out from their villages and who lost their assets. Some of these households came as early as 1994 in search of a secure working environment and better living conditions.

Another factor accounting for Lasanood’s rapid growth since 1990 is that successive droughts in Sool Region over the last several seasons claimed the lives of a significant number of livestock, especially sheep and goats (shoats) and camels, which are two important determinants of wealth in these pastoral food economy zones. Local herders living in the Sool Plateau and lower Nugaal Valley of Taleh District, in particular, experienced several unbroken rainy season failures that decimated their camel herd to about 50% of the normal size. The drought has also affected poorer pastoral household ability to obtain enough food and income as they experienced significant asset loss that severely weakened their purchasing

power. Some of those households who could no longer live in a pastoral setting became destitute and dropped out of pastoralism altogether, migrating to Lasanood town.

Demographically, Lasanood is a very homogenous town in terms of clan affiliation and has been enjoying relatively peace and stability since 1990. This has encouraged a substantial level of investment from members of the Diaspora community, mainly in the form of housing, transport and small businesses. Of late, growing investment in the construction sector has been creating more job opportunities and lubricating the local economy, and thus still attracting more people into the town. These outside investments also partially explain the ever-increasing population number in the town. However, former pastoralists are finding it hard to compete with better skilled former southerners, who get most of the available construction jobs.

A significant level of integration exists between IDPs, returnees and original inhabitants, facilitating reasonably good overall food security. However, as the population growth exceeds the growth of jobs, infrastructure and public services, health facilities are overstretched and, and accessibility to clean water has been an acute problem, especially for low-income households, putting more strain on household purchasing power.

### **Main Livelihood Sources**

Lasanood has a relatively strong economic base, which depends primarily on livestock sector. Other mainstays of the local economy are remittances (for better off and middle classes) from the diaspora community and the transport sector, supported by a good road network which links the town to Berbera and Bosaso ports as well as central Somalia. Moreover, the substantial cross border trade between Puntland and the neighbouring Zone Five in Ethiopia passes through Lasanood, which makes it a growing commercial hub.

Even though there is no strong baseline at household level showing the relative importance of various income sources among households according to different wealth group, the livestock sector is believed to be the most important source of income for most households. During a rapid assessment on June 7-8 and interviews with local elders and key informants, FEWS NET and FSAU found that 50-60% of the urban population derives a substantial amount of their income from the livestock sector, directly or indirectly, in a normal year – defined as [1996](#).

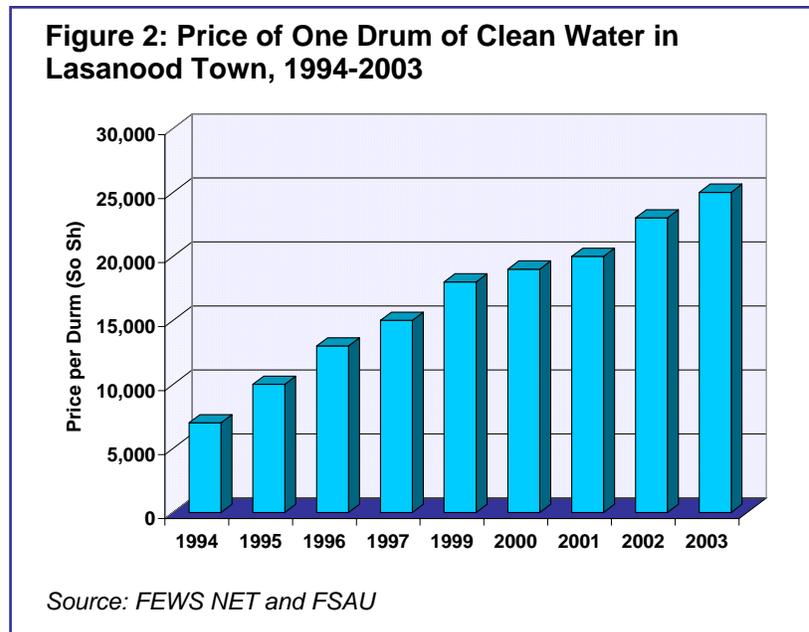
Most households in town own livestock, mainly shoats and some camels, which are kept by their kin or family members in the countryside. Thus, a significant number of the population, especially the middle wealth and better off groups, has continuous and unlimited access to livestock and livestock products in a normal year. Overall, urban household food and income is closely linked to pastoral production and therefore drought in the pastoral areas has more far reaching implications on the urbanites in Lasanood than one would otherwise expect.

Lasanood is also the commercial link between Zone Five of Ethiopia, Puntland and central Ethiopia as well as the major livestock market in Burao (Somaliland). Many households, therefore, engage in livestock trade. It is this trade and associated service sector that provides an additional important employment opportunities for poor households.

However, the ban on imports of Somali livestock by Somalia's trade partners in the Arabian Peninsula since September 2000 has seriously damaged the livestock trade and related employment opportunities. Moreover, successive droughts in Sool and Hawd Plateaus weakened livestock and reduced their marketability. This has hurt market activities and employment opportunities for poor urban households.

Nowadays, poor and very poor households in Lasanood, representing 20-25% of the population and owning fewer animals of their own, receive the bulk of their food and income from sources other than own livestock or the livestock trade. Construction, small business, and petty trade are the most important employers for lower income households.

FEWS NET, FSAU and local health workers found that self-employment activities generate up to half (45-50%) of poor household income in a normal year. Important self-employment activities include street vending, operating teashops, collecting and selling firewood, milk retailing and collecting and selling sand and rocks for construction. The second important income source is paid employment, which contributes 30-35% of annual poor household income. Paid employment includes construction, portering, employment on small horticultural farms, delivery and sale of water by donkey cart, and selling *khat* on behalf of *khat* distributors. Income from sale of livestock and livestock products provide 15-20% of poor households' annual income, while gifts and social support provides about 5% of their annual income.



On the expenditure side, poor households spend 60-70% of their annual income on staple foods. In addition to local cereals, rice and wheat flour are the main staple foods consumed by poor households in a normal year. However, prices of locally produced cereals like sorghum and maize always remain high due to high transportation cost from the south. In most cases, households prefer imported rice and wheat flour to local cereals. Poor households also spend 15-20% of their annual income on non-staple food purchase, such as sugar, meat and, edible oil. Households spend 10-15% of their annual income on non-food essentials, such as house rent, clothing, kerosene and firewood.

Poor household income options are not easily expandable (when households can expand some sources of income to offset a decrease in another sources of income). Hence, their normal expenditure patterns leave them no extra income to cater for health care or clean water, making them vulnerable to water borne diseases. Moreover, price of potable water has been increasing since 1994 as shown in Figure 2.

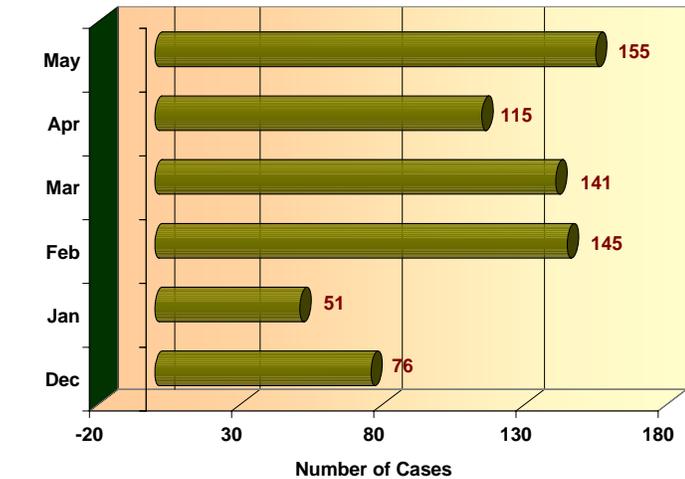
### The Water Problem

Lasanood lies in the middle of the Nugal valley, which has an abundant water resource. The water table is shallow and most of the wells in the town (about 17 of them) are only 8m deep. This shallow depth has become a health hazard as water in wells comes in contact with seepage from shallow latrine pits. Thus, the incidence of water contamination with human wastes is very common. This is confirmed by high level of water borne diseases and diarrhoea among children of poorer households who cannot afford to buy clean water for consumption.

Available water is not suitable for household domestic uses, cooking and washing. Furthermore, laboratory analysis of the shallow wells in the town, carried out in Dubai by the Lasanood business community, found a substantial amount of mineral content that rendered it unfit for human consumption.

Depending on level of income, households receive water from a number of sources. Some households can afford to buy water trucked from *berkads* (large cement-lined water run-off reservoirs) in the Hawd Plateau, hand dug wells, boreholes, streams and, communal dam. Water harvested from roofs of the buildings is common. The communal dam, which is 3km away from the town, holds water in the first 3-4 weeks in a normal rainy season.

**Figure 3: Cases of Water-borne Diseases among Children in Lasanood, December 2002 – May 2003**



Source: Lasanood MCH and OPD

However, according to Sool Region Medical Doctor, a number of analyses conducted in Nairobi and Germany confirmed results similar to those found for the shallow wells – a high level of minerals and other hazardous chemical compounds. Elders and health workers also reported a significant level of diseases/mortality rate among under-five children of low-income groups like the destitute and IDPs. Despite the efforts by the Norwegian Peoples’ Aid (NPA), the only international agency on the ground, availability of clean water is a continuing endemic problem. Data from the Lasanood OPD shows that the incidence of water borne diseases and diarrhoea among children has remained high in the last six months, as shown in Figure 3. The most prevalent diseases are gastro- intestinal parasites, Salmonella, Hepatitis and other waterborne diseases. Doctors associated most of these diseases to the quality of the water that people consume. This in turns compromises child nutrition and growth, especially among poorer urbanite groups who cannot import water from great distances/buy.

M. Y. Aw-Dahir, FEWS NET  
 Dr. Ahmed Arten, FSAU FM  
 Osman Abdi, FSAU Nutritionist  
 With contribution from Dr. Muse Gelle, Sool Region Medical Doctor

USAID/FEWS NET Tel: 254-2-350523/4/5 Email: [somalia@fewsn.net](mailto:somalia@fewsn.net)