Security on the Move - Research Brief 3:

Displacement and Camp Urbanisation in Mogadishu

(March 2019) This research brief summarises key findings from the 2017-2019 Security on the Move research project. Funded by DFID and ESRC, Security on the Move focused on the perspectives and experiences of displaced people who settled in four Somali cities: Baidoa, Bosaaso, Hargeisa and Mogadishu. These four cities are under different political administrations, but share two core characteristics: First, they are growing rapidly in terms of size and density and second, an important driver of this growth is large scale in-migration caused by (forced) displacement. Although many issues relating to the economic precarity of displaced people are shared across the cities, there are important differences in regard to the historical experiences of 'camp urbanisation' and local and international efforts to manage camps and other settlements. This research brief focuses on the experiences of displaced people in Mogadishu, the capital city of the Federal Republic of Somalia

Urban Camp: Photo by Asha, Mogadishu

Key findings

- Many displaced people in Mogadishu have experienced - and continue to live in fear of - evictions. They have been pushed further and further to the city outskirts.
- Camps for displaced people have become an important part of the political economy of aid.
- Displaced people usually lack access to many basic services, and depend on humanitarian aid.
- Precarity is fostered by a lack of paid jobs and an increasingly competitive market for casual labour.
- The lack of labour regulations (or the failure to implement them) makes displaced vulnerable to many forms of exploitation.
- Women often bear a much larger economic burden of provision for their families. Many men struggle to provide for their families.

- Displaced people continue to experience various forms of physical insecurity and violence in camps and in the city.
- Domestic violence is prevalent.

City Background

The war and violent conflicts that have shattered south-central Somalia since the 1990s have often found their most pronounced expression in Mogadishu, the capital of the Federal Republic of Somalia. Since the fall of Siyaad Barre's military regime in 1991, Mogadishu has been the site of different forms and phases of armed conflicts. These have included a variety of armed groups, among them clan factions, the Islamic Courts Union, invading foreign armies, Al Shabaab, and internationally mandated forces, such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Mogadishu is characterized today by deep internal divisions often relating to land and property and ex-

pressed in terms of 'clan'. The social makeup of the city has changed significantly since the violence of the early 1990s and the indiscriminate expulsion or killing of clan groups associated with the former military regime. The city has been at the centre of numerous attempts to establish local administrations and national governments. It is the base of the internationally backed Somali Federal Government, although this administration exerts limited authority beyond the city. In addition, although the Al Shabaab administration was expelled from the city in 2011, the Islamist militia continues to attack targets in the city and maintains a parallel taxation system.


Satellite images shows growth of settlement in the north-western outskirts of Mogadishu between 2012 and 2018. The junction near the University is now at the intersection of several districts where many of the interviewees lived (Source: Google Earth).

Many people who today live in Mogadishu have experienced mass violence and human rights violations. A significant proportion of Mogadishu residents have experienced forced displacement, often on multiple occasions. Over the years, the city has been affected by waves of large scale out-migration and in-migration. People fled the city, for instance, in the wake of the Ethiopian invasion in 2006, and many came to the city in the aftermath of the 2011 famine in the southern and central regions. Continued fighting in recent years between AMISOM, forces aligned with the Somali Government, and Al Shabaab, coupled with consecutive droughts have driven people from rural areas to seek refuge and opportunities to rebuild

their lives in the city. As a result, Mogadishu has rapidly expanded in size and population density over the last decade.

Research methods and participants

In total, in 2017/2018 the Security on the Move research team interviewed 120 men and women (the majority of whom were displaced people) of different ages and clan backgrounds across the four cities. It provided 40 people (10 in each city) with cameras which they used to document their everyday lives. The photos in this brief were taken by those displaced people. People interviewed in Mogadishu mainly came from southern and south-western regions, such as Bay, Bakool, Lower and Middle Shabelle (see route map below). They arrived in Mogadishu between 1 month and 7 years prior to the interviews. Several of the interviewees were forced to move within Mogadishu, often because they were evicted from other camps.
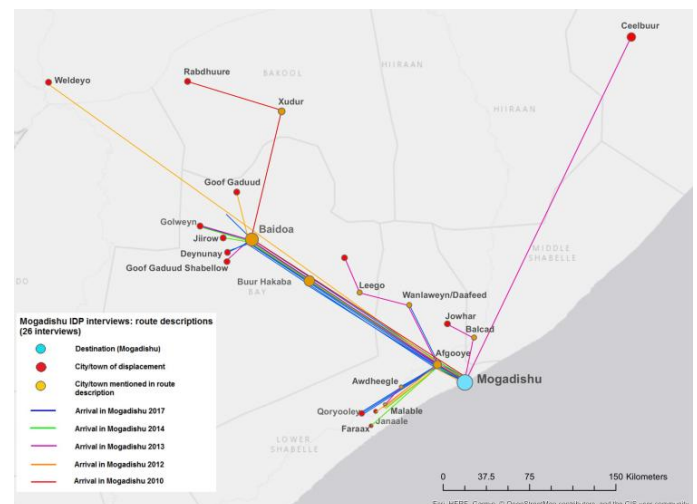
Map: Peter Chonka

Research findings

Many displaced people in Mogadishu have experienced - and continue to live in fear of - evictions. Rising land prices increases competition for land in the city centre and displaced people have been pushed further and further to the city outskirts. The settlement of displaced people in previously unoccupied areas itself can contribute to the increase of the value of the land. Interviewees spoke of how they cleared land of vegetation and rubble, established shelters, attracted businesses and humanitarian support. This led to the integration of the camps into the physical and social urban infrastructure. Road links, transport networks, and waterpoints are established, while

small businesses develop in and around the camps. As these investments increase the area's value, owners re-emerge and evict settlers in order to sell plots or to further develop the land. Interviewees spoke of cycles of displacement and their moves between camps around the city and towards its outskirts. Evictions often take place without warning and are executed violently. The property of those expelled from the land is often destroyed, people are injured in the course of evictions and interviewees had seen others being harmed or even killed.

Camps have become an important part of the political economy of aid. Individuals with access to land (either as owners or in agreement with owners) set up camps and encourage new arrivals to settle on 'their' land. Once the number of people has reached a certain threshold, camp leaders (or 'gatekeepers' as they are labelled by international organisations) hope to attract international aid in order to take a share. Another prevalent practice is the erection of 'rice huts': residents from other Mogadishu neighbourhoods cooperate with camp leaders and set up empty huts with the aim of receiving a share of the international assistance. Agencies criticize the practices of gatekeeping and the setting up of rice huts as a diversion of aid from intended beneficiaries. The interviewees in the project, however, expressed rather ambivalent views about these activities. They saw the hard work of many gatekeepers to attract international aid, and regularly expressed gratitude for the provision of initial shelter or other forms of material support on their arrival to the camp or city. Interviewees in Mogadishu emphasized the security provision of gatekeepers, and the need to be affiliated to people from the local host clans. To share aid seems an expected price to pay in exchange for security.

People who arrive in Mogadishu often live in camps where they lack access to basic services such as housing, water, sanitation, and education. Interviewees emphasised the daily physical struggle to get water; the lack of sanitation and unhygienic living conditions. Qu'ranic schools (*dugsi*) are held in open spaces without facilities, and many people cannot even afford to send their children to these types of schools. Child labour is rampant, and girls often have to take care of younger siblings while parents leave the camps to find work.

Economic precarity, a lack of job opportunities and labour regulations were emphasized by interviewees in all cities. Displaced people make up a large part of the workforce for fast growing cities such as Moga-

dishu. Most interviewees relied on petty entrepreneurial activities or casual labour: women often go from door to door to get day jobs doing laundry, as cleaners or housemaids. Men, and in some cases also women, work as porters or try to get work at one of the many construction sites in the cities. Competition is high and people often need personal or clan connections to get access to the labour market. City newcomers often lack these connections.

Photo: Asha, Mogadishu

Casual workers face many forms of exploitation. Women experienced harassment when working in households, and many have been affected by delayed or denied payment. Men work in construction without safety regulations. If they get injured during their work, they neither receive medical care nor compensation. Again, while labour regulations may exist, there are few or no institutions equipped or willing to support people if these labour rights are violated.

Experiences of displacement affect men and women differently. Women are often bearing a much larger economic burden of provision for their families. They often work more for less pay, and have additional responsibilities for child care, water collection, and other housework. Men are often not able to provide for their families. Many men also struggle to find meaning in their new urban lives. Sickness and mental exhaustion among men seem normalised in camps in Mogadishu. Domestic violence is prevalent in the camps (and beyond). Interviewees often linked this with economic insecurity and/or the use of (and expenditure on) khat by husbands. Divorce or family abandonment was reported as being common and the camps are home to a high proportion of single women.

Given their physical and economic precarity, displaced people are more exposed to general physical security risks in the camps and in the city. There were numerous reports of the risk of robberies and sexual violence, particularly against women who move outside of the camps for work. Women spoke of mitigat-

ing these risks by avoiding leaving the camp after dark, travelling in groups to find work, and using mobile phones to stay in contact with each other. Flimsy shelters in the camps often provide little protection from intrusion of outsiders or the effects of violence between militias, criminals and security forces. Interviewees reported cases of people being hit by stray bullets or mortar rounds.

Photo: Hawa, Mogadishu

In perspective: comparisons with and lessons from the other project cities

Compared to the other project cities, Mogadishu has the longest continuous history of emergency and large scale in and out migration of displaced people since the 2000s. Since the establishment of the Federal government, humanitarian aid and the activities of international organisations have become concentrated in the city. The more recent development of a significant humanitarian presence in Baidoa, alongside the ongoing conflict in its surrounding area has also rapidly increased the numbers of displaced people arriving there. Unlike Baidoa, however, Mogadishu's newcomers are not from locally dominant clans and are therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and often enter into clientelistic security relations with local host groups. These clan dynamics aggravate the form,

scale and violence of evictions in Mogadishu. Although trends of evictions and the development of camp economies are developing in a similar way in Baidoa, the closer clan links between that city's newcomers and long established residents potentially mitigates against similar levels of violence. (Re)settlement initiatives in Bosaaso and Hargeisa have helped to mitigate against the cycles of evictions that characterize Mogadishu. Resettlement initiatives in Hargeisa and Bosaaso were clearly appreciated, and the provision of title deeds for property acquired through these schemes gave some people a sense of greater security.

However, the establishment of settlements far away from the city exacerbated a social divide between 'locals' and displaced 'outsiders' that should be avoided in resettlement plans that are developed in Mogadishu. Although new settlements in Bosaaso have become economic hubs in their own right, they continue to attract more displaced people who do not benefit from the initial incremental tenure schemes (which give ownership of land to recipients after a period of uninterrupted settlement). Also, the 'semi-permanent' housing that is often provided in settlement schemes was criticized as uncomfortable impractical, and unsustainable. Long term city planning needs to address these issues from the outset, in order to ensure genuine benefits for vulnerable populations. However, given the more complex and dynamic security context in Mogadishu, urban planners face many challenges in engaging at all with resettlement schemes. The biggest issue here will likely relate to the availability of land. Nonetheless, the experiences of cities like Bosaaso or Hargeisa should be taken into account. Consultations should be undertaken not only with potential land donors and government officials, but also with the intended beneficiaries