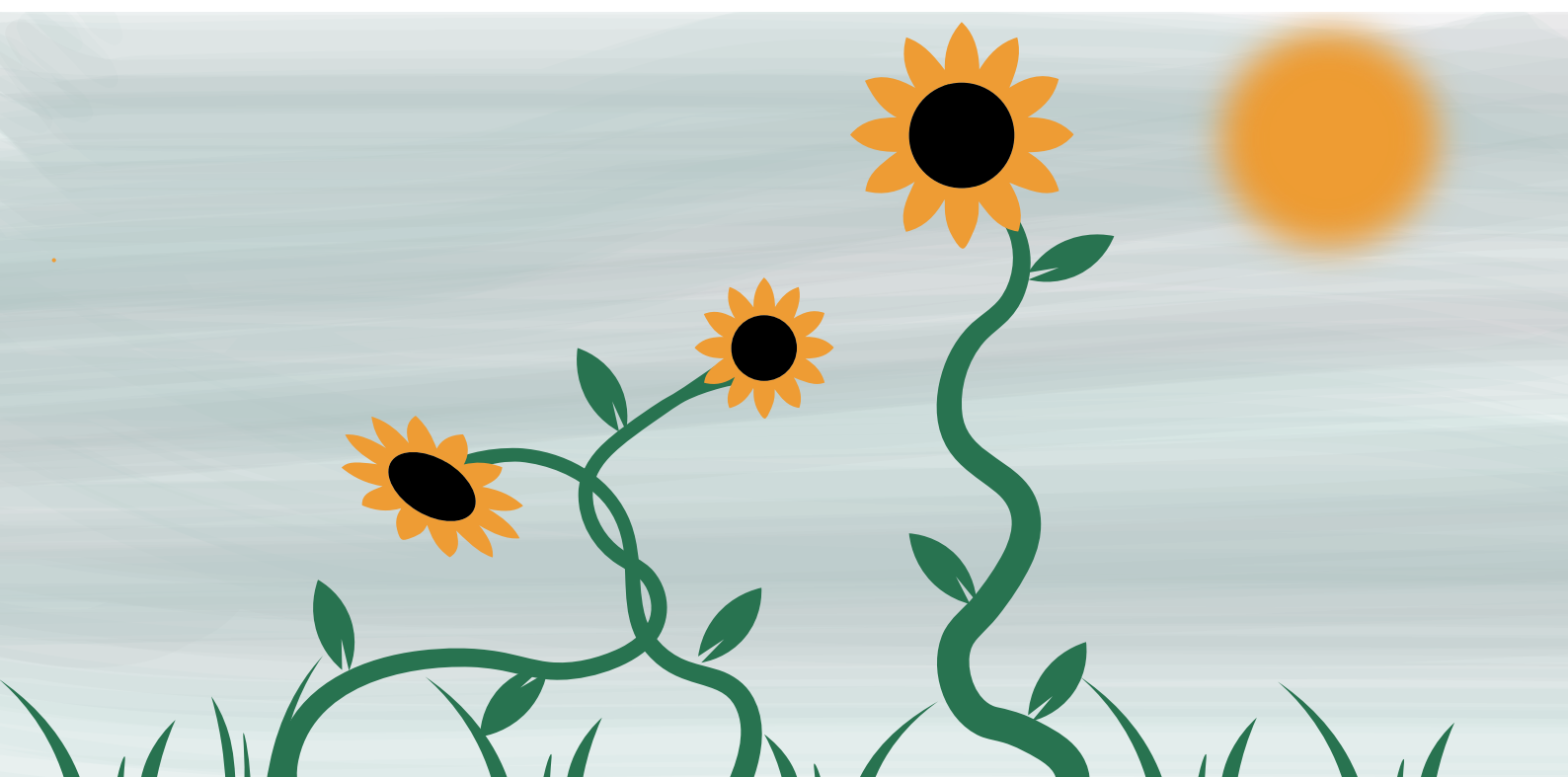


HPG working paper

The lives and livelihoods of forcibly displaced people in Mogadishu, Somalia

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Acronyms

BRCiS	Building Resilient Communities in Somalia
FDP	forcibly displaced person
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IT	information technology
MHPSS	mental health and psychosocial support
NGO	non-governmental organisation
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
SAGAL	Social Transfers to Vulnerable Somali People
SomRep	Somali Resilience Program
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency

1 Introduction

While the number of forcibly displaced persons (FDPs) globally – including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and those displaced directly or indirectly because of climate change – has risen steadily over the past several decades, humanitarian funding has failed to grow at a similar pace, leading to increasingly larger shortfalls, compared to humanitarian need (Development Initiatives, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). This context, combined with a renewed global policy commitment to refugees and IDPs (as seen in the outcomes of the Global Refugee Compact and more recent work by the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement), has led to an increased focus on building and supporting livelihoods in displacement.

The shortfall in humanitarian funding appeals really is greater than ever. At the end of 2023, it was reported that the United Nations (UN) had only received one-third of the funding it had requested (Lederer, 2023). Cuts in humanitarian funding have always prompted pivots to self-sufficiency models for aid to displaced people, both cutting their access to life-sustaining support and expecting them to achieve economic self-reliance through poorly financed and unpredictable livelihood schemes (Crawford and Holloway, 2024a).

While there is growing attention from donors, policymakers and practitioners towards livelihoods in displacement, little is known about how displaced people themselves want their livelihood endeavours to be supported or the barriers that they face to entering the labour market. For decades, when the humanitarian community has implemented livelihoods interventions, it has continued to focus largely on skills trainings and microfinance, but it has neglected the larger scaffolding that would allow people to find and sustain their own livelihoods, on their own terms.

The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), on behalf of the IKEA Foundation, has been looking at the state of displacement around the world and exploring the types of external investments that contribute to lasting and sustainable livelihoods for FDPs. The project has produced three outputs. The *Global evidence review* highlights trends in displacement and reviews existing evidence around the globe for what sorts of interventions can (or cannot) help FDPs find safe and sustainable livelihoods (Crawford and Holloway, 2024a).

This Mogadishu case study looks more in depth at a particular context of mixed urban displacement – Mogadishu, Somalia – where returnees (former refugees in Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti) and IDPs (displaced due to conflict, drought, flooding or a combination of these factors) live side-by-side, and compete for livelihoods opportunities, with economic migrants and the urban poor in a growing, over-crowded and increasingly expensive city (see Box 1). This study offers a ‘deep dive’ into the lived experience of FDPs in Mogadishu – some recently displaced, others living for more than a decade in displacement camps, others returning after long periods displaced abroad – and aims to amplify their perspectives. The researchers hoped to hear what, if any, livelihood interventions people have benefited

from over the years; to understand better how FDPs frame ‘livelihoods’ within their family priorities; and to see what FDPs feel are their greatest obstacles to achieving better economic security, to inform recommendations and humanitarian policy from the bottom up.

Box 1 Why Mogadishu?

Mogadishu was chosen as the site for this case study for three reasons. First, as the *Global evidence review* highlights, forced displacement is increasingly an urban phenomenon – mirroring trends in urbanisation generally – and cities in many cases provide a better context for displaced people to find jobs and support their families (Crawford and Holloway, 2024a). Second, while there is some research on refugee livelihoods, IDP and returnee livelihoods are significantly under-researched, and even less is available from the point of view of displaced people. The *Independent review of the humanitarian response to internal displacement* found that IDPs prioritise livelihoods, but they are not involved in decision-making regarding how their livelihoods should be supported (Sida et al., 2024). Finally, Mogadishu has a diverse population of FDPs that allows us to compare differences based on length of displacement, whether people are internally displaced or returnees from refugee camps abroad, and whether they were primarily displaced by climate change or conflict.

The lack of other examples of this type of study (i.e. reports focusing on ground-up discussions with FDPs on livelihoods, independent of any planned interventions) suggests this absence of affected people’s voices may represent a gap in how policymakers and practitioners think about supporting livelihoods. Given the poor or unproven track record of so many external livelihood interventions, maybe it is time to re-emphasise a slower approach that starts with listening to what displaced people say they need.

Based on the *Global evidence review* and this case study on Mogadishu, the policy brief offers four key recommendations for donors, policymakers and practitioners who are involved in or wish to be involved in helping FDPs find and sustain their own livelihoods (Crawford and Holloway, 2024b).

1.1 Methodology

The findings of this paper are based on a series of key informant interviews and focus group discussions with a mix of newly arrived and longer-term IDPs and returnees, carried out in Mogadishu between September and November 2023. Table 1 shows the total number of interviews, and the split by type, gender and age. For clarity, this table has disaggregated the participants of the 10 focus groups – two focus groups of IDP men, two of IDP women, two of returnee men and two of returnee women, as well as two focus groups of mixed IDPs and returnees, split by gender. Interviews were conducted in Somali by researchers based in Mogadishu.

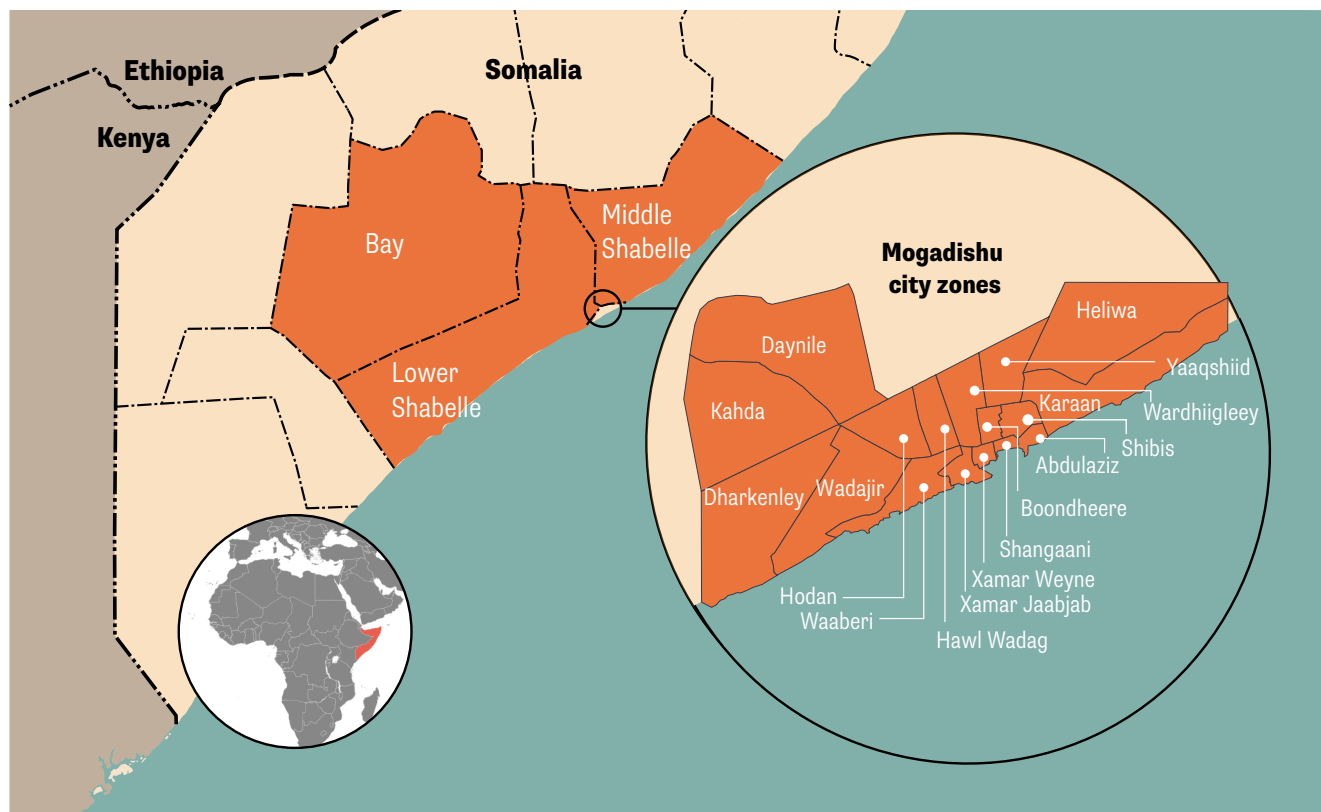
Table 1 Interviewees by type and length of displacement, gender and age

Type	Gender	Age	Total
Newly arrived IDPs (displaced for one year or less)	Men	18–29	5
		30–39	1
		40–49	2
		50+	3
	Women	18–29	10
		30–39	6
		40–49	3
		50+	4
Subtotal			34
Longer-term IDPs (displaced for more than one year)	Men	18–29	6
		30–31	2
		40–49	2
		50+	0
	Women	18–29	1
		30–31	0
		40–49	0
		50+	0
Subtotal			11
Returnees	Men	18–29	9
		30–31	1
		40–49	3
		50+	6
	Women	18–29	7
		30–39	4
		40–49	3
		50+	5
Subtotal			38
Total number interviewed			83

Once in Mogadishu, the IDPs interviewed for this study largely resided in IDP camps in three districts – Daynile, Hodan and Kahda – which host most of the IDPs in the city. The main camps from which interviewees came were Kulmis, Dulmane, Gallad and Bahane. The selection of these specific camps was done with the help of local fixers. The number of IDPs interviewed was divided between those newly displaced by the floods and those displaced previously due to conflict.

Unlike IDPs, returnees are more dispersed throughout the city. Therefore, a representative sample of returnees was selected by accessing the National Commission for Refugees and IDPs database. This selection method also ensured diversity of the returnees according to where they had previously been displaced, divided between Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti. The interview sample also included returnees who were living in IDP camps like Dan Kulan, as well as those who were living with relatives in the districts of Karaan, Wadajir and Shibis. Returnees who were living in the city’s suburbs for convenient, affordable rent prices also lived in the areas of Tabeelaha (in the Lower Shabelle region, outside of Mogadishu) and Garasbaaley, in the district of Hodan (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 District map of Mogadishu



Source: REACH

1.2 Challenges and limitations

Although the research team attempted to achieve roughly even representation among different types of FDPs present in Mogadishu – newly displaced IDPs, longer-term IDPs and returnees – between men and women and across four different age groups, some gaps remained unfilled. In particular, longer-term IDP women are woefully underrepresented in this study. This could be due to several reasons. First, this group may have been less available because of their relatively more stable livelihoods, due to their time displaced, which allows them space to find and maintain work. Second, this group may not have been put forward for interviews by the local fixers as frequently as women who have been recently displaced, because they were less in need of assistance. Although interviewees were told they would not receive assistance as a result of this study, it is still possible that there was some expectation of aid.

Another limitation of this research is its inability to say something more concrete about the role clan backgrounds and connections – Somalia’s unique form of social capital – play in everyday life. This study was initially designed as a global study, where the interviews undertaken by the research team in Mogadishu were to be complemented by a review of similar, recently published perception surveys on displaced populations in other urban and peri-urban settings – of which there are only a few. Thus, the interviewees were not asked directly about their clan connections, as it was deemed by the research team as potentially sensitive and of limited use in a global study, although several interviewees offered this information when describing the challenges they face in Mogadishu.

The findings in this paper are both impressionistic and limited to a snapshot of a particular context of urban displacement. Nevertheless, the unique voices and priorities uncovered – in contrast to the conventional checklist of interventions that dominate donor and agency discussion – might point the way toward different ways of thinking about support for FDP livelihoods.

2 Background

Somalia has been marked by large-scale displacement for decades. At the end of 2022, almost four million people remained internally displaced in Somalia (IDMC, 2023). Conflict and climate change have both contributed to movement, whether that be out of the country into refugee camps in surrounding countries, returning to Somalia from exile abroad, or as IDPs. Displacement can follow years of violence, conflict and strains on livelihoods due to climate-related events, which can exhaust all resources and other coping strategies. But mobility can also be a more proactive choice, influenced by a variety of factors, as people seek to move for better opportunities for themselves and their families (Hailey et al., 2023).

Of the 45 IDPs interviewed, 24 said they had been displaced for climate-related reasons, 13 because of conflict and 8 said that it was a mixture of both climate and conflict that triggered their movement. There was no significant distinction between IDPs who had been newly displaced and those who had been displaced longer term, in terms of their key driver of displacement. Returnees, however, were more likely to say that they had been displaced by conflict. Although not all returnees answered this question in the same way, of the 20 who did answer, 18 said they had originally left Mogadishu because of conflict, 1 said it was because of both climate and conflict and 1 said it was because her brother had a heart condition, and they moved to a refugee camp to try to get resettled to a third country where he could access better healthcare.

Increasingly, the trend for internal movement in Somalia – and globally – has been from rural areas to cities and towns, such as Mogadishu, whose population is growing at a rapid pace (Earle, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2023; Halakhe and Miller, 2023). Although roughly 870,000 people left Mogadishu in 2007–2008 due to violence, by 2015, Mogadishu was the second-fastest-growing city in the world and is currently home to more than two million people (Hagmann et al., 2022; Adam, 2023a). The loss of livelihoods in rural areas, as well as the availability of humanitarian assistance and relative safety in Mogadishu, are oft-cited reasons why people move to the city (Gabobe et al., 2023; Halakhe and Miller, 2023).

There are an estimated 500,000 IDPs in Mogadishu, as well a large population of returnees (Chonka et al., 2023). Most IDPs come from regions bordering Banadir (the administrative region of Mogadishu), such as Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle, with others coming from slightly further away, from Bay. These three regions have seen significant clan conflicts and military offensives, as well as being amongst the hardest hit by the famine in 2011 (JIPS, 2016). Most IDPs also differ from the city's urban poor in that they do not belong to the dominant clans in Mogadishu and cannot resort to their connections for support when needed, as their clans are unlikely to have sufficient power in the city (Jaspars et al., 2020; Kamau et al., 2023).

Weak governance at the state level and low levels of tax revenue have resulted in inadequate public services and few social safety nets in Somalia (Earle, 2021; Halakhe and Miller, 2023). This is particularly true for IDPs, who often reside on the outskirts of Mogadishu, where the limited public services that are available often do not reach (Hagmann et al., 2022). Somalia has two national social safety net

systems. The first, Baxnaano, is concentrated in rural areas and targets 220,000 poor households with children under the age of five, and it expands to 315,000 poor households whose livelihoods are affected when specific shocks, such as droughts, floods or locust infestations, occur (Birch, 2023). There remain questions as to ‘whether Baxnaano has a role in addressing the needs of [...] IDPs’ (Al-Ahmadi and Zampaglione, 2022: 47). According to a key informant, it is anticipated that Baxnaano will be extended to urban areas, including Mogadishu in the future. The second social safety net is Social Transfers to Vulnerable Somali People (SAGAL). This provides cash-based social transfers to almost 45,000 households – including IDPs, returnees and host communities – in urban centres along four corridors, but it does not cover Mogadishu (Birch, 2023). Mogadishu has previously had a municipal-level social protection programme called Urban Safety Nets. Run by the Banadir Regional Authority, World Food Programme and Danish Refugee Council, it targeted 10,000 households, most of whom are protracted IDPs, with monthly cash transfers between 2020 and 2022 (McLean and Ammoun, 2021).

Given the paucity of national social safety nets, FDPs rely mostly on daily labour, often in the informal sector; support from neighbours and family, either in places of origin or abroad; and – for some, but not all – small amounts of humanitarian assistance. The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia targeted 7.6 million people, including more than 700,000 newly displaced people, 1.1 million protracted IDPs, 3.2 million shock-affected urban people, and more than 50,000 refugees, asylum seekers and returnees (OCHA, 2023). Less than half of the funding for this plan, however, was received in 2023 (OCHA, n.d.).

Where some progress has been made is in the various national laws and policies created to address the country’s displacement crisis (see Table 2). For example, the National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020–2024) aims to create an enabling environment in which IDPs, refugees, returnees and vulnerable members of the host community can access secure housing, sustainable livelihoods and justice and participate in mainstream society as full citizens by 2024 (Government of Somalia, n.d.). As part of this, in March 2020, Somalia ratified the Kampala Convention – ‘the world’s only binding continent-wide treaty to protect IDPs’ (ibid.: 30). Others, particularly at the municipal level, have proven to be aspirational, but difficult to implement and progress. The Banadir Regional Administration’s (2019) aim in its ‘Policy for IDPs and returnees in Mogadishu’ was to achieve durable solutions for all IDPs in Mogadishu – so that there would no longer be IDPs in Mogadishu – by 2023.

Another area of progress across Somalia is the various durable solutions and resilience-building initiatives, such as Danwadaag, Saameynta, the Somali Resilience Program (SomRep) and the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) consortium, among others. The Danwadaag (Somali for ‘common purpose’) and Saameynta (Somali for ‘impact’) programmes emphasise building the capacity of municipal governments to manage investment in cities, the delivery of basic services and the provision of safe housing for IDPs and returnees (IDC, 2020). SomRep focuses on building resilience to climatic shocks and other risks in pastoralist, agropastoralist, fisherfolk and peri-urban host and IDP communities (SomRep, 2018). Similarly, BRCiS seeks to strengthen the resilience of Somali communities through disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action and economic empowerment (BRCiS, 2023). However, none of the IDPs and returnees who were interviewed for this project mentioned benefiting from these programmes.

Table 2 Laws and policies addressing displaced populations in Somalia at the national level and in Mogadishu at the municipal level, 2017-2023

Year	Law/policy
2017	National Development Plan 8 (2017–2019)
	National Disaster Management Policy
	National Youth Policy
2018	Recovery and Resilience Framework
	Registration and Identification Policy
2019	Banadir Regional Administration Policy for IDPs and Returnees in Mogadishu
	Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing to Eligible Refugee-Returnees and IDPs
	National Employment Policy
	National Eviction Guidelines
	National Policy for Refugee-Returnees and IDPs
	Social Protection Policy
2020	Banadir Regional Administration Durable Solutions Strategy (2020–2024)
	National Development Plan 9 (2020–2024)
	National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020–2024)
	National Refugees Act
	Ratification of the Kampala Convention
2021	National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Policy
2023	National Identification and Registration Authority Bill

Source: Ahmed et al., 2023; Halakhe and Miller, 2023; Government of Somalia, n.d.

3 Findings based on type and length of displacement

Not surprisingly, discussions in Mogadishu with a range of FDPs confirmed the saying that being poor is expensive. Just covering basic needs – food, shelter, transport, healthcare, education – requires all and more of one’s disposable income every month. Having no financial cushion means families cannot make meaningful investments in improving their livelihoods. Without this cushion, any shock – such as a medical emergency or loss of an income source – results in even greater cost-of-living increases when the family needs to borrow to cover the expense.

The varying categories of people interviewed for this study were in general comfortable with the status assigned to them by international authorities, such as ‘IDP’, ‘returnee’ or ‘refugee’. For the most part, they accepted the descriptor as an accurate reflection of their situation, though it should be noted that interviewees sometimes used a single Somali word to cover refugee, IDP or returnee. Being labelled an IDP, or to a lesser extent a returned refugee, was equated with poverty, but the label itself did not carry stigma in most cases – perhaps because an estimated 30% or more of Mogadishu’s population are IDPs.¹ The exception to this was parents who felt their children were shunned or bullied in school because they were from the countryside or because of their dialect or accent.

Where a feeling of ‘apartness’ was felt more acutely was in the lack of access to social capital that would come from living in one’s own town or village, and among one’s own clan – connections for jobs, housing, emergency support, loans, etc. Though other studies have suggested that some longer-term IDPs in Mogadishu have begun to establish their own social capital networks in the city (World Bank, 2014), this was not the feeling among those interviewed for this study. There were, however, some distinct characteristics among the different profiles of people interviewed (outlined below), and these may contribute to a better understanding of how the international community might consider its approach to displacement and livelihoods.

3.1 Recently displaced people are the most vulnerable

More than 750,000 people were internally displaced in Somalia for the first time in 2022 (OCHA, 2023). IDPs interviewed for this study who were displaced within the past year were by far the least settled

¹ This seems to have shifted over the past several years, as a study by Sturridge et al. in 2018 found that ‘IDP respondents were extremely aware of the bias and discrimination associated with being labelled as an IDP’ (p. 41).

and most vulnerable² among all of the FDPs interviewed, and those displaced as a result of violence or conflict as opposed to disasters described themselves as particularly fragile. Of the 34 recently displaced IDPs interviewed, only 19 (56%) were employed, whereas 9 of the 11 IDPs who had been in Mogadishu for more than a year (82%) described themselves as employed. This overall finding is consistent with other studies on IDPs in Mogadishu and other urban areas in Somalia (World Bank, 2014; Sturridge et al., 2018; Hagmann et al., 2022; Gabobe et al., 2023; Hailey et al., 2023; OCHA, 2023).

The types of employment that FDPs in Mogadishu found themselves in also varied slightly by length and type of displacement. The main source of livelihood for newly displaced IDPs was selling assorted goods, acting as a porter at the market or doing laundry or cleaning. IDPs who had lived in Mogadishu longer also engaged in these types of livelihoods, but there were a few who had been able to incorporate more skilled work. For example, longer-term IDPs worked as Qur'an teachers, in construction, as a tailor, and as a teacher at a school run by an international non-governmental organisation in the IDP camp.

While employment rates for those displaced by climate change and those displaced by conflict were roughly similar, IDPs displaced more recently by conflict were much more likely to express feelings of hopelessness in their current situation in Mogadishu. Often heard phrases from this group included 'I wonder how we ended up in this misfortune' and 'It is hard to keep living like this'. This difference in perspective is unlikely to be explained by any variance in previous livelihoods of those displaced by climate-related crises and those displaced by conflict, as both would have been engaged in agriculture prior to moving to Mogadishu – a livelihood that is hard to translate from rural to urban settings.

From an economic point of view there might be little to distinguish IDPs in Mogadishu from other rural–urban migrants, but those who have been displaced face more hurdles to achieving sustainable livelihoods. Recent-arrival IDPs interviewed were generally reliant on humanitarian aid (formal and informal); unsure of how they might translate their skills into urban-based livelihoods; unsure of how to negotiate the city; and susceptible to harassment, violence or labour exploitation, due to their lack of clan connections and social capital. In some cases, the interviewees for this study suffered debilitating physical injuries from conflict that limited their job opportunities; in other cases, they were clearly still suffering from emotional trauma. One woman returnee shared that she struggles to wash clothes for others because, as she explained, 'In the war time, a mortar hit me on that hand affecting everything up to the head on that side. Even my eyes are affected.'

Among some of the newly displaced interviewed, there was still some hope from those displaced due to drought or floods of returning home to their villages and livelihoods. A common refrain in several of the

2 Vulnerability here does not refer to the traditional humanitarian understanding based on vulnerability assessments and preconceived criteria such as gender, age, displacement status and disability, but rather focuses on the lived realities of displaced people, as represented in the interviews conducted for this study. In Mogadishu, for example, vulnerability often stemmed from a lack of social capital or inadequate housing (discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2). For a critique of vulnerability as it is typically operationalised in humanitarian action, see Barbelet and Wake (2020).

interviews was, ‘If the conditions were different, I would consider going back’. By contrast, those who moved because of violence were adamant they would remain in Mogadishu whatever the hardships and build a new life. As one stated, ‘I cannot and will not go back there. I am afraid of Al-Shabaab... I am traumatised by them. Even here, I think they are watching me.’ Similar results were found in Herat, Afghanistan, where conflict was a key factor in IDPs’ decision to stay in the city, while those displaced primarily by climate change were more likely to want to return (Holloway et al., 2022).

Most IDP parents, no matter the cause of their displacement, insisted they would stay in Mogadishu for their children’s future. One mother stated her intent to stay by declaring, ‘The only thing I want and is important for me now is education for my children.’ Another described how she would not go back because she lost a child on the way due to the cold, and she would not risk losing another.

3.2 Longer-term IDPs are still vulnerable, but more settled

Most situations of displacement become protracted.³ Many of the longer-term IDPs interviewed for this study were displaced during the famine in 2011 and drought in 2017, while others were forced to move following the floods in 2020–2021, and still others from various periods of violence in Somalia over the past decades. This group demonstrated how, over time, FDPs begin to reach some greater degree of stability, even if – it should be stressed – most of those interviewed continue to live in extreme poverty. Indeed, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2023), 87% of IDPs who have been displaced for more than a year in Mogadishu are unable to meet their basic needs.

While still facing considerable hardships, the longer-term IDPs interviewed for this study had, for the most part, settled into a relatively more stable life in Mogadishu. They were not reliant on any regular humanitarian aid and had few expectations that they would be receiving humanitarian assistance or services from the international community or from the government. They had learned to negotiate life in the camps and life in the city generally. Some had received training from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), many had received training in basic health and hygiene in the IDP camps, while some had received livelihoods training in areas such as soap making or henna dying.

As a group, they also had more definite ideas about the constraints on their current incomes as well as clearer ideas about what they would need to improve their families’ livelihoods over the longer term. There was little expectation of finding regular wage employment, nor did most of the interviewees wish to be given training to learn skills or trades. Instead, most interviewees said they would like to be supported through small amounts of capital to set up businesses – mostly as small kiosk owners or as bajaj (tuktuk) drivers. Several interviewees who had received livelihood training desired cash to repair equipment or restock necessary inputs (e.g. for soap making) or to increase their working capital to expand existing businesses (e.g. kiosks, hair salons, henna dying). In fact, most of the small number of interviewees who had received small business trainings and grants from NGOs had ultimately been

3 Most people displaced for six months to a year tend to remain displaced for much longer periods. ‘Protracted’ displacement is usually considered to be for a period of more than five years (UNHCR, 2023).

forced to abandon their efforts. In some cases, the businesses found no markets; in other cases, the businesses did not generate enough working capital for supplies or additional investments needed to keep it going.

3.3 Returnees are the most resilient, though still struggling

Those who had returned to Mogadishu from refugee life in Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti – most of whom had been living in exile for 10 years or more – displayed the greatest degree of resilience⁴ and the most diverse livelihood strategies among those interviewed for this study. Some of the returnees interviewed for this study worked similar jobs to the IDPs interviewed: selling things, construction, laundry, portering. The range of items sold, however, varied greatly, from hair oil to clothes to charcoal to different types of food. There were also several teachers, a mechanic, a translator and a university student in this cohort.

The stronger livelihood prospects for returnees from refugee camps in Kenya, Djibouti and Yemen are a strong affirmation of the value of effective ‘care and maintenance’ regimes for displaced people. What made their lives in Mogadishu better off and more resilient than their IDP neighbours were not individual livelihood support interventions (these were largely irrelevant), but the relative safety they had experienced in camps and better quality of education they had received, compared to IDPs who remained in Somalia, and, more generally, the experience of living and working in different places, including learning new languages. None of the IDPs we interviewed – including the long-term displaced – had benefited from similar levels of protection and support as their returnee neighbours had in exile.

Most of the returnees interviewed for this study had returned to Somalia through repatriation schemes organised by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), and had received cash repatriation grants, that helped ease their re-entry into Somalia, at least for the first six months or year.⁵ Of the 38 returnees interviewed for this study, 25 (66%) described themselves as employed. Although several had eventually themselves ended up in IDP camps – which are among the lowest-cost housing options in an increasingly expensive city – most had settled in other parts of Mogadishu.

In many ways, returnees face similar challenges and have similar profiles to the urban poor in Mogadishu. Almost all returnees had lived in Mogadishu prior to moving abroad, and many benefited

4 Similarly to how this paper is using ‘vulnerability’, it is also using ‘resilient’ as a marker of people’s ability to recover from their displacement, based on their own lived experiences.

5 In January 2018, the ‘enhanced return package’ offered to Somali refugees returning from Kenya or Yemen consisted of a package of ‘core relief items’ (three blankets, two 10-litre jerry cans, seven boxes of BP-5, three soap bars, three sleeping mats, one plastic sheet, two cooking pots, one large spoon and kitchen knife, five tablespoons, plates and metal cups); grants up to \$25 to cover school fees for the first nine months, along with a school uniform and school supplies, for each school-aged child; a reinstatement grant of \$200 per person; a subsistence allowance of \$200 per household for the first six months; and the opportunity to enrol in livelihood programmes such as cash-for-work, technical and educational vocational trainings and support for self-employment (UNHCR, 2018).

from their belonging to the majority clan in the city. Yet, a recent study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2022) found several significant disparities between the two groups, which highlight the impact that being displaced and then returning can have on people's lives. For example, less than 10% of returnees in the IOM study were in full-time employment, compared to 33% of those who had not been displaced. More than 40% of returnees were unemployed, compared to only 6% of the non-displaced community. Almost all returnees in the study (91%) lacked income-generating assets (IOM, 2022).

Returnees from Kenya still maintain ties with camps and relatives in Kenya: some had left children to finish their education in a school system they considered superior, while others were considering sending children back to school in Kenya or even returning themselves to re-establish businesses they had had in the camps. Other returnees from Yemen were disappointed that conflict in that country precluded them from going into exile there again where they had found more work opportunities and a higher quality of life – a reflection also of the challenging economic situation in Somalia faced by much of its population. Studies of returnees in Kismayo and Afgoye uncovered similar findings: voluntary returnees who returned to Somalia expecting improved security and better job opportunities quickly became disillusioned by the realities of injustice and poverty that greeted their return (Ahmed et al., 2023).

As with longer-term IDPs, the returnees interviewed wanted cash grants or loans to establish or enlarge small businesses – including in some cases to continue business for which they had received livelihood training from NGOs. In general, however, the livelihoods that returnees wished to adopt were far more varied than those of IDPs. While many still sought capital to become a bajaj driver or own a small kiosk, some returnees also mentioned desires such as starting a photography or mobile repair business, becoming a barista in a café, entering the information technology (IT) sector and becoming a flight attendant.

4 Main barriers FDPs must overcome to establish livelihoods in Mogadishu

Although relatively more stable and less precarious than the recently displaced, longer-term IDPs and returnees still described a daily hardscrabble life, similar in many ways to the urban poor in Mogadishu. In general, across the range of those interviewed (including among the recently displaced) on their livelihood prospects, constraints and needs, several strong priorities related to livelihoods surfaced consistently:

- the role of social capital in obtaining and maintaining livelihoods, particularly for IDPs;
- the need for secure and affordable housing and transport;
- the need for stronger labour protections, including protections for children and against sexual harassment and exploitation for women and girls;
- the role that unpaid care work plays in preventing sustainable livelihoods, particularly for women;
- the impact of emotional and mental health issues on people's lives and livelihoods.

Longer-term, development-style investments are not the bread-and-butter work of most humanitarian agencies and NGOs working to support FDP livelihoods. Yet, in the context of Mogadishu, the displaced people interviewed for this study clearly stated that housing and transport infrastructure as well as improved policy and governance capacity were their livelihood priorities. In essence, it is the scaffolding within which people's lives and livelihoods are allowed to flourish that needs to be strengthened by livelihood interventions, rather than the livelihood itself.

4.1 Social capital

Social connections through clan, family and kinship ties play a strong role in a person's livelihood prospects in Somalia; yet these ties are complex and contested. Historical marginalisation of particular clans in areas like Bay and along the Shabelle river have resulted in their increased vulnerability to climate crises like drought and eventual forced displacement to cities like Mogadishu because they have less of a diaspora on which to rely, have turned to vulnerable cash crops to try to recoup losses from poor harvests, and/or have been victims of land seizures (Jaspars et al., 2020).

Clan hierarchy in Mogadishu emerged following the civil war when clans laid claim to specific territories. Within those areas, members of those clans are seen as residents while people who belong to other clans are treated as guests and are restricted from accessing housing, employment and financial services (Somali Public Agenda, 2023). As seen in Section 3.3, while most returnees interviewed for this study can tap into these networks as previous residents of Mogadishu, most IDPs interviewed could not because they belonged to minority clans and marginalised groups. Some of the IDPs were from agropastoral communities and may have been part of the dominant clans in their places of origin, but now find themselves lacking the same connections in the city. Others had always been part of minority

clans, both in their hometowns and in displacement. While some IDPs who have been in Mogadishu for several generations may be able to form their own networks in the city, this was not the case for the IDPs interviewed for this study.

Both IDPs and returnees saw the need for social capital in obtaining and sustaining livelihoods in Mogadishu. An IDP from the Lower Shabelle region who had been displaced by the climate crisis and had been in the city for only two months noted that she had not received any job opportunities due to a lack of acquaintances and networks. Another woman from Lower Shabelle who had been displaced by conflict and had been in Mogadishu for three months stated that one of her main challenges in getting food on the table every day was ‘being a stranger in this place’. In her place of origin, she benefited from social capital when farmers would freely give her maize in harvest season, but in Mogadishu, she found no such support. ‘Here,’ she said, ‘it is up to you to figure out life.’

Although most returnees had lived in Mogadishu before being displaced abroad, not all of them belonged to the majority clan in the city, which created a similar lack of social capital as experienced by IDPs. A returnee who lived on the outskirts of Mogadishu before being displaced to Yemen commented on her lack of social capital due to being from a marginalised clan, acknowledging that her clan background meant that ‘we don’t have a robust support system to fall back on’. Another woman who also returned from Yemen commented on her inability to find shelter and access basic needs – both of which are typically negotiated through clan connections – and remarked that even though her family was skilled and ‘every one of us is good at something [...] the problem is we cannot get a job because getting a job needs networking and clan privilege’.

This study and previous studies of IDPs in Mogadishu have shown that the lack of social capital and ‘clan privilege’ has restricted business opportunities and movement through the city. Social capital plays such a large role in people’s lives that, according to Somali Public Agenda (2023), even if people from minority groups get assistance to set up businesses, they may never be profitable because members of majority clans may not patronise them. Moreover, many IDPs choose to stay close to their informal settlements due to their subordinate and marginalised position in the city, both as IDPs and as members of non-dominant clan groups who cannot claim urban land rights or protection from encroachment or forced eviction (Chonka et al., 2023; Gabobe et al., 2023).

4.2 Secure and affordable housing and transport

IDPs and returnees alike stressed the precarity and expense of their accommodation as a factor inhibiting their ability to pursue better-paid jobs or to invest in new or existing small businesses. Instead, they accept any jobs they can find, so they can pay their rent on time. This link between adequate housing and livelihoods has recently been made by IOM (2023: xi), who found that ‘IDPs living in suitable shelters are twice as likely to achieve financial stability’, though this study was unable to determine causality.

In Mogadishu, informal camp or settlement managers act as the primary gatekeepers,⁶ who provide land, basic services (e.g. water and sanitation) and some protections in exchange for either cash – typically between \$15 and \$20 each month – or a proportion of humanitarian assistance – up to 60% in some cases (Chonka et al., 2023; Gabobe et al., 2023; Hailey et al., 2023; Somali Public Agenda, 2023; Majid and Adan, 2024). Newer IDPs especially talked about the inadequacy of their housing. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, more than 80% of IDPs displaced in the previous year included shelter as one of their top three priorities. As a recently displaced woman interviewed for this research project described, ‘My children and I are living in a miserable condition. We have a poor shelter that does not protect us from the rain’ – a situation shared by the other IDPs who had arrived with her. Other interviewees emphasised the rising cost of living, ‘especially the house rents’, according to one interviewee. ‘As a family,’ they continued, ‘we have been forcefully evicted from many houses due to rent fee delays. We have had to move from one place to another, looking for a cheaper and safer accommodation.’

Mogadishu’s rapidly expanding population and increasing gentrification in its central districts have continued to push IDPs and the urban poor further out of the city in search of affordable housing (Jaspars et al., 2020; Adam, 2023a). As IDPs and others settle in the peripheries of the city, and as they start over again clearing land, building roads and connecting to public services, the value of the land they reside on rises, and they are evicted all over again (Hagmann et al., 2022; Kamau et al., 2023). One interviewee noted, ‘We live in a camp that is constantly under threat of eviction by camp management.’ In a 2019 study by Impact Initiatives, 39% of displaced people in Mogadishu felt they were under threat of eviction, while an almost identical proportion – 36% – had actually been evicted during the previous two years. There is some evidence to suggest that recent changes to land lease agreements have resulted in a reduction of forced evictions for IDPs (Kamau et al., 2023).

As with housing, the cost and availability of transport was repeatedly cited as a major obstacle to securing more stable income – and the two are interlinked. The current transportation infrastructure was established when the population of Mogadishu was half of what it currently is, and it has deteriorated greatly since then due to conflict, instability and a lack of investment (Adam, 2023b). Moreover, with most informal IDP settlements located on the outskirts of Mogadishu, the need for transport into the city for work is greater, particularly considering the lack of public and private social services and enterprises located in the peripheral districts (Adam, 2023a; 2023b; Gabobe et al., 2023; Kamau et al., 2023). Interviewees talked about the difficulty and cost of getting to markets where they worked as porters, or to more affluent areas where they worked as maids. One interviewee described having to pay up to \$5/day in transport to bajaj drivers to get to work because minibuses⁷ were too

6 Often camp managers are just one set of gatekeepers, within a chain of other gatekeepers, each of whom influence the distribution of aid (Majid and Adan, 2024). Other actors within this chain include landlords, militias, local government officials, etc.

7 Minibuses with a maximum capacity of 18 people gradually replaced the city’s functional bus service following the outbreak of civil war in 1991, and these are now also disappearing in favour of bajaj, adding to the congestion on Mogadishu’s streets (Adam, 2023b).

crowded and unreliable. Others talked about the unavailability of affordable transport to arrive at early morning jobs, or about eventually leaving jobs in more central areas of Mogadishu because of the expense of transport.

Yet, at the same time, transport was one of the main areas where interviewees felt they could find sustainable livelihoods. More than a third of all men interviewed (15 out of 40) – both IDPs and returnees – said that getting a loan for a bajaj would be the opportunity they needed to create a sustainable livelihood for themselves. While the transportation sector needs improvement, adding more bajaj to the streets is unlikely to be the solution. In 2020, it was estimated that 35,000 bajaj operated in Mogadishu, and in 2023, the city limited the number of bajaj on the road by dividing and colour coding the vehicles and only allowing each colour group on the road on alternate days – a system which has yet to reduce traffic congestion due to the anticipated increase in bajaj operating in the city (Adam, 2023b; Jibril, 2023).

4.3 Unpaid care work

For women, the lack of care options was referenced multiple times – both directly and indirectly – as a major obstacle to improving their household's income. One returnee woman spoke of how she wants business opportunities, but she needs to be able to do them from home so that she can continue to take care of her elderly mother. Similarly, a recently displaced IDP woman desired to restart her 'front-door business', where she would sell vegetables, cooking oil and other essential items from her home while watching her children. Another newly displaced IDP woman told the interviewers that she stays at home and no longer does anything, when asked how she currently makes a living. Later in the interview, she also remarked that her children used to have schools to go to prior to displacement, but now they stay at home. Many others talked about schools as prohibitively expensive. Beyond fees, paying for uniforms and books ensures that school is 'largely beyond the ability of IDP parents', and less than 25% of IDP children under six are currently enrolled (Kamau et al., 2023: 26). Without appropriate, affordable childcare, many mothers are faced with an impossible choice between going to work and sustaining a livelihood, and watching their children.

The issue of unpaid care work for vulnerable and displaced people is not new. The burden for childcare, looking after elderly relatives and those with physical or mental illnesses and disabilities, as well as household labour such as cooking and cleaning, falls predominantly on women and girls worldwide, limiting their opportunities for education and paid work and resulting in persistent gender inequality (GADN, 2017; Coffey et al., 2020). Yet unpaid care work is often not considered by humanitarian and development actors who want to implement livelihoods interventions, get people into the labour force and promote self-reliance.

4.4 Stronger labour protections

Labour exploitation was another theme that dominated discussions about the obstacles to achieving better livelihoods. Somalia does not have a minimum wage policy, so the oversupply of labour in particular markets results in low wages and occasional payments in food instead of money (Ahmed et al., 2023). Both men and women interviewed for this study described regularly having their wages reduced or withheld completely and having no recourse to complain about their employers. Women, particularly those in the laundry business, repeatedly talked about their powerlessness vis-à-vis their employers. One young woman described a typical scenario:

People tell you to come back to them tomorrow [for payment] after you washed their clothes and cleaned for them. I tell them that I can't, because I left hungry children back at home. Then they tell me that they will send the money later [but] they never send it.

Another young woman described her mother's experience: '[She] goes to work for cleaning [people's houses] sometimes ... and faces cruelty ... They give her some rice ... instead of the money they promised her.' A young man assured a paying job as a waiter was told that he 'is just a novice and doesn't deserve to be paid' and that 'he should feel lucky just for the chance to get trained'.

Closely related to labour exploitation were examples cited of sexual harassment and violence. Several women expressed living with a preoccupying fear of sexual violence in their workplaces; others detailed incidents of harassment and violence they had experienced at work or travelling to work. One woman described being threatened while looking for daily laundry work, saying, 'That day, I came back home terrified, and we went to sleep without dinner'.

Finally, many incidents of child labour were cited, including keeping children from school so they could work or be sent to beg. In some cases, the children had also been harassed or further exploited in their workplaces. One father lamented that he felt compelled to send his child to work:

One of my daughters was hired as a housemaid yesterday, so as to support the family. You can imagine the difficulty of having [to send a child as] a labourer. But I do not have any other choice.

4.5 Emotional and mental health issues

Many of the respondents suggested that they were unable to find or keep jobs because of the impact of emotional and mental health issues that have arisen due to traumatic events and their forced displacement. One returnee woman spoke of her emotional health issues – stemming from being forced back to Somalia by her husband from Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya, five years ago – as the biggest challenge she had to putting food on the table every day. Others spoke of the toll that sexual and labour exploitation took on their mental health as they tried to work now that they were in Mogadishu. Several mentioned lingering mental health issues that had been sparked by their experiences during the conflict and their forced migration, particularly those who crossed the Red Sea to Yemen.

The presence of mental health issues in the interviews undertaken for this study is unsurprising, given that the World Health Organization estimates that almost one-quarter of people affected by conflict also suffer from mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Charlson et al., 2019). Similar results were found in Pemba, Mozambique, where several IDPs related how the trauma experienced prior to displacement and on the journey to Pemba had severely limited their ability and willingness to adapt to their new surroundings (Sturridge et al., 2022).

Several studies have documented the mutually reinforcing role that mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) can play in supporting people's livelihoods, and vice versa. Being self-reliant and having a sustainable livelihood can improve mental and emotional wellbeing, but equally, poor mental health can prevent FDPs from entering the labour force or keeping a job (Schuettler and Caron, 2020). Indeed, strengthening livelihoods has been included as part of the suggested comprehensive response for MHPSS in emergency settings since 2007 (IASC, 2007). Yet, MHPSS has largely not been integrated into livelihoods programmes in the same way that the reverse has been encouraged (if not successfully implemented) (Schininà et al., 2016; Schuettler and Caron, 2020).

5 Conclusion

While our interviews with IDPs and returnees in Mogadishu represent a limited sample in a specific setting, many of their impressions and challenges echo displacement experiences in other low-income contexts. Only a few interviewees had profited from training in business and other skills, which suggests that with the right approach these kinds of interventions can help some families. On balance, though, they are expensive and challenging to get right. More often, these interventions had not unlocked meaningful changes in people's lives.

As in other situations of displacement, international assistance – including for those few who had received some kind of livelihood intervention from NGOs – was just one small element of strategies employed to provide basic needs for their families and to grow their income sustainably (Willitts-King et al., 2019). Rather than relying on, or expecting, government or international assistance, they were focused on many of the practical challenges faced in building livelihoods and, for the most part, confident that improvements in the 'scaffolding' of daily life – housing, transport, safety and security, labour protections, unpaid care work and social capital – would allow them room to build more stable lives.

5.1 Policy implications

Based on our interviews with newly displaced people, there are strong arguments for providing life-sustaining humanitarian and protection assistance to this group. Longer-term IDPs and returnees described arduous day-to-day lives, but these were relatively more stable and less precarious than those of the newly displaced in Mogadishu. As such, this cohort of protracted IDPs and returnees might be considered as more promising traditional 'livelihoods' beneficiaries, since livelihoods is often viewed as something to tackle once the emergency phase is 'over'. But this conclusion or approach on livelihood programming might be overestimating the actual prospects for achieving sustainable livelihoods in the overall context of the economy of Mogadishu and its capacity to create jobs and wealth among a growing population, not to mention the additional barriers present for those from marginalised clans. It might also be a stretch to conclude that some better-off IDPs or returnees among those we interviewed might have greater 'livelihood potential' than their slightly more vulnerable neighbours: they are all struggling to make ends meet in poor camps and districts in Mogadishu.

The following is a summary of the views expressed by those interviewed for this study and some suggestions about how their thinking might help shape the policies and actions of international organisations, donors and foundations hoping to contribute to better livelihoods for displaced people in urban settings. Prior to implementing any of these recommendations, however, donors and aid organisations must continue to undertake robust political economy analyses on how the city works, the role that marginalisation and exclusion play in shaping the lives of IDPs, the interactions between different networks and actors, potential opportunities and their risks and, perhaps most importantly, the overarching displacement economy that currently exists and how any aid given will influence and

change that economy. While most organisations do this already, publishing these analyses for the benefit of other organisations – rather than each organisation duplicating these efforts – would be more time- and cost-effective.

Overall, donors and aid actors should avoid funding and implementing individual-level livelihood-specific interventions:

- Skills training for FDPs has been shown to have limited value. The market in Mogadishu did not support most of the skills, services or goods that FDPs had been trained in. The lack of adequate working capital, spare parts and supplies undermined many of the ventures detailed in the interviews. Only a small number of interviewees had converted skills training into jobs or successful small businesses.
- **Therefore**, organisations, donors and foundations thinking about supporting traditional livelihoods interventions for FDPs need to be more selective about where these interventions take place. These types of interventions (e.g. skills training, microbusiness development, etc.) may be relevant in cities with relatively thriving economies, strong job creation and more reliable governance contexts.

Instead, more investment should be made in community-level interventions that create the scaffolding that will support people's lives and livelihoods:

Housing, transport and unpaid care work

In many low-income displacement hosting contexts, long-term development work of building infrastructure and government capacity is needed. Investments and work on housing (e.g. via social housing), transportation infrastructure and childcare opportunities (e.g. state-sponsored preschools, sufficient school places) would unlock greater livelihood prospects for FDPs in Mogadishu.

Therefore, aid organisations and donors looking to help develop the livelihoods of FDPs should consider solutions to structural obstacles that could make a real difference in people's lives. In settings where this infrastructure is lacking, effective 'care and maintenance'-style interventions – including humanitarian food assistance combined with social protection services (such as rental subsidies, healthcare and education) – will contribute to livelihood prospects in people's future.

Labour protections

A functioning legal framework for FDPs, including the provision of basic security and protection from labour exploitation, is a prerequisite for interventions to help people realise sustainable livelihoods.

Therefore, organisations, donors and foundations who wish to help support the livelihoods of FDPs should use their position to advocate for and leverage hosting governments to implement legal protections for all workers, including FDPs.

Emotional and mental health

Trauma, loss and emotional stress are widespread experiences for FDPs that undermine their capacity for sustainable livelihoods.

Therefore, organisations and donors who aim to support livelihoods programmes should advance the mainstreaming of MHPSS. Integrating MHPSS into legal frameworks can help support the varied needs of FDPs and increase the effectiveness of livelihoods interventions.

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