

The Gatekeeping Economy: Commercializing Displacement and Profiting from Vulnerability in Mogadishu, Somalia



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Abstract

Using Mogadishu as a case study, this study exposes the systematic commercialization of internal displacement in Somalia, where the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been transformed into a profitable enterprise. The research identifies gatekeepers as central actors who exploit displaced populations, creating a vicious cycle of displacement that perpetuates vulnerability and deepens the country's broader crisis.

Drawing on qualitative fieldwork, the findings reveal that this exploitative system generates severe human rights violations, including homelessness, psychological trauma, and social disintegration. The study concludes that existing legal frameworks have consistently failed to protect IDPs and that weak institutions have allowed this crisis to persist, rendering emergency aid alone inadequate.

The study argues that sustainable solutions require fundamental reforms that prioritise the protection of the rights and dignity of Somalia's most vulnerable citizens and break the cycle of commercialised displacement.

Keywords: Gatekeeping economy, commercializing displacement, urban displacement, forced eviction, Somalia.

1. Introduction

The collapse of the Somali central government in 1991 precipitated decades of military and political violence, triggering mass displacement. However, displacement in Somalia is not solely a consequence of civil war and violence; it is also deeply intertwined with profound failures in urban planning and land management. As local militias competed for territorial control in the ensuing statelessness, the humanitarian crisis intensified. By 2011, approximately a quarter of Somalis were refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), creating one of the world's most complex displacement situations. In Mogadishu's informal settlements, many IDPs reside on government or privately owned land without secure tenure or definitive claims. Compounding their vulnerability, rising land prices and urban reconstruction have made these informal settlements frequent targets for eviction and redevelopment. Consequently, displaced populations find return and integration nearly impossible because of entrenched and competing land claims (Bradbury & Hashi, 2017).

Displacement in Somalia has occurred in recurrent waves. The initial civil war in the 1990s caused the first mass displacement. A period of relative stability followed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but this proved short-lived. A resurgence of fighting in 2006, combined with severe drought, forced hundreds of thousands to flee once more. This pattern of cyclical displacement underscores the chronic instability faced by IDPs (Lindley & Haslie, 2011).

The proliferation of informal settlements has significantly complicated land use in Mogadishu. The absence of a clear, enforceable legal system has fuelled numerous land disputes, leaving IDPs, who typically lack any form of secure housing, in a state of perpetual insecurity. Their vulnerable position makes them easy targets for forced eviction, a practice exacerbated by rising urban land prices and growing property demand.

This dynamic frequently sparks conflict between long-term residents and newly arrived displaced communities (IDMC, 2018).

The vulnerability of IDPs is systematically exploited by so-called gatekeepers, individuals who present themselves as intermediaries. These actors prey on displaced communities by extracting fees for access to land, security, and basic services. Power imbalances and legal loopholes trap IDPs in a debilitating cycle of dependency and fear, leaving them exposed to forced eviction and exploitation without legal protection or effective recourse. Forced evictions result in homelessness, loss of property, and severely diminished access to healthcare and education. They are driven by a chaotic and unregulated property market characterised by rent hikes, illegal occupation, and unauthorised construction, with the harshest impacts borne by women and children (NRC, 2022).

This paper examines the causes and consequences of forced evictions in Somalia, with a specific focus on Mogadishu, through a human rights lens. It argues that forced evictions, particularly in Mogadishu, are not isolated humanitarian incidents but structural problems rooted in economic incentives. The research addresses a critical knowledge gap in Somalia's protracted displacement crisis by focusing on monetisation of the crisis. It demonstrates that recurrent evictions are driven by informal practices such as gatekeeping and speculative increases in land value, which transform displacement into a commercial enterprise. The study further highlights the inadequacy of existing legal and institutional frameworks in responding to this economy of displacement.

While the crisis of commercialized displacement is a national challenge with different forms and magnitudes, this paper focuses on Mogadishu as a critical case study. As the nation's capital and largest recipient of IDPs, the dynamics in Mogadishu offer a stark and revealing lens through which to analyse the broader political economy of displacement in Somalia.

The economic factors that perpetuate this crisis include escalating land value, poor governance, and institutional apathy. Evictions result in a profound loss of dignity, psychological trauma, the destruction of livelihoods, social fragmentation, and heightened vulnerability for women and children. Most critically, a governance deficit persists because legal and institutional safeguards for IDPs are not upheld. The findings of this study are therefore essential for informing policies that protect the rights and dignity of IDPs and enable them to break this cycle of vulnerability. As Somalia undergoes a process of recovery and reconstruction, its response to the displacement crisis will serve as a fundamental test of its commitment to justice, inclusivity, and stability. This underscores the importance of the present research in shaping a more equitable future.

Research Gaps

Although the issue of internal displacement and forced eviction in Somalia has gained scholarly and policy interest, there are still important research gaps, especially on the commercialization of displacement, the institutional exploitation of IDPs, and the failure of legal and institutional responses. Although the literature records the magnitude and causes of evictions, there has been little detailed discussion of how eviction has been turned into a commercial activity, particularly through informal mechanisms such as gatekeeping, and how this has degraded humanitarian interventions and long-term solutions.

There is a research gap in the study of the political economy of displacement, especially regarding how gatekeepers arrange the settlement of IDPs and harvest aid or rents on the displaced people. Despite recent reports by Refugees International (2023) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, 2021) drawing attention to the development of gatekeeping as a form of exploitation, little empirical research exists on how these systems work, how they are connected to

local power structures, and the effects they have on aid delivery and the lives of IDPs. Although Somalia has developed legal frameworks, including the National Eviction Guidelines (2019) and the Policy Framework on Displacement (2014), there is no research on how these are implemented and effective on the ground. The disconnect is in the realization of why enforceable rights do not translate into protection, particularly since 85 percent of the IDPs occupy the private land without tenure (UNHCR). The presence of laws has been recorded, but not the institutional, political, and societal-related obstacles that impede their implementation (Danwadaag, 2023; NRC, 2021). In addition, the lack of state-based eviction taskforces and a relatively low level of government intervention in eviction prevention can be considered a governance vacuum that is under-researched (Eviction Ways of Working in Somalia, 2022). Despite the National Solutions Pathway Action Plan (2024-2029) and the National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020-2024) providing frameworks of durable solutions, longitudinal research on what is a sustainable return, local integration, or resettlement of IDPs in urban environments does not exist. It is still concerned with emergency response rather than transitional justice, land restitution, or socio-economic integration.

Research Objectives

This study aims to provide a critical analysis of the commercialized system of forced evictions in Mogadishu through four specific research objectives. Ultimately, the paper argues that internal displacement has been transformed into a commercialized system, sustained by a symbiotic relationship between predatory gatekeepers and weak institutions. This system systematically converts human vulnerability into economic profit, rendering existing legal frameworks ineffective. The specific research objectives are:

- **To analyse the political economy of forced evictions** by examining the roles of gatekeepers, the financialization of aid and land, and the underlying mechanisms that transform displacement into a profitable business.
- **To assess the (in)efficacy of national and international legal frameworks** in protecting IDP rights, identifying the specific disjuncture between law, policy, and practices that enable continued exploitation.
- **To document the multifaceted impacts of commercially-driven evictions**, focusing on the socio-economic, psychosocial, and gendered consequences for displaced populations.
- **To identify and evaluate the coping and resistance strategies employed by IDPs**, assessing their potential as a foundation for more sustainable and community-centred interventions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by a dual theoretical framework, combining the Theory of Natural Rights with a political economy analysis. The Theory of Natural Rights posits that individuals possess inherent rights to life, liberty, and property by virtue of their humanity, irrespective of state recognition. Drawing on the philosophy of John Locke, this view holds that governments are instituted precisely to protect these rights. From this perspective, the plight of Somalia's Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) constitutes a grave and violation of their natural rights. The theory highlights the imperative to uphold core values such as the right to dignity, the entitlement to live free from exploitation and discrimination, and the right to security, which requires protection against forced evictions and violence, as enshrined in instruments like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

To comprehend how these violations are perpetuated, the study integrates a political economy lens. This complementary framework examines how political and economic power is organized to create and sustain a system that actively profits from the abrogation of natural rights. In the context of Mogadishu, the prolonged absence of effective state institutions has enabled the rise of an informal, extractive economy. This economy is orchestrated by a network of actors who systematically convert the plight of IDPs into a profitable enterprise.

Therefore, this paper employs a dual theoretical approach. The Theory of Natural Rights provides the moral imperative for action and the standard against which the situation is judged a violation. The political economy analysis reveals the mechanisms that make these violations a profitable, self-sustaining enterprise. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework to argue that internal displacement in Mogadishu has been transformed into a commercialized system.

This system is sustained by a symbiotic relationship between predatory gatekeepers and a strategically weak state, with a humanitarian sector constrained to operate within its logic. It systematically converts human vulnerability and the natural rights designed to protect it into economic profit. The subsequent analysis will present empirical evidence to substantiate this argument, structured around the key pillars of this commercialized system.

Given the vulnerability of the participants and the sensitivity of the research topic, this study adhered to rigorous ethical standards. To safeguard confidentiality, all data were anonymized, and no personally identifiable information was collected or included in this report.

Acknowledging a methodological limitation, this study primarily draws on the experiences of IDPs and humanitarian practitioners. Future

research would benefit from incorporating the perspectives of gatekeepers, landowners, and state officials to provide a more comprehensive view of the power dynamics within this system. Furthermore, the geographical focus on Mogadishu means the findings may not be fully representative of the experiences of IDPs across all regions of Somalia. As such, this study serves as a critical sample and a foundational model of the commercialization thesis, which should be tested through future comparative research in other urban centres.

2. Literature Review: The Political Economy of Eviction in Somalia

The crisis of displacement and eviction in Somalia is fundamentally rooted in the collapse of its land governance systems following decades of war. Decades of conflict have left deep marks on the country and its towns. The logical outcome of this is that the country now has one of the largest rates of internal displacement in the globe. Millions of Somalis have been forced to leave their homes, in some cases, more than once, to find a place of safety or they can get some kind of livelihood. The majority of them are in densely populated urban areas, such as Mogadishu. The land tenure system, which was once highly diversified in the country, has also been ruined due to the years of war. The land management before the war in Somalia was carried out in both a formal and a traditional land management system. The countryside tends to possess the community-based common property, but cities are more organised in regard to properties that are mostly privately owned. Since then, it has become increasingly difficult to secure land rights, particularly for the poor. (Danwadaag 2023).

This systemic collapse has created a massive and chronically vulnerable displaced population. Due to such conditions, IDPs abandon their homes and usually move to large cities and erect temporary houses on personal land, which exposes them to eviction. Over 1.1 million individuals have

been evicted since 2017, usually without any prior notice, and they have to seek alternative places to stay independently (International Organization for Migration). According to the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), this uncertainty puts many internally displaced people (IDPs) in a very weak position. About 85 percent of the IDPs live on land that is owned by another person and lacks legal protection, thus becoming easy targets of forcible evictions and exploitation.

Recorded evictions in Somalia have remained persistently high, with around 1.3 million cases documented between 2017 and 2024. The crisis peaked in 2018 with 347,444 evictions before gradually declining. Although there was a notable drop to 26,370 in 2022, the numbers have since surged again, reaching 250,201 in 2024, underscoring a chronic and worsening problem (Source: NRC Eviction Portal). These statistics reveal that eviction rates fluctuate over time, indicating that housing security remains a pressing and unresolved issue.

Already struggling cities are expanding rapidly, further complicating the lives of families that have to leave their houses daily. Evicted persons are forced to move out of informal settlements frequently due to lack of formal land tenure agreements. Evictions are a common situation that leave families vulnerable and unsafe in their homes because of unpredictability situation. Evictions continue to be a major issue although the international community is collaborating with local governments to establish formal land tenure and give displaced families legal documents that enable them to remain in their settlements longer. This will assist them in not fearing the possibility of being evicted and enable them to concentrate on restoring their lives (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2023).

About 81 percent of the informal settlements occupy private land which implies that they can be easily evicted. They are even more vulnerable

without legal protection and fail to receive justice. It is hard to identify good solutions to the housing, land, and property (HLP) rights in a weak legal system and broken governance. This increases the vulnerability of displacement and insecurity of IDPs. On average, evictions displace tens of thousands each month; in Mogadishu alone, over 150,000 people were evicted in 2017, including a single mass eviction of 35,000 individuals in December of that year (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018).

In Mogadishu, thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) are threatened with displacement due to land conflict. The eviction of people not only relocates families, but also destroys shelters, jobs, and schools, which greatly impacts the lives of affected people.

The vulnerability of IDP settlements can be systematically assessed. NRC has five eviction risk levels: extreme, high, medium, low, and below. Each of these risk levels is determined by a series of pre-defined criteria based on conditions identified during evaluation. The chances of evictions in cities are highly varied according to the stability of land agreements and the degree of durable solutions programs in the IDP settlements (NRC 2023).

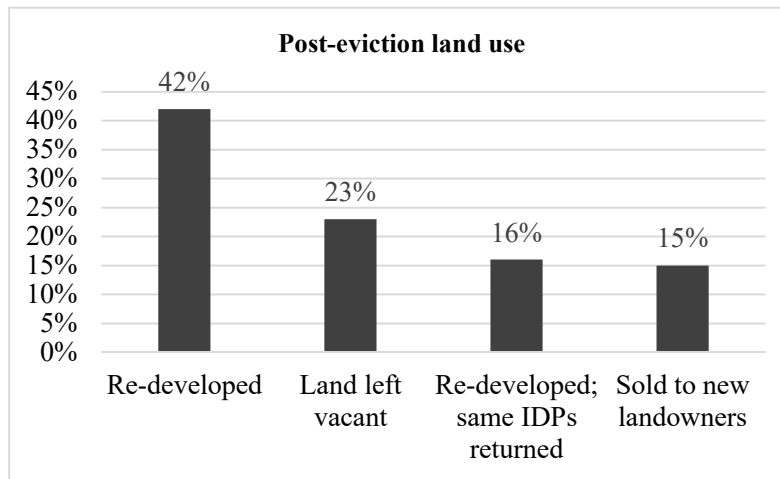
- **Extreme (Active Eviction Crisis):** Notices have been issued, agreements have expired with no renewal, there are active land disputes, and widespread rental defaults. Eviction is imminent.
- **High (High Risk):** Significant risks persist due to the absence of formal agreements or because existing agreements expire in less than a year, with landowners often showing no interest in renewal. Additional challenges, such as land disputes, further exacerbate the situation.
- **Medium (Moderate Risk):** This level represents an intermediate risk, applicable in situations where occupancy agreements are set to expire within a year. While renewal is a possibility, it is not guaranteed. This

category also includes sites on government-owned land with authorized occupancy but no long-term development guarantees.

- **Low (Stable):** This risk level applies where secure, long-term agreements (2-5 years) are in place, land ownership is unambiguous and undisputed, and the community has sufficient livelihood means to cover rent. If the land is government-owned, there are no immediate plans for its use.
- **Below (Highly Secure):** This category denotes a highly secure environment free from eviction threats. It is defined by thorough pre-occupation due diligence, long-term tenure arrangements exceeding ten years, clear and uncontested land ownership, and the presence of an economically self-reliant community that is not dependent on humanitarian assistance.

The primary drivers of these evictions are economic, linked to urban development and rising land values. They are fueled by land ownership disputes, land price increases, and informal renting agreements. Figure 1: Post-eviction Land Use illustrates this clearly: 42% of evicted land is redeveloped with new houses, buildings, roads or shops, while another 16% is redeveloped with some former residents resettling. A survey of 350 IDP sites found that half had been developed in some way after eviction. These results reveal a close relationship between the increase in land values, urbanization, and the increase in forced evictions as property owners reclaim land to develop it (NRC, 2021). In Somalia, forced evictions are mainly caused by development projects, either state-driven or privately driven. Eighty-nine percent of the evictions are carried out by private landlords, and 11% are done by the state. Meanwhile, 23 percent of these sites remain empty, over half of them in the Banadir region, and 15% of the land has been sold to new owners.

Figure 1: Post-eviction Land Use



Source: Post-eviction development in urban areas in Somalia, NRC

The human impact of this cycle of displacement is severe. The situation is aggravated by rapid urban expansion and increasing land pressure. The displaced individuals are usually not under the protection of the law and may be forcibly evicted from their homes. As evidenced in Mogadishu, the land tenure system in Somalia is poorly developed, and thus evictions are more prevalent, complicating the efforts of humanitarian agencies to assist and the planning of the IDPs. While the Federal Government of Somalia (2014) states that eviction must be done only in extremely exceptional situations under a stringent legal process, with advance engagement and appropriate alternative housing offered, in practice, evictions are usually unannounced and often accompanied by violence, which destroys homes.

The effects are particularly acute for vulnerable groups. Studies have shown that over 500 IDPs are displaced daily, mostly because of poor land tenure and informal settlements that expose them to exploitation. The effects of these evictions are severe on the health and social well-being of people as they are exposed to violence, property loss, and mental health problems like stress and anxiety. This is especially true of women, who

are more likely to be sexually assaulted during and after the eviction process (Jelle, et al, 2021). The majority of IDPs who have been re-displaced are residents of the Kahda and Daynile districts in Mogadishu. (IDMC, 2019, Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016).

In conclusion, forced evictions themselves have become a primary driver of displacement, creating a vicious cycle that prevents long-term recovery. Eviction complicates the process of IDPs returning to their feet and finding long-term solutions. In the cities of Mogadishu and Baidoa, evictions are extremely frequent, and people move once again. One of the primary causes of people being forced to leave their homes is forced evictions, particularly in cities such like Mogadishu (Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat 2018). Repeated evictions are especially dangerous to IDPs as they do not have legal protection and secure land titles (UNOCHA, 2022), forcing them to move regularly and further deteriorating their living conditions (Refugees International, 2022).

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the lived experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mogadishu, focusing on the socioeconomic dynamics of displacement and eviction, particularly the commercialization of IDPs.

Data were collected in Mogadishu between March and May 2024 through three methods: semi-structured key informant interviews, direct observations, and a review of relevant literature. A total of 50 interviews were conducted with 40 IDPs and 10 humanitarian practitioners. The open-ended format allowed participants to share in-depth perspectives on displacement and eviction.

Observations were conducted in the Kahda and Daynile districts, both of which host active IDP settlements and have recent histories of eviction. This approach provided additional insights into living conditions and the social interactions of IDPs within the host communities.

The literature review included academic studies, reports by non-governmental and international organisations, and Somali government policy documents on land tenure and IDP rights, situating the findings within broader legal and policy contexts.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance and diversity in experiences. The IDP sample was stratified by age, gender, and socioeconomic status to capture a wide range of perspectives.

Interview data were analysed thematically. Transcripts were coded iteratively to identify key patterns and recurring ideas, which were then synthesised into overarching themes. These themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions to illuminate the dynamics of displacement commercialization and its impact on IDPs.

4. Results and Discussion:

This chapter presents and analyzes the key findings from interviews and observations, structured around the pillars of the commercialized displacement system. It integrates empirical data with interpretation to demonstrate how human vulnerability is systematically monetized.

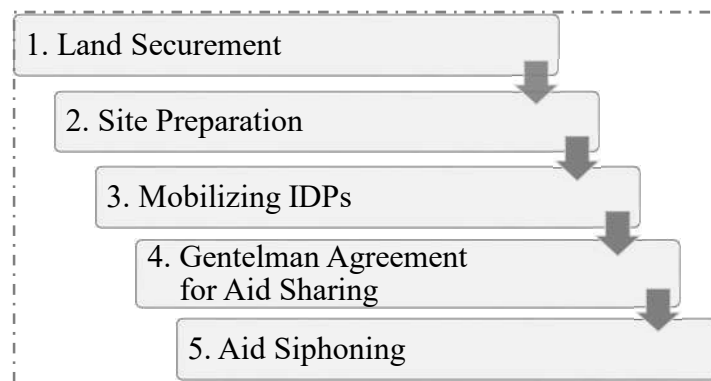
4.1 Gatekeeping and Commercialization

In the complex landscape of displacement, gatekeeping has emerged as a significant and troubling issue. Interviews confirmed the gatekeeping model (Figure 2), in which an individual secures land for settling IDPs.

Typically, the gatekeeper rents a piece of land, often for a substantial one-time payment mostly ranging from \$3,000 to \$5,000. This arrangement begins when the gatekeeper clears bushes from unoccupied land owned by an individual and prepares it for habitation.

Once the land is prepared, the gatekeeper mobilizes IDPs who have been evicted or are fleeing conflicts and disasters. A “gentleman’s agreement” is then established, where IDPs must pay a share of any aid they receive, whether in cash or in-kind, to the gatekeeper. This share varies based on the perceived value of the land occupied by the IDPs and the gatekeeper's level of rigidity in enforcing the agreement.

Figure 2: The Gatekeeping Cycle Model



Source: Author, based on Key Informant Interviews (2024)

This arrangement is not merely a rental agreement but constitutes the establishment of a de facto local ruler. The 'gentleman's agreement' to share aid transforms humanitarian assistance into a revenue stream for the gatekeeper, siphoning aid, perverting the purpose of international aid and creating a perverse economy around displacement.

Under this model, the gatekeeper functions not merely as a landlord but as the local authority of the settlement, extracting rent from both land and humanitarian aid. This gatekeeping mechanism represents a paradigmatic

feature of the political economy of displacement, systematically converting the basic human need for shelter and security into a tradable commodity. In doing so, the gatekeeper operates as a market actor, deriving profit from the erosion of fundamental rights to life and dignity. The persistence of this exploitative system underscores a some kind of disconnect between the legal framework, which formally protects IDPs, and the reality on the ground.

Interviews with key informants reveal that humanitarian agencies are aware of this exploitative situation but feel powerless to dismantle the gatekeeping practice. The reasons for this inaction are due to political instability and the complex social dynamics at play. IDPs, fearing repercussions or further evictions, often feel compelled to comply with these agreements, trapping them in a cycle of dependency and exploitation.

This dynamic, as observed in Mogadishu, underscores a persistent structural challenge within the humanitarian ecosystem. In order to maintain access to vulnerable populations, humanitarian agencies are frequently required to engage with existing local structures, which in this context are controlled by gatekeepers. Consequently, humanitarian interventions risk becoming embedded within these systems, where aid resources may be redirected in ways that inadvertently perpetuate prevailing power relations and profit-driven dynamics.

4.2 Frequency and Drivers of Evictions

The most shocking finding of the key interviews was that all the participants indicated that they had been evicted. Among the interviewed internally displaced persons (IDPs), 15 were residing on public land and 25 were residing on private land. The most recent eviction was of 29 IDPs (including 13 and 16 people) who had been residing on their present land

less than two years prior to the eviction. Also, 7 of the IDPs had been in their places 3 to 5 years before eviction, and only 4 had been living on the land over 5 years. The study shows that the IDPs usually evicted after twenty-four months of settlement and hardly anyone stays in their house after more than five years. This trend brings out crucial insecurity and social marginalisation among the IDPs.

The data from Mogadishu reveals a pattern of chronic instability: the majority of respondents experience eviction within two years of settlement, not as isolated incidents, but as part of a cyclical process of displacement. This precarity is neither random nor incidental; it is systemic. The repeated uprooting systematically erodes access to essential services and security, prevents the formation of stable community ties, and blocks long-term investment and personal recovery, keeping the IDP population in a permanent state of exploitable vulnerability. Crucially, this cycle is intrinsically linked to rising urban land values, which render IDP settlements prime targets for redevelopment and profit. Landowners, incentivized by short-term financial gain, consistently favor transient occupation over stable, long-term leases, reinforcing a dynamic in which displacement becomes both a symptom and a driver of urban speculation.

These group narratives emphasise that repeated evictions are a frequent problem among IDPs in Mogadishu, which underscores the prevalence of the eviction crisis on this marginalised community.

An interesting result is the fact that many evictions are frequent among IDPs in Mogadishu since almost all displaced people were evicted more than once. This displacement that is of a cyclic nature tends to lead to reduced accessibility to services and security making it associated with the increasing land value in the city making the IDP settlements appealing in redevelopment.

4.3 Legal Frameworks vs. On-the-Ground Reality

Despite the presence of well-established legal safeguards at both international and national levels, the lived reality in Somalia reveals a stark gap between these frameworks and their implementation, leaving many vulnerable populations unprotected in practice. The following analysis examines the international legal framework and national policies, contrasting them with the on-the-ground reality.

a) International Instruments

The prevention of evictions is a central concern of global human rights law and is addressed by various international instruments. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms the right to adequate housing, while the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) protects the right to life and personal security. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognises housing as part of an adequate standard of living. Together with related resolutions of the Human Rights Council, these instruments establish legal safeguards for individuals against forced displacement.

Other notable instruments include the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which prohibit the arbitrary displacement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Principle 6); the African Union's Kampala Convention (2009), which obliges states to establish fair and simplified mechanisms for resolving property disputes related to IDPs (Art. 11[4]); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which mandates state support for children's right to housing (Art. 27[3]).

UN Human Rights Commission resolutions recognize forced evictions as serious human rights violations. The 2007 Basic Principles and

Guidelines on Development-Based Evictions and Displacement urge states to prevent coerced displacement and to ensure remedies for victims. According to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, forced evictions violate multiple human rights by displacing people without due legal safeguards, undermining access to housing, essential services, and community life.

b) National Legal and Policy Frameworks

Somalia's Provisional Constitution upholds citizens' rights (Art. 12[2]) and mandates lawful, non-discriminatory administrative decisions (Art. 33) and accessible judicial remedies for human-rights violations (Art. 39).

The National Eviction Guidelines (2019) serve as the primary domestic framework regulating evictions. mandate several key protections. These include adherence to international law, requiring the government to comply with instruments like the UN Guiding Principles. They also enforce notification and due process, compelling landowners to provide adequate notice and granting IDPs a right to appeal. They explicitly restrict forced evictions to exceptional circumstances, such as the reclamation of state-owned land or the enforcement of legitimate property rights, while emphasising (Federal Government of Somalia, 2019).

- Prevention of homelessness and protection of vulnerable groups (e.g., women and children).
- Transparency and due process, including advance notice and the right to appeal.
- Vulnerability assessments to tailor responses to at-risk populations.
- Provision of humanitarian assistance, including shelter, food, and medical care.
- Exploration of alternatives to eviction and community involvement in decision-making.

- Mechanisms for monitoring, accountability, and reporting violations.

Complementary frameworks include:

- **Policy Framework on Displacement (2014)**, which requires lawful, humane eviction with adequate notice and dialogue with affected communities.
- **Interim Protocol on Land Distribution for Housing (2019)**, which promotes fair and transparent land allocation to prevent arbitrary displacement.

In principle, these measures align Somalia’s national standards with international norms.

c) Legal Framework vs. On-the-Ground Reality

Despite the robust legal framework on paper, implementation remains weak. Interview data shows that the provisions for “Notification and Due Process” and “Provision of Alternatives” are almost universally disregarded. This gap stems less from policy design than from limited political will and state capacity, leaving space for a commercialized eviction system driven by power and profit to flourish with minimal legal constraint.

Recent initiatives such as the National Solutions Pathway Action Plan (2024–2029) and the National Durable Solutions Strategy (2020–2024) signal a policy commitment to durable, rights-based solutions. These frameworks stress tenure security, access to basic services, livelihood support, and community participation in decision-making, key factors in rebuilding resilience. However, without stronger enforcement, coordination, and accountability, these strategies risk remaining aspirational.

4.4 The Human Cost of Commercialization

Beyond the statistics of displacement lie profound human consequences, as the relentless cycle of eviction inflicts severe socio-economic and psychosocial harm, dismantling lives and erasing futures. The commercialization of displacement reduces the fundamental rights to shelter and security into commodities, transforming them into sources of lasting trauma, economic devastation, and social fragmentation.

The effects of eviction on the affected populations in Mogadishu are very immense, as brought out by the key informant interviews. IDPs in its turn, sudden displacement could be characterised not only as deprivation of shelter, but as a crushing breakage of their lives. Families reside in anxiety and fear of being evicted, which makes them anxious and leave without sleep. One of the mothers narrated how she rushed packed off the children and she did not know what was going to happen to them. Informants stressed the high emotional cost of constant evictions, and people have already described their feelings of despair due to disintegration of social networks. One of the elders told, the fact that we are evicted every time, seems like we lose a part of ourselves, and it is a sign of a broken community relationship and trust.

These forced evictions are very high in terms of human cost. The IDPs are also the tenants that exist without a binding tenure making them more vulnerable to eviction at any time. The psychological effects are enormous and there are accounts that there is an increase in anxiety and stress particularly in women and children. In addition, evictions interfere with livelihoods, access to necessary services and cause more poverty and educational disturbances.

Also, it harms the economic stability since the loss of homes frequently implies the loss of livelihood. One young male stated that he had to give

up his small business every time they evicted him, which made his family poorer. The key informants indicated that there were more stress-related diseases especially in the vulnerable women and children. Displacement destabilises settled communities increasing vulnerability and restricting access to needs such as food, water, and healthcare. These conditions are aggravated by the current environmental crisis that continues to increase insecurity and suffering without providing economic backing to the families to prosper in their resettlements. In order to deal with these concerns, it is necessary to provide some immediate solutions to strengthen land governance and formalise the settlement of IDP and give them legal status and protection.

The impacts of eviction are multifaceted and severe. Interviews revealed profound emotional distress, with IDPs reporting overwhelming anxiety, helplessness, and vulnerability. This is compounded by the immediate loss of shelter, leading to inadequate housing and homelessness. Furthermore, evictions cause crippling economic hardship through unemployment and loss of livelihoods, while simultaneously causing a social disruption that severs vital community networks and support systems (Source: KIIs, Author 2024).

4.5 Drivers of Evictions

Multiple interconnected drivers, ranging from direct economic pressures to profound systemic failures, fuel the forced eviction of IDPs in Mogadishu. Interviews have also shown that poor land governance, insecure tenure as well as property disputes are causes of forced evictions in Mogadishu. The IDPs lack formal tenure of the land they occupy, therefore, are easily vulnerable to eviction as the land prices rise. Ownership records are also not clearly registered; consequently, this has added to the conflicts and the absence of safeguards before the law which has rendered the IDPs helpless. Increasing capacities of the cities, and

competition of the resources brings conflict between the IDPs and the host communities leading to discrimination. This is further compounded by the presence of weak institutions, political instability and lack of good control by the government that disrupt social cohesion and keep the populations of the displaced in vulnerable situations.

a) Urban Expansion and Demands for Land

Urban growth and the real estate business in Mogadishu significantly impact land dynamics, particularly for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The city has seen substantial reconstruction and development since 2012. However, these projects threaten IDPs, among other vulnerable groups. As new buildings encroach on their settlements, they are often forcibly relocated to the city's outskirts.

This displacement is driven by a growing population and the resulting demand for urban land, which encourages landowners to evict vulnerable IDP communities to capitalize on rising property values. As land becomes a more valuable commodity, landlords exploit the IDPs' precarious position by hiking rents or redeveloping properties. This economic pressure forces families out, leaving them with no good options. According to key informants, a cruel irony exists: the establishment of IDP settlements often leads to land appreciation, the introduction of small businesses, schools, and aid agencies. Yet, this very development becomes the reason for their eventual displacement, pushing them into worse conditions.

b) Weak Land Governance and Insecure Tenure

Forcible eviction is also threatening to the IDPs as they encroach in the land without making any official agreement and their landowners can take back their land at any given time. This is a very risky stature which is

compounded with the fact that land prices are rising, and settlements are of informal nature hence prone to exploitation and abuse. Lack of tenancy agreements also helps the landlords evict their tenants at a short notice, particularly with reference to urban development where the marketability is a priority. Another issue raised by the key informants is that Mogadishu also faces the fact that the situation of IDPs is also problematic due to the lack of clarity of land ownership records and conflict.

Even though, the humanitarian aid is supposed to provide the required assistance, this aid can lead to dependence, which is not the intended purpose, and the IDPs are marginalised because of the lack of coordination in the organisations. The tenure system in Somalia is complex and based on outdated laws, which strip the right to legal status from many of the IDPs, and it is difficult to seek justice after they are evicted. These laws lack structures to combat injustices.

c) Resource Competition

The influx of displaced populations into Mogadishu has intensified competition for scarce urban resources, generating social tensions that further endanger IDPs, who enter this competition from a position of structural disadvantage. Host communities increasingly view IDP settlements as burdens that strain limited services and threaten property values. Landowners accuse IDPs of overcrowding neighbourhoods, building unauthorized structures, and damaging land. These accusations, whether accurate or not, provide social justification for eviction (UNHCR, 2023).

Key informants described how this resource competition breeds resentment and frames IDPs not as merely vulnerable populations but as illegitimate competitors and threats to community well-being. This perception facilitates exploitation: because IDPs are seen as unauthorized

users of urban space, their removal becomes socially acceptable and even desirable. Displaced persons remain perpetual outsiders, vulnerable to eviction whenever their presence conflicts with the interests of more powerful urban actors. This situation perpetuates a commercialized displacement system that capitalizes on their chronic instability.

d) Limited Enforcement of Legal Protections

According to the literature review, political instability and the lack of enforcement of legal protection are substantial barriers to helping displaced people in Somalia. The existing legal system, with old land laws and a lack of enforcement, does not ensure the rights of the IDPs, and they are arbitrarily evicted without any appeal. Although the Somali National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons appreciates the aspects of challenges of the IDPs, it does not have effective implementation mechanisms since there is weak institutional capacity, lack of resources and training in the government bodies.

Even though the policy offers a guideline on how to deal with the needs of IDPs, there is no effective legal enforcement of the policy thus limiting its effectiveness. Key informants indicate that unless there are enforceable laws, the rights of the IDPs are prone to abuse. Moreover, the provisions of the policy are not legal, and it is hard to get effective legal redress against any arbitrary eviction by the IDPs. Finally, lack of coordination among the stakeholders leads to gaps in service provision and assistance to the IDPs. Such disorder results in doubling of efforts and several IDPs are left without the much-needed immediate help.

e) Knowledge Gap on Justice Systems

Key informants pointed out that access to justice is a significant challenge because most of the IDPs are facing challenges related to accessing legal

services, which include financial constraints, ignorance of the law, and geographical barriers. The court system is sometimes threatening and complicated such that it discourages people from seeking justice. Moreover, the judicial system has been found to be corrupt and inefficient and has compromised the effectiveness of the legal mechanisms as informants have reported practices of bias and corruption that affect their access to fair treatment and justice.

f) Insufficient Government Oversight

Key informants emphasised that the lack of government control contributes to the problems of IDPs in Mogadishu. Failure to effectively monitor land use and property rights results in arbitrary eviction and exploitation by landowners leaving vulnerable populations unprotected and their rights abused. Poor institutional capacity and resources are also a barrier to protection policies. There is also the lack of government involvement in humanitarian activities leading to disintegration of aid organisations, thus leaving gaps in assisting IDPs. This absence of control in the end erodes the stability and protection that is required to enable the IDPs to resume their rights and ensure their means of living.

4.6 Limitations of State-Led Eviction Prevention

The government's role in preventing evictions in Somalia is poorly defined, as highlighted in the "Eviction Ways of Working in Somalia" strategy paper. Despite legal obligations to protect against forced evictions, the government's involvement is limited. The paper mentions the creation of Eviction Taskforces, but their effectiveness and formal status are unclear, raising worries about government participation. This gap critically impacts IDPs' rights to adequate housing since most prevention initiatives rely on non-state actors like Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) partners and humanitarian organizations.

This shift places the burden of protection on these external entities and highlights the government's failure to fulfil its obligations. Additionally, the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for compliance monitoring leads to fragmented responses and ineffective handling of eviction issues. Key informants noted that without government leadership, accountability is undermined, jeopardizing the sustainability of prevention efforts and raising concerns about legal remedies for displaced populations.

4.7 Role of International Partners

According to documents reviewed, international partners under the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Housing, Land and Property (HLP), and Protection Clusters play a crucial role in preventing and responding to evictions. The "Strategy Paper: Eviction Prevention and Response Ways of Working in Somalia 2022" provides a comprehensive framework for the CCCM, Housing, Land and Property (HLP), Shelter, and Protection Clusters, outlining key actions for both the prevention of evictions and appropriate response measures, including assistance and remedial interventions for affected populations (Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC 2022).

a) Prevention

Preventing evictions requires early and coordinated action that addresses both immediate risks and the deeper causes of insecure land tenure. The Eviction Prevention and Response Strategy (UNHCR, 2022) provides a clear framework to protect internally displaced populations before eviction occurs. Key measures include regular collection of eviction risk data, which is compiled monthly into the HLP Eviction Risk Map Dashboard to highlight high-risk sites, and the establishment of site-level referral pathways that connect communities to support from HLP or

CCCM partners. Conflict analysis and dispute resolution training help local leaders manage land-related tensions effectively.

Cross-sectoral site decongestion improves settlement planning and opens opportunities for longer-term tenure agreements. Government-led eviction taskforces carry out joint risk analysis and advocacy, while preventive engagement strengthens the capacity of local authorities and encourages collaboration among stakeholders. HLP due diligence verifies property ownership and identifies disputes, providing essential legal safeguards. Together, these measures offer a practical and sustainable approach to reducing eviction risks before they escalate.

b) Assistance and Remedial Action

Strategy Paper: Eviction Prevention and Response Ways of Working in Somalia 2022 also provides a comprehensive framework for addressing evictions in Somalia through a series of coordinated humanitarian and legal interventions, including eviction alerts, situation reporting, site monitoring, shelter/NFI assistance, and cash support for affected households. These activities are primarily led by international organizations such as IOM, UNHCR, NRC, and OCHA, in coordination with humanitarian clusters like CCCM, Shelter, and Protection.

The international response to an eviction is a coordinated, multi-step process. It begins with an Eviction Alert issued by site leaders to HLP partners, followed by a situational Eviction Report compiled within 72 hours. Site monitoring and gap analyses are then conducted to assess needs, leading to the direct provision of Shelter/NFI support and cash assistance for housing and legal fees to the affected households (Source: Eviction Prevention and Response Ways of Working in Somalia, 2022).

4.8 Coping Strategies

The findings reveal a central paradox at the heart of the commercialized displacement system: the very strategies IDPs employ to survive often reinforce the structures of their own exploitation. While these coping mechanisms demonstrate remarkable resilience and resourcefulness, they are not pathways out of the system but rather methods of navigation within it. This analysis examines these strategies not merely as evidence of adaptation, but as actions that, by necessity, feed the predatory economy from which they seek refuge.

The interviews have also confirmed that the victims of eviction use different coping mechanisms to manage the situation. One of them is the construction of informal housing places where the IDP can share their residence places or relocate to other less afflicted areas. Some of the interviews clarify that their evictions started at the city Centre towards Afgoye where they feel a number of evictions. The options of this plan work to minimise the chances of being kicked out of the house.

Economic adaptation is another key consideration that can lead to financial stability; the IDPs with their involvement in the other form of earning income activities are more placed to decimate the economic cost of displacement. IDPs establish small business enterprises in all their destinations and within a low time.

The other side of commitment is the unity in the community where the displaced individuals join hands and struggle to protect their rights. The other significant measure through which the IDPs can negotiate effectively with the landowners through the gatekeepers, an act that will possibly help them avoid eviction. This is carried out by 'bribing' the gatekeepers whenever the evictions are about to occur. They support each other helping individuals who have become victims of the eviction to

create new temporary. The IDPs should be given humanitarian assistance to meet their urgent needs and focus on rebuilding their lives since it is being provided with services they require. One has to also adjust to urban life since the life offers opportunities and support systems that sustain an individual. Religious and cultural gatherings give rise to the psychosocial resilience formation since they affirm the emotional influence and cementing the ties among groups.

Finally, the roles played by the key informants affirmed that the IDPs were highly resourceful and creative as they organised themselves into collaborative teams, locally referred to as the *Hagbad* or *Ayuuto*, thus also making them economically strong.

While these coping strategies demonstrate remarkable resilience, they also reveal how IDPs are forced to engage with the exploitative system. ‘Bribing’ gatekeepers to avoid eviction directly feeds the gatekeeper economy. Similarly, the need to constantly relocate and re-establish small businesses locks families into a cycle of precarious investment and loss, preventing the capital accumulation needed for escape. These strategies are essential for survival but ultimately reinforce the very structures of dependency and commercialization that the paper identifies.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study, focused on Mogadishu, demonstrates that Somalia’s internal displacement crisis, particularly in Mogadishu, has evolved beyond a humanitarian emergency into a structured commercialized system of exploitation. The findings reveal a self-perpetuating cycle in which displacement is not merely the outcome of conflict and climate shocks but has been transformed into a profitable enterprise. At the centre of this system is the gatekeeper mechanism, an extractive enterprise that monetizes displacement by organising the settlement of IDPs on vacant

land and siphoning humanitarian aid, often facilitated by the presence of displaced communities and the humanitarian aid they attract.

This system is inherently unstable, collapsing by design upon eviction and leaving IDPs without protection or support. Evictions are frequently carried out violently and without notice, denying affected populations access to legal redress. Such actions severely damage social cohesion, mental health, and human dignity, with women and children facing the greatest risk.

The study concludes that the extensive human suffering associated with displacement in Somalia is not an incidental by-product but a direct consequence of this commercialization. Existing legal frameworks, such as the National Eviction Guidelines, remain largely on paper, constrained by weak institutions and ineffective enforcement. The recurrent and unpredictable nature of evictions further entrenches cycles of vulnerability.

The findings from Mogadishu suggest that addressing this entrenched crisis requires a decisive shift from short-term humanitarian interventions toward long-term, rights-based governance and robust accountability mechanisms. Future research should specifically investigate the precise barriers to implementing existing laws.

Ultimately, as Somalia undergoes a process of recovery and rebuilding, a sustainable response to the displacement crisis must be rooted in a fundamental recognition: that the rights and dignity of internally displaced populations are indispensable to national stability and development. Their protection is not merely a humanitarian concern but an imperative of both justice and effective governance.

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