



HIRAAD INSTITUTE
for Public Policy Studies

POLICY BRIEF

Food Security over Sovereignty

Can the Somali Region achieve food self-sufficiency in the face
of climate change and global food crises?

Executive Summary

The Somali Region of Ethiopia faces persistent food insecurity driven by recurrent droughts, climate change, weak agricultural infrastructure, limited institutional support, and increasing dependence on imported food. While Ethiopia has made substantial national investments toward food self-sufficiency through agricultural modernization and climate-resilient initiatives, these policies have not sufficiently addressed the unique realities of the Somali Region, where pastoralism and agro-pastoralism dominate livelihoods.

This paper assesses the facilitating and constraining factors to achieving food self-sufficiency in the region. Findings reveal strong community willingness for local food production and consumption, but also significant structural barriers — poor access to agricultural inputs, water scarcity, inadequate extension services, and weak policy implementation. The evidence suggests food self-sufficiency should not be pursued as complete import substitution, but as a balanced strategy that strengthens local production while maintaining strategic trade.

Achieving food self-sufficiency requires climate-resilient investments, local food promotion, stronger local institutions, improved value chains, and policies tailored to pastoral production systems.

Background

Food self-sufficiency refers to a country's ability to meet its food needs primarily through domestic production — though it is often criticized as economically inefficient when pursued through strict import substitution. Recent global food crises and climate shocks have renewed interest in strengthening domestic food systems as a buffer against food insecurity in times of crisis and turbulence.

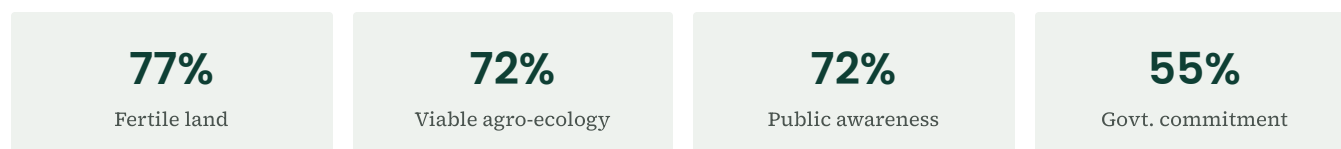
For the Somali Region, food self-sufficiency represents not only an economic objective but a strategy for enhancing resilience against climate variability, supply chain disruptions, and external market dependence. Success requires recognizing the region's unique pastoral economy rather than applying crop-centered national policies designed for Ethiopia's agrarian regions.

Major Findings

01 — PUBLIC WILLINGNESS & STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

Strong Public Willingness

A majority of respondents believe food self-sufficiency is attainable provided adequate investments are made. Key enabling factors include fertile agricultural land, viable agro-ecology, public awareness, and government commitment.



Structural Constraints Remain Severe

Farmers identified multiple systemic barriers to production — food insecurity is primarily constrained by production systems rather than demand.

Challenge	Share reporting
Poor access to seeds / fertilizers	88.7%
Water scarcity	78.0%
Lack of modern farming tools	76.6%
Climate change	76.4%
Weak agricultural extension	75.6%
Poor commercialization	73.2%
Poor transport infrastructure	63.5%

02 — CONSUMPTION PATTERNS & INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

Local Foods Remain Central to Pastoral Diets

Sorghum (94%), wheat (87%), and maize (87%) dominate consumption. Pastoralists favor local foods for availability (93%), affordability (71%), cultural preference (69%), and nutritional value (62%) — over 70% report increased local consumption in the last five years.

Imported Foods Continue to Shape Urban Markets

Despite this, imported foods dominate urban and peri-urban markets on the strength of better quality, more attractive packaging, greater consistency, and established supply chains. Over 82% of respondents say imports significantly influence local consumption patterns.

Institutional and Policy Gaps Persist

45% rate government efforts as low; 58% call existing policies insufficient; 39% see no meaningful promotion of local food consumption. National food self-sufficiency policy remains largely crop-focused, insufficiently adapted to pastoral and agro-pastoral systems.

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

93%

believe local foods could compete with imports if quality improved

82%

consider producer support very important

94%

agree local foods are essential to self-sufficiency

Policy Recommendations

1 · Climate-Resilient Agriculture

Expand irrigation; promote drought-resistant crops; improve water harvesting; strengthen climate information services.

3 · Competitive Local Value Chains

Improve processing; modernize packaging; establish quality standards; promote branding of local products.

5 · Institutional Coordination

Strengthen federal-regional-local collaboration; involve pastoral communities in policy design; improve monitoring.

2 · Support Pastoralists & Smallholders

Improve livestock health services; expand extension; increase access to affordable inputs; facilitate financing.

4 · Agricultural Infrastructure

Prioritize rural roads, storage, cold-chain systems, market infrastructure, and agro-processing industries.

6 · Local Food Consumption

Run food-literacy campaigns; raise awareness; encourage public institutions to procure local foods.

Conclusion

Food self-sufficiency in the Somali Region is both achievable and strategically important, but only through a context-specific, climate-resilient approach. Persistent structural barriers — limited access to inputs, inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional support, and climate vulnerability — continue to constrain progress despite strong community commitment.

A balanced strategy that strengthens domestic production, enhances pastoral livelihoods, develops competitive value chains, and maintains strategic engagement with regional food markets offers the most sustainable pathway to improved food security and resilience.