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# THE MISSING LINK IN SOMALIA'S PEACEBUILDING PROCESS

The exclusion of internally displaced people

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## Abstract

The voices of millions of internally displaced people (IDPs) are missing in Somalia's peacebuilding process. This paper aims to evaluate the state of protracted displacement in Somalia and explore the role of IDPs in the country's peacebuilding process. A critical review of key government policies and documents from the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations reveals that Somali IDPs are reduced to "beneficiaries" with no agency rather than active citizens who can contribute to their solutions. This paper, however, finds that engaging IDPs in peacebuilding would be valuable in finding the missing link between the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding nexus.

## About the author



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## Acronyms

<b>CCCM</b>	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
<b>DSI</b>	Durable Solutions Initiative
<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person(s)
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>OSF</b>	Open Society Foundations
<b>ReDDS</b>	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
<b>RLRH</b>	Refugee-Led Research Hub (University of Oxford)
<b>RSC</b>	Refugee Studies Centre (University of Oxford)
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Introduction

## Problem statement

Somalia has the seventh largest internally displaced population<sup>1</sup> in the world (Drumtra, 2014). Across the country, an estimated 2.9 million people have been displaced by the vicious cycle of violence and natural disasters such as floods, drought, and famine (CCCM, 2022). Mogadishu, Somalia's capital city, hosts the highest concentration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country; according to the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), more than half a million IDPs live there. IDPs living in Mogadishu face forceful evictions, exploitation, and police harassment (DRC, 2022). In the camps, women and girls are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence (Amnesty International, 2013).

Several notable events since the early 1990s caused this mass internal displacement: The first event was the 1991 civil war and subsequent famine following the collapse of the central government. The second, the 2006 invasion of Ethiopian forces, backed by the United States government. And third was the devastating famine that took place in 2011, which claimed the lives of a quarter of million people (Maxwell and Majid, 2016). In between the violence and droughts, there were flash floods and continuous clashes among warring clans over resources because of climate change, which exacerbated the situation. Most of those displaced persons have not returned to their homes.

One of the most pressing challenges Somalia is facing is the long-term internal displacement caused by these successive waves of socio-political unrest. In 2022, nearly three million people were displaced across the country (OCHA, 2022). With rising global temperatures and climate change multiplying already existing threats, the displacement trend has been increasing significantly in recent years. Currently, the country is facing its driest conditions in 40 years (Oxfam, 2021). As of August 2022, more than one million people have been displaced by drought because of four consecutive failed rainy seasons (OCHA, 2022).<sup>2</sup> Many longer-term IDPs have been displaced all their lives and have no prospect of returning to their homes or re-integrating into the host society (UNHCR, 2022). The United Nations (UN) and the international community have invested billions of dollars in peacebuilding efforts in Somalia but have achieved little in establishing an effective state (Menkhaus, 2014).

The drivers of forced displacement in Somalia are complex and overlapping. A growing body

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<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement defines IDPs as 'persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border' (UN Guiding Principles, 1998, p.7).

<sup>2</sup> This figure does not include the overall 2.9 million IDPs. These are people who have been displaced by the drought in the first eight months of 2022. See: OCHA (2022). [Somalia: 2022 Drought Impact Snapshot \(As of August 2022\)](#), 18 August 2022.

of research and government reports found conflict and climate-related events to be the key drivers of displacement (Federal Government of Somalia, 2021). Most internally displaced people (85%) have self-settled in informal settlements (3,400 sites as of December 2021) or internal displacement camps in urban centres (CCCM, 2022), putting pressure on already overstretched local resources. The living conditions of these camps are precarious, with a lack of access to healthcare, poor shelter, and inadequate food and water.<sup>3</sup>

An important overlooked area of research is how the protracted displacement situation undermines Somalia's state and peacebuilding processes. What is the role of the millions of IDPs - most of whom belong to minority and marginalised groups - in the reconstruction of the country?

There is significant literature and evidence on the link between effective peacebuilding and the inclusion of local people in the peace processes. Scholars in peacebuilding have a broad consensus on the importance of including IDPs in peacebuilding activities (see, e.g., Richmond et al., 2007). To build upon this body of evidence, I have reviewed more than 12 government, UN and international organisations policy documents and national strategies relevant to the Somali context and found that there is a significant trend in the lack of coordinated and holistic approaches to tackling the root causes of displacement and finding durable solutions. While the number of documents referenced here is limited, they are significant in that they mainly come from the key actors leading and involved in Somalia's state and peacebuilding process. Somalia's state-building agenda is missing the voices of a significant number of its own citizens who are excluded from national conversations. A critical look at the programmes for IDPs reveals that displaced people are often seen as incapable individuals with no agency. Thus, their views have not been reflected in the government policies that affect their everyday lives and shape their future.

This research aims to assess the state of the protracted displacement situation in Somalia and explore the role of IDPs in the country's peacebuilding process. The paper contends that durable solutions are a key element to building lasting peace and argues that displaced populations should be put at the centre of national peacebuilding programmes.

## Research questions

This paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is the state of involvement of IDPs in Somalia's peacebuilding process?
- How are the missing voices of IDPs hindering Somalia's peace and state-building?

The paper will first present the methods used to analyse the literature and findings. It will then delve into the existing academic literature on displacement and peacebuilding to

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<sup>3</sup> See: Hujale, M. (2020). [Mogadishu left reeling as conflict and climate shocks spark rush to capital](#), The Guardian, 27 January 2022.

understand the link between the two and highlight the gaps in the context of Somalia. The third part of the paper will break down the discussion and results into smaller sections based on themes that arise in the analysis. Finally, the conclusion provides an overview of the main arguments, implications of the research, and recommendations.

## Research methods

This desk-based research draws on a literature review of peer-reviewed and grey literature on peacebuilding and internal displacement, as well as an analysis of UN and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) documents and government policies and strategies to address the displacement situation in Somalia. It examines the work of key organisations working on durable solution programmes.

## Literature review

For the literature review, I used keywords (e.g. peacebuilding [Somalia]; internal displacement Somalia; peacebuilding and internal displacement) to find resources on key academic search engines (mainly Google Scholar, supplemented by journal searches using the University of Oxford's online library). I then reviewed the abstracts of over 30 articles to identify their relevance. If relevant, I read the paper and noted its central themes and contentions. Over time, this enabled me to identify the main discussions and gaps within the literature.

In addition to looking for relevant literature on IDPs and peacebuilding, I reviewed over 12 government documents, including policies, strategies, and projects aimed at finding durable solutions for internally displaced people in Somalia. I also reviewed UN programmes and strategies developed by national and international organisations that work with displaced people. These include multi-donor and multi-agency projects such as Danwadaag, as well as government-run projects such as the Durable Solution Unit implemented by the Benadir regional authority in Mogadishu.

## Positionality and limitations

This research is informed by personal knowledge on the subject. I have written extensively about Somalia's displacement situation for various international media organisations in the last ten years. Although the interviews I conducted over the years through my journalism work are not directly related to the research questions, they helped inform my conceptual and contextual understanding of the topic.

I initially planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with displaced people living in major IDP camps in Somalia, including Mogadishu, and talk to experts working on displacement in the country, but due to limited time and budget, this was not feasible. Instead, this paper provides an important foundation for further research on this topic.



## Literature Review

This literature review lays out contemporary academic debates on peacebuilding and the role of IDPs in peacebuilding. It highlights an overview of the reconciliation processes in Somalia. Finally, it looks at the concept of localisation and ownership in the context of peace and state-building.

### Defining 'peacebuilding'

Peace-related research has gained greater interest since the end of the Cold War, as scholars and policymakers have sought to support international peace interventions through an evidence-based understanding of civil war and the root causes of conflict (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013). The general consensus is that peacebuilding is not just preventing war, but rather creating a space to promote positive peace, eradicate the root causes of conflict, and, more importantly, allow societies to establish their own mechanisms to sustain peace. However, there is still significant disagreement as to what 'peacebuilding' means in practice.

Thirty years ago, in his landmark report, 'An Agenda for Peace', the then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali introduced the concept of post-conflict peacebuilding and defined it as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict" (Barnett et al., 2007, p 35). Today there are a plethora of UN agencies and international organisations that contribute to the cause of peacebuilding efforts across the world. In 2005, the UN Security Council established a peacebuilding commission under the leadership of Kofi Annan to help countries that have come out of conflict or war to rebuild lasting peace.

However, as Barnett et al. (2007) point out, different UN and international organisations use a wide variety of terms that are similar, but not synonymous, with peacebuilding based on how the concept fits into their broader core mandates. Peacebuilding is generally an external intervention meant to prevent states from erupting into war or returning to it. For this reason, there has been a lot of criticism of how the UN's Agenda for Peace is being implemented all over the world. The fact that each UN agency uses its own model of peace activities highlights why there is no coordination among key partners working with war-torn countries.

### Somalia's peace processes

Between 1991 and 2008, Somalia had a series of peace conferences, many of which took place in neighbouring countries such as Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, while others took place within the country. Throughout this process, players and stakeholders came from majority clans. As shown in studies conducted by Interpeace, representation at these conferences were based on clan, military, and economic power. The studies also found that internationally sponsored processes have generally empowered warlords and political elites. This partly explains why most of the externally led peace processes have failed. The focus

and result of the internationally led peace conferences since 1991 have been power-sharing rather than true or effective reconciliation. The latter is a complex process that is more than just reaching a short-term agreement to stop the conflict. Those claiming to represent the public did not have popular acceptance hence the lack of local legitimacy. According to Interpeace, the number of groups claiming to represent the Somali people have multiplied in every conference, from only four armed movements in 1991 to over 30 factions in 2004. Today while the nature and dynamics of the conflict have changed considerably, the underlying issues of representation and dominance by the majority and powerful remain the same. Millions of poor and displaced communities have no role in the ongoing state formation and peacebuilding processes.

### Peace-keeping and internal displacement: success or failure?

There is a growing recognition among scholars with an interest in peacebuilding that displacement and peace are inextricably linked. Koser (2009) says that, on the one hand, displacement is the consequence, while on the other, it can be the key objective of armed conflicts; and that when peace talks fail, displacement is renewed. However, current peacebuilding initiatives remain inadequate to stop internal displacement since they heavily rely on foreign strategies by international actors and disregard those of local actors, including IDPs (Richmond, 2016).

Strong evidence suggests that the decades-long liberal peacebuilding model that has been implemented globally is not relevant for most post-conflict contexts. There are numerous examples, such as Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Indonesia, where foreign-led peacebuilding interventions have achieved little (Mac Ginty, 2011). And one of the reasons why it seems to be unsustainable is because it does not involve local communities in the implementation of peace activities (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013). These activities often do not reflect the experiences of the local population and often focus on dealing with state authorities that have little connection with the grassroots civil society organisations and hence lack local ownership. Moreover, experts on Somalia, such as Menkhaus (2009), believe external policies helped make things worse, not better, for Somalia. Menkhaus argues that in some instances, foreign powers have intentionally promoted divisions in Somalia and used the country for proxy wars.

While this view is disputed since the cumulative benefit of the UN and international community's involvement in Somalia over the years suggests otherwise, there is no doubt that the UN has a bad reputation among Somalis. Anecdotal evidence suggests that local Somalis view the UN's political and humanitarian missions with suspicion and blame them for perpetuating the longstanding conflict in the interest of major geopolitical powers that are fighting to gain influence in the strategic region.

While direct involvement of displaced populations in peace processes has been historically difficult due to the exclusive and high-level structure of the process, there are some examples

of successful instances of this. For instance, in 1992, Guatemalan refugees, and to some extent IDPs, in Mexico managed to secure an organised and collective return.<sup>4</sup> They formed 'Permanent Commissions' with the help of UNHCR and entered into an accord (8 October accord) with the government of Guatemala. The agreement ensured mechanisms for the returnees to acquire specific benefits and land upon their return.

### Including IDPs: a way forward?

The document analysis suggests that international and local mediators as well as the Somali government perceive people in IDP camps as the "recipients" of the peace outcome rather than active citizens with agency who could contribute to the peace process.

It is claimed that sustainable peacebuilding cannot be achieved without the involvement of those most affected by conflict (Richmond, 2012). However, IDPs are treated as beneficiaries of peacebuilding instead of being seen as partners who can make meaningful contributions to the peacebuilding process. Research has shown that there is growing understanding of the importance of the local communities in peacebuilding with the view that locally owned initiatives based on bottom-up approaches will be successful (Lundqvist and Öjendal, 2018). Local ownership happens when the solutions to problems faced by society come from the people it affects most.

Peacebuilding in Somalia has historically been dominated by powerful elites (Interpeace, 2009). The elite diaspora, who returned to Somalia after previously fleeing, used their connections to participate in conferences. There are examples elsewhere of the inclusion of refugees (who share similar challenges with IDPs) in peace processes. For example, Burundian refugees who participated in the Arusha Peace Process Consultations ensured that topics such as the provision of land rights, safe return, and reintegration were included. Refugees in exile have also participated in referendums and elections, examples include Eritrea, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (Janmyr, 2016).

Yet, scholars and policymakers continue to debate the concept of "local turn" in the context of peacebuilding. It is important to ask who represents the locals. Is it the elite or the national level actors? On the other hand, who should be considered local? Is it those most affected by conflict, the most marginalised, or the civil society organisations? In the Somali context, the political elite, including diaspora returnees and the business class, claim to represent those most affected. They get access to national reconciliation conferences and speak on behalf of the nation. While they have the right to be part of the country's reconstruction, they do not, however, necessarily reflect the realities of the people affected by displacement. IDPs living in camps have not lost their agency, skills, and, more crucially, the right to contribute to the future of their country. The debate on who is local and who is not is a longstanding one in

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<sup>4</sup> Jamel, A. (2000). [Refugee repatriation and reintegration in Guatemala: Lessons learned from UNHCR's experience](#), UNHCR Regional Bureau for the Americas and the Caribbean, September 2020.

Somalia. It is exacerbated by diaspora returnees who take up senior government positions and use their foreign passports and western education to get high-paying jobs in the UN. They have the social and economic capital to access and lead national conferences whereas locals often feel “robbed” of their opportunities and voices.<sup>5</sup>

Richmond (2012) argues that the concept of local ownership is determined by international actors and is not locally driven. It involves local participation and lacks choice over how ownership is experienced. Due to the power imbalance between locals and internationals, ownership comes with conditionality rather than local legitimacy and autonomy. The accurate description in this context is participation rather than local ownership since local players have little choice over what they can own. He asserts that “modern conceptions of local ownership, propagated by international peacebuilders, conform to the neo-liberal version, contained within the liberal state, in which liberal institutions are owned, while markets, profit and private ownership of material resources exist, protected by law, constitutions and security forces. It is predetermined externally, not by local context, history, society, culture, politics, or hierarchy.” (p.359)

Growing evidence shows that durable solutions for the displaced are not just limited to humanitarian solutions. Peace agreements in various conflict contexts in the world have included provisions that recognise the role of displaced people. However, in Somalia, the role of IDPs in peacebuilding has been significantly overlooked.

## Discussion

This section outlines findings from the analysis and answers the research questions.

The analysis shows that there is a lack of focus on the role of IDPs in peacebuilding in Somalia in the literature. Major actors involved in state and peacebuilding, including the government and UN agencies, focus more on finding “durable solutions” for the displaced without fully incorporating peace activities in their programming. But durable solutions require internal sustainable peace. Looking at documents from government and UN projects designed to achieve durable solutions, the language suggests that IDPs are reduced to ‘beneficiaries’ with a constant need for food, water, and shelter. While these basic services are essential and, of course, a priority for affected communities, evidence shows that their plight has not changed for nearly three decades. Contrary to making a difference, the numbers, complexities, and needs have significantly increased. Displaced people have been living in emergency mode all their lives. While millions of people, mainly from minority clans, are languishing in informal settlements, forgotten in the margins of main cities and towns, elites and powerful clans continue to shape the political and socio-economic situations of the country.

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<sup>5</sup> This Twitter hashtag was started by a group of local youths who complained of the diaspora taking over their opportunities. See: <https://twitter.com/HadhicinDhalint>

## Policy vs practice

It is evident that the Federal Government of Somalia made some progress in developing policies and frameworks that aim to protect IDPs. In the past couple of years, Somalia has adopted several policies, including the Policy on Internally Displaced Persons and Refugee Returnees, and the National Evictions Guidelines. It has also ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of IDPs in Africa (known as the Kampala Convention). This was a significant development since it is a legally binding instrument which requires states to adopt policies and amend legislation in accordance with its provisions. In 2016, the government launched the Durable Solutions Initiative (DSI), a national framework aligned to the National Development Plan (NDP), which aims to design and implement durable solutions through collaboration and coordination with all actors and government partners.<sup>6</sup>

However, while the government has ratified these conventions, the story on the ground in terms of national implementation shows a more difficult picture. The NDP does not specifically address the need for IDPs' involvement in peacebuilding. The document talks about "inclusive politics" as an essential condition for poverty reduction and sustainable development. However, it reinforces the traditional concept of the "powerful majority takes it all" system of governance since it does not explicitly give prominence to the rights of the millions of those displaced. The NDP presents IDPs "as the most vulnerable group" who need assistance. However, the document missed an opportunity to highlight the strength and rights of these people. The NDP also emphasises the need for durable solutions for the displaced, a solution that should come from the national government and UN agencies. Again, it fails to put displaced people at the centre of the durable solutions. Therefore, while emerging policies and national frameworks show promising government commitment to addressing the protracted displacement situation by providing legal protection to affected communities, without practice, they may not solve the problem.

First, like its partner aid organisations, the government focuses on "finding durable solutions" by providing basic services and promoting social and economic well-being. This mindset strips people of their right to participate in the country's state formation. No doubt, it is a priority for people to access adequate food and proper shelter, but these do not bring about lasting solutions.

Second, there is not a single strategy that exclusively addresses the role of IDPs in peacebuilding. The government needs to take the lead in providing a framework that obliges actors working with IDPs to adopt a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding. This would not only empower displaced people but will also allow policymakers to benefit from the wealth of skills and expertise that IDPs would contribute to the peace processes. While relative

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<sup>6</sup> Integrated Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia (2019). [Durable Solutions Initiative](#), May 2019.

stability does not mean sustainable peace, there are promising signs that Somalia is moving slowly in the right direction when it comes to political stability and democratic governance. Therefore, an area-based integrated approach can work well where the government leads collaboration between all actors and puts affected populations at the centre of decision-making.

## Power-sharing and exclusion of minorities

The vast majority of IDPs belong to minority clans and have no power or resources to cope with the protracted displacement situations (Majid and McDowell, 2012). They continue to live in abject poverty. Somalia's clan-based system of governance makes it challenging for IDPs to actively take part in the affairs of the country, let alone in the search for their own durable solutions. Historically, clans played a significant role in the socio-economic and political set up of the country. Since the civil war broke out in 1991, clans provided protection and, to this day, they continue to provide some form of protection in areas where the central government has little control. The current political system is based on a complex power-sharing formula where the four major clans take the seats in the parliament equally, and the remaining seats are divided among the five minority clans (Ahmed, 2019). This system not only reinforces but also institutionalises the longstanding marginalisation and discrimination of the minority clans who have little power and resources to negotiate with.

## Gatekeepers

The number of IDPs is increasing as more and more people move to urban areas as a result of a complex combination of violence and recurring drought. There are no officially designated IDP camps, and people fleeing end up in informal settlements. The vacuum left by the government is filled by what people in the humanitarian sector call 'gatekeepers'. These are local managers who provide IDPs with a plot of land, sometimes water, and, more importantly, protection from other dominant clans from the city. They act as brokers between local authorities, NGOs, and IDPs. These people are not just well-wishers who volunteer to respond to the crisis but are members of powerful clans who saw business opportunities in the aid sector. They often take a share of the aid given to the displaced people, control their movement, and regulate and restrict aid agencies' ability to provide humanitarian assistance (Bryld et al., 2015). But NGOs also rely on these middlemen to continue reaching their target, which maintains the status quo. Host communities also benefit from the aid flow by posing as IDPs with the help of gatekeepers who keep a share of what they receive.<sup>7</sup> Gatekeepers are often accused of extorting cash and non-food items from the displaced in exchange for their 'protection' and piece of land. The gatekeepers see themselves as 'humanitarians' and prefer to be called 'informal settlement managers'. It is important to note that whatever their motivation, these people are linked to either local authorities or clan militias who provide security and protection. The sector is divided in its

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<sup>7</sup> Mumin, A.A. (2019). [Somalia's displacement camp 'gatekeepers' – 'parasites' or aid partners?](#), The New Humanitarian, July 2019.

approach to gatekeepers. Some shun them and see them as criminals, while others argue that they are a force to be reckoned with. However, we should be careful in depicting all gatekeepers as greedy people who exploit displaced people. Some of them are genuine humanitarians who fill crucial institutional gaps. They do not have the power to stop human rights abuses that take place within the camps, including thugs and local militias who sneak in the night and rape vulnerable women and rob their food items.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the role of the gatekeepers within the broader ecosystem of the internal displacement needs nuanced analysis lest we criminalise and discourage people with good intentions who provide services and protections to affected communities. In an interview with *The New Humanitarian*, the former head of OCHA Somalia, Justin Brady, argued that gatekeepers are inevitable in Somalia since there is no replacement for them. He said the challenge is to disrupt the 'bad ones' and integrate the 'good ones' into the aid system (Mumin, 2019).

## The UN and INGOs

Traditionally, the UN and other international organisations have been leading humanitarian and development responses in Somalia since the country is still rebuilding collapsed institutions, often filling the gap left by the central government. The humanitarian sector is showing significant interest in IDPs and durable solutions, but most do not see peacebuilding as a stand-alone pillar, instead only mentioning it as a complement or side note. However, there have not been effective coordination mechanisms among actors working with internally displaced communities. This lack of coordination, coupled with the overall failure of sustained support in humanitarian response, perpetuated the protracted situation. To respond to the growing displacement in East Africa, 14 NGOs came together to form the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS) to improve joint learning on policy development and coordination in the collective search for lasting solutions. In 2017, a cluster of organisations co-led by the UNHCR and the UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM) established a Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster to improve coordination through integrated multi-sectoral response. This mechanism was later transitioned into a state-level coordination mechanism covering the whole country. One of the key objectives of saving lives is to support displaced people to achieve durable solutions. The CCCM supports displaced communities but does not offer IDPs the opportunity to be part of the solution. While this brings much-needed attention and support to displaced communities, it fails to incorporate peacebuilding into the overall durable solutions strategy.<sup>9</sup>

## Political participation

One way to connect the nexus between humanitarian, development, and peace-building objectives is to facilitate political participation for IDPs. They have the right to take part in

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<sup>8</sup> IRIN (2011). [Somalia: Rape on the rise amid "climate of fear" in Mogadishu IDP camps](#), 22 December 2011.

<sup>9</sup> See: Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat, [Somalia Country Unit](#).

their country's politics by both voting and standing for elections, just like any other citizen. Somalia is working towards universal suffrage where every citizen would be able to vote for their leader. And, while there is a lot of effort and debate about the voting system, the government does not give much attention to the voting rights of the three million IDPs across the country. There is no clarity on whether they would be able to vote in the constituencies they fled to, or whether they would be obliged to cast their votes in their regions of origin.

The historic "one person, one vote" local elections that took place in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland in October 2021 have shown how IDPs can play an active role in the country's journey to democratisation (Interpeace, 2021). The elections allowed displaced people from other regions of the country to vote and stand for public office. Among the councillors elected in Gardo town was Muhsin Abdullahi who lived there as an IDP for five years. His historic win signalled a new dawn for the minority who are discriminated against in that region. Speaking to the BBC Somali service after his election, Muhsin said his immediate priorities would be housing the internally displaced people in the town. It is evident that when individuals within affected communities are given the opportunity, they can be a useful resource in addressing challenges confronted by the larger community. They understand the situation better than others and they are more likely to receive support and trust from the local community.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> BBC News (2021). [Muxsin iyo doorashadii Qardho: "Xaaskeygaa ku riyootay anigoo ku guuleystay doorashada"](#), October 2021.



## Conclusion

While significant resources and focus has been channelled to the search for durable solutions for Somalia's protracted displacement situation, major actors, including the government and the UN, continually fail to remove the structural barriers to localisation, and fully involve the millions of affected communities in state-building and peace processes. IDPs have proven that they have the skills and agency to contribute to solutions to their predicament, but historic marginalisation and the current system of governance has made it near-impossible for them to participate in the search for durable solutions. It is clear that the challenges and needs of IDPs have multiplied in recent years, and the previous ways of doing things have not worked. Although there is limited evidence in results, there is a paradigm shift in Somalia's aid industry and the humanitarian sector at large, where donors and international organisations are moving from humanitarian to more development-led approaches, or at least trying to bridge the gap.

Connecting peacebuilding as the third leg of the nexus remains a challenge that is undermining overall progress. By analysing government and UN policies, this study has found that there is no effective coordination mechanism across all actors. This is the case both within the government (central and federal member states), between INGOs and the government, and among the UN and INGOs. This lack of collaboration, which has negatively impacted the efficiency of delivering assistance and knowledge-sharing, has been exacerbated by conflicting priorities by donor governments. It is inevitable that more Somalis will be driven from their homes because of climate change and conflict and, as we have already seen, recurring droughts and famine will force people to abandon their livelihoods and change their lifestyles. The federal government should take leadership in making sure that communities affected by displacement are at the centre of any intervention, including those involving peace, development, and humanitarian organisations.

Finally, some of the key areas for continued exploration that emerge from this paper include the need for in-depth, field-based qualitative research to find out what IDPs in Somalia think about their inclusion in peacebuilding; the barriers to meaningful participation; and recommendations on how to involve IDPs in reconciliation, peace, and development processes.

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