

COMMODIFIED CITIES

URBANIZATION AND PUBLIC GOODS IN SOMALIA

Tobias Hagmann, Abdi N. Mohamed, Abdirahman E. Ali,
Jamal Mohamed, Mahad Wasuge, Mohamed H. Ibrahim,
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Rift Valley Institute

MAKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE WORK

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This report was produced by the Rift Valley Institute drawing on the findings of the Somalia Urbanization Review ‘Fostering Cities as Anchors of Development’ published by the World Bank with funding from DFID (FCDO) and the Somalia Multi-Donor Partnership Fund in 2020.

Editing: Ken Barlow, Magnus Taylor

Thanks to Mark Bradbury, Peter Chonka, Sean Fox, Makiko Watanabe and Michael Winter for comments that helped shaping the arguments in this report.



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GLOSSARY

EU	European Union
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal Member State(s)
GALWA	Galkayo Water Company
IDP	internally displaced person
LDT	land dispute tribunal
NGO	non-governmental organization
PPP	public–private partnership
PSAWEN	Puntland State Authority for Water and Energy
RVI	Rift Valley Institute
SDF	Somaliland Development Fund
SNM	Somali National Movement
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USD	US Dollar
WHO	World Health Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Somalia has been at the top of various indices of state fragility for some time, with a recent assessment citing Mogadishu, Kismayo and Merka as the three most fragile cities in the world.¹ While the perilous fragility of Somalia's urban centres may seem clear, it is a rather more difficult task to determine just how fragile they are and who suffers the most as a result. Moreover, if Somali cities are fragile, they are concomitantly resilient. Otherwise, how can one explain the impressive demographic growth, urban development and skyrocketing real estate prices witnessed over the past decade or so? Despite their various challenges and shortcomings – including successive waves of destruction, reconstruction, destabilization and re-stabilization – Somali urban centres continue to be attractive places to live, work, trade, get an education and socialize for many Somalis. What is also clear is that this urban growth has largely occurred without any significant involvement from local or national government.

As such, it is necessary to avoid falling into the trap of overlooking what works. Among government officials, urban planners, and development workers, Africa's burgeoning metropolises are frequently understood as failed cities, unable to provide even basic services.² Whatever resourcefulness is in evidence is regarded as merely temporary compensation for fundamental failure. As AbdouMaliq Simone argues, however, such a perspective forecloses opportunities to capitalize on existing informal economies and structures.³ In addition, discussions of Somali urban fragility tend to counterpose Somali cities against an idealized functional city. There are, of course, very few cities in the world that come even close to this ideal.

Given their history, social systems in these fragile cities are often impenetrable to outsiders. This is certainly the case in Somali cities, where activities such as land acquisition

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- 1 John de Boer, Robert Muggah and Ronak Patel, 'Conceptualizing City Fragility and Resilience', United Nations University Centre for Policy Research Working Paper 5, 2016. <http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:5852/ConceptualizingCityFragilityandResilience.pdf>.
 - 2 Rosalind Fredericks and Mamadou Diouf. 'Introduction: Decolonizing Urban Theory'. In *The Arts of Citizenship in African Cities: Infrastructures and Space of Belonging*, edited by Mamadou Diouf and Rosalind Fredericks, 1-23. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
 - 3 AbdouMaliq Simone, *For the City Yet to Come. Changing African Life in Four Cities*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004.

or accessing of municipal services often require complicated negotiations between landowners, brokers, customary authorities, bureaucrats working in municipal tax offices, land registration authorities and the justice system, as well as other unofficial mediators and enforcers. This report attempts to take a more nuanced perspective of the modes and impacts of urbanization in the Somali territories, looking at what works, what doesn't, who benefits, who is excluded, and the consequences arising from this. In so doing we highlight the degree to which urbanization in Somalia – which only some four decades ago was described as 'a nation of nomads' – has taken a hold.⁴ By 2019 some 46 percent of Somalia's estimated 15.9 million inhabitants were urban dwellers and the Horn of Africa country's annual 4.3 urban growth rate is among the highest worldwide.⁵

Specifically, the report focuses on service delivery in Somali cities, and how in many instances this has been achieved by what is best described as a 'privatization from below'. Here, state collapse, displacement, rebuilding without planning, and large infusions of capital have led to major public goods becoming heavily commodified. As a result, the private sector has established an overwhelming pre-eminence in these areas, with governmental authorities doing little more than taking a fee, while providing minimal if any regulation or oversight. Though on the positive side such commodification and 'self-regulation' allows public goods to be delivered where otherwise they might be absent, it comes at the cost of massive urban inequalities, both spatial and socioeconomic, to the degree that for many the right to the city becomes extremely limited.

Here, it is worth expanding on this report's understanding of the term 'public goods'. In conventional economic theory a public good is characterized by non-excludability and non-rivalry, meaning that individuals cannot be excluded from using them and use by one person does not reduce the overall availability of the good for others. A 'common good', by contrast, is a good that is non-excludable but rivalrous, meaning that its consumption decreases its overall availability.⁶ The three urban resources analysed in this report – urban land, water and mobility – are thus a mixture of public and common goods, as well as resources that are neither non-excludable nor non-rivalrous. A second, more conventional, use of 'public good' is one that highlights the public utility of a particular asset or service. This second meaning is much closer to a 'public service' than a resource or good. In this report, we use the term

4 Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society: Reconstructing the History of a Pastoral People, 1600-1900*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

5 UN World Population Prospects 2019 <https://population.un.org/wpp/> and World Urbanization Prospects 2018 <https://population.un.org/wup/>.

6 William H. Oakland 'Theory of Public Goods'. In *Handbook of Public Economics Vol. 2*, edited by Alan J. Auerbach and Martin Feldstein, 485-535, Elsevier, 1987.

‘public goods’ to refer to resources or goods that either have a public character or play a major role in public wellbeing within Somali cities.

The three public goods at the centre of our analysis vary not only in terms of excludability, rivalry and materiality, but in terms of their social organization and governance. They allow for differentiated analytical insights into the provision of public goods in the Somali urban space. Urban land is a multi-faceted public good oscillating between very private and markedly public characteristics. While subject to speculation and commodification, land also represents a symbol of belonging and territorial control to particular social groups. The water sector, meanwhile, provides particular insights into collective action problems, as water operators face a major hurdle when mobilizing capital to invest in water infrastructure that has the potential to decrease costs for water users. Finally, the mobility of people and goods provides a good indicator of a city’s socioeconomic organization. Here, analysis of traffic and transport offers insights into differentiated mobility patterns, as well as coordination and competition between private transport operators. In all three cases, a significant degree of commodification and self-regulation can be seen across Somali cities. Moreover, all three appear, to varying degrees, to reproduce and even exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities.

Urbanization in the Somali territories is transforming Somali society in multiple and profound ways, with the growth of urban centres and networks paralleled by new patterns of accumulation, investment, redistribution, inclusion and exclusion. All this raises questions concerning the welfare of urban residents, the sustainability of these cities, and how best to respond to their fragility. Drawing on a comparative overview of multiple urban resources across the Somali territories, this report sheds light on how these challenges play out and what might be the most appropriate response to them. At present, policy-makers and donors are only just beginning to grasp what is happening in urban Somalia. If issues of urbanization by privatization, the role of self-regulation, and the reproduction of urban marginality are to be addressed, this shortfall in knowledge must be addressed.

Methodology and outline of report

This study is based on data collection in seven Somali cities, namely Mogadishu, Kismayo, Beledweyne, Baidoa, Galkayo, Bosaso and Borama. These cities display different characteristics with regard to their demographic size, political affiliation and economic geography. They include one primary city (Mogadishu), four secondary cities (Baidoa,

Bosaso, Galkayo, Kismayo) and two tertiary cities (Beledweyne and Borama).⁷ The selection also reflects different (sub-)national political unities and histories, namely the capital of the Federal Republic of Somalia (Mogadishu), Somaliland (Borama), Puntland (Bosaso, Galkayo), Hirshabelle (Beledweyne), South West State (Baidoa) and Jubbaland (Kismayo). The selected cities include both coastal (Mogadishu, Bosaso, Kismayo) and hinterland (Baidoa, Borama, Beledweyne, Galkayo) cities of different economic importance. Throughout, the report draws on and synthesizes unpublished empirical material and analytical insights derived from nine studies commissioned by the World Bank's urbanization review in Somalia: a literature review, seven city studies on the political economy of urban public goods, and a synthesis report.⁸

The report proceeds as follows. Section 1 provides an overview and brief of urban Somalia from pre-colonial times until the present day, before Section 2 explores the formal and informal mechanisms that govern the delivery of public goods in Somali cities. Building on this, Sections 3, 4 and 5 provide analysis of how these mechanisms play out in the cases of, respectively, urban land, water and mobility. In particular, the analysis centres on the commodification of these services, the role of self-regulation, and the potential impacts on socioeconomic and spatial inequality. Finally, Section 6 offers conclusions, policy recommendations and suggestions for future research.

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- 7 World Bank. 2013. 'A Rapid Assessment of Three Somali Urban Areas', mimeo. In international comparison Mogadishu's estimated 2.1 million inhabitants qualify Somalia's capital city as a 'medium sized city'. UN (United Nations). 2014. *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision*, (ST/ESA/SER.A/366). Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2014-Report.pdf>.
- 8 World Bank. *Somalia Urbanization Review: Fostering Cities as Anchors of Development*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2020. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35059>

URBAN SOMALIA THEN AND NOW

Colonial and postcolonial governments lastingly shaped urbanization and the development of built forms in Somalia's major cities.⁹ Urban areas occupied by British and Italian colonial authorities – and, following independence in 1960, by Somali officials – tended to be better planned, with better infrastructural services, such as water, electricity and paved roads. Meanwhile, unplanned informal settlements were built by poorer residents using makeshift materials. In the former British Protectorate – the present-day breakaway Republic of Somaliland – British colonialists acted according to two contradictory impulses. On the one hand, they encouraged cosmopolitan urban spaces, as these were less likely to harbour local resistance; on the other hand, they promoted clan segregation to facilitate indirect rule by appointment and the promotion of customary authorities.¹⁰

During the colonial era, a network of towns and markets emerged across Somalia as livestock production reoriented itself to the export trade, which grew at rapid pace starting from the 1960s due to Saudi Arabia's booming oil economy. New towns drove a rising demand for meat and became gathering points for increasingly market-oriented pastoralists. Concomitantly, a new mercantile class emerged in Berbera, which engaged brokers and drivers and reoriented existing systems of credit, thereby reconfiguring herd-ownership among pastoralists.¹¹

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- 9 Coastal towns like Zeila, Mogadishu, Merka and Barawa developed 'Islamic urban cultures' long before colonialism. They served as 'commercial entrepôts in the western Indian Ocean trading system', but had only a few thousand inhabitants during the 19th century. Lee V. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society*, 25–26. On the histories of Mogadishu and the Geledi city-state in Afgoye see, respectively, William D. Puzo, *Mogadishu, Somalia: Geographic Aspects of its Evolution, Population, Functions and Morphology*, PhD dissertation, University of California, 1972 and Virginia Luling, *Somali Sultanate: The Geledi City-State over 150 Years*, London: HAAN, 2002.
- 10 Abdifatah Tahir, 'Urban Governance, Land Conflicts and Segregation in Hargeysa, Somaliland: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Dynamics', PhD dissertation, University of Sussex, 2016.
- 11 Abdi Samatar, 'Merchant Capital, International Livestock Trade and Pastoral Development in Somalia', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 21/3 (1987): 355–374; Abdi Samatar, Lance Salisbury and Jonathan Bascom, 'The Political Economy of Livestock Marketing in Northern Somalia', *African Economic History* 17 (1988): 81–97.

The (non-)provision of infrastructure such as electricity corresponded to colonial priorities. In Somaliland, Britain built limited public infrastructure as part of its strategy of maintaining a restricted administrative presence sufficient to secure trading routes and ensure supplies to its colony in Aden.¹² In the south, infrastructure provision was almost entirely privatized, as the Italian colonial administration (starting from 1936) and Italian-run United Nations (UN) trust territory (after 1950—1960) attempted to build a settler colony and establish plantations.¹³

From independence to civil war

Following independence in 1960, Somali cities embodied – at least for some time in the 1960s and 1970s – the possibilities of ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’. In the early days of Siyad Barre’s ‘scientific socialism’, and despite a high degree of centralized state control, they were also marked by literacy campaigns, mandatory primary education for children, changing gender roles, and attempts to construct affordable public housing.¹⁴

During this period, service delivery became the responsibility of parastatals. Investment was concentrated in Mogadishu, with other regions – including major cities such as Hargeysa – neglected.¹⁵ In the wake of the disastrous Ogaden war with Ethiopia in 1977—1978, the Siyad Barre regime turned its focus to regime survival. Development aid, concessionary infrastructure loans and refugee aid became an essential part of the state budget, leading to around 70 per cent of government expenditure being funded by foreign aid by 1987. Thus, the appropriation of external rents and resources became an essential governance strategy.¹⁶

12 I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa*, Oxford/Hargeysa/ Athens, OH: James Currey/Btec Books/Ohio University Press, 2002.

13 Emma Lochery, *Generating Power: Electricity provision and state formation in Somaliland*, PhD dissertation, Oxford University, 2015.

14 Abdi Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality*, London/New Jersey: Zed Books/Institute for African Alternatives, 1988; Cindy Horst, ‘Implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda? Somali debates on women’s public roles and political participation’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 11/3 (2017): 389—407; RVI (Rift Valley Institute) and HIPS (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies), *Land Matters in Mogadishu: Settlement, ownership and displacement in a contested city*, Nairobi: RVI, 2017. <http://riftvalley.net/publication/land-matters-mogadishu#Wo4ry9IzY2w>.

15 Tahir, ‘Urban Governance’.

16 See Tobias Hagmann, *Stabilization, Extraversion and Political Settlements in Somalia*, Nairobi and London: Rift Valley Institute, 2016. <http://riftvalley.net/publication/stabilization-extraversion-and-political-settlements-somalia#W6pAN-hKjbo>.

In the urban sphere, this meant service delivery essentially collapsed, even in the capital Mogadishu.¹⁷ Makeshift settlements, locally referred to as *obosibo*, became a growing phenomenon in the capital in the 1980s, driven by drought, forced migration and government centralization.¹⁸ Throughout this time, the populations of Somalia's major cities, including the capital, increased rapidly.

In the decades following independence, herd management strategies, modes of market access and pastoral resource use underwent important changes. This period was characterized by the spread of grazing enclosures, privatization of water points, competition between clans over water and rangeland, and reduced mobility.¹⁹ The extended 1974 drought was an important catalyst in driving more pastoralists to move to towns, as the government sought to attract former herders to cooperative farms and fishing ventures. The result was a rapid increase in out-migration to these urban areas.²⁰

A 1979 study on Somalia's urban settlement patterns observes that 'towns of medium and big size are few' and that only 'Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Kismayo' qualify as being a 'big town'.²¹ The study concludes that urban growth has been 'spectacular in the Shabelle and Juba river areas',²² but slower in the country's central regions due to limited water availability.

Urban flight and re-urbanization after 1988

The outbreak of civil war from 1988 initially led to the de-urbanization of Somalia's main cities as urban dwellers fled violence, with many seeking refuge in their rural home clan territories. As a consequence of the war, the economy, development and political life of the country was decentralized and privatized.²³ Civil strife drove people from the capital

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- 17 Roland Marchal, 'A Survey of Mogadishu's Economy'. Nairobi: European Commission/Somalia Unit, 2002.
- 18 Rick Davies, *The Village, the Market and the Street: A Study of Disadvantaged Areas and Groups in Mogadishu, Somalia: A study prepared for: Municipality of Mogadishu, UNICEF, OXFAM, CCFD–France*, 1987.
- 19 M. P. O. Baumann, J. Janzen and H. J. Schwartz, eds., *Pastoral Production in Central Somalia*, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, 1993.
- 20 Luca Ciabbarri, 'Trade, Lineage, Inequalities: Twists in the Northern Somali Path to Modernity', in *Milk and Peace, Drought and War: Somali Culture, Society, and Politics: Essays in Honour of I.M. Lewis*, edited by Markus Hoehne and Virginia Luling, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
- 21 D. M. Bohra, 'Patterns of urban settlements in Somalia', *GeoJournal* 3 (1979): 66.
- 22 Bohra, 'Patterns of urban'.
- 23 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *National Human Development Report Somalia 2001*, New York: UNDP, 2001.

Mogadishu, leading to the rapid growth of older cities such as Hargeysa and Bosaso, as well as the emergence of new urban centres such as Garowe and Burtinle. The rise of these urban centres led to the extension of services throughout the country, though some cities, such as Baidoa, Kismayo, Barawa and Mogadishu, continued to face multiple and prolonged conflicts.

In Mogadishu, and to a lesser extent Kismayo and Hargeysa, the overthrow of the Siyad Barre regime in 1991 was accompanied by the looting of public property, as well as violence against clans perceived as associated with the former regime.²⁴ Although the resultant chaos and displacement affected all Somalis, it had a disproportionate effect on members of the Darood clan and other non-Hawiye clans, as well as vulnerable minority groups such as the Reer Hamar and other coastal communities.²⁵ Subjected to horrendous violence, they fled en masse and were forced to abandon houses and property. In some places, such as Barawa, entire minority communities were ‘cleansed’ and have not returned. This legacy of urban land seizures and appropriation of houses has for long posed a significant obstacle to the normalization of political and social relations in Somalia.²⁶

In Somaliland, meanwhile, the bombardment of Hargeysa and Burao by government forces led to widespread destruction, the death of tens of thousands of civilians and the displacement of hundreds of thousands to Ethiopia.²⁷ This experience of targeted destruction, in particular the bombing of Hargeysa in response to the Somali National Movement (SNM) insurgency, was crucial to northern Somalis’ subsequent abandonment of—or at least distancing from—a hitherto shared Somali national identity, leading ultimately to Somaliland’s declaration of secession in 1991.²⁸

With the return of relative peace in many parts of Somalia in the late 1990s, reconstruction efforts were promoted by diaspora groups, individuals, local businesspeople and returnees.²⁹ This, however, led to an increase in land conflicts, driven not only by rising land valuations

24 Lewis, *A Modern History*.

25 Jutta Bakonyi, ‘Between protest, revenge and material interests: a phenomenological analysis of looting in the Somali war’, *Disasters* 34/S2 (2010): S238–S255; Liwdien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*, Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2013; RVI and HIPS, *Land Matters*.

26 Marchal, Roland and Zakaria Yusuf. ‘Power Politics in Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis’. Unpublished draft, prepared 2017; RVI and HIPS, *Land Matters*.

27 Mark Bradbury, *Becoming Somaliland*, London/Oxford: Progressio/James Currey, 2008.

28 Gérard Prunier, *The Country that Does not Exist: A History of Somaliland*, London: Hurst, 2021.

29 Ismail I. Ahmed and R. H. Green, ‘The heritage of war and state collapse in Somalia and Somaliland: local-level effects, external interventions and reconstruction’, *Third World Quarterly* 20/1 (1999):

but disputes over belonging.³⁰ Since then, a major demographic reconcentration in Somali cities has occurred due to a variety of factors, namely: rural flight as a result of drought and forced migration; diaspora investments and returnees; the formation of new administrative centres as part of ongoing federalization; and international aid investments.

On the one hand, cities that are in the relatively stable parts of Somalia and situated along important trade routes have grown over the past three decades, due to population inflows from other parts of Somalia and neighbouring countries. Cities in Puntland provide a good example of this, with Garowe – Puntland’s administrative capital – growing from a small town of ‘approximately 14,000 inhabitants in 1991 to an estimated population of 70–120,000 in 2011’, and the population of Bosaso, a far more commercially important urban centre, increasing from around ‘30,000 in the late 1980s to around 300,000 in 2007, and 600,000–800,000 in 2015’.³¹ On the other hand, protracted insecurity has left some Somali cities segregated along clan lines. While some degree of spatial division had always existed, this trend has accelerated since the civil war. In cities that underwent major reconstruction, such as Hargeysa or Burao, inhabitants largely reside in clan enclaves, with their social engagements limited to weddings, sports, shopping and get-togethers located within their respective neighbourhoods.³² This has also affected delivery of services. For instance, businesses allied to locally dominant clans – albeit with cross-clan shareholding for additional security – provide water in different parts of Mogadishu.

Finally, some urban centres have grown in prominence as a result of being attached to a particular state-building project. In contested cities such as Galkayo, which is claimed by Puntland and the Galmudug regional administration, this is a driver of both urbanization and fragility.³³ Garowe’s development, by contrast, has largely been driven by the city’s role as administrative capital of the state of Puntland, established in 1998. Other cities whose growth can be directly linked to the success or failure of their respective Federal Member State (FMS) include Jowhar in Hirshabelle and Dusamareb in Galmudug.

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- 30 Lee Cassanelli, *Hosts and Guests: A Historical Interpretation of Land Conflicts in Southern and Central Somalia*, Nairobi and London: Rift Valley Institute, 2015. <https://riftvalley.net/sites/default/files/publication-documents/RVI%20-%20Research%20Papers%20-%20Hosts%20and%20Guests.pdf> Rift Valley Institute, *Key Land Conflict in Somalia*, Nairobi: Somalia Stability Fund, 2021. <https://stabilityfund.so/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Land-Conflict-Full-report-PRINT.pdf>
- 31 Kirstine Strøh Varming, ‘The Experiential Limits of the State: Territory and Taxation in Garoowe, Puntland’, DIIS Working Paper, 2017.
- 32 Adan Aboker et al., ‘Notes on the Governance and Evolution of Somali Cities’, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, unpublished draft, prepared 2018.
- 33 HIPS (Heritage Institute of Policy Studies), *Gaalkacyo Conflict: Drivers, Contributors, and Potential Solutions*, Mogadishu: HIPS, 2016. www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Gaalkacyo-Conflict-Drivers-Contributors-and-Potential-Solutions-.pdf.

Displacement and marginality in the city

Since 1988, forced migration has continued to be the most important drivers of urbanization in Somalia and Somaliland.³⁴ As the abandonment of Mogadishu by around 870,000 people in 2007–2008 demonstrates,³⁵ population movements do not only take place towards major cities – Somalis also move between cities, cyclically between cities and rural areas, and even *within* cities.³⁶

The numbers, especially in terms of internally displaced persons (IDPs), are staggering. In 2018, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that 900,000 Somalis had been displaced to other parts of the Horn of Africa as refugees.³⁷ Recent estimates of the number of IDPs stand at over 2 million: in addition to 1.1 million in situations of protracted displacement, a further 943,000 are estimated to have been displaced by a combination of insecurity and climate shocks, as well as – since late 2016 – related food insecurity.³⁸ Recurrent fighting, contested land tenure and drought have left Bay, Bakool and the Shabelle regions, as well as the Juba Valley, particularly hard hit by displacement. In some cities, notably Mogadishu, IDPs – who lack title deeds – have been displaced by forcible evictions resulting from increases in land values.³⁹

A majority of IDPs have no intention of leaving the cities in which they reside.⁴⁰ In cities such as Bosaso where the displaced are indistinguishable from the urban poor, and form part of

34 For an overview of the successive waves of displacement that have taken place since the early 1990s, see World Bank/GPFD (Global Program on Forced Displacement), *Analysis of Displacement in Somalia*, Copenhagen: Tana Consulting, 2014. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/21056/932380WPop1264otoDCoeditsoo9o12o14.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

35 They were fleeing violence between the Ethiopian-backed Transitional Federal Government and groups linked to the Islamic Courts Union.

36 Anna Lindley, 'Leaving Mogadishu: Towards a Sociology of Conflict-Related Mobility', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23/1 (2010): 2–22.

37 UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), 'Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: Delivering More Comprehensive and Predictable Responses for Refugees', 20 March 2018. www.unhcr.org/comprehensive-refugee-response-framework-crrf.html.

38 UN Somalia, 'Durable Solutions', 2018. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimates a lower number, though it believes this is an underestimation of the extent of displacement. In 2017, it believed the number of IDPs to be 825,000, with a further 388,000 displaced by conflict and around 800,000 displaced by drought over the whole year; see IDMC (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre), *Somalia: Figures Analysis*, 2018. www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/GRID%202018%20-%20Figure%20Analysis%20-%20SOMALIA.pdf.

39 World Bank. 2013. 'A Rapid Assessment'.

40 Caitlin Sturridge, Oliver Bakewell and Laura Hammond, *Return and (Re)Integration after Displacement*, London/Nairobi: EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window) Research and Evidence Facility, 2018.

the everyday work force, it is often impossible to single out IDPs as a specific group.⁴¹ They thus become part of the ‘uncontrolled growth of numerous dense, un-serviced temporary settlements on the urban fringes’,⁴² constantly at risk of eviction or exploitation by powerful groups who control land. In most Somali cities, IDP settlements are interspersed with host communities, refugees and economic migrants, with IDPs integration into the local context dependent on, among other things, the duration of their stay, their clan origin and the local economy.⁴³

IDPs are among the most disadvantaged in cities, finding it difficult to access health, education, shelter and sanitation services, or obtain sufficient food and clean drinking water.⁴⁴ Along with youth and women, they are often excluded from the informal urban economy, and so are forced to rely on multiple livelihoods, remittances—if they receive them—and humanitarian aid. Moreover, their experiences of insecurity are deeply gendered: male IDPs are often viewed with suspicion by host communities given they have come from areas governed by al-Shabaab, while women and girls in settlements are at particular risk of domestic abuse, rape, sexual exploitation and assault, as well as child or forced marriage.⁴⁵

Spatially, IDPs are concentrated in underserved neighbourhoods, with, for example, an estimated 55 per cent of the 400,000 IDPs identified during a 2016 Mogadishu IDP profiling exercise living in Daynile and Kahda, on the city outskirts.⁴⁶ As the number of IDPs has swelled, these urban dwellers have suffered numerous waves of evictions, driven both by the government (due to purported concerns around criminality and drug use) and private actors with a stake in the land occupied by the IDPs.⁴⁷

41 Filiep Decorte and Ombretta Temptra, ‘Improving living conditions in Bossaso, Somalia’, *Forced Migration Review* 34 (2010): 16–18.

42 Decorte and Temptra, ‘Improving living conditions’, 16.

43 REACH, ‘IDP assessment in Mogadishu’, 22 February 2016. <https://www.reach-initiative.org/what-we-do/news/idp-assessment-in-mogadishu/>; World Bank/GPFD, *Analysis of Displacement*.

44 JIPS (Joint IDP Profiling Service), *Internal Displacement Profiling in Hargeysa*, Geneva: JIPS, 2015. www.jips.org/uploads/2018/10/Profiling-Report-Somalia-Hargeisa-2015.pdf; UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and JIPS (Joint IDP Profiling Service), *Internal Displacement Profiling in Mogadishu*, Geneva: JIPS, 2016. www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1133019/1930_1465988858_original-mogadishu-profiling-report-2016.pdf.

45 Fouzia Musse and Judith Gardner, ‘A Gender Profile of Somalia’, unpublished draft prepared for the EU Somalia Mission, prepared 2013; Sturridge, Bakewell and Hammond, *Return and (Re)Integration*.

46 UNHCR and JIPS, *Internal Displacement Profiling*.

47 NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council), *Back to Square One*, Nairobi: NRC, 2018. www.nrc.no/resources/reports/back-to-square-one/.

The majority of Mogadishu's IDPs and urban poor live in camps on public or privately owned land, where they are ostensibly represented and protected by persons known as 'gatekeepers' or 'black cats'. Gatekeepers profit from the distribution of aid reaching the settlements, typically taking a percentage of the aid intended for those they claim to be representing.⁴⁸ A web of local powerbrokers, usually drawn from the dominant clans in a particular district and comprised of landowners, district officials, businessmen and gatekeepers, have effectively monopolized the business of urban informal settlements and inward migration to Mogadishu. Similar phenomena have been reported in Bosaso and Kismayo, though their operation appears to be less oppressive in these cities.⁴⁹

48 RVI and HIPS, *Land Matters*.

49 Erik Bryld, Christine Kamau and Dina Sinigallia, *Gatekeepers in Mogadishu*, Nairobi: Somalia Cash Consortium, 2013. www.cashlearning.org/downloads/1376766704.pdf; Erik Bryld and Christine Kamau, 'Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS): Kismayo and Bossaso', Tana Consulting Briefing Paper, London: IAAAP, 2018.

GOVERNING SOMALI CITIES

Somali municipalities have undergone significant legal and political changes over time. District administrations were an invention of the British and Italian colonizers, with the Italian trusteeship establishing territorial councils and organizing municipal elections in the 1950s. Somalia's independent civilian government (1960—1969) did not change the composition of regions, though the 1961 constitution provided a degree of decentralized administration.⁵⁰ Local administrations played an important part in the national and local elections during the 1960s. Then, in a 1969 decree, the Siyad Barre regime reorganized the municipalities and increased the number of regions from 8 to 16, each containing 3 to 6 districts. In 1974, Benadir was divided into three regions – namely Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle and Benadir (the latter consisting of the city of Mogadishu only) – making a total of 18 regions.⁵¹

The 1991 state collapse presented Somali local governments with novel dynamics and challenges. While the Somaliland and Puntland administrations eventually created new regions and districts, the current provisional federal constitution (2012) only acknowledges the districts and regions that existed prior to the collapse of the military government – that is, 18 regions and 92 districts.⁵² In south and central Somalia, the post-1991 evolution of city administrations in many ways reflects national political developments. Initially, district administrations that governed major towns were self-appointed. When the Somaliland and Puntland administrations became more influential, however, they started appointing regional governors and district commissioners. Then, with the formation of interim regional administrations—the Federal Member States (FMS)—in 2013, state governments were officially able to nominate administrators within their respective territories. Federalization has exacerbated exclusivist claims to Somali cities, which once had a cosmopolitan touch. The 2013 Regional and District Administration Law passed by the Somali Federal Parliament gives exclusive rights to the administration of regions and districts to those hailing from them (natives), thereby privileging the autochthonous principle of kinship (*u dhashay*) over

50 Republic of Somalia, Constitution of the Republic of Somalia, 1960.

51 Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Somalia: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1992. <http://countrystudies.us/somalia/>

52 Federal Republic of Somalia, Provisional Constitution, 2012.

that of territorial attachment (*ku dashay*).⁵³ In a federal model that associates particular territories with specific genealogical descent groups, cities become the property of such groups rather than a shared, cosmopolitan space.⁵⁴

Urban governance after 1991

Post-1991, Somali towns and cities have been governed by a multitude of actors who cooperate and compete in their attempts to control urban land, people and services. Such arrangements explain the dynamism and, at times, instability of urban political settlements. The result has been a plural urban governance landscape characterized by:

- legal pluralism, with state (district, municipal, FMS), customary (elders, clan leaders) and religious (sheikhs, Shari'a courts) actors and norms co-producing urban governance, at times working with, at other times against, each other;⁵⁵
- a multitude of neighbourhood, communal, state, public and private actors, often rendering conventional distinctions between 'private' and 'public' problematic or obsolete;
- armed groups – whether clan militias, security forces, street gangs or al-Shabaab – who produce de facto governance through coercion in many parts of Somalia;
- inter-group dynamics, both cooperative and conflictive, that manifest in kinship based mobilization and provide the societal backdrop against which the above three elements operate.

In the majority of cities studied, respondents were of the opinion that one or two dominant clans benefit disproportionately from government appointments, business opportunities and access to basic services. This dominance based on genealogical descent – whether real or perceived – breeds grievances that threaten urban stability. Moreover, clan domination in a given area often leads to centre-periphery dynamics being exacerbated, with reconstruction

53 Federal Republic of Somalia, Regional and District Administration Law, 2013. See Cedric Barnes, 'U dhashay – Ku dhashay: genealogical and territorial discourse in Somali history', *Social Identities* 12/4 (2006): 487–498.

54 On the relation between war and territorialisation after 1988 see Markus V. Hoehne, 'The rupture of territoriality and the diminishing relevance of cross-cutting in Somalia after 1990', *Development and Change* 47/6 (2016): 1379–1411.

55 See Ken Menkhaus, 'State failure, state-building, and prospects for a 'functional failed state' in Somalia', *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 656/1 (2014): 154–172.

or infrastructure development seen as being concentrated in majority clan areas at the expense of others. This has been the case in, for example, Kismayo, where tensions have arisen between members of the Ogaden clan family residing in Kismayo and those of the Marehan clan family residing in Gedo region.⁵⁶

State institutions, customary authorities and a broad range of political and economic entrepreneurs – from businesspeople to security forces – exist alongside each other in Somali cities. While this co-existence can be productive, leading to ‘hybrid’ or coordinated governance – such as in Borama or Hargeysa, where police, elders and courts often cooperate in dispute settlement – it can also be destructive, with competing authorities undermining both each other and broader attempts to institutionalize the political rule of urban populations.⁵⁷ The degree to which multiple authorities collaborate or clash in urban governance thus needs to be answered on a case-by-case, city-by-city and year-by-year basis.

Formal institutions

Important de jure and de facto variations exist across Somalia when it comes to city administrations and municipalities. Though Article 48 of the Federal Republic of Somalia’s provisional constitution acknowledges sub-national tiers of governance, the roles and responsibilities of the different levels of government, their legislative powers, the division of labour between administrations, and even the basic principles of fiscal federalism have yet to be determined.⁵⁸ Somaliland was the first political entity to endorse decentralization, adopting the Regions and Districts Law (No. 23) in 2002, which was extensively revised in 2007.⁵⁹

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- 56 Saferworld, *Forging Jubbaland: Community Perspectives on Federalism, Governance and Reconciliation*, London: Saferworld, 2016. www.saferworld.org.uk/downloads/pubdocs/forging-jubaland.pdf.
- 57 Similar examples are documented in Nicole Stremlau and Ridwan Osman, ‘Courts, clans and companies: mobile money and dispute resolution in Somaliland’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4/1 (2015): p. Art. 43; Alice Hills, ‘Somalis works: police development as state building’, *African Affairs* 113/450 (2014): 88–107.
- 58 This lacuna is also reflected in yet to be defined fiscal responsibilities of different layers of government. Somali Public Agenda, ‘Fiscal federalism in Somalia: constitutional ambiguity, political economy and options for a workable arrangement’, Mogadishu: Somali Public Agenda, 2021. <https://somalipublicagenda.org/fiscal-federalism-in-somalia/>
- 59 Republic of Somaliland, Regions and District Law (Law No. 23/2002), amended 2007, Hargeisa: Republic of Somaliland.

The local council elections of 2002 and 2012 gave the Somaliland electorate the opportunity to vote for their respective councils in 23 districts.⁶⁰ These councils then elected mayors and deputy mayors. The elected councils are relatively functional in seven Somaliland cities and towns: Hargeysa, Burao, Borome, Gabiley, Berbera, Sheikh and Ergabo.⁶¹ Mayors in these municipalities enjoy considerable power, while revenue has increased over time due to an expanding revenue base and enhanced tax collection.⁶² This has allowed individuals to maintain a system of patronage, which includes control over the sale of public land, preferential treatment in contracting or procuring goods, services and employment, and evicting people from certain areas.

The District Councils Law (No. 7) adopted in 2003 governs local municipalities in Puntland.⁶³ Both Somaliland and Puntland reviewed their laws as part of a 2017 UN Joint Programme on Local Governance (JPLG)-led review of decentralization policy.⁶⁴ More recently, Jubbaland and South West State have adopted local government laws, while Hirshabelle and Galmudug are in the process of following suit. It is important to point out, however, that municipalities have no de jure status in current Somali law, but are part of districts.

The capacities and functioning of city administrations, including municipalities, vary considerably across the Somali territories. While cities in Somaliland and Puntland are ruled by councils who elect the mayor,⁶⁵ most district council administrations in central and southern Somalia have either not been established, or were established only recently without a popular vote. As a consequence, city administrations in most of Somalia are not elected locally, but appointed by regional or FMS officials. Meanwhile, Mogadishu's political status

60 Hargeysa had 25 councils elected, while smaller cities had 21, 17 and 13 councils, depending on which category (A, B or C) they fell in to.

61 The administrative role of local councils is, however, ill-defined and their jurisdiction remains unclear. Relations between the regions and local councils are often contentious.

62 See also Ken Menkhaus, 'If Mayors ruled Somalia: beyond the state-building impasse', Policy Note 2, Uppsala: The Nordic Africa Institute, 2014. <https://nai.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:714676/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

63 Puntland State of Somalia, 'Law No.7 of 18th /09/2003 on the Laws of the District Councils of the Puntland State of Somalia', The Official Gazette, Garowe: Puntland State of Somalia. http://www.jplg.org/mis/documents/Puntland_Local_Government_Laws_No_7_2003_English_Version.pdf

64 JPLG (Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service Delivery in Somalia), *Programme Annual Progress Report 2017*, Nairobi: JPLG, 2018.

65 Local elections were piloted in Eyl, Ufeyn and Qardo districts in Puntland in October 2021 in view of local elections to be held in 2022. Interpeace, 'Historic Puntland local elections pave way for Somalia's democratization', Nairobi: Interpeace, December 8, 2021. <https://www.interpeace.org/2021/12/local-government-elections-in-puntland-pave-the-way-for-somalias-democratization/>

remains in limbo, its administration effectively appointed by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS).

The relative importance of state actors such as municipalities, police, or courts – as opposed to non-state actors – has, to a degree, increased over time since state collapse in 1991. This is particularly the case for the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, whose pacification went hand-in-hand with (limited) bureaucratic rule being re-established in cities such as Hargeysa, Burao, Borama and Berbera. In the remaining parts of the former Somali Democratic Republic, however, things are less clear cut. While new state institutions have emerged as part of the painful creation of FMS over the past six or so years, at the city level, many municipalities and district administrations remain weak-to-very-weak in terms of their administrative and service delivery capacity.⁶⁶ This continued ‘state failure’ at the city level is indicative of the enormous state-building difficulties that lie ahead in Somalia. It may also reflect a tendency by Somali political elites to seek better funded and more prestigious positions at the FMS and national, rather than municipal, level. Exceptions to this apply in some of the bigger cities.

Executive bias

One reason for Somali city administrations’ minimal functionality is the role played by state, regional and federal institutions. Both the general working of local government and the provision of particular public goods and services hinge to a degree on the division of labour between local administrations and those at a higher level. With the partial exception of Somaliland, local government has limited autonomy and local officials have a tendency towards upward rather than downward accountability.⁶⁷ This means that urban residents’ political preferences are usually overlooked in favour of politics at the state, ‘national’ (Somaliland) or federal (Somalia) level. The picture that emerges is of city governments lacking the fiscal and political autonomy to develop public services, despite considerable public revenue being collected at the city level—including by city administrations. In Somalia’s emerging FMS, the relevant state government appoints city mayors by decree.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, in Somaliland and Puntland, the respective governments appoint regional governors, who also play roles in urban management. Local urban government is thus often

66 Gaël Rabbaland et al. ‘Reflections on the future role of the state in Somalia from the perspective of aid effectiveness’, *Development Policy Review* 40/1 (2021): <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12549>.

67 Our city studies did not consider local government officials’ remit outside their city, including in rural governance.

68 A typical example is Baidoa, where the commissioner or city mayor is not elected by the council, but appointed by the South West State president.

supplanted by, or forced to compete with, regional and national administrations whose agendas are far removed from local priorities.⁶⁹

The executive bias in Somalia's emerging federalism is particularly prominent in the security sector, with federal and state executives dominating decision-making related to urban security. For instance, the Puntland president has wide-ranging constitutional powers and influence on security and justice matters.⁷⁰ In Bosaso, while the police and police commissioner report to the mayor, the remaining security forces report directly to the Puntland government. In Mogadishu, Somalia's Ministry of Internal Security coordinates security efforts, including the work of the police.⁷¹ Elsewhere, the Beledweyne mayor plays no role in security provision, with the police stationed in the city effectively under the supervision of the Hirshabelle state police commander. Despite the multiplicity of security forces across Somalia, most – with the exception of the police – are not specifically trained or mandated to maintain public order in cities. Instead, plural security forces reflect the competing interests of different Somali and foreign sponsors and chains of command. Most important from a city-level viewpoint is the fact that city administrations have very little say in directing security forces, with the exception of some police forces. Urban security thus remains largely an executive prerogative, dominated by national or state-level officials.

Moreover, police forces stationed in Somali cities are ill equipped, badly trained and under staffed.⁷² As such, they struggle to conduct proper criminal investigations, further undermining the judiciary. Borama, for example, has only two police stations, with approximately 100 officers for an estimated urban population of 270,000, while in Beledweyne few criminal cases are reported to the police, who are often not mobile enough to pursue perpetrators. Bribery is rife, with IDPs and minorities in particular targeted by security forces for detention and extortion. In Somaliland, which has a longer and more successful track record of pacification and state-building, the urban residents of Borama and Hargeysa cooperate more closely with authorities than in the rest of Somalia.

The limited reach of the courts and police is illustrated by the fact that, across Somali cities, court decisions touching on sensitive political or commercial interests – such as the eviction

69 In Borama for example, the national government has sold land circumventing the city administration.

70 In 2018, some 36 per cent of Puntland's budget was spent on security.

71 The FGS spends approximately a third of its budget on security and defense. See Federal Republic of Somalia, 'Appropriation Act for 2020 Budget', Act. No. 15, Mogadishu: Federal Republic of Somalia. <https://mof.gov.so/publications/appropriation-act-2020-budget>

72 World Bank, 'Federal Republic of Somalia: Somalia Security and Justice Sector PER', Report No: AUS8353, Washington DC: World Bank, 2017. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/644671486531571103/pdf/Somalia-Security-and-justice-sector-public-expenditure-review.pdf>

of an unlawful land occupant – are often not implemented because security forces fear violent backlashes from clan militias. Given these shortcomings, civil and criminal cases, as well as incidents of political violence, are predominantly arbitrated by non-state actors. Among these actors is al-Shabaab, which arbitrates clan, land and other conflicts in cases where the group itself does not control the relevant urban space. For instance, al-Shabaab courts in Lower Shabelle are known to resolve land conflicts in the Greater Mogadishu area.⁷³ Justice provision by al-Shabaab is preferred by some as it is less susceptible to corruption, decision-making is quicker than with state courts, and arbitrations are enforced.⁷⁴ More often, though, conflicts are resolved through mediation by individuals or groups, as well as through customary dispute settlement mechanisms. Families may negotiate compensation directly with each other – through elders – thereby circumventing state courts. Clan elders and religious leaders play key roles in adjudicating inter-group conflicts and providing justice in Somali cities.⁷⁵

Even within city administrations, political decision-making is often concentrated in the hands of the executive, to the detriment of public servants. In Bosaso, for example, the local council's 15-member standing committee is assigned to various municipal departments, creating the risk that administrative decisions are politicized. This points to a recurrent theme in modern Somali politics – namely, the co-existence of weak state capacity with a strong, at times authoritarian, executive.⁷⁶ This mismatch between revenue generation and little-to-no investment in the urban space by local government reinforces Somali city administrations' weak functionality.

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- 73 On Al Shabaab's 'political-religious legitimacy' see Michael Skjelderup, 'Hudud punishments in the forefront: application of Islamic criminal law by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen', *Journal of Law and Religion* 29/2 (2014): 317–329.
- 74 Tobias Hagmann and Mohamed M. Seid, 'Ending impunity – fostering redress and accountability in Somalia', in *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab*, eds. M. Keating and M. Waldman, London: Hurst, 2018.
- 75 Mahdi Abdile, 'Customary dispute resolution in Somalia', *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 1 (2012): 87–110.
- 76 The Federal Government's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) is a case in point. Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, 'Predatory politics and personalization of power: the abuses and misuses of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) in Somalia', *African Affairs* 119/475 (2020): 251–274.

URBAN LAND: THE COSTS OF COMMODIFICATION

While land occupancy and ownership in Somali cities is largely unplanned, it is not disorganized or arbitrary. Land settlement in urban centers can be broken down into three layers. The *first* layer encompasses city centres and business districts, which are inhabited by a mix of descent groups, often a combination of ‘original’ or longstanding inhabitants and more recent arrivals who have acquired commercial properties. In most Somali cities, commercial centres remain in the same locations they were pre-civil war. The *second* layer encompasses the bulk of a city’s residential areas, with each neighbourhood typically dominated by a particular clan lineage. Clan distribution across the urban space often reflects historical migration patterns from the hinterland, while clan-based urban settlement and segregation is an outcome of the civil war. A *third* layer comprises the city outskirts, which are dominated by poor(er) housing and informal settlements inhabited by IDPs, daily labourers and other vulnerable groups. These settlements may also be characterized by clan segregation, while IDP and returnee enclaves are also found in city centres and residential areas.

Formally, local governments are responsible for land demarcation, issuing and retaining land title deeds, resolving land disputes and collecting land-related taxes, while the state Ministry of Public Works is responsible for designing and implementing urban planning. In reality, statutory law and government institutions administering urban land are largely absent or ineffective. Instead, market forces and a variety of societal actors shape urban land acquisition, formalization, management and dispute resolution. In the absence of reliable government intervention, these actors produce the modicum of trust required to own or transact land. Consequently, urban land property rights in Somalia are often produced by non-state actors, and only later recognized (and ‘formalized’) by local administrations. Actors involved in urban land governance thus include regional and local government, private developers, companies, land brokers, public notaries, customary authorities, al-Shabaab, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies like UN-Habitat and diaspora investors.

Both under the Siyad Barre regime and subsequently, land grabbing by powerful groups has been rewarded with the issuance of land title deeds by government.⁷⁷ Informality and the absence of land documentation does not, however, necessarily translate into tenure insecurity for all urban dwellers. While in a majority of cases households in Somali cities do not possess formal title deeds, their land claims are nonetheless recognized by government, neighbours and others.

Most public lands and buildings were occupied in or after 1991.⁷⁸ Subsequently, emerging sub-national administrations – both at the regional and city level – started reclaiming public properties from squatters. Though progress has been made, many former government properties continue to be occupied by powerful individuals or IDPs who have nowhere else to go. Due to its status as the national capital, Mogadishu has extensive public lands that formerly belonged to various branches of the Siyad Barre government, much of which the FGS has, since around 2013, retaken. The Somaliland government has strived to do the same in its capital Hargeysa. Overall, the status of public land in Somali cities remains precarious. Difficulties in reclaiming public properties and, more importantly, the failure of city administrations to secure public land when new land is being enclosed or registered, explain why Somali cities almost entirely lack public lands and spaces. Although municipalities are formally in charge of land administration, they must negotiate with private land owners when land is required for public purposes. In some cases, local government has sold off public land to politically connected people at low prices.

Land rush and grabbing

Commodification of urban land, both residential and commercial, is the main feature of urbanization in present-day Somalia, with the seven city studies evidencing the rapid transformation of real estate in Somali cities. Commercial interests, diaspora investments in land and construction, spending by aid agencies, land speculation, the construction of schools, universities and hospitals, and the clearing of land by IDPs have all contributed to urban land commodification. In Baidoa, for instance, former burial sites were reclaimed for residential purposes, while in Galkayo a former army base was converted into shopping malls.

77 Besteman, Catherine and Lee V. Cassanelli. *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia: The War Behind the War*. London: Haan Publishing, 2003; de Waal, Alex, 'The Prairie Fire that burned Mogadishu: The Logic of Clan Formation in Somalia', *Occasional Paper*. Medford, MA: World Peace Foundation, 2018. <https://sites.tufts.edu/reinventingpeace/files/2018/12/The-Prarie-Fire-that-burned-Mogadishu-final-1.pdf>

78 Roland Marchal, 'Les mooryaan de Mogadiscio. Formes de la violence dans un espace urbain en guerre', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* XXXIII(2) (1993): 295–320.

Land commodification translates into increased wealth for the few and increased vulnerability for informal dwellers. IDPs and inhabitants of makeshift settlements in the urban periphery have regularly been evicted as new land in the expansion zone is enclosed.⁷⁹ In Mogadishu and elsewhere, this has motivated so-called ‘gatekeepers’⁸⁰ to invest in IDP camps and related service delivery, for example, water provision, knowing that the surrounding land plots will rise in value and attractiveness. Once land prices reach a certain threshold, gatekeepers evict and relocate IDPs to an even more marginal location, pocketing the proceeds of the land sale. The establishment of relief centres in the city outskirts has thus contributed to a spike in real estate prices.

Not only are IDPs the victims of evictions driven by the increasing value of land, but an IDP settlement itself can increase the value of urban land. This occurs through the labour of IDPs and camp managers who clear bushes, cut roads and spur basic infrastructure development. In addition, they attract investments by humanitarian actors and businesses. It is often after these basic settlements have been connected to wider city and infrastructural networks that IDPs are evicted.⁸¹

Informants across the seven cities studied referred to land grabbing as a recurrent land appropriation strategy. While, given the legal uncertainties surrounding ownership, it is not always clear what constitutes a land grab, local observers identified the following processes as constituting land grabbing:

- Seizure of land without due process, often with the aim of obtaining payment as part of a future land settlement,⁸²
- Occupancy of land and properties belonging to absent owners, displaced households or individuals belonging to a weaker or ‘minority’ clan;
- Eviction of vulnerable groups such as IDPs to claim, occupy or sell the land they previously inhabited.

79 Jutta Bakonyi, ‘The political economy of displacement: rent seeking, dispossessions, and precarious mobility in Somali cities’, *Global Policy* 12/2 (2020): 10–22.

80 Bryld, Kamau and Sinigallia, *Gatekeepers in Mogadishu*.

81 We are indebted to Peter Chonka for this observation.

82 A tactic informants referred to using the Somali proverb, *Ku qabso ku qadi mayside* (‘engage in a dispute to earn something’).

Land grabbing often triggers conflicts. In several cities, for instance Galkayo and Kismayo, local gangs of young men regularly grab unregistered land. In other cities, politically connected elites, including politicians and senior officials, facilitate the long-term lease of public land to private companies.

Speculation is one of the main causes of land commodification.⁸³ Aside from the initial acquisition, there is little cost or risk involved in land speculation. In the western part of Borama, for example, vast amounts of land are demarcated – indicating they are owned by someone – but remain unused until they are resold, while in Mogadishu big companies such as the telecommunication firm Hormud have acquired large swaths of land, driving up land prices.⁸⁴ Big business owners may push landowners whose property they prey on into debt by drawing them into a land dispute. Even informal settlements at times benefit from land commodification and speculation, with landowners renting out their space and moving even further out of the city.

The diaspora is commonly cited as one of the main drivers of Somalia's skyrocketing urban real estate prices. Diaspora land investments occur either via remittances to relatives who buy land plots or through direct investments. As Somali diaspora communities across the globe have integrated into their host societies and advanced economically, securing land in the 'homeland' has become an important objective for many of them.⁸⁵

Revenue streams are produced by all land-related decision-making, economic transactions and conflict adjudication. Land brokers, local government and elders involved in land management all receive fees. Brokers earn a 10–15 per cent commission on land sale prices, while public notaries are paid for notifying land sales, and may receive a bribe to register a lower price in order to reduce the subsequent level of taxation. Municipalities charge fees for the issuance of urban and rural title deeds, and collect taxes on property sales and the construction of new buildings. In Baidoa, for example, government militia levy a USD 50 fee per construction site. Both statutory and Shari'a courts charge fees for

83 For a review of land prices in Mogadishu see Mohamed Ibrahim Nur, Tajun Arrifin Masron, Sharif Yusuf Gedi, 'Modeling of residential property rents in Somalia using two-stage modeling: hedonic regression and artificial neural network', *International Journal of Housing Markets and Analysis* 13/2 (2020): 331–356.

84 Somali Public Agenda, 'Land prices in Mogadishu and its impact on the urban poor and IDPs', Governance Brief no. 6, 2019. <https://somalipublicagenda.org/land-prices-in-mogadishu-and-its-impact-on-the-urban-poor-and-idps/>.

85 Hansen, Peter, 'Diaspora returnees in Somaliland's displacement economy.' In *Displacement Economies in Africa: Paradoxes of crisis and creativity*, Amanda Hammar eds., 145-160. London and New York: Zed Books, 2014.

adjudicating land disputes: in Beledweyne, sheikhs receive a USD 200 payment for settling land-related inheritance disputes, while in Bosaso Shari'a courts receive USD 500–1,000 per adjudicated land case. Finally, the construction boom accompanying urban land commodification provides the urban poor with labour opportunities, while also, indirectly, financing al-Shabaab, which taxes the overland transport of construction materials – for instance, between Mogadishu and Baidoa.⁸⁶

Unchecked commodification and the failure of local authorities to set aside public land explains why there is little public space remaining in Somali metropolises. Thus, city officials have difficulty securing permanent lands for IDPs, as well as for police stations, schools, health clinics, public parks, and recreational or community centres.

Managing urban lands

The authority to govern and regulate land in Somalia is deeply contested. Land governance in urban Somalia and Somaliland reflects its role as an asset, which is 'not just a potential income stream but a considerable political resource and a source of prestige'.⁸⁷ In a highly monetized political system such as Somalia's, where candidates need to spend significant amounts on even local elections, land can be used to generate funds or parcelled out to relatives as a 'currency' for patronage.⁸⁸ Many politicians have close ties to businesspeople or conglomerates active in the retail and construction sectors, for whom control of land is essential to their pursuit of profit and power.⁸⁹ For instance, the passage of a Public Procurement Bill has been stalled in Somaliland's parliament for some time now, as it would allegedly impede the ability of powerful, well-connected businesses to obtain government and donor contracts.⁹⁰ In Mogadishu, mayors are routinely accused of using land control to further their financial and political interests.⁹¹

Urban land management is a good example of co-regulation. Although city governments play significant de jure and de facto roles in land management, a broad range of actors – including

86 Hiraal Institute, *A Losing Game: Countering Al-Shabab's Financial System*, Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, 2020. <https://hiraal institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A-Losing-Game.pdf>

87 RVI and HIPS, *Land Matters*, 50.

88 Alex de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015.

89 Anette Hoffmann et al., *Somalia's business elites – Political power and economic stakes across the Somali territories and in four key economic sectors*, The Hague: Clingendael Conflict Research Unit, 2017.

90 Hoffmann et al., *Somalia's business elites*.

91 Andrew Harding, *The Mayor of Mogadishu: A Story of Chaos and Redemption in the Ruins of Somalia*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016.

brokers, notaries, clan elders and firms – regulate urban land in practice.⁹² In Puntland, for example, UN-Habitat plays an important role in IDP resettlements to the east of Bosaso.⁹³ In Somaliland, which has had an urban land law since 2001,⁹⁴ local government has the main legal responsibility for land management, but both here and elsewhere in Somalia, municipalities do little more than document land sales, issue and archive title deeds, and tax land sales and plots. The Somalia National Development Plan (2017–2019) calls for urban planning and the rebuilding of land administration, but FMS are only now beginning the process of organizing their land laws.⁹⁵ Puntland is still working on its urban land legislation, while the rest of Somalia is reliant on a mixture of pre-1991 laws, executive fiat and what often appears as arbitrary land management.

Urban land management and ownership are dominated by middle-aged and old men. This is reflective of inheritance laws and practices that give larger shares to male family members, the subordinate position of women in Somali society, and men's superior purchasing power and access to information pertaining to land and land sales. Women thus have limited opportunities to access urban land on their own. While there are no formal restrictions on female land ownership and some Somali women – notably among diaspora investors – do own land, when it comes to land registration or other public acts related to land governance, female owners often call on male relatives to speak on their behalf.⁹⁶

Land brokers and public notaries shape land administration. Brokers are involved in almost all land transactions and possess privileged information on urban real estate and land markets. They typically set the price of a land sale, shaping access to land ownership by selling information – often to friends or families – on the quality of a given land plot. This includes information on whether a particular land plot is claimed or disputed by other parties. Despite their influence, brokers are not licenced or regulated by government. Public notaries play an important and underappreciated role in land administration, certifying land transactions by issuing documentation that attests to the 'legality' of land transactions.

92 In Kismayo, land planning and management has been outsourced to the Kenyan company Milestone. In other cities not covered by the study, for example Hargeisa, UN Habitat has played an important role in developing land surveys.

93 Personal communication Peter Chonka, 7 April 2019.

94 Republic of Somaliland, Urban Land Management Law (Law No. 17/2001), amended 2008, Hargeisa: Republic of Somaliland.

95 Federal Government of Somalia, 'National Development Plan 2017-2019', Mogadishu: Federal Government of Somalia, 2016.

96 NRC (Norwegian Refugee Council), 'Housing, land and property rights for Somalia's urban displaced women', Oslo: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016. <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/somalia-housing-land-and-property-rights-for-somalias-urban-displaced-women-2016.pdf>

Land owners then use the documents produced by the notary to obtain their title deeds from the municipality.

Customary authorities, in particular clan elders, regularly decide on land matters. The absence of urban land cadastres or city title-deed archives provides elders and neighbours who can vouch for a person's land ownership with considerable room for manoeuvre. Due to their family ties, clan elders remain a recurrent mechanism for resolving land disputes in Somalia. Customary authorities thus both replace and complement land-related arbitration in courts, with elders often taking on cases that courts cannot resolve or, if prompted by relatives, reopening old cases.

Religious leaders (sheikhs) and Shari'a courts also settle land disputes, in particular inheritance disputes among family members.⁹⁷ While both religious and state courts regularly arbitrate urban land conflicts, they are often unable to enforce decisions.⁹⁸ This is the comparative advantage of al-Shabaab, whose courts are less prone to corruption, and are swift in deciding and enforcing decisions.⁹⁹

Over the past two decades, Somali cities have been plagued by land conflict, with disputes between individuals having the potential to escalate into full-blown (clan) inter-group conflict.¹⁰⁰ Specifically, land conflicts commonly occur as a consequence of:

- disputes over neighbouring land plots boundaries;
- land or property being grabbed from displaced or absent owners;
- lost or fake title deeds, or multiple land titles existing for the same land plot;
- land being claimed, registered and formalized in the city's extension zone;
- family members failing to agree on inherited land or who has the right to sell it;

97 Mark Fathi Massoud. *Shari'a, Inshallah. Finding God in Somali Legal Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

98 Joakim Gundel, Louis-Alexandre Berg and Yahya Ibrahim, 'Political Economy of Justice in Somalia', Justice, Security, and Development Series Working Paper, Washington, DC: The World Bank Group, 2016.

99 RVI (Rift Valley Institute), 'Contested Land: Study on Land Governance, Urbanization and Forced Displacement in Somalia – Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa', Nairobi: RVI, 2020. unpublished paper.

100 SSF (Somalia Stability Fund) and RVI (Rift Valley Institute), *Land Conflict in Somalia*. Nairobi: SSF, 2021.

- new investments, such as the construction of a road or a building;
- federalization and the demarcation of competing clan-based, territorial spheres of influence (notably in divided cities such as Galkayo).

Some regional administrations have established specialized land dispute tribunals (LDTs),¹⁰¹ whose task is to adjudicate the logjam of land dispute cases affecting local judiciaries, particularly district and regional courts. LDTs were first established in Somaliland (2010 in Hargeysa and 2015 in Borama and Berbera) and more recently in Puntland (2018), and are about to be established in other cities.¹⁰²

Urban land politics

Urban land governance and land dispute management involves multiple state, quasi-legal—including customary—and extra-legal authorities, all of whom claim authority over land. As touched on above, land disputes are adjudicated through a combination of formal courts, customary authorities using *xeer* (customary law), and Islamic law, with the heavily backlogged courts often the last port of call. *Xeer*, a mechanism for providing collective justice, is not always well-suited to address property related disputes that ultimately reflect ineffective legal and policy frameworks governing land in the Somali territories. Shari'a courts lost some authority in Mogadishu following the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union, but remain powerful in areas under al-Shabaab's influence. 'Secular' courts are notoriously slow and corrupt, with their decisions difficult to enforce against powerful, well-connected individuals.¹⁰³

The right to urban land ownership in Somalia is mostly undocumented, often contested, and almost always related to kinship ties. Accessing, claiming or defending land rights is contingent on securing recognition by corporate kinship groups, which are typically represented by clan elders or relatives who sit on state institutions. Securing land rights thus effectively means being represented in fora where land claims are negotiated and approved, whether in courts or in deliberations among customary authorities. Defending land claims also requires being able to pay for such representation. This explains why some groups

101 LDTs are inter-ministerial committees bringing together one or several judges and members of different line ministries involved in land administration.

102 UN Habitat, *Harmonization of the Legal Systems Resolving Land Disputes in Somaliland and Puntland: Report and Recommendations*, Nairobi: UN Habitat, 2015. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Harmonization%20Of%20The%20Legal%20Systems%20Resolving%20Land%20Disputes%20In%20Somaliland%20And%20Puntland1.pdf>

103 Joakim Gundel et al., 'Political Economy of Justice in Somalia'; RVI and HIPS, *Land Matters*.

have difficulty securing urban land titles: low-income households lack the capital to pay for representation in court or customary fora, while the clan elders of smaller or weaker clan lineages have difficulties asserting land claims against stronger groups.

The political economy of urban land in Somalia has produced both winners and losers over the past two decades. Among the former are landowners with secure ownership arrangements, typically pre-dating the 1991 fall of the Siyad Barre government. Big companies, presidents, government officials and households with capital benefitted and continue to benefit from land commodification. In major cities such as Mogadishu, owners of important land plots are often politically connected businesspeople who obtained land titles under the Siyad Barre government – typically as part of deals to develop particular commercial ventures, dispossessing the previous or original landowners. Due to the strategic location of their registered plots, these owners benefitted massively from the skyrocketing of real estate prices after 2000. One unexpected winner in this is al-Shabaab. As land has become more valuable, resulting in a sharp rise in conflicts and land grabbing, so courts have become progressively overwhelmed with conflict resolution. Al-Shabaab's delivery and enforcement of land dispute resolution boosts its status as a competing authority to Somali state institutions.

Competition for control over land manifests itself in disparate institutional arrangements. In Somaliland, public land remains deeply contested, with local leaders jockeying for positions on Hargeysa local council's land sub-committee, which regulates public land. Allegations against some of these leaders include giving access to public land through contracting arrangements, goods and services procurement, employment, and authorizing evictions.¹⁰⁴ Disputes over land ownership is a common problem for aid organizations implementing projects in Somaliland. In other regional states in Somalia, leaders of local and district councils are directly appointed by regional leaders, and the control of land is less contentious, albeit no less problematic. Competition over land intensifies as its value increases: this can be seen in Berbera, with local leaders and businesspeople vying for control of warehouses and other open space in anticipation of the port's redevelopment by Dubai's DP World under a 30-year, USD 440 million contract.¹⁰⁵

104 Aboker et al., *Notes on the Governance*.

105 Aboker et al., *Notes on the Governance*; David Styant, 'The politics of ports in the Horn: War, peace and Red Sea rivalries', *African Arguments*, 18 July 2018. <https://africanarguments.org/2018/07/18/politics-ports-horn-war-peace-red-sea-rivalries/>.

Segregated cities

The rapid commodification of urban land has reconfigured Somali cities, deepening and accelerating the socio-spatial differentiation between centre and periphery, rich and poor. It has also intensified the economic and functional differentiation of market places, transport infrastructure and various elements of the value chain. These transformations are manifest in the concentration of capital, services, multi-storey buildings and high-end consumer goods visible in city centres such as downtown Baidoa, the eastern part of Beledweyne, central Borama, western Bosaso, North Galkayo or Mogadishu's commercial centre. Firms increasingly purchase large plots outside cities, for example in Bosaso or Beledweyne, where they construct warehouses, factories, holding grounds and other business ventures. Land commodification has also been driven by investments of the diaspora, whose influence can be seen in the housing styles and city architecture apparent in many urban centres.

Most importantly, this increased socio-spatial and economic differentiation of Somali cities has translated into the spatial marginalization of vulnerable groups, who are excluded from economic opportunities, political decision-making and social life in the city centre.¹⁰⁶ This is most obvious in Mogadishu, where many politicians, civil servants and security personnel settle in Waaberi, Hamar Jajab, Hamar Weyne, Bondhere and parts of Warta Nabadda, while the 600,000 IDPs eke out a living in the city periphery in the Afgoi corridor.¹⁰⁷

Hence, a feature of most Somali cities is marked spatial segregation, with specific lineage groups occupying certain areas and neighbourhoods. Although these kin concentrations act as social safety nets, segregation also limits opportunities for interaction – thereby reinforcing the logic of the lineage group as the prime unit of political and social organization. The net result has been 'more clan homogenous' neighbourhoods and a decline in the cosmopolitan and intercultural urban open-mindedness that, for instance, historically characterized Somalia's coastal urban settlements.¹⁰⁸

In most of Somalia's cities, social and clan-based segregation resulted from the civil war and subsequent de- and re-urbanization, with particular residential areas or entire parts of a city now associated with particular clan lineage's numerical strength and dominance. Given no genuine national-level reconciliation has occurred in Somalia over the past three decades, mistrust (whether between different clan families or between lineages of the same clan

106 On the particular precarity of IDPs see Jutta Bakonyi, Peter Chonka and Kirsti Stuvøy, 'War and city-making in Somalia: property, power and disposable lives', *Political Geography* 73 (2019): 82–91.

107 African Review, 'Satellite photos show urban growth west of Mogadishu', 24 January 2011, <https://africanreview.com/finance/economy/satellite-photos-show-urban-growth-west-of-mogadishu>

108 Marchal and Yusuf, 'Power Politics in Somalia', 11.

family) persists, shaping the expansion and urbanization of cities, as well as the country's decentralized federal system of governance. The tendency of each community to build and invest exclusively in their own geographical areas has divided cities and towns along lineage. While public institutions and places such as universities, schools, workplaces, mosques, youth or women's organizations and political parties do offer limited social interactions and inter-marriages, they have largely failed to promote public socialization and social integration. Moreover, diaspora investments in or in the vicinity of certain cities have often been made along clan lines. Given that some clan families have larger diaspora and therefore larger levels of investment, this has reinforced segregation along lineage and wealth lines.

URBAN WATER: REPRODUCING INEQUALITIES

Water provision and its commodification in Somali cities has undergone important shifts in recent years. While water supply and markets now differ starkly across cities, they share the same historical sequence of events, beginning with the civil war and its aftermath, during which most of the public water infrastructure built by the Siyad Barre administration was destroyed or looted. Following the state collapse in 1991, water provision in cities essentially relied on shallow wells and boreholes dug, drilled and operated by individuals and small companies. Later, from the early 2000s onward – partly as a result of a series of UNICEF water investments and partnerships – private companies began drilling boreholes in the outskirts of towns and established pipe networks servicing city centres and more affluent neighbourhoods. In recent years, new shareholder companies providing piped water have entered the market. While this has led to more competition, unresolved questions remain as to the most suitable water sector business model going forward. Although urban water delivery still lags behind demand, overall it has both expanded and improved over time.

Water delivery and consumption patterns reflect existing urban inequalities. The rich receive bottled and piped water, the poorest get their water from shallow wells,¹⁰⁹ and the urban middle class have access to a mixture of piped and other water sources.¹¹⁰ Water expenses are a significant burden for urban households – in Baidoa, for instance, they are second only to food expenses.¹¹¹ Water prices and quality also depend on location and seasonality, with prices increasing during dry seasons and droughts. In the case of Mogadishu, neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the Indian Ocean cannot use local wells because of salinity. As piped water does not reach city peripheries where poor(er) communities live,

109 Shallow wells are usually pumped by hand and very dirty. Water sold at water kiosks is of better quality if sourced from treated pipelines. Though water kiosks were often built to service the urban poor, they became part of residential areas as cities expanded geographically, and thus often fell out of use by the poorest people.

110 Local bottled water companies either possess their own boreholes or purchase piped water from private wells, which is then filtered and treated.

111 Shelter Cluster Somalia, *Mapping Infrastructure Exercise: Baidoa*, 2004. www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/20150410_baidoa_mapping_exercise_report_-_december_2014_o.pdf.

residents there must rely on shallow wells, water kiosks, water trucks or donkey carts. Where roads and access are particularly bad, donkeys are used to distribute water.

Water provision in urban Somalia is heavily gendered, with women only marginally involved in the water supply chain. Water company shareholders and their technical staff are almost all men. In Beledweyne, for example, only two of the 25 water companies operating were female owned and none employed female staff. Women are, however, important water clients, whether in terms of their daily household chores or as owners of small and medium-sized businesses. Most importantly, in poor settlements without piped water, women shoulder the burden of carrying 20-litre jerrycans. The expansion of citywide pipeline networks is thus crucial to relieving women of the responsibility of fetching water and carrying heavy loads, thereby freeing them to perform other tasks.

Despite an overall improvement in urban water services to more peripheral areas, demographic growth and limited water supplies have led to periods of water scarcity across Somali cities. Lack of water storage capacity also increases residents' vulnerability during the dry season. Thus, water has become an expensive commodity, particularly for informal settlement residents who rely on trucked water or assistance from aid agencies.

Water quality, with the attendant health risks and diseases, remains a significant issue, though in a number of cities there are plans to begin monitoring it. Currently, however, water treatment is limited, with facilities capable of carrying out this process scarce. In Borama, diminishing water resources are of great concern to the public–private partnership (PPP) stakeholders and the population at large, with Shaba and the Somaliland Development Fund (SDF) estimating that current water sources will only serve the city for the next ten years. Further supplies will require large, currently unidentified investments, as well as infrastructure development that is as yet unplanned for. Similarly, in Bosaso, current water sources are insufficient and run the risk of drying up. In Mogadishu, meanwhile, waste and sewage has polluted areas of groundwater, meaning unfiltered well water is no longer suitable for drinking.

Numerous actors have a stake in urban water provision, with – households aside – construction companies, hotels, restaurants, schools, hospitals, mosques and government offices constituting the main water consumers. Bigger consumers, such as construction companies, are able to negotiate discounted water rates, while some companies and hotels have their own boreholes. Borehole and well owners, water companies – some owning boreholes, others buying water – truck owners, middlemen and water sellers, including donkey cart operators, are involved in water provision. Water trucks owners buy and distribute water purchased from borehole owners or water tanks harvesting rain water. Some

bottled water companies source water from boreholes or water companies, then filtrate the water, while others import bottled waters from Arab Gulf States. Among humanitarian agencies, UNICEF plays a dominant role in water provision in Somalia, with longstanding experience – though a mixed record – in bringing development partners and donors together to expand pipeline networks to reach the urban poor.

Water provision as business

Somali cities are laboratories of privatized water supply, with water markets ranging from a monopoly in Borama, where only Shaba water company is allowed to operate, to perfect competition in Beledweyne, home to some 25 water providers (see Table 1).¹¹² Given Somalia's weak state capacity, it is often assumed that PPPs are the best possible institutional arrangement for water delivery. In practice, the record of water PPPs in Somali cities has been mixed, as becomes evident when comparing the Borama and Bosaso city studies.¹¹³ In Borama, the PPP in place since 2003 has been strong. Water provision by Shaba has expanded to over 13,000 households and no cases of waterborne diseases have been reported by 2019. The main critique levelled at the Borama PPP is that the absence of competition discourages Shaba from lowering prices and prevents competitors from entering the market. By contrast, the PPP in Bosaso has proven much less successful, with Gumco water company unable to expand its services and failing to attract additional investment in its distribution network. Today, it services only around 7,000 households. In several cities, shareholder companies providing piped water have recently been established, though it is too early to determine which of these companies will be successful.

Water firms are typically established by a group of male shareholders, who provide the initial capital.¹¹⁴ Day-to-day operations are managed by relatively few employees – in Beledweyne, for example, the average number of staff employed by water companies providing piped water is four.¹¹⁵ Firm ownership can range from the more homogenous to the more

112 In the absence of panel data, including water prices, number of clients and water quality, it was impossible to determine which of the observed water markets has produced the best results so far. A UNICEF commissioned study ranked Shaba in Borama and Galkayo Water Agency (GALWA) in Galkayo as top performers. Faisal Hashi, 'Public Private Partnership (PPP) in Urban Water Supply System: A Review Study of Somalia'. Nairobi: UNICEF, 2019.

113 For a review see Hashi, 'Public Private Partnership (PPP)'. A study of Garowe's water PPP pointed out institutional weaknesses and the fact that the municipality was not involved in water supply. Abdinur Ali Jama and Khaldoon A. Mourad, 'Water services sustainability: institutional arrangements and shared responsibilities', *Sustainability* 11/916 (2019): doi:10.3390/su11030916.

114 In case of Shaba in Borama, funding also came from donors, namely UNICEF, EU and, later on, the SDF.

115 Employment figures across the water sector, including donkey cart truckers, are absent.

heterogenous in terms of clan membership. For instance, a new water company seeking to operate in the relatively mixed and volatile western part of Beledweyne had a cross-clan ownership structure. This protects the company from being associated with a single clan lineage, effectively easing its business operations.

In other contexts, where entire neighbourhoods are associated with a particular clan group, firm ownership reflects local clan affiliation. In this scenario, kinship ties with relatives are useful as they increase acceptance of the company and the likelihood of clients paying, and protect the company's infrastructure. Where water companies are dominated by a particular clan lineage (or family), competition among water firms immediately takes on a clan dynamic. Such is the case in Kismayo, where Caafi is owned by members of the Ogaaden clan family and the more recent company Juba Water is Majerteen owned.¹¹⁶

Different water firms have pursued different business strategies, particularly in terms of relations between water producers and distribution. Mogadishu exemplifies these competing business models. In the southern part of Mogadishu, Somali Water Development Union dug some 60 wells and took over boreholes, giving borehole owners a share reflective of their respective customer size. In northern Mogadishu, Xamar Water Development Company pursued a similar strategy, but closed some of the existing wells, sharing water sale profits between borehole owners (40 per cent) and investors (60 per cent). In central Mogadishu, however, Benadir Water Development Company has pursued again another strategy, with borehole owners who are part of its pipeline network continuing to distribute water on their own.¹¹⁷ Most borehole owners are afraid of losing their decision-making power with regards to water distribution, and so are more welcoming of Benadir Water Development Company's policy. This points to an ongoing struggle in the urban water sector between, on the one hand, borehole owners afraid of losing their autonomy to water companies, and, on the other hand, water companies that are scaling up water infrastructure and operations by incorporating existing water sources.

116 When bottled water first became available in Hargeysa, bottling companies were associated with particular clans and consumers preferred to drink the water of 'their clan'.

117 Though the water distributed is sourced from the company's new wells outside of town. Borehole owners charge consumers USD 1 per m³, with half this amount paid to the company.

Table 1. Water supply in seven Somali cities (as of 2018, except where indicated)

	Main water source	Water companies and type of provision	Market share (# households)	Market structure	Other remarks
Baidoa	Boreholes; shallow wells	Warjanaay (PW)	85% (8,000)	Oligopoly	Rationing in times of scarcity
		Shafi (PW, BW)	15% (1,400)		
		Shifo (BW)			
Beledweyne	Unprotected and shallow wells; river water	25 water companies, including:		Perfect competition	Association of water companies formed 2015
		Hawa Ahmed (PW);	(600)		
		Muraya Ahmed (PW);	(600)		
		Computer (PW);	(500)		
		Al-Jaburi (PW);	(600)		
		Aduun (DC);	N/A		
		Zamzam (PW);	(2,800)		
		Naruura (PW);	(500)		
		Al-Furqaan 1 (PW);	(1,390)		
		Al-Furqaan 2 (PW);	(400)		
		Hussein Dheere (PW);	(550)		
Abdi Farah Gedi (PW);	(1,300)				
Moia Saha (BW)					
Borama	Boreholes outside of town	Shaba (PW, T, DC)	nearly 100% (13,096 in 2017)	Monopoly	Shaba awarded two 10-year PPP contracts, lasting until 2023
Bosaso	Boreholes; shallow wells	Gumco (PW, T);	45% (7,000)	Oligopoly	Risk of water shortage; recent water price increase (from USD 1 to USD 1.3)
		Bosaso Water Co. (PW);	15% (1,000)		
		Borehole and water tank owners	40% (7,000)		

Table 1. Water supply in seven Somali cities (as of 2018, except where indicated)

	Main water source	Water companies and type of provision	Market share (# households)	Market structure	Other remarks
Galkayo	Wells; water reservoirs	<i>North Galkayo:</i> <hr/> GALWA (PW); <hr/> Daryeel (PW) <hr/> <i>South Galkayo:</i> <hr/> Arafat/Jamac Dharas <hr/> Durdur (PW); <hr/> Furat Water Co. (BW); <hr/> Hubaal (Bosaso); <hr/> Saafi Aqua (Bosaso)		Oligopoly	
Kismayo	Wells; boreholes	Caafi (PW, BW); <hr/> Juba Water (PW, T); <hr/> Well and water tank owners	30% (6,000) <hr/> 70%	Changing/ unclear	Juba Water Co. as new entrant
Mogadishu	Wells; boreholes	Benadir Water Development Co. (PW); <hr/> Xamar Water Distribution Co. (PW); <hr/> Somali Water Development Union Co. (PW); <hr/> 32 bottled water companies		Oligopoly	Struggle between borehole owners and companies

PW = piped water; BW = bottled water; T = trucking; DC = donkey cart

Source: RVI city studies

Borama and Beledweyne excepted, the market structure of the water sector in the studied cities involves an oligopoly, with the dominant position of particular water companies – for example Warjanaay in Baidoa or Cafi in Kismayo – explained by their longer existence. Water

competition is most pronounced in Beledweyne, where water supply is the least consolidated – its vicinity to the river having facilitated the spread of providers – and Mogadishu, where over 30 companies sell bottled water. While the city studies did not quantify water revenues at firm level, the proliferation of new water companies and the significant infrastructure investments made indicate a booming business.¹¹⁸ In Kismayo, a well-informed source estimated water suppliers had a cumulative annual revenue of USD 80,000–100,000.¹¹⁹

Water companies charge clients either by the cubic metre or, more commonly, on a monthly basis. In Beledweyne, for instance, customers negotiate monthly water prices in the range of USD 10–20, with young families and small households receiving a discount. Users also pay for their house to be connected to mains water pipes, with Bosaso Water Company, for instance, charging USD 300 for this service. All the water companies in the seven cities studied provide water for free or at a reduced price for poor and old people, IDPs, and mosques and other public institutions.¹²⁰

Variation across cities

The expansion of water services over the past decades reflects increasing demand for water in the context of rapid urbanization in Somalia, while water provision modalities reflect city-specific politics. Back in 2005, Baidoa hosted a very limited water supply network, which mostly relied on trucking, donkey carts and water kiosks. By 2017, the city had some 500–600 shallow wells and a 24 km pipeline network established by UNICEF. In Beledweyne, the first water companies providing piped water emerged in 2000 at a time when some 70 per cent of the town population used shallow wells as the main water source. By 2016, some 25 water companies had emerged, predominantly sourcing untreated water from the Shabelle river. Firms undercut each other and lost profits, until eventually a water association was established in 2015 with the aim of regulating competition. As a result, a company must agree to release a customer before s/he can be connected to another provider.

Borama had very limited water supply before 2003, when it established a PPP that conferred an exclusive operating licence—with the exception of bottled water—on Shaba water company. The PPP – which is currently in its second ten-year licence, running to 2023 – brings together the Mayor of Borama, the Somaliland Ministry of Water Resources and Shaba. One

118 An exception may be Shaba company in Borama, which reported difficulties in recovering the investments made in its infrastructure.

119 Including Caafi, Juba Water Company, companies distributing bottled water, and well owners.

120 Bosaso's Gumco company, for instance, provides water at a 40 per cent discount to hospitals, schools, IDPs and government offices.

reason for Shaba's relative success is that its 21 shareholders are politically connected and influential.¹²¹ As a result the company has managed to obtain substantial donor funding to expand its pipe networks, water tanks and water kiosks.

Water supply in Bosaso is also dominated by a PPP, this one involving the Puntland State Authority for Water and Energy (PSAWEN). In contrast to Borama, lead provider Gumco (Golden Utility Management Company) does not hold exclusive rights. The Bosaso city study highlights the multiple failures of the local PPP, in particular an inability to raise capital from either donors or the government for the expansion of the supply network. The PPP was established in 1998 when Gumco took over water infrastructure funded by UNICEF and the EU. At first water accessibility improved, but as Bosaso's population grew Gumco was unable to expand due the installation costs involved. As a result, many poorer households living in the city periphery continue to rely on water trucking, which is more expensive. Ultimately, the PPP failed to significantly reduce prices and works to the detriment of poorer households.¹²² Gumco's close relation with the Puntland government has also been criticized. A new entrant established in 2017, the Bosaso Water Company, aims to fill the gap in supply by providing piped water in the eastern parts of the city.

The divided city of Galkayo is home to three main water providers, two based in the northern Puntland part of town, and one based in the Galmudug-controlled southern part of town. In the north, the dominant shareholder company GALWA (Galkayo Water Company) took over a 25 km pipeline network of water points as part of a UNICEF-brokered PPP with the PSAWEN. Like all water companies in Puntland, GALWA provides untreated water to its customers. The central parts of North Galkayo have the best water provision, with Daryeel, a smaller company, supplying water to a limited number of households and farms. In South Galkayo, Arafat water company has supplied piped water since 2005. The 2017 arrival of Durdur, a company run by diaspora businessmen, forced Arafat to lower water prices from USD 1.3 to USD 1 per m³. As in other cities, most IDPs in Galkayo use untreated water tank trucks, kiosks and wells.

Kismayo residents rely predominantly on water from shallow wells. The arrival of water companies providing treated piped water is relatively recent: Caafi began serving Kismayo's

121 Among the shareholders is current Somaliland vice president Abdirahman Abdallahi Ismail Saylici.

122 Water prices recently increased from USD 1 to USD 1.3 per m³, reflecting water shortages as Bosaso becomes increasingly dry.

residents in 2014, while its competitor Juba Water was established in 2018.¹²³ As is the case in many of Kismayo's other investment sectors, the water sector is dominated by diaspora returnees. The Jubbaland Somali State administration has consulted with a series of government agencies and water firms with a view to establishing a PPP in Kismayo. Currently, water supply does not meet the demands of the city's growing population.

In Mogadishu, the public water infrastructure's collapse was followed by the spread of shallow and deep water wells, from which water was distributed by donkey carts in the 1990s. As a result of untreated shallow wells, the capital suffered regular cholera outbreaks up to the early 2000s. Due to chronic instability, shareholder water companies providing piped water emerged relatively late in Mogadishu. Today, three main companies – Somali Water Development Union Company, Xamar Water Development Company and Benadir Water Development Company – dominate the supply of piped water, and are expected to further expand their operations and grid. Water distribution by donkey cart has become rare in Mogadishu, mostly limited to households who receive salty water. While there is no shortage of water in Mogadishu, there are indications that the ground water is polluted, posing health risks.

Water and the state

Water delivery in the seven cities studied is entirely private, shouldered by local companies as well as international humanitarian organizations and their local NGO partners. Apart from issuing licences, levying particular fees and being mostly a nominal counterpart in PPPs, Somali government institutions are not actively involved in water supply.¹²⁴ Most problematically, public sector investments in water supply infrastructure have rarely occurred, with revenues received from water often not reinvested. In northeast Somalia, for instance, where the Puntland government is part of seven water-related PPPs,¹²⁵ payments received have become rents used for other purposes.

The city studies point to limited consumer choice with regard to water providers. In the absence of effective government regulation and enforcement, Somalia's water sector is de facto self-regulated. Well owners and water companies determine the modalities of service

123 In Kismayo, Caafi supplies some 30 per cent of residents, including Fanole, Farjano and Alanley settlements, and provides subsidized water to IDP camps. Caafi also supplies water in Baidoa and Mogadishu; see www.caafi.so/.

124 An exception is Hargeysa, where the parastatal Hargeisa Water Agency provides water; see www.hargeisawateragency.org.

125 Bosaso, Quardho, Garowe, Burtinle, Bacadweyn, Goldogob and Galkayo. Hashi, 'Public Private Partnership (PPP).

provision. In doing so they have developed their own rules and procedures concerning customer registration, means of payment, and the provision of subsidized water to government, IDPs and religious institutions. Self-regulation also entails arrangements among suppliers to decrease competition or fix prices. Such is the case in Bosaso, where Gumco and Bosaso Water Company harmonized their water prices and agreed not to compete for clients. While price-fixing may have stabilizing effects on local politics and inter-group relations, it is problematic from a consumer viewpoint. Self-regulation also means that the quality control and safeguarding of water standards is left to companies.

All Somali administrations charge water companies a licencing fee – in Baidoa, for instance, the local government charges USD 500 for a water operator licence. In Borama, Shaba water company pays 5 per cent VAT to the Somaliland government and transfers 3 per cent of its income to Borama municipality. In Mogadishu, the Benadir Regional Administration taxes water providers when they install new pipes, charging USD 1 per metre of water pipe. Often, water companies pay soldiers to dig land for new pipes, paying USD 1.8 per metre. Al-Shabaab has no specific taxation policy in the water sector, but levies fees on lorries transporting water pipes and equipment to, for example, Baidoa. Furthermore, where al-Shabaab has a presence or sphere of influence, water companies – like other businesses – pay protection money.

The Somaliland and Puntland administrations have both developed water policies, but have ‘little capacity to enforce them’.¹²⁶ Despite UNICEF continuing to push for PPPs for water provision in Somalia, the ‘public’ part of the equation – meaning local government – struggles to effectively manage water policy or play a substantive role in the partnership.

Reproducing inequalities

While urban water supply has improved and expanded over time in many Somali cities – mostly with little support from local authorities – its economics reproduce and may even exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities. Private companies have no mandate and insufficient capital to expand the supply of treated, piped water to the urban poor in city peripheries. As

126 UNICEF. ‘UNICEF Somalia WASH Strategy Note: 2018–2020’. Nairobi: UNICEF, 2018, p. 2. Somaliland adopted a national water policy in 2002 and a water act in 2010. Republic of Somaliland, ‘National Water Policy’, Hargeisa: Ministry of Water and Mineral Resources, 2002; Republic of Somaliland, The National Water Law (Law No. 49/2010), amended 2018, Hargeisa: Republic of Somaliland. Puntland adopted a water policy in 2007. (Note: The website of PSAWEN, the Puntland Ministry in charge, is no longer online.) The FGS adopted a national water resource strategy in 2021. Federal Government of Somalia, ‘National Water Resource Strategy 2021-2025’, Mogadishu: Ministry of Energy and Water Resources.

a result, poor urban households, who rely on water trucks, donkey carts or water kiosks, pay considerably more per cubic metre of water than richer households connected to the pipe network. Thus, these households – among whom are a disproportionate number of IDPs and people belonging to minority clans – become the main losers of the privatized, self-regulated water supply market. In Borama, for example, most vulnerable communities live outside Shaba's coverage area, while in Baidoa, IDP camp-dwellers end up paying USD 4.17 per m³ water – an amount more than three times higher than that paid by consumers with access to piped water. The inability to connect urban peripheries to water pipelines is a major factor in the inequalities, both economic and in terms of opportunities, being reproduced in Somali cities.¹²⁷

A reliance on trucked rather than piped water explains why vulnerable communities – including IDPs, members of minority clans, and the urban poor – often have to rely on external assistance and subsidized water prices. Humanitarian agencies have a history of providing water to disadvantaged urban dwellers, either by paying for water trucking, establishing new water storage facilities, or expanding or rehabilitating water sources in IDP camps. In Mogadishu, for instance, NGOs buy water from private well owners, transport it in tanks, then sell 20-litre jerrycans at a reduced price. NGOs are also involved in water treatment, including supporting ministries of health in this area. Though local water companies service IDP settlements and poor households at reduced costs, only by extending piped water to urban peripheries will structural inequalities in water use be properly resolved. Linked to this is the problem that owners of boreholes and water tanks can fetch higher prices serving disconnected water users beyond existing pipeline perimeters, and so have no incentive to invest in pipelines.

127 Exorbitant water prices in Kismayo should be highlighted, with families paying up to USD 24 per month for water consumption corresponding to 4 m³. Abdishakur Mursal, email message to lead author, 31 January 2019.

URBAN MOBILITY: GETTING AROUND THE CITY

With increasing urbanization, mobility has become more important for Somali urbanites. Transport options continue to diversify, creating new winners and losers. Among the winners are: investors and businesspeople with a stake in the transport sector, including vehicle owners and importers of vehicles and fuel; public administrations, which have profited from the many duties, taxes and road tolls imposed on motorized transport; and middle-class urban dwellers, who have benefitted from more affordable and individualized travel options, such as the Bajaj three-wheelers. In addition, al-Shabaab has made the taxation of overland transport and vehicles a centrepiece of its financing strategy.

Public transport in Somali cities, both in terms of people and goods, is exclusively provided by private individuals and companies, and thus is highly commodified. Motorized urban public transport essentially consists of minibuses, Bajaj three-wheelers, taxis and passenger buses.¹²⁸ Minibuses – the most affordable option – have for a long time provided the bulk of this motorized mobility. In the seven cities studied, 14-seaters such as the Nissan Homy (colloquially referred to as ‘BL’) operate mostly on fixed routes. In some cities, minibuses are primarily contracted to transport school children or employees of a particular business or international organization. Bajaj three-wheelers, the newcomer to urban Somali transport, are now posing a serious challenge to the minibus’ hegemony (see Box 1). Taxis are the most expensive travel option, traditionally serving mainly the business class and political elites.¹²⁹ The latest addition to the scene is Dhaweeye, a Somali version of Uber established in 2018, with a presence in Mogadishu, Bosaso and Hargeysa. Its drivers are screened by the company and use a taximeter. Dhaweeye has some 500 registered vehicles in Mogadishu alone.¹³⁰

Today, Somali passengers can choose between low- and high-budget travel. A good example is overland transport between cities. In recent years, bus companies have emerged – many with the involvement of diaspora entrepreneurs – offering a more upscale travel experience,

128 Manual carts/wheelbarrows are also used to transport goods.

129 In cities such as Bosaso the taxi market changed with the arrival of the Toyota Probox, which is cheaper and more fuel efficient than the previously dominant Toyota Mark II wagon.

130 <https://dhaveeye.com/>

including reserved seats, fixed schedules and even onboard Wi-Fi.¹³¹ While most passengers cannot afford to travel with such companies, the arrival of improved transport options has incited innovation across the entire transport sector. Overland passenger transport is becoming more professional and regular as minibuses start to operate according to a fixed schedule. In Bosaso, for instance, station wagons travelling to Garowe are increasingly being replaced by minibuses.

Mobility patterns

Mobility patterns in Somali cities are determined by socioeconomic status, gender, age, occupation, kinship, and the prevailing security situation. Distinct mobilities include work-related commutes to central business districts and market places, and students going to school or university. In Mogadishu, where mobility is very much securitized, government officials and security personnel move around the city with protection, often flouting traffic rules. Many people cannot afford to pay for public transport, but lack their own means of transport. Consequently, some households have to strategically prioritize which member(s) are given the money for fares. Furthermore, all the cities studied have parts – typically newly developed and settled areas in town outskirts – that are difficult to access. Thus, IDPs, who often live in peripheral settlements less well connected to city centres, tend to be less mobile as they often have to walk significant distances to the nearest bus stop.¹³²

In terms of affordability, a socially stratified mobility pattern emerges. The urban poor either travel on foot – the only option available to those who cannot pay for public transport – or by minibus. Going on foot is tiresome, even dangerous, as proper pedestrian pavements are lacking, resulting in accidents caused by potholes or vehicles. Minibuses are predominantly used by the urban poor, students and IDPs. The middle class and urban professionals make use of the Bajaj. Taxis are typically used on a case-by-case basis, for instance when commuters return late in the evening or when it is too hot to walk. Other more affluent users, including students and NGO workers, also make use of taxis, including the newly established Dhaweeye.

131 On buses and public transport in Hargeysa see Warsame M. Ahmed, 'Somaliland's booming informal transport sector: pitfalls and potentials', 2017, <https://govsea.tumblr.com/post/162993615604/somalilands-booming-informal-transport-sector>

132 Bakonyi et al., 'War and city-making in Somalia'.

Box 1. The rise of the Bajaj tricycle

The arrival of Bajaj three-wheelers in the Somali territories around 2002/2003 revolutionized urban transport.¹³³ The Bajaj, also referred to as a tuk-tuk, brought cheaper and more individualized mobility than that offered by the previously dominant 14-seater minibuses.¹³⁴ While buses take a long time to fill up, the Bajaj are much more flexible. They take customers door to door and can access neighbourhoods with bad roads. Neighbourhoods previously not served by minibuses are now connected to city centres. Due to its affordability and the fact it provides greater privacy than minibuses, the Bajaj is a favoured mode of transport among women transporting heavy loads. Not only has the Bajaj been instrumental in bringing cheaper individualized mobility to Somali cities, it provides a livelihood for tens of thousands of young men in the 15–25 age bracket. Several of the city studies remark on how parents acquired Bajaj three-wheelers for their sons as an income-generating activity, thereby luring them away from potential al-Shabaab recruitment. A Bajaj costs about USD 3,000 and drivers pay some USD 5 per day for fuel, with a Bajaj driver earning some USD 18–25 per day in Beledweyne and USD 15–20 in Galkayo. The dramatic proliferation of Bajaj means, however, that profits have been dwindling. Bajaj are also associated with unsafe driving and an increase in road accidents.

Two recurrent obstacles to urban mobility that emerge in the city studies are traffic jams and insecurity. Severe traffic congestion is a regularly occurrence on main thoroughfares, in particular during lunchtime and between 4 and 6 pm. In cities such as Bosaso and Mogadishu, as well as exacerbating pollution, congestion has started to cripple the local economy. In cities with unresolved clan conflicts, mobility is limited for some transport operators. In Beledweyne, for instance, some Bajaj drivers avoid particular neighbourhoods for fear their vehicle may be snatched as part of an outstanding *dīya* or blood compensation payment involving their clan family.¹³⁵ Similarly, vehicles driving from one city to another are sometimes hijacked as part of an ongoing clan feud.

133 For an Ethiopian comparison see Daniel Mains and Eshetayehu Kinfu, 'Governing three-wheeled motorcycle taxis in urban Ethiopia: states, markets, and moral discourses of infrastructure', *American Ethnologist* 44/2 (2017): 363–274.

134 Bajaj is a brand name, referring to the Indian company of the same name, which is the world's largest producer of motorized three-wheelers, also known as tuk-tuks.

135 Bajaj drivers belonging to weaker clans without a militia can circulate all over Beledweyne, as they are not part of the conflicts pitting more powerful armed clan groups against each other.

Despite improvements in road infrastructure since 2012, insecurity renders Mogadishu Somalia's most immobile city. Government personnel mostly stick to specific neighbourhoods and a particular set of hotels and gathering places. Their fear of going beyond the perimeter of relative security means they do not go to popular places such as Bakhara market. Entire neighbourhoods have limited accessibility as the government seeks to quell the al-Shabaab insurgency and protect itself from attacks. For instance, some secondary roads leading to Maka Almukarrama Street and Wadnaha Street are permanently closed, while the 'green zone' around Halane and Aden Adde International Airport are blocked to Bajaj and minibuses. Travellers are subject to strict security controls.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Internal Security regularly closes roads or shuts down traffic in entire neighbourhoods for security reasons. Hotels and businesses also sometimes close roads with the government's agreement. Various security forces – namely the Somali National Army and police officers – perform security checks in secondary streets, during which they interrogate passengers and check driver's licences and tax payment slips. The combined result of road closures, security checks and periodic lockdowns in Mogadishu are traffic jams, restrictions on people's ability to move around the city and a slowing down of business activity. Conversely, the securitization of transport in the capital has been beneficial to private transport and security agencies, such as Sahal Hospitality Service Company, which obtained a monopoly on picking passengers up at the airport following a ban on all other public transport doing so.¹³⁶

Managing transport

The transport sector remains unlegislated across the Somali territories,¹³⁷ the only exception being Mogadishu, where in October 2018 the Benadir Regional Administration banned the importing of Bajaj in response to road overcrowding. There are no limits placed on the number of vehicles that can be imported to Somalia, which partly explains the rapid growth of vehicles in the urban space. In 2014, The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Health Observatory reported some 59,457 vehicles registered in Somalia.¹³⁸

136 The company, which is owned by members of the federal parliament, is licenced to undertake security checks at the airport.

137 Some administrations continue to rely on the Somali Republic's dated 1962 Traffic Code (Legislative Decree No. 4, 16 December 1962).

138 It is unclear whether this includes Somaliland and Puntland; see the WHO's Global Health Observatory data repository at <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.A995>.

Given that the transport sector represents a major source of revenue for all Somali political entities, multiple ministries and branches of government are mobilized in its service. Their tasks range from the registration and taxation of vehicles to building and maintaining roads to providing basic road safety. Within the FGS, for example, the Ministry of Public Works is in charge of managing urban roads and preparing budgets for road developments, which are typically funded by donors. In terms of road construction, district authorities oversee the demolition of illegal structures, the Ministry of Labour provides the workforce, while policing falls under the Ministry of Internal Security. The Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation issues licences to transporters, while the Ministry of Finance collects car and traffic taxes. All imported vehicles are registered in Mogadishu port, where they obtain a government-issued number plate.¹³⁹

In Puntland, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport has sub-contracted two private companies to provide number plates, road tax stickers and driver's licences. At the district level, the Department of Public Works is in charge of transport and road infrastructure, including issuing licences to transport operators and charging relevant fees. All Puntland vehicles are registered and issued a licence after entry at Bosaso port. In Somaliland, district authorities are tasked with tax collection, running traffic police and maintaining or improving the urban road infrastructure—often in partnership with donors. In view of the development of Berbera corridor, the Somaliland government established a dedicated Ministry of Transport and Road Development in December 2017.¹⁴⁰

Aside from registration, licencing and taxation, urban transport is de facto mostly self-regulated through the corporate governance of transport operators. Governance emanates to a large degree from the private transport associations and cooperatives that have formed at the city level. Minibus cooperatives established in recent years are a case in point. In cities such as Baidoa, Bosaso and Borama, these cooperatives organize their members into different groups (A, B, C), which operate on alternate work days. This temporal division of labour among bus operators limits unhealthy competition, thereby securing an income for all bus operators. It also reduces the volume of traffic and mitigates jams. In Borama, the bus and Bajaj cooperatives have also agreed their respective geographical areas of operation. This arrangement is enforced by local traffic police and has thus effectively become a government-sanctioned rule.

139 A private company is responsible for vehicle registration in Mogadishu.

140 Finn Stepputat and Tobias Hagmann, 'Politics of circulation: The makings of the Berbera corridor in Somali East Africa'. *Environment and Planning D* 37/5 (2019): 794—813.

Transport cooperatives take on other roles as well, safeguarding the economic interests of their members. In Borama, members of the Bajaj cooperative pay an annual USD 60 membership fee. In return, the cooperative works as an informal insurance mechanism, resolves internal disputes, and represents Bajaj drivers' interests vis-à-vis local authorities.¹⁴¹ In Bosaso, cooperatives support their members financially and pay the traffic police, while several transport cooperatives are involved in maintaining roads and bridges.

A number of larger transport associations with members in multiple sites and cities also exist, with the Hiraan Transport Association a case in point. The association includes taxi drivers, Bajaj, minibus and truck owners, and is said to employ some 11,000 persons. Another example is Dalmar Transportation Cooperative, which operates across Puntland and has some 2,000 members.

Despite these efforts at self-regulation, urban mobility and transport in Somali cities are hampered by the following obstacles:

- *Road conditions are poor to catastrophic.* Both primary and secondary roads are inadequately built and maintained. Secondary roads often have to be repaired by local residents and road users.
- *Traffic rules and standards are non-existent or unenforced.* Issues include reckless driving, absence of offloading spaces, vehicles with steering wheels on the wrong side, frequent stopping by buses, under-resourced or corrupt traffic police, and an absence of traffic lights.
- *Insecurity and robbery limit mobility.* Concerns faced by drivers and residents include fear of assault due to outstanding *diya* payments, fear of clan conflict or al-Shabaab insurgency, and government security measures.
- *Traffic jams and congestion* during peak hours has become an increasing problem in many Somali cities.
- *Affordability of transport fares.* The absence of subsidies or government-run transport means that many poor households struggle to pay transport fees.

141 Bus operators in Borama pay a USD 500 annual cooperative membership fee, as well as a daily fee of 5,000 Somaliland shillings.

Profits of mobility

Transport is an important economic sector in the Somali territories, encompassing – in addition to transport operators – car dealers, fuel stations and importers, garages, spare parts dealers, driving schools, travel agencies, car washers and decorators. Diaspora investors have promoted new overland bus companies and invested in gas stations and taxi services. Somalia's many port cities, for instance Berbera in Somaliland, make it relatively easy to import used cars from Arab Gulf States or, in the case of Mogadishu, trucks from Italy.¹⁴²

The transport sector provides an income for the many actors making a living from moving people and goods. In Bosaso, for instance, a minibus operator makes a net daily profit of USD 4.2, a taxi driver can earn up to USD 30 per day, while an overland transporter between Bosaso and Garowe earns around USD 170 for the 500 km trip. Though we lack data to quantify the financial volume of public transport in the Somali territories, the city studies point to multiple revenue streams that both state and non-state actors, including armed groups, generate from urban mobility, including overland transport. Taxing things that move is easy, which explains why both Somali public authorities and al-Shabaab mount roadblocks to levy fees on vehicles and their operators.¹⁴³

The rising number of vehicles in Somali cities, including the explosion of Bajaj tricycles, translates into more government income. The main sources of government revenue include customs duties on imported vehicles, registration fees, number plates fees, annual vehicle tax and road taxes. The Somaliland government, for example, imposes a daily tax on Bajaj as well as two annual taxes on vehicles and a vehicle import tax, while the Puntland government raised a total of some USD 4.5 million from the transport sector annually, including customs duties on cars, vehicle and road taxes, and driver's licences.¹⁴⁴ Despite government raising substantial revenue from taxing transport operators, vehicles and traffic, little of this is reinvested in repairing, improving or building local roads, which is often taken care of by local communities.

142 Compared to neighbouring landlocked Ethiopia, where the government imposes steep taxes on imported vehicles.

143 See Transparency Solutions, *Beyond Isbaaro: Reclaiming Somalia's haunted roads*, Hargeisa: Transparency Solutions, 2016. <https://transparencysolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Beyond-Isbaaro-Research-Publication.pdf>.

144 By contrast, Bosaso district only collected some USD 6,500 in 2018.

An important – if not perhaps the biggest – share of government revenue derived from mobility stems from checkpoints, which have the dual purpose of taxation and security.¹⁴⁵ They also allow governments to mark a physical presence in the urban space. Hirshabelle regional administration, for instance, collects some USD 300,000 per month at checkpoints in Beledweyne, much of which is used to fund the fuelling of police and military vehicles, with some revenue allocated to prison services and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).¹⁴⁶ Government-manned checkpoints typically bring different line ministries together. In Puntland's North Galkayo, for instance, Puntland police and Criminal Investigation Department, local government – which collects customs fees – and the tax police are all present at the main checkpoint.

At checkpoints in Somaliland, drivers usually show their car registration, a driver's licence and proof of valid vehicle tax. In Mogadishu, the numerous permanent and temporary checkpoints are manned by police forces, who ask for ID cards and, at times, bribes. At the southern checkpoint towards Afgoi everybody must offload their vehicles for a thorough screening. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab roadblocks, which primarily affect city-to-city overland transport, are both a major source of income for the insurgents and a security risk for government workers and pro-government individuals.¹⁴⁷ On the Baidoa–Mogadishu route, for example, al-Shabaab taxes a heavy load truck (carrying 450 sacks) at USD 1,300. This is by far the highest road toll faced by a transporter, which must pay a staggering total of USD 4,600 in 'taxes' along the route.

Exclusion and gender dynamics

Among the main losers of the current commodified political economy of urban mobility are, once again, the urban poor, including IDPs, who often live far away from city centres and cannot afford public transport fares. Thus, they are forced to walk long distances in order to access work, places of education or health services. Poor roads, lack of street lighting and roadblocks disproportionately impact those residing in IDP areas. Furthermore, some

145 Tobias Hagmann, *Trade, Taxes and Tensions in the Somali Borderlands*, Nairobi: Rift Valley Institute, 2021. <https://riftvalley.net/sites/default/files/publication-documents/RVI%202021.11.24%20Trade%20taxes%20%26%20tensions.pdf>

146 The administration waives fees on some of the Hiran Transport Association's trucks, allowing the association to pay for *diya* or other expenses.

147 see Landinfo, *Somalia: Practical issues and challenges associated with travels in Southern Somalia*, Oslo: Landinfo, 2016. https://landinfo.no/asset/3569/1/3569_1.pdf; UNSC (United Nations Security Council), 'Letter dated 7 November 2018 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council', 9 November 2018, S/2018/1002. www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2018_1002.pdf.

businesses are losing out due to recurrent traffic jams and security controls that undermine the timely movement of their goods. Finally, vulnerable groups in particular, including elderly people, women and children, suffer from the prevailing lack of road safety and huge number of traffic accidents.

In terms of gender dynamics, the vast majority of transport operators and employees in the sector are men. Almost no women drive a bus, Bajaj or taxi in Somali cities, though some businesswomen do own vehicles, including, for instance, trucks used for the import of agricultural produce from neighbouring Ethiopia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women are the main users of public transport, particularly Bajaj. From a broader mobility perspective, women are more vulnerable to physical and sexual assault than men when navigating cities after sunset and in more remote parts of town.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Somalia's – like Africa's – 'future is, opportunely, urban'.¹⁴⁸ Urbanization in the Somali territories is transforming society in multiple and profound ways, with the growth of urban centres and networks paralleled by new patterns of accumulation, investment, redistribution, inclusion and exclusion. The three public goods scrutinized – urban land, water and mobility – offer privileged insights into the everyday working of Somali cities. Rapid urbanization and the attendant commodification so clearly in evidence raise a number of concerns about urban residents' welfare, the sustainability of Somali cities, and how to respond to their fragility.

The Somali state remains unsettled, as does citizenship and citizens' equal right(s) to the city. Though these issues are most visible in Mogadishu, they can be seen to varying degrees across all the seven cities studied – Mogadishu, Kismayo, Beledweyne, Baidoa, Galkayo, Bosaso and Borama. Localized, kinship-mediated land control and access to the city prevail, while the nation state remains contested.

The risks and hazards facing urban residents in Somalia and Somaliland fall disproportionately on disadvantaged groups – such as IDPs, the urban poor, members of 'minority' and non-local clans – and on women and youth. In cities already marked by a lack of basic services, newly urbanized groups are particularly vulnerable to evictions, disruptions to water availability and environmental shocks, such as flooding and drought. Spatial inequality corresponds to social inequality in many (though not all) cases, particularly in terms of mobility and access to water.

The seven city studies reveal the negligible role played by city administrations in legislating and regulating public goods and service delivery. This is explained by three factors. First, legislating has not been a priority in Somali city administrations, with most of the researched cities lacking a representative government or proper legislative body. Second, some public goods – namely security, and to a lesser degree water and mobility – are or

148 Edgar Pieterse and Susan Parnell. *Africa's Urban Revolution: Policy Pressures*. London: Zed Books, 2014, p. 6.

have been primarily legislated by national government bodies.¹⁴⁹ Third, ongoing state-building explains why city administrations in the Federal Republic of Somalia have not yet institutionalized sufficiently to start regulating the provision of public goods.

The seven city administrations studied have very limited ability when it comes to defining and providing the three public goods examined. The pattern that emerges is one in which local governments are involved in licencing, registration and taxation, and exert a degree of oversight in some sectors (for example, as part of water PPPs). Overall they are marginal in the production of actual public services. In all seven cities studied, the provision of humanitarian aid and basic services to IDPs and other vulnerable urban residents is predominantly shouldered by foreign aid agencies. Local governments thus mostly act as intermediaries for external actors with the resources and technical skills to provide basic services. Particularly in the cases of water and mobility, the registration and licencing of private providers appears to be local government's main contribution to service delivery.

The role played by local government in overseeing service delivery by private and contracted actors in Somali cities is also relatively insignificant. Among the commonly outsourced services documented in the city studies are garbage collection, the issuance and registration of vehicle number plates and driver's licences, and water provision. The most formalized and significant oversight role by local government can be seen in the water sector, in cities with a PPP arrangement.

Policy recommendations

Make urban development more inclusive

While growing numbers of Somalis live in cities, not everyone has the same 'right to the city', with the absence of a government safety net meaning that socioeconomic inequalities translate into unequal access to urban public goods. The high level of commodification seen in the urban land, water and mobility sectors has led to IDPs, the urban poor and other vulnerable communities being regularly disadvantaged. There is therefore a need to push for more inclusive investments and urban development in Somali cities. This includes new aid conditionalities, a political dialogue on citizenship rights, clarifying and strengthening the economic and political rights of non-locals (in particular IDPs), and expanding representative government at the local level.

149 Here meaning the Somaliland, Puntland and FGS administrations.

Break the vicious cycle of weak city administrations

City administrations in the Somali territories are caught in a vicious cycle: they produce little in terms of services for urban dwellers, which explains why the latter are hesitant to pay taxes, which in turn undermines the ability of local government to provide services. This cycle reflects legacies of conflict and predatory pre-1991 government actions, and is why Somali cities lack the legal frameworks, policies and capacities needed to deal with urbanization. Steps that need to be taken in order to break this cycle include keeping land commodification in check, redefining the policy and fiscal roles played by different levels of government, establishing more adequate local government agencies, and strengthening government oversight over private contractors.

Improve private sector self-regulation and services

Service provision in Somali cities is de facto self-regulated through corporate governance, with private actors determining the conditions, quality and quantity of public goods and services. By establishing associations, setting prices and defining standards, private actors both shape service provision and profit from it. There is therefore a need to consider how the existing private regulation of service delivery can be made more inclusive, affordable and effective. This can be done by developing, institutionalizing and recognizing business standards governing public goods provision.

Develop urban financial budgets

Managing urban centres and infrastructures, as well as servicing local populations, requires substantial public funds, which are currently provided mainly by aid and private actors, rather than local government. While city governments raise substantial capital from taxing fixed and mobile assets, in particular traffic and transport, little of this revenue is reinvested in city infrastructures. There is therefore a need to both generate more public revenue and reorient existing revenues towards city development. For external actors and donors, this entails partnering with city administrations, supporting fiscal and financial capacities, appropriating various rents, and developing tax regimes that promote more inclusive service delivery.

Produce more and better data on Somali cities

Investments in Somali cities require validated data and knowledge that can inform and guide policy interventions. Such data and knowledge is currently unavailable, as local academic institutions have weak research capacities, problems of access and insecurity persist, and much of the knowledge production that does take place involves commissioned

research unavailable to the public.¹⁵⁰ A funding mechanism for longer-term research and the development of local research capability on urbanization trends is needed.

150 Mahad Wasuge, Ahmed M. Musa and Tobias Hagmann 'Who owns data in Somalia? Ending the country's privatised knowledge economy', Governance Brief no. 12, Mogadishu: Somali Public Agenda, 2021. https://somalipublicagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SPA_Governance_Briefs_12_2021_ENGLISH-1.pdf

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