

## ISSUE BRIEF

# SOMALIA: DROUGHT AND RISING COSTS TAKE HOLD

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### Key messages

- Inflation is impacting people's ability to afford basic food items and livelihood inputs. The economic impact on farming and pastoral livelihoods is having a knock-on effect for other economic activities that rely on their trade.
- Actions being described by interviewees are predominately short-term coping and survival strategies, rather than long-term adaptation to mitigate the environmental and economic shocks they are experiencing.
- While the accumulation of debt is part of economic life in Somalia, interviews were unable to uncover either whether the current level of borrowing is beyond people's means, or the long-term implications for households of this borrowing. Answering these questions will be important for understanding household recovery.
- Lack of violence within the communities interviewed should be noted for future lessons on mitigating conflict risk. Despite the pressures that people are facing, community-based support and conflict-resolution mechanisms are helping to manage tensions.

Elderly woman in Daifa village, Jowhar, Somalia.  
Photo credit: AMISOM, Public domain



## About this paper

This brief is the second in a series that highlights the challenges facing people from different livelihoods across three sites in Somalia: Burao (Togdheer), Galkayo (Mudug) and Jowhar (Middle Shabelle). The economic, environmental, political and social contexts at the local, national and regional levels are continuously evolving, and regional to global events such as the economic repercussions of Covid-19 are being felt at the local level. We want to capture how pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and farmers are coping with and adapting their livelihoods to such dynamism. It continues the line of inquiry outlined in the report [Livelihoods, Conflict and Mediation: Somalia](#) (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2022).

This brief contributes to wider SPARC research on understanding the challenges deemed most critical to pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in Somalia: how these challenges impact their livelihoods; how these challenges affect incidents of conflict; and what coping and adaptive strategies they currently employ to manage these challenges. While not a statistically significant sample, the interviewees' responses offer some insight into local contexts that should be considered when designing humanitarian, development and climate resilience actions.

The Government of Somalia, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and other humanitarian and development partners have an interest in supporting the people of Somalia in coping with climate-induced shocks and stresses, and in understanding the underlying social, economic and political factors contributing to vulnerability that turn these shocks and stresses into crises. Livelihood development, strengthening of livestock markets and anticipatory action are some measures that can be taken as entry points for addressing today's challenges and reducing the risk of future crises. However, such programmes must keep abreast of issues on the ground and anticipate new challenges, through understanding how historical sociopolitical inequalities have given rise to current situations.

## 1. Introduction

The interview data<sup>1</sup> presented in this brief provides insight into how households within Burao, Galkayo and Jowhar respond to and mitigate various types of shocks. The research focuses on both conflict events (e.g. armed violence, disputes) and non-conflict events (e.g. flooding, drought, elections, price rises). The interview

<sup>1</sup> A total of 45 interviews were carried out across the three regions of Burao, Galkayo and Jowhar, with 15 in each location. The interviewees were 20 women and 25 men. A diverse set of livelihoods was represented within this interview sample: farmer 33.3%; agro-pastoral 24.4%; pastoral 24.4%; business 8.9%; casual labour 4.4%; and farmer plus other livelihood activity 4.4%.

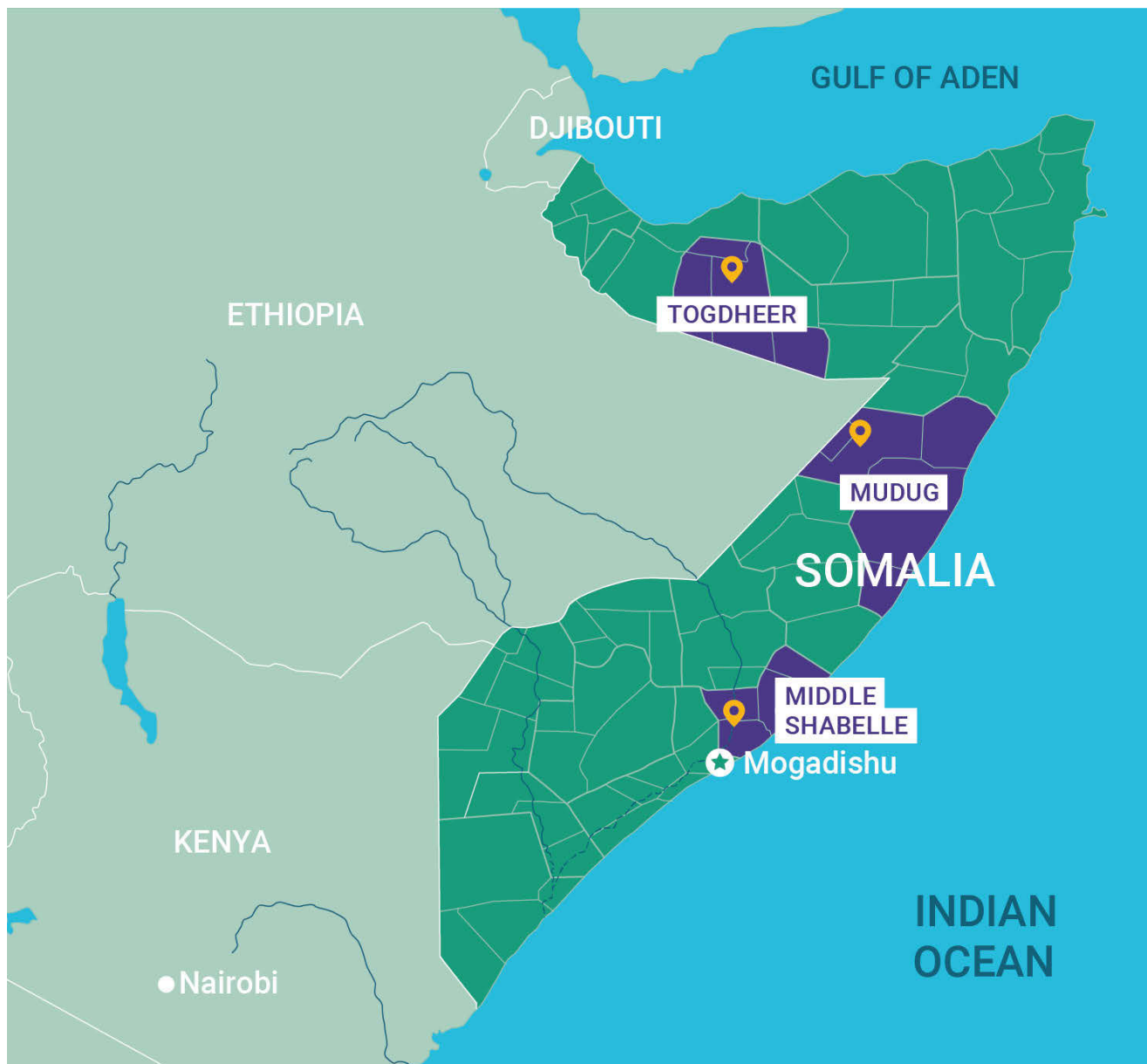
data analysed within this brief was collected in Somalia between February and March 2022. Although interviews were conducted nearly a year ago, the results of this study remain relevant as they provide a more in-depth understanding of current livelihood challenges in Somalia.

After four consecutive failed rainy seasons, Somalia is in the midst of protracted drought. This analysis offers a snapshot of the experiences of people in: Burao (Togdheer), Galkayo (Mudug) and Jowhar (Middle Shabelle). Before the interviews, the 2021 Deyr rains, typically occurring between October and December, failed across much of the country. Delays in onset, unequal distribution and rainfall deficits resulted in severe drought conditions that further reduced household incomes and availability of food in both rural and urban areas (FEWS NET, 2022). Current situation reports on the humanitarian crisis there still highlight that drought has a severe impact on pastoral and agro-pastoral communities as well as on the rising cost of living for households (OCHA, 2022; IOM, 2022).

Aside from drought, security concerns persist. Al-Shabaab attacks have continued, and the government stepped up its operations against the insurgency (Zeuthen, 2022). Towards the end of 2021, the northern port city of Bosaso, Puntland, also witnessed an outbreak of conflict. Externally, the war in Ukraine has had an impact on local prices in Somalia. This is due to a reduction in the number of imports of staple items such as grain, which in turn pushes up local prices (Fall, 2022; Raghavan, 2022). The outbreak of conflict in Europe follows the global Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in an economic downturn for the interview sites. Previous research under SPARC shows that, while households in Burao, Galkayo and Jowhar found ways of coping, the period saw declines in job opportunities, livestock market value and remittances from abroad (Levine et al., 2021a).

Further, the interview data presented in this brief provides insight into how households within Burao, Galkayo and Jowhar are responding to multiple shocks in terms of livelihood strategies, community support and managing tensions. In the sections that follow, we chart the effects of the failed 2021 Deyr rains and rising cost of living, as well as measures being taken by households, and their impact on social relations. Our interviews reveal that households were experiencing rising costs in terms of basic food items and livelihood inputs. An economic downturn within the local economy is affecting not only those directly engaging in pastoral and farming activities, but also the livelihood activities that rely on these sectors. In terms of managing these pressures, households are resorting to short-term coping and survival strategies (e.g. reduction in daily meal intake, selling livestock, borrowing money). However, despite these pressures, the interview data did not reveal a significant rise in violence within the interview sites. Instead we saw community support that focused

FIGURE 1: MAP OF STUDY AREAS



The map shows the approximate locations of the study areas (Burao district in Togdheer region, Galkayo district in Mudug region, and Jowhar district in Middle Shabelle region).

on helping the most vulnerable, equitable water access, and community-based conflict resolution that continued to manage tension when it did occur. This evidence offers insights for both recovery and conflict risk during crises.

## 2. Burao

Interviews in the region of Burao were conducted close to the regional capital, Burao Town, in the villages of Wisil, Adan Saleban and Looya. The three villages were originally established as livestock watering points with borewells during the British colonial period. Today, villagers are still

connected to pastoral livelihood activities, but the local economy also includes farming, charcoal production, transportation, petty trading, and restaurants and tea rooms.

### Protracted drought and its impact

During the 2021 Deyr season, Wisil, Adan Saleban and Looya experienced poor rainfall. Interviewees reported that: their grazing areas were depleted by extreme drought; sheep and goats were in poor bodily condition due to lack of pasture; and cows were weaker due to travelling long distances in search of land for grazing, which also

resulted in decreased milk production. However, a few interviewees mentioned that their camels were in good condition. The number of livestock sold by pastoralists in local markets and in Burao Town significantly reduced, which extensively impacted the local economy – the decline in livestock sales resulted in a lack of pastoralists who would buy from local vendors.

The poor 2021 Deyr rains resulted in setbacks for agriculture: only a small number of farms were cultivated (these were mostly larger farms with their own borehole); some farms were temporarily converted into grazing spaces for livestock; and small farms were not cultivated at all.

### **Inflation and basic needs**

Interviews revealed that inflation was taking a huge toll on households. Interviewees in Burao highlighted the rising cost of staple food items such as wheat flour, rice and cooking oil. Similarly, the cost of farming and herding inputs such as livestock feed, crop seeds, fertiliser and pesticides significantly increased. Another challenge faced by local people was the rising cost of fuel. Interviewees also reported a massive increase in transport fares due to a surge in fuel prices. Several mentioned that they had been depending on support from their relatives. Aid agencies also assisted some households with food supplies.

Although rain-dependent farms lacked water, households had sufficient water access via boreholes and water trucks. Many interviewees observed that boreholes were largely owned by individual farmers, not by communities, and several interviewees reported that borehole owners would provide water for a minimal fee. In some cases there was no 'fee' but, rather, people across the community would contribute towards buying fuel for borehole pumps. Households that were far from boreholes bought water from water trucks.

### **Coping and survival strategies**

A wide range of mechanisms were adopted to mitigate the impact of drought and hardships induced by poor rainfall. One interviewee in Adan Saleban described how the higher costs of living meant that they had to take on more debt. Another interviewee in Adan Saleban described how inflation and rising costs meant that they had to reduce the amount of food they were consuming as a household. In Wisil, an interviewee explained that the ability to afford basic food items varies: some are able to afford the higher cost of food, while others either have to rely on support from relatives or have buy food on credit.

The increased cost of fodder meant that some pastoralists could not afford it and had to veer away from traditional grazing methods, substituting grass with feeds such as sorghum and seeds from the *Prosopis juliflora* tree (locally known as Ali-Garoob). Those with larger herds had already migrated with their animals to destinations with

sufficient rain and better pasture, such as Hawd, Cawl, Kurta, Warta Sheekha and Wabo-gaajo.

### **Conflict in Burao**

Regarding community relations, interviewees reported a decrease in disputes. People were focused on surviving hardships induced by droughts and poor rains, as well as the rising cost of living. There was no mention of hostilities towards people moving in search of better economic opportunities, but a common view expressed by interviewees was that disputes about water were rare. Furthermore, there seemed to be a cooperative attitude towards water access. For example, the water committee in Adan Saleban waived charges for people who could not pay their water fee.

## **3. Galkayo**

Interviews in the Galkayo region were conducted in the towns of Galkayo and Bacaadweyn and the villages of Taalo-Cad, Ceelberdale, Buursaalax and Daarusalaam. The dominant livelihood activities in these villages are livestock rearing and small-scale farming. Proximity to a main market town, such as Galkayo or Galdogob, provides an opportunity to run small businesses, such as shops and restaurants. This can be seen in Taalo-Cad (Galkayo), Buursaalax and Daarusalaam (Galdogob).

### **Protracted drought and its impact**

Consecutive failed rainy seasons affected pastoralists and farmers alike. For pastoralists, the lack of water and fodder has resulted in livestock deaths. The livestock that managed to survive did so in poor bodily condition, meaning that, when sold at market, sellers failed to fetch a decent price. The livestock's poor condition also resulted in a decrease in milk production, which meant that pastoralists were unable to sell supplementary livestock products, such as milk and butter.

Farmers also saw a reduction in productivity due to the failed rains. Some chose not to cultivate their land at all, but those who were able to plant crops had reduced yields. When farmers sold what little produce they had, they got what they considered to be a decent price. However, given the small amount of viable products, and rising costs due to inflation, the income generated was not enough to cover household expenditures.

The impact of drought on pastoralists and farmers had a knock-on effect for other livelihoods. For example, a restaurant owner in Bacaadweyn Town described how the outmigration of pastoralists from the area led to a decline in business; a garage owner in Daarusalaam Village explained that an increase in vehicle-running costs has resulted in people not using their vehicles, including farm vehicles, therefore reducing the need for regular maintenance.

### **Inflation and basic needs**

There was agreement across all livelihood groups interviewed: the rise in the cost of living was affecting both inputs into livelihoods and the ability to afford basic food items. Interviewees cited several reasons for the rise in prices that went beyond drought conditions, including the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on supply chains, as well as the ban on the Somali shilling in favour of the US dollar. One interviewee suggested that conflict, although not in the immediate area of Galkayo, was contributing to the increase in local prices – ongoing conflict in Ethiopia was said to have disrupted fodder imports, contributing to a rise in local fodder prices. The same interviewee also referred to the recent conflict in Bosaso, Puntland and how it had contributed to a rise in the local price of food items and kerosene.

### **Coping and survival strategies**

In terms of mitigating shocks, as in Burao, interviewees in Galkayo described a series of short-term measures. In response to rising food prices, interviewees described reducing the number of meals eaten per day. Some reduced their daily meal intake to two per day, while others would consume only one meal per day. Reliance on water trucks was a common theme among pastoralists and farmers. Yet these deliveries are expensive, and villagers often had to pool resources or borrow money from family members to pay for water deliveries. Still, borrowing money is not an option for everyone. Some interviewees suggested that poor livestock prices meant that lenders refused loans based on the belief that livestock owners would not be able to repay them. Some farmers reported borrowing money now in hope that good rains would come, boost crop yields and allow them to pay back their loans.

Some pastoralists in Galkayo moved their livestock to areas that had better 2021 Deyr rains. Interviewees referred most to the region of Sanaag. Other destinations included the regions of Karkaar, Adunka, Garacad, Bari and Hawd. One interviewee in Ceelberdale Village noted that pastoralists migrated to the Sanaag region after hearing on the radio that there were sufficient Deyr rains there.

### **Conflict in Galkayo**

Despite the clear pressures people were facing at the time of being interviewed, there did not appear to be a significant rise in violence. Rather, interviewees described how neighbours pooled resources to help the most vulnerable. One interviewee referred to a 'traditional community self-help system' describing it as 'the only way we try to mitigate the impact of price increases'.

Similar to sentiments expressed in Burao, some interviewees said that people were simply too busy mitigating the effects of drought to engage in 'trouble'. However, access to water can lead to tension. Disagreements seemed to occur while queuing for

water trucks. According to interviewees, overall these disagreements passed without violence. And, even where there was the threat of violence, community structures were in place to resolve tensions. For example, one interviewee described an incident where two parties from the same sub-clan threatened each other with armed violence. The incident passed without the use of force and was resolved immediately by clan elders and the local water committee.

Other interviewees also spoke about the role that water committees played in ensuring equitable access to water. In Ceelberdale Village, water committees were working alongside village elders and 'city intellectuals' to determine the criteria for people who should be prioritised. Water committees were also said to have carried out needs assessments for water in their local areas.

## **4. Jowhar**

Interviews in Jowhar region were conducted across nine villages close to the Shabelle River: Baarow Weyne, Buur Fuule, Faanoole, Geedo Barkaan, Jiliyaale, Konko, MahGadaay, Qalafow and Tuulada Halgan. Livelihood activities here are defined by group identity. Members of the main interview sample from Shiidlo (a minority group from the Bantu and not part of the four main clans in Somalia) predominately practise farming, with some diversifying into agro-pastoralism. This group also includes those who work on farms (both family farms and other people's farms as casual labourers), run shops, and men who work as labourers in construction. The Abgaal and Gaaljecel clans made up a smaller portion of the interview sample and both practise pastoral livelihoods, but the Abgaal are also agro-pastoral.

### **The effect of protracted drought and flooding, and their impacts**

Unlike Burao and Galkayo, certain villages in Jowhar experienced flooding. Interviewees in Qalafow, Buur Fuule and Geedo Barkaan reported floods and waterlogging, meaning many could not cultivate their farms, resulting in a decline in crop yields. Some villages lost entire harvests due to the Shabelle River flooding, submerging farms. At the time of the interviews, farmers were still waiting for the water to recede to begin cultivating their fields for the Gu rainy season, which usually begins in March.

Interviewees from the villages of Fanoole, Jiliyaale and MahGadaay reported water shortages. In Faanoole, the Shabelle River's water level significantly dropped, well water became contaminated and algae developed – due to a lack of alternatives, some villagers were still using that well water. In Jiliyaale, there were only two operational wells because the others dried up.

Overall, as a result of poor 2021 Deyr rains, interviews in Jowhar revealed that many farmers recorded immense

financial losses because they spent their business capital preparing for the 2021 Deyr season, but made no profit due to lack of harvest. Others sold their maize seed to pay off accumulated debt. Rice farmers in particular reported that they were having difficulties with loan repayments. Similar to Burao and Galkayo, poor 2021 Deyr rains in Jowhar also impacted livelihoods outside farming and pastoralism. For example, petty traders who sold vegetables and other foodstuffs closed their shops because they did not have enough goods to sell.

### **Inflation and basic needs**

All interviewees in Jowhar reported a surge in food prices, which caused households to change their consumption patterns and, as in Galkayo, this included reducing the number of daily meals consumed. Many families reported not being able to afford three meals a day. Another major observation from interviews was the rapid price increase in farming and herding inputs. During the past year, the cost of maize seed, Maankaal livestock feed and tractor rental significantly increased.

Several female interviewees mentioned that an aid agency operating in the area distributed cooking oil and maize to assist households struggling with high food prices. However, some aid recipients sold these items to purchase preferred staples, such as pasta and rice. According to one female interviewee, ‘if we would have been consulted, we would have told the aid agencies to distribute rice and pasta because most of the maize they give ends up in the market’.

### **Coping and survival strategies**

As in Burao and Galkayo, interviews in Jowhar further revealed short-term strategies being used by people to help mitigate environmental and socioeconomic challenges. There have been changes to household consumption patterns. For example, some interviewees reported a reduction in the amount of food that people are eating. Similar to Burao, some people are also using credit to buy food. An interviewee explained that, due to how much they had already received, they were reluctant to obtain any more on credit to avoid becoming a ‘burden’.

In terms of addressing water shortages, farmers increased the rate at which they pumped water from the river into their fields for crops, livestock and domestic use. Interviewees mentioned that local pastoralists were selling their livestock at lower prices because they could not afford the water or fodder necessary to keep their livestock and also urgently needed the money to cover basic household expenses.

Migration and mobility were particularly prominent topics in interviews. People have been moving away from villages affected by floods and droughts. Jowhar and Mogadishu were said to be the preferred destinations for people seeking better opportunities. Men who left their

villages reportedly worked in construction and charcoal production, whereas women found jobs as domestic workers in Jowhar Town and Mogadishu.

### **Conflict in Jowhar**

As in Burao and Galkayo, current pressures including access to water have not resulted in an increase in violence. In fact, one interviewee described how those farmers who were able to harvest would share with the farmers who were less fortunate.

This is not to say that disputes over access to water do not occur. For example, interviewees observed that farmers worked collectively to maintain canals, but it was also reported that the farmers occasionally disagreed on when those irrigation canals should be used. Sometimes, minor disputes arose when farmers who had contributed neither resources nor labour towards canal maintenance insisted on withdrawing water. But, similarly to Burao and Galkayo, interviewees overall detailed the roles played by water committees, community elders and religious leaders in helping to resolve any disputes and managing access to water.

## **Discussion and recommendations**

The humanitarian situation has continued to worsen since interviews took place. However, the measures that were being taken by households to cope, or simply survive, provide important insights in terms of planning for recovery.

### **What debt accumulation means for recovery**

The ‘debt-creditor’ relationship is commonplace within Somalia, and borrowing money is part of pastoral livelihoods (Majid et al., 2017; Banerjee et al., 2022). For example, pastoralists will obtain credit based on the price of livestock, borrowing when low and repaying when livestock prices increase (Majid et al., 2017). However, the type of debt being acquired by households warrants further investigation. Understanding whether the level of debt being taken on is greater than normal, as well as the terms under which this money is being borrowed, are key. As per the interviews, farmers have been borrowing in hopes of better future rains, which at the time of publication have yet to come. We also heard from households that described taking on more debt in response to mitigating the impact of the rising cost of living. Are people taking greater risks in their borrowing? And what are the implications of increased risk for the ‘debt-creditor’ relationship, particularly for the poorest households?

### **How local community action helps to reduce the risk of violence**

A long-term aim of this work is to understand how certain shocks – be they environmental, economic or political – affect incidents of conflict. What is clear is that, despite

the pressures households were facing, there did not appear to be a significant increase in the level of violence across all three sites at the time of conducting interviews. Even where resources such as water were scarce, the communities we spoke with demonstrated a willingness to act cooperatively. This type of community support is not unique to our data collection. Previous research undertaken by SPARC in 2021 revealed several examples of local community action taking place during adverse environmental impacts (Levine et al., 2021b).

This does not mean that the risk of conflict is not there – one general point made by interviewees was that the risk of conflict relating to land access increases during the dry season. However, the ability demonstrated by

local community structures (such as water committees) to manage scarce resources, alongside continued trust in mediation provided by local leadership, show that the escalation of conflict over resources can be avoided during periods of scarcity. This is all the more important to recognise during a time when climate change is increasingly viewed as a ‘threat multiplier’, exacerbating existing socioeconomic tensions, including those related to shared resources (Brookes et al., 2022). Our data suggests that the analysis of the risks that may exist within this inter-relationship – and the opportunities to alleviate such risks – should focus on the role that community structures and leadership play in alleviating tensions around shared resources, with solutions that identify ways to support these mechanisms.

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