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THE IMPACT OF THE WAR ON RURAL SOMALILAND

by

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' I did not know conventional weapons could cause such destruction, it is as if a nuclear bomb had exploded in this town'

-- Omer Issa, New African, May 1991

Summary

Three years of war and a decade of army occupation have had devastating effects on rural Somaliland. The war has resulted in death and destruction of rural life and livelihoods unequalled in the history of the country. Its consequences defy any quantitative measurement. There were mass deaths and mass emigration which affected the entire rural population. About 20,000 nomads and agro-pastoralists have lost their lives and thousands more have lost all of their assets including livestock, homes and other properties and have become destitute.

This was a war of destruction which affected every aspect of life in rural Somaliland. Market centres were turned into battle grounds; water sources were either destroyed or poisoned; land mines were planted in the grazing areas; irrigation wells were demolished; pumps and tools either looted or rendered useless.

Introduction

Britain granted independence to Somaliland on 26 June 1960 to become the first independent Somali state in history. But the independence was short-lived and four days later it merged with the Italian Trust Territory in the south to form the Somali Republic. The legislative bodies of the former colonies merged to create a new Somali Parliament in Mogadisho. The southern capital became the national capital; southern leaders held all the major posts in the new government and the majority of seats in Parliament. Somaliland made sacrifices in the interest of the union and accepted all the condition demanded by the southern leaders.

However, more than 70 years of different colonial rules meant that there were fundamental differences between the two former colonies. There were major differences in cultural, political, administrative, economic and social systems. The language problem alone (i.e the use of Italian as a second language in the south, versus English in Somaliland) was insurmountable.

Soon after the Union, there was widespread discontent in Somaliland. In a referendum for the Constitution on 20 June 1961, Somaliland voted against. And in December 1961, there was an unsuccessful coup staged by a group of junior officers to rescind the Act of the Union.

The recent crisis began in the late 1970s when the Somali government led by dictator Siyad Barre lost the Ogaden war with Ethiopia. The war caused a flood of refugees from the Ogaden region and other parts of Ethiopia. This huge influx of refugees became a burden to the already limited resources of the country, particularly in Somaliland where half a million refugees settled.

A decade of army occupation in Somaliland started in 1980 when the government devised a policy of repression against the Isaaqs which it perceived as a threat to the regime. To implement such a policy the Somali dictator manipulated the Somali clan system. He used his power and expertise in tribalism to unite other clans against the Isaaqs and succeeded in creating enmity and hatred between the Somali communities.

The Isaaqs protested against the oppression and formed the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981. The formation of the SNM intensified the repression and plunder of the Isaaqs by the regime. From 1981 onwards, the SNM fighters engaged in a guerilla war along the border and sometimes infiltrated into the mainland to carry out surprise

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attacks against military and security forces. The government forces made reprisals against the rural people who became scapegoat for revenge as they were accused of being sympathizers.

In 1988 SNM launched a surprise assault against the government forces stationed in two cities of Somaliland, Hargeisa and Burao. The attack was an unpredicted outcome of a peace accord between the two embattled dictators of Somalia and Ethiopia to hang on to power (Henze: 1991). The response from the government to the SNM invasion was a wholesale, indiscriminate aerial and ground bombardment of towns and villages in all parts of the country. It was an act of genocide (The Guardian: August 1989).

The dictator was toppled in January 1991 when his troops were defeated, but only after he fulfilled his promise of leaving behind nothing but destroyed country.

On 18 May 1991 Somaliland was declared an independent republic. People in Somaliland saw the secession as a restoration of the country's sovereignty in 1960. It was the people of Somaliland who first surrendered their independence in 1960 in the interest of the union. But 30 years with Somalia has brought them nothing but ***catastrophe***. Now they consider future union with Somalia as unlikely and unacceptable (Drysdale: 1991).

During the years of repression and war in Somaliland, the rural population suffered from a disproportionate share of the burden. Nomads were often singled out for a brutal campaign of murder, rape and extortion (Omaar: 1993). Most of these violent actions occurred well before the outbreak of the war 1988 (Amnesty International: 1988).

The effects of the war and a decade of army occupation are widespread and far reaching, but here the paper is concerned with the effects of the war on the rural economy. Specifically it looks at the impact of the war on pastoralism, agro-pastoralism, food production, and markets and trade.

War effects in general are relatively difficult to assess due to unique characteristics of war compared to the other disasters. It is also difficult to isolate the effect of war from many other variables which are occurring at the same time e.g. drought. Some effects can be noticed well before the war actually erupts, while others persist long after its end. Nevertheless, the physical and direct effects are more visible immediately after the war occurrence than the indirect and long term effects.

Despite these difficulties, it is necessary to determine the effects of the war on such factors as rural lives and living conditions, incomes, assets, market exchange, trade and other economic indicators, and the extent to which these effects can be attributed to the war. In this study the assessment was made on the basis of the available material facts and data relating to the war.

The study is based on a survey data from Somaliland, extensive literature on the war and the writer's experience of the country. Because of a lack of quantitative data, the study is mainly descriptive. The survey from Somaliland provided some data which was analyzed by using simple analytical techniques involving hypothesis testing. Figures and tables are used to illustrate where possible.

1. Human Deaths Due to the War

In a region where statistical information on anything is either not available or highly unreliable, it is difficult to get a correct estimate of total human deaths due to the war, let alone the numbers killed in the rural areas. But a reasonable estimate based on interviews conducted by the writer puts the number of rural people killed at around 20,000. This represented about 20% of the total number of deaths of more than 100,000 (Guardian: 1993) during the war.

The killings were carried out in the form of summary executions, aerial bombardment, ground attacks and destruction of villages in the rural areas. These were indiscriminate and barbaric. Mass graves and corpses left to rot on the ground are testimony to the scale and brutality of the occupation forces.

The attacks of government forces against the rural people were well documented by Robert Gersony (1989) in his report 'Why Somalis flee'. Gersony argues that armed attacks were often targeted at farmers and nomads, their livestock, watering points and grazing areas near their villages in the absence of resistance, conflict or SNM forces during the war. He states:

> The Somali Armed Forces conducted what appear to a systematic pattern of attacks against unarmed, civilian villages, watering points and grazing areas of northern Somalia [Somaliland], killing many of their residents and forcing the survivors to flee for safety to remote areas

Fully mechanized special troops known as the '***Isaaq Exterminating Wing***' (Dabar-

goynta Isaaqa) were largely responsible for these brutal acts in the rural villages. They had the task of implementing the government's policy of punishing nomads and farmers and destroying rural life. They destroyed or poisoned wells - vital for the pastoral economy - seized livestock and burned down entire villages to deprive the rural people of their basic means of livelihood (Amnesty International: 1988).

The destruction was carried out in the spirit of a 'death letter' the army commander, General Morgan, had written to Siyad Barre outlining his strategy of destroying the Isaaq clan. He advocated a number of punitive measures in Somaliland including "rendering uninhabitable the territory between his army and the SNM by destroying water tanks and the villages".

2. Loss of Livestock and Assets

Although the exact number of animals lost due to the conflict is not yet known, it is estimated that more than half of the total livestock population was lost in the war (SEPHA: 1991). This loss is directly attributable to the war and consequential lack of veterinary services (ibid).

A survey carried out by Save the Children Fund (SCF: 1992) after the war, reports average livestock holdings of 65 smallstock, 1.3 cattle and 10.8 camel for the returnees. This represents 35%, 57% and 95% falls from pre-war averages for each livestock type respectively.

The following table shows comparison of average holdings before and after the war.

Table 1. Comparison of Livestock Holdings for Returnees

Type of Livestock	1980	1991	% Fall
Smallstock	100	65	35.00
Camel	25	10.8	56.80
Cattle	25	1.3	94.80

Source: Sogreah, 'Livestock Survey', 1980; 'The Price of Peace', SCF, 1991.

The survey shows substantially lower camel and cattle holdings. In normal (pre-war) times the basic holding for a family was one hundred smallstock 'tiro', 25 camels and

25 cattle. Now as a result of the war livestock numbers have fallen dramatically. The worst affected groups are wealthy families who had possessed 100 camels and 300 or more smallstock, but are now retaining only a fifth of those numbers. According to the survey, some families who owned more than 200 smallstock before the war have now reported less than 50.

Average holdings are well below the minimum viable stock which an average nomadic household needs to meet subsistence requirements and maintain the herd size from one year to the next. About 75 smallstock constitutes a minimum viable stock given the herd off-take levels in Somaliland. However, adequacy of the holdings for subsistence depends on the terms of trade between livestock and food-grain.

Low camel holdings among the nomads means loss of security against droughts and famines. Traditionally camels were the most valued livestock in Somali nomadic life. The fall of camel holdings would dramatically increase vulnerability of pastoralists to future droughts.

The SCF study covered only the returnees with livestock holdings and the average livestock holdings reported exclude destitute families who lost all of their livestock during the war. These destitute nomads now depend on food aid distributed in refugee camps in Ethiopia (Ryle: 1992). The exact number of the destitute is not known but according to some reports up to 8% of the rural households have lost everything. This estimate is consistent with the results of the writer's survey on agro-pastoralists in the North West region of Somaliland.

The SCF survey also did not cover impoverished nomads who have migrated to urban towns in search of relief. These households have a smallstock holding of less than 20 which can not support them even with assistance from relatives if they remain in the nomadic life.

Heavy losses of livestock were results of ground attacks and land mines, confiscation and looting, lack of water and veterinary services, and distress sales.

2.1 Ground Attacks

Large number of livestock were lost in ground attacks and land mines laid by the government forces. Ground attacks were often targeted at watering points and villages to kill as many livestock as possible. Water sources were destroyed by blowing up with

mines or draining out water reservoirs. Many open wells were poisoned, others were foiled with rubbish. Sometimes even corpses were thrown into wells. Water tankers were also prevented from taking water to pastoralists in the remote areas during the dry season. In 1986 alone, up to 100 tankers were confiscated by the army for defying a ban to supply water to remote villages. Saying that "it is raining in *Hawd*" publicly was considered as anti-government by the security forces.

Confiscation and large scale looting of livestock by the military and armed militias from the Ethiopian refugees based in the country were also responsible for many losses. In fact most of the armed forces based in the rural areas had powers to confiscate any number of livestock for their consumption even before the war. Obviously refugee militias and some of the military bases over-used this power.

Confiscation was in line with the government's strategy contained in Morgan's "death letter" which detailed ways of forcing people into submission by campaigns "to redistribute wealth" in his words, which involved confiscating livestock; relocating villages and destruction of water reservoirs.

2.2 Mines

Mines planted extensively in most of the rural areas were also responsible for some of the losses. Many households have lost most or all of their herds due to land mines. Originally, land mines were used as a strategy for counter-insurgency against the SNM, but during the war mines were planted indiscriminately in and around grazing areas and water points. No one knows with any precision the number of mines in the country, but estimates range from 2 - 10 million (Warsidaha Somaliland: 1993).

2.3 Lack of Veterinary Services

The pastoralists suffered from lack of veterinary services even before 1988 due to curfews and restrictions imposed on the movement of people and transport. Some of the drugs which were available from private stores were either looted or destroyed when the war broke out. The problem was exacerbated by increased pest and disease incidence in Ethiopia. There were also shortages of pasture, water and labour. Many of the SNM recruits were boys who left their livestock.

2.4 Distress Sales

A sudden fall of livestock prices during the war led many pastoralists to sell higher number of animals to meet their subsistence requirement. The livestock markets in Ethiopia were flooded with animals and the terms of trade between livestock and food grain deteriorated.

The pressure to either sell or slaughter more and more animals including breeding stock had increased because the number of people to be supported from a given herd size had increased and the subsistence requirement of the family was no longer met from normal peace time milking, sales of livestock and livestock products such as ghee and hides. As the herd size and the quality fell, more female or breeding stock had been slaughtered or sold with no prospect for reconstitution.

3. Disruption of Agricultural Production

Settled agro-pastoralists were hit hardest during the war. Their close proximity to main towns and the belief by the regime that they supported rebels caused them to be targets of government forces. The survey in the North West region of Somaliland reveals that the agro-pastoralists have lost most of their livestock and assets.

The survey was based on a same sample of households which were interviewed in a yield estimation and household survey (NWADEP: 1988) carried out by the staff (including the writer) of a World Bank funded agricultural development project in the north-west region in 1987. The same households were re-sampled because the 100 families interviewed in the 1987 survey were chosen randomly from a sampling frame of agro-pastoralists in the region and were representative of the whole region. This allowed comparisons of the same households' asset and livestock ownership before and after the war.

Eighty respondents out of the one hundred sampled in 1987 were interviewed. Twelve of the remaining twenty were killed in the war and the remaining 8 have migrated permanently from the region to Djibouti and other neighbouring countries.

Results of the study reveal that some 20% of the households are now destitute and have lost everything they owned before the war. The other 80% of the sample have lost 88% of their sheep, 84% of goats, 73% of cattle, 75% of camel, 62% of oxen and 42% of

Donkey. These reductions in average livestock holdings reported in table 2 are all statistically significant.

The agro-pastoralists interviewed have reported that they suffered most of the losses in the first year of the war 1988. When the war started they began to migrate with their livestock to Ethiopia. But before they crossed the border between Ethiopia and Somaliland government troops attacked them and looted their animals. Many of them sold large number of animals in that year to purchase expensive food in Ethiopia for their families and relatives who fled from the towns and cities.

Table 2. Comparison of Mean Number of Animals Before and After the War

Type	Mean		T-Value	Significance
	1988	1992		
Sheep	40.58	4.89	6.77	**
Goats	14.30	2.33	4.42	**
Cattle	12.00	3.28	9.70	**
Camel	3.30	0.83	2.86	**
Oxen	2.52	0.96	4.90	**
Donkeys	1.46	0.85	2.10	*

** Significant at 1 percent

* Significant at 5 percent

The war also had a devastating effect on crop production. Sorghum and maize were the main food crops grown in the region. In addition, Kat (Catha edulis), a mild stimulant plant which Somali men chew, was the most important cash crop in the region until 1983 when its cultivation and use was banned by the government. Kat was highly successful and well adapted to the environment. The banning of Kat had a serious consequence in the region because it played an important role in the rural economy. About one third of the farmers owned Kat fields and depended on it for 80% of their income (Ahmed: 1990). It provided employment for the landless labourers because of its labour intensive operations. The government's decision to outlaw Kat, which was later rescinded in April 1990, was essentially a means of punishing farmers in the region.

Crop production virtually ceased during the war. Only 20% of the agro-pastoralists

resumed cultivation after they returned from Ethiopia in 1991 because of a lack of seeds, tractors or oxen to cultivate the land and problems of mines.

Horticultural farms in the country were abandoned during the war. Irrigation equipment such as pumps and pipes were looted, and wells and tree crops destroyed. In Arabsiyo, a town 20 miles west of the capital Hargeisa, 90% its citrus and guava farms were all destroyed. Small number of families in some areas have now partially resumed work on their farms by growing vegetables. But most of the horticultural farmland remains uncultivated because of lack of seeds and acute shortage of irrigation equipment (Coulton et al: 1991).

4. **Disruption of Markets and Trade**

The war has disrupted all markets in the country. Market exchange and trade, which were central to the survival of rural households, had totally collapsed. The export of livestock had been suspended during the war. And as a result animal prices had fallen to a record level. This was accompanied by a rise in food prices as both food production and imports had stopped. Farmers and pastoralists were forced to sell more of their animals to buy the increasingly expensive food grains. In other words the terms of trade between livestock and grain had fallen.

Animal prices fall sharply during conflicts for two main reasons. First, increased animal sales flood the markets. Herders and agro-pastoralists exchange animals for grain because it provides a cheaper source of calories. Animal calories cost more than twice grain calories and pastoralists meet at least two-thirds of their calories requirement through grain purchase. Given the lower cost of acquiring grain calories, hard times force pastoralists to be more dependent on grains acquired through animal sale.

Second, animals are 'superior' goods and their demand falls sharply during crises. This is exacerbated by the loss of weight by animals and poor health which further reduces the price animals can sell in the market (Sen: 1981).

The fall of the terms of trade between livestock and grain continued in the first two years of the war 1988-89 and thousands of herders were forced to liquidate all of their livestock and other assets to meet subsistence requirement. The terms of trade between smallstock and cereal grain fell drastically from 1:1 in 1987 to about 17:1 in 1991. Thus, to acquire the same amount of grains, 17 times more goats/sheep had to be sold in 1991 than in 1987. The terms of trade between livestock and grain was reported to

have been lowest in 1989, but because of a lack of data figures for 1991 and 1992 were used for comparison of the terms of trade before and after the war. This is shown in figures 1,2,3 and table 3.

It was this failure of "exchange entitlements" that caused many herders to slide into destitution and join the refugees in Ethiopian camps.

Table 3. Terms of Trade Index Between Animals and Cereal for Three Different Periods

Exchange Rates	1987	1991	1992
Cereal grain-goat	100	5.80	29.40
Cereal grain-camel	100	7.70	19.30
Cereal grain-cow	100	8.00	20.00

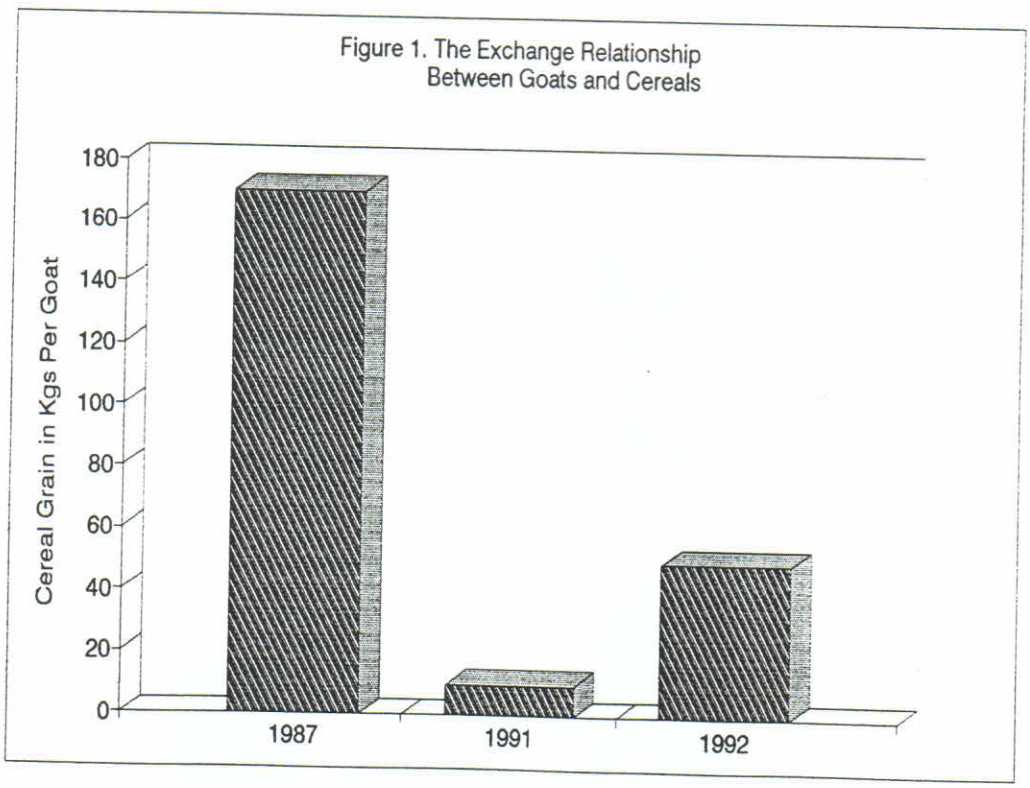


Figure 2. The Exchange Relationship
Between Cows and Cereals

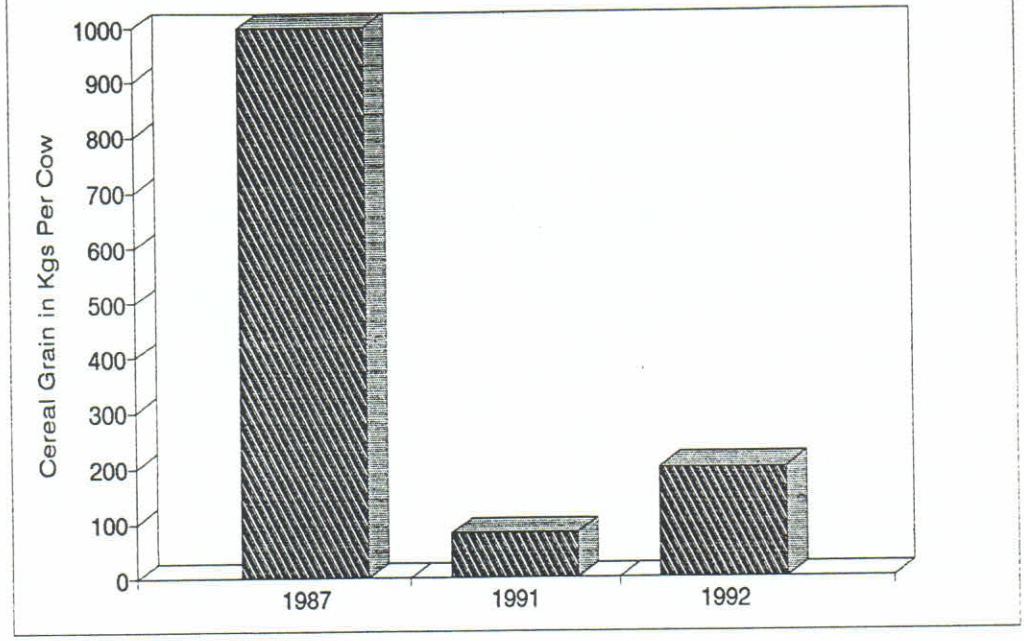
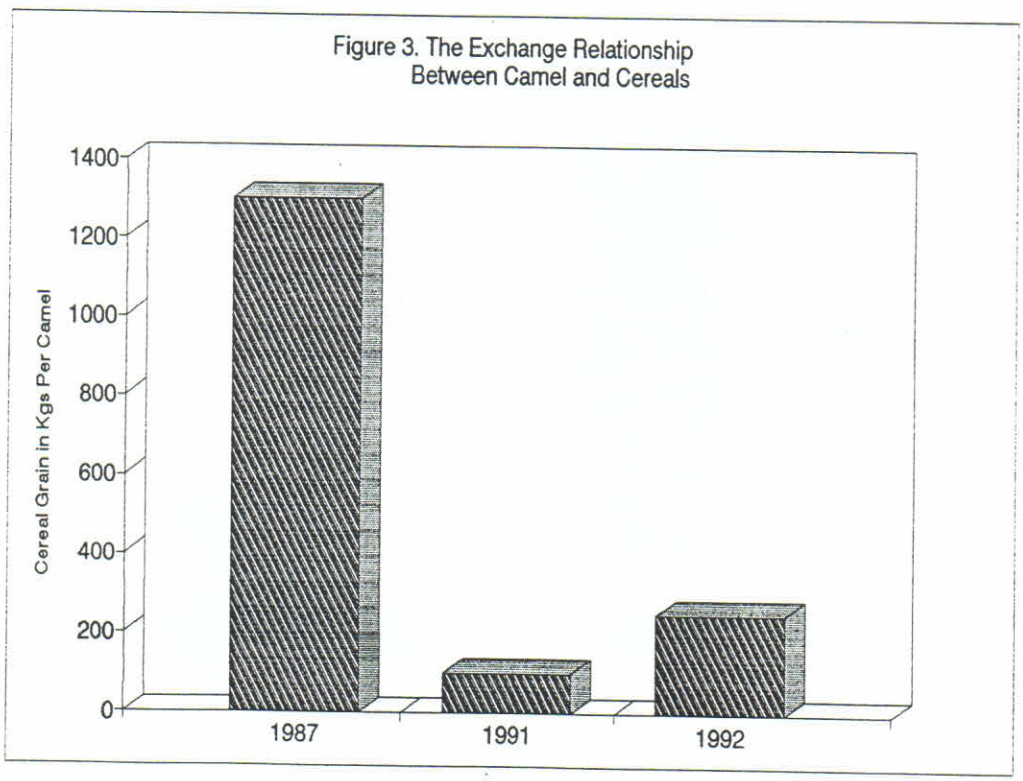


Figure 3. The Exchange Relationship
Between Camel and Cereals



The fall of livestock prices was contributed by the closure of Berbera port. Livestock export which provided 90% of the country's foreign exchange earnings virtually stopped from the second half of 1988 to 1990. Private traders started to resume animal exports in the second half of 1991 with modest success. Around 200,000 smallstock and 10,000 cattle were exported to Saudi Arabia via Yemen (SCF: 1992). However, more than 50,000 sheep and goats were turned back after sample testing of the animals in Yemen found brucellosis. This has damaged the prospect of a quick resumption of livestock trade. The following table shows livestock trade before and after the war.

Table 4. Livestock Exports ('000)

Year	Sheep	Goats	Cattle	Camel
1981	685	680	116	15
1982	730	719	157	15
1983	559	557	54	8
1984	339	337	8	4
1985	718	719	43	7
1986	567	567	56	9
1987	579	579	52	20
1988	201	203	27	11
1989-90	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
1991	140	60	10	0

Source: Elmi, A. (1991).

The collapse of the banking system during the war also disrupted money markets in the country. Lack of a central bank and control of the money supply has caused the Somali shilling to lose its value against foreign currencies. This was further exacerbated by the fact that Somali shillings continued to be printed by faction leaders. As a result the exchange rate has fell from 200 So Sh to the US dollar in late 1988 to 10,000 So Sh in April 1992. Apart from the devaluation, the exchange rate shows very high fluctuation within a short time period. This has caused uncertainty and instability in food and livestock markets. Table 5 shows the devaluation of the Somali shilling for the four months from January to April 1992.

Table 5. Foreign Exchange Rates (Somali Shillings Per US $) in 1992

	Week			
	1	2	3	4
January	6550	6600	6650	6650
February	6750	6750	6800	7150
March	7400	7650	8100	9500
April	9500	10000	10000	8600

6. **CONCLUSIONS**

A decade of death and destruction unequalled in the history of the country had a devastating consequence on the lives and livelihoods of rural people in Somaliland. It has resulted in mass deaths and displacement of tens of thousands of people. It has weakened the coping strategies of rural households to future conflicts, droughts and famines. The war has pushed the margins of affected groups beyond the bounds of mere "vulnerability" to a state of critical impoverishment which has created unprecedented levels of hardship and stress among rural households. As a result of the war many rural households are now less able to endure deterioration of rural conditions caused by the periodic droughts that occur in the region.

The effects of the war were particularly tragic in the first year when disastrous living conditions prevailed and all humanitarian assistance were entirely cut off. This was the period when many rural families were forced to sell their livestock and other assets and have become destitute. As the war intensified over the years, the economic and social life of the rural people was shattered. Their own government had treated them as an enemy.

One of the most devastating disruption caused by the war was the virtual collapse of livestock exports and food imports. The trade was deliberately suspended by the government, while many market centres were turned into battle grounds. Only fragments of former markets were established across the border in Ethiopia. The banking system has totally collapsed causing the Somali shilling to become worthless.

Most of the recent famines in Africa were caused by wars and this war was no exception, but extra ordinary resilience, ingenuity and strength of character has enabled the rural people to live through the worst crisis in the history of the region.

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