



ENHANCING MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES: DISRUPTING THE CYCLE OF FORCED EVICTIONS IN SOMALIA

Quick primer: Insecure land rights for Urban IDPs

As of 2023, there were over 3 million IDPs living in Somalia's cities, most of whom occupy privately-owned land.

Some of these IDPs simply find unoccupied parcels of land and establish their new homes there without asking permission from the owners.

Others do settle with the permission of the landowners or their representatives, in exchange for labor, regular cash payments, or a percentage of the aid they receive. This is especially the case when they share clan ties with the owners. However, these are informal "handshake" agreements that tend to be vague on essential details, like how long IDPs can occupy the site, what an IDP can or cannot build on it, or how to fairly resolve disagreements between the parties.

In either situation, IDPs rights are typically insecure, although that can vary depending on the quality of the relationship between the occupants and the landowner.

The value of urban land has been rapidly increasing in the past decade—a combination of sheer demand from the mass arrival of IDPs and returnees, the value added from the infrastructure built around providing services to IDPs (roads, buildings, water and sewage infrastructure), and relative stability stimulating economic growth.

Many landowners, typically powerful individuals from local clans, have seen an opportunity in these newly valuable assets, either by selling it to speculators who have no relationship with the IDPs or building on it themselves.

When they want to reclaim their land, landowners often provide only a few days notice, and can choose to enforce the eviction with violence using hired thugs to beat occupants and bulldozers to demolish their homes.

Development is, by far, the most common driver of forced evictions in the country—more than all other causes combined.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Somalia are forcibly evicted from their homes on an annual basis. These evictions disproportionately affect internally displaced persons (IDPs) who live in informal, multi-family sites on privately-owned land in and around cities. Return to their initial homes is unlikely for most of the IDP inhabitants of these sites, either because of ongoing violence in their original communities or the devastation of their livelihoods through drought. The result is an ever-expanding population of precariously settled communities across the country. They typically have insecure rights to settle in these locations so when landowners suddenly decide to reclaim the sites for their other purposes, or the inhabitants are unable to pay the costs to stay, mass forced evictions take place.



Forced evictions are often violent, emotionally traumatic, and can have [long-term effects on peoples' health and wellbeing](#).¹ Also, occupants' possessions and livelihoods are often damaged or destroyed during evictions, further deepening existing conditions of chronic poverty and food insecurity. Once someone is evicted a first time, they become even more likely to experience this repeatedly in short succession, depriving them of the ability to re-build a semblance of stability, dignity, and home.

Evictions also increase the costs for organizations who work to provide services to IDPs. Many evictions end up with the destruction of infrastructure (shelters and latrines) and other assets that helped settle these communities. Combined, [this destruction accounts for millions of dollars of losses](#) for people who are evicted and the agencies who support them.

Faced with a chronic, multifaceted, and escalating protection crisis, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the Protection Cluster, and the Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) Area of Responsibility (AoR) in Somalia spearheaded the establishment of a coalition of international and local NGOs, local authorities, and others to disrupt this cycle through a combination of locally specific strategies to monitor, divert, mitigate, and prevent forced evictions.

This case study looks at each aspect of this initiative and focuses on the essential role of [multi-disciplinary engagement](#) as a key element of [Results-Based Protection](#) to disrupt the cycle of forced evictions.

Ongoing Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting

To more deeply understand the problem of forced evictions in Somalia, The HLP AoR and the Protection Cluster established [a monitoring system](#) in 2015 which has continued to evolve and grow since. This system is composed of a network of community paralegals and local partners who monitor known and likely hotspots, and document and report threats and incidents of mass evictions.² Over the years, they have refined their monitoring methods based on the evolving context and feedback from partners in the community, local authorities, and donors. They have also expanded to new locations throughout the country.

With the help of an information dashboard, they have been able discern trends, locate hotspots, and refine who is most vulnerable to being evicted in specific locations and why, who are the main threat actors and their motivators, and who are the stakeholders who have the mandates and capacities to respond. This data has also been crucial for coordination, advocacy, and refining responses.

RBP Point: Continuous Analysis

The information collected by the paralegals is automatically relayed into an information dashboard administered by the Protection Cluster. With multiple years of data, they have been able to identify trends associated with specific events and locations. For example, evictions tend to drop across the country during Ramadan, and spike right after. Also, evictions tend to spike ahead of national elections. This information has allowed them to adjust their responses in anticipation of these predictable events (by taking preparatory measures in the lead up), but also note when anomalies emerge. In specific areas that are hotspots, humanitarians focus their energies to work with local authorities and communities to identify the most relevant pathways to prevent forced evictions.

¹ There have been reports of deaths during evictions, including children buried by bulldozers and shootings.

² Individual evictions are typically not captured.



Local Prevention, Diversion, and Mitigation

Crucially, this monitoring is directly linked to a response system focused on preventing, or at least diverting, evictions. If people are evicted or need to relocate, the response system tries to mitigate the effects of relocations.

- **Preventing evictions** means that the landowner withdraws the eviction threat and extends the occupant's ability to stay on the land for up to five years. This is the ideal outcome but is not always possible.
- **Diversion** is based on the recognition that landowners often have a right to reclaim their land but should do so while respecting the dignity and safety of the occupants. Through diversion, the parties negotiate for a window of time (approximately two months) where occupants can find an alternative site to settle and leave. These negotiations are essential to prevent coercion and violence.³
- **Mitigation** is necessary if occupants must relocate. Actors mobilize to mitigate the negative impacts of those relocations and help them stably resettle with the hope of breaking the cycle of displacement.

These actions are triggered when one of the monitors identifies a likely threat of a forced eviction. They issue an alert that goes to members of the Protection Cluster as well as local Eviction Task Forces. These Eviction Task Forces are composed of different actors in each location, but can include mayors, staff from regional and local governments, community leaders, leaders of IDP settlements, and humanitarian actors. If more than 100 people are affected by the eviction threat, the HLP AoR refers it to OCHA, who steps in to coordinate the response.

RBP Point: Multidisciplinary Strategies

Effectively responding to threats of forced evictions requires multiple organizations and actors who have different skills and mandates to be involved at different moments in time.

Members of these task forces visit the communities who have been threatened with evictions. Through discussions with the occupants, they identify if it is possible and safe to negotiate with the landowners to prevent or divert the eviction. They also try to identify who the best actors would be to approach the landowner; This can be representatives from the IDP community inhabiting the land, it can be local clan leaders, religious leaders, or others. Local government officials can get involved but do so only if needed since they understand that involving formal authorities can escalate the problem, rather than resolve it. Typically, local authorities engage once there is an agreement between the landowners and the occupants to serve as a guarantor of that agreement. Community paralegals, law firms, and local universities also get involved to provide legal aid to draft agreements or to represent tenants in the rare instances a case goes to the courts.

³ NRC's Eviction Tracking combines prevention and diversion into a single datapoint—prevention. This case study disaggregates these outcomes for clarity, using globally recognized nomenclature.



However, preventing evictions or relocations is not always possible, either because:

- A. The alert came too late and it already happened.
- B. The risks of violence and coercion associated with staying are too high.
- C. The occupants have agreed to relocate after negotiations.

In these situations, humanitarian agencies try to support inhabitants to relocate and find new housing with safety and dignity. This support is usually a combination of the following, depending on the needs of the people who are being relocated:

- 1. Identification and verification of a new settlement site.
- 2. Cash to cover rent for the first months in new locations.
- 3. Transportation of their personal effects.
- 4. Cash subsidy to cover other costs.
- 5. Legal aid to ensure that they have secure agreements for their new homes for three to seven years.
- 6. Assistance to establish livelihoods in the new locations.
- 7. Support to connect to services in new locations.

These actions are carefully designed to break the cycle of recurring displacement that is so common and deepens people's vulnerability. According to the HLP AoR (via their [monitoring dashboard](#)), 2023 was the first year that the number of people who successfully diverted or prevented evictions (242,776) surpassed the number of people who experienced forced evictions (207,851).⁴ However, due to insufficient funding and growing needs, mitigation resources cannot always be deployed.

⁴ For areas where monitoring is taking place.



Building Relationships with Local, Regional and National Authorities

Government authorities at all levels (municipal, regional, and national) are a crucial part of this response, and over the past few years, they have been taking on greater leadership in these interventions. Now, all five of the regional Eviction Tasks Forces across the country are chaired by local authorities. The National Ministry of Planning, Investment, and Economic Development (MoPIED), the Commissions for IDPs and Refugees (National and Regional), and Durable Solutions Units (Regional and Municipal) are all playing crucial roles as well.

Key actors within these agencies have emerged as champions of this issue and have been instrumental in developing local and national laws and policies. Some highlights include:

- The Council of Ministers adopting [National Guidelines for Evictions in 2019](#).
- In 2020, all regions in Somalia except Banadir agreed to a moratorium halting all evictions during the COVID-19 period. The Mayor of Baidoa went a step further and issued a decree penalizing any acts of eviction. In Baidoa, this decree and its enforcement resulted in a decline from 25,722 evictions recorded in 2019 to 1,150 in 2021.
- Building on the advocacy and implementation of the eviction moratorium, the Southwest State passed a new Urban Land Law in 2022 with a robust chapter on forced evictions.

This leadership by government actors, and close partnership with humanitarian and development actors, was carefully built over several years from the ground up. The first ties were established from 2013-2015 with mayors and other local authorities across the country through informal meetings to learn about their needs and challenges. Eventually these meetings extended to new parts of the country and higher levels of government.

In collaboration with development actors such as U.N. Habitat and the [Joint U.N. Programme on Local Governance \(JPLG\)](#), humanitarians also provided local, regional, and national government offices and officials with technical and material support (including stationary, computers, and GPS's), and training on how to use these tools. This was complemented by regularly sharing information between agencies and training government staff on global norms and national laws for land rights and forced evictions. Over time, this close collaboration helped build trust between the organizations and their representatives.

One of the factors that has been attributed to the successful long-term building of relationships with authorities has been low staff turnover in both government agencies and amongst the organizations working with them, while staff have also advanced into positions of greater seniority within their respective organizations.

One emerging issue is that as the Somali government begins to reestablish their control over parts of the country and deliver services, different agencies are looking to reclaim public properties that had been occupied by IDPs. To avoid forced evictions driven by government actors, organizations are working with authorities to map out these public properties and establish protocols to enable the dignified relocation of occupants when necessary. This is also being communicated with the donors of these projects to ensure that they understand what steps and resources are needed to reestablish services in these locations.



Preventing Forced Evictions

Humanitarians and local governments have been in “response mode” for years, rushing to put out the fires of new eviction threats. However, preventing evictions from happening in the first place requires humanitarians and government actors to reduce the primary source of vulnerability for IDPs living in these settlements—informal, insecure, and short-term rights. This requires a different set of solutions.

RBP Point: Multidisciplinary Strategies

Delivering meaningful protection outcomes often requires humanitarians and development actors to combine approaches and funding sources.

One low-cost solution was to convince donors and local governments to require humanitarian actors to ensure that the occupants and the landowners have clear and secure occupancy agreements before building new infrastructure (shelters, latrines, etc.). On one hand, this avoids landowners using the presence of IDPs to attract investments on their properties, after which they can evict the occupants. On the other hand, it can also avoid conflicts with landowners who had not given their consent for this construction in the first place. This lack of consent had often triggered some forced evictions in the past, leading to the destruction of the infrastructure that had just been built. These new agreements are enforced by local governments, with [durations of three to seven years](#). While this isn’t a long-term solution, it provides more certainty and stability to all parties, greatly reduces the risk of forced evictions, and [is more cost-effective for donors and government actors](#). This approach also contributes to the long-term strengthening of the capacity and legitimacy of government institutions.

But understanding that some IDPs are unlikely to return to their homes, a group of agencies called the [Danwadaag Durable Solutions Consortium](#) has built on the foundations of the eviction response work to pilot alternative solutions to this protection problem. By combining humanitarian and development approaches and resources, each agency involved plays the technical lead role on a different theme—government engagement; housing, land, and property (HLP); shelter; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH); livelihoods; and localization. In collaboration with displaced communities and government agencies, they weave together multi-disciplinary solutions based on secure, long-term rights for IDPs.

Members of the Danwadaag Durable Solutions Consortium:

- Concern Worldwide
- GREDO
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- The Juba Foundation
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- Regional Durable Solutions Consortium (ReDSS)



Among the solutions they are working on include:

- A program in which families are supported for 15 months with a combination of [rental subsidies and livelihoods assistance](#) to enable participants to become self-sufficient.
- Working with IDPs who have robust enough livelihoods to [purchase their own land](#) within cities and to do so securely to avoid fraud or conflicts.
- [Local governments granting public lands to IDPs](#) to settle on and own, on which humanitarian agencies help build the necessary infrastructure (roads, water, latrines, educational facilities, etc.).

While these proposed solutions are still in the pilot stages, they demonstrate that multidisciplinary strategies are required to meaningfully reduce protection risks like forced evictions.

RBP Questions to Consider

- What further role could communities vulnerable to eviction play in the monitoring and analysis of protection threats?
- How can communities be engaged to track the longer-term outcomes of eviction prevention and diversion efforts?
- How could the trends analyses be used to strategically inform scalable prevention efforts and pre-position resources for eviction mitigation to avoid having communities fall through the cracks when resources are lacking?
- What are other ways that humanitarian actors can apply long-term systems thinking to address protection problems in countries faced with protracted conflict and disaster?

Additional Resources:

- [Somalia, the harsh reality and devastating effect of forced evictions in Somalia. \(2023\)](#)
- [Loss and Damage: Cost analysis in investments and infrastructure due to forced evictions in Somalia \(2022\)](#)
- [Worsening drought escalates forced evictions in Banadir region, Somalia\(2022\)](#)
- [I want my land, you have to go: Understanding the eviction phenomenon in Baidoa \(2021\)](#)
- [Forced evictions and their social and health impacts in Southern Somalia: a qualitative study in Mogadishu Internally Displaced Persons \(IDP\) camps. \(2021\)](#)
- [Post eviction development in urban areas of Somalia. \(2021\)](#)
- [Rapid Assessment Report: Garasbaley Evictions \(2021\)](#)



- [An unnecessary burden: Forced Evictions and Covid-19](#) (2020)
- [Constant risks, looming disaster: the urgent case for a moratorium on evictions](#) (2020)
- [Back to square one.](#) (2018)