



Control and utilization of *Prosopis juliflora*: Ideas into action

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Turning the 'garaanwa' tree in Somaliland into a new resource for all



Coverage by Hargeisa Cable TV (HCTV) reached audiences across the Somali-speaking world

More eyes were opened to the many uses of the *garaanwa* or 'devil tree' in Somaliland at a workshop with development agencies and government departments. Seen by most as a terrible weed deserving of complete eradication, this workshop took another step in showing its potential as a new source of fuel, fodder and even human food.

Introduced by development organizations in the 1970s and 1980s to control desertification, people knew not from where it came, and called it *garaanwa*, or the unknown tree. Not just drought tolerant, it proved so well adapted that it spread widely and rapidly. It is truly hated by people in rural areas, where it invades riverbanks, pastures and farm land, forming impenetrable thickets, killing off native vegetation. It blocks paths and roads, the stout thorns piercing hooves and feet alike, earning the name *geed jinni*, or devil tree. The call from the communities is: "Please help us get rid of this!"

But the workshop offered a better solution. In her opening address, the Minister of the Environment and Rural Development, Hon. Shukri Haji Ismail told the audience how *prosopis*, as it is known internationally, has many

uses. She supports its utilization as a way to also control its spread. Ms Sadia Ahmed of PENHA-Somaliland (the Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa) and co-organizers of the workshop, explained PENHA's work in promoting prosopis use over the past ten years. The commissioner of the National Environment Research and Disaster Preparedness Authority (NERAD), Mr Mohamed Muse Awale suggested integration into drought-coping mechanisms. Mr Abdikarim Adan Omer, Project Manager of the Somaliland Development Fund (SDF), drawing on insights from SDF advisor Dr Abdulla Gafar's experience in Sudan, outlined a way forward. Mapping the spread is a first step. Mr Ugo Leonardi of FAO shared results of their latest survey, and a preliminary estimate of some 550,000 hectares of prosopis in Somaliland.

PENHA served biscuits and bread made with prosopis flour. The minister and the 40-strong audience all appreciated the subtle flavour – also showing that it is not poisonous as some people think! On display were prosopis honey, pod syrup and flour to taste, flooring tiles, carvings and other crafts made from prosopis wood, animal feed, charcoal and a range of books, brochures and information leaflets.



Mr Pasiecznik and Hon. Shukri Haji Ismail, Minister of Environment and Rural Development, with prosopis flour and biscuits

Mr Nick Pasiecznik, advisor to PENHA, then took the stage. He shared his 28 years of experience working with prosopis around the world, describing the various uses and whole industries built on prosopis products, through a series of colourful pictures, from the USA, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Kenya, Djibouti and India. A clear message – to control its spread, and at the same time make nutritious feed, the pods *must* be collected and milled. The protein is in the seed, and with every tonne of pods that are milled, two million seeds, or two million invasive trees of the future, are destroyed. Promoting conversion to charcoal will encourage clearance of land. Creating new charcoal and pod flour animal feed industries, can together not only stop the spread of prosopis, but will also provide much needed income and employment in rural areas.

'Ideas into action' was the theme of the discussions that followed. More awareness-raising at all levels was a common intervention, with one firm action being the setting up of demonstration farms. Attracting commercial interests was another. Robert Bowen of FAO suggested that prosopis control and utilization should be included in new development programmes. And a task force was proposed, so all interested parties could collectively help to make concrete actions happen, with PENHA collecting the names of eight organizations and agreeing to take this forward.

The workshop was the main event in the 'Prosopis roadshow', that started in Berbera on 27 May, and included lectures at Gollis University (29 May) and Burao University (31 May), community meetings in Beer (31 May), Beerato (1 June) and Dinqaal (3 June), and numerous informal seminars and visits along the way.