Mogadishu: City research brief

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The African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) is a collaborative research programme, seeking to tackle complex urban development challenges in the continent's rapidly changing cities. ACRC aims to generate robust insights and evidence that will help improve the living conditions and urban services for all city residents, especially disadvantaged communities.

ACRC's research integrates political settlements thinking with city systems analysis, to understand the dynamics underpinning infrastructure and service challenges in cities. Targeted analysis of specific urban development domains provides deeper insights into how sectoral shortcomings can be overcome and residents' needs addressed.

Mogadishu is one of 12 African cities in which ACRC is engaging community organisations, researchers, practitioners, key state actors and non-state agencies, to co-produce knowledge and evidence to advance urban transformation.

Research highlights

> **Mogadishu is developing rapidly in the absence of urban planning**. The state's incapacity to legislate, regulate and provide oversight for Mogadishu's urban development shapes the everyday experiences of urban residents

> **Insecurity exacerbates Mogadishu's urban challenges**. Mogadishu faces several significant challenges related to state building, economic development and political and economic inclusivity. The pervading context of urban insecurity continues to constrain efforts for urban reforms.

> **We identify a number of potential strategic interventions to address complex urban development challenges in Mogadishu**, building on existing initiatives and emerging political priorities.

Research summaries

Political settlements

Mogadishu's political settlement is deeply fragmented and intertwined with national-level politics. As Somalia's capital city, Mogadishu is a source of significant economic and political power for elites and national political aspirants. In the absence of multiparty elections, Somalia's political landscape is organised around a clan-based power-sharing agreement, known as the 4.5 formula. The president of Somalia directly appoints occupants to the highest offices in the Banaadir Regional Administration (BRA, the Mogadishu municipality), including the mayor, the deputies, and the general secretary. The mayor, in turn, appoints key BRA officials as well as Mogadishu's district commissioners. Mogadishu's urban governance is therefore deeply rooted in national-level political realities.

Urban governance in Mogadishu is often characterised by insecurity, limited state capacity, an absence of state provision of services, and unclear structures of authority. Despite these political challenges, local communities within Mogadishu have invested significantly in urban development, including the reconstruction of roads and other critical infrastructure. Governance oversight and continued statebuilding is needed to better harness these investments for urban populations.

City of systems

The city of systems team evaluated ten systems critical to Mogadishu's urban infrastructure: education, energy, finance, food distribution, healthcare, law and order, sanitation, transportation, waste management and water. Mogadishu's key services (with the exception of parts of the law and order and healthcare systems) are generally provided by private actors and humanitarian agencies, with limited state oversight.

The privatisation of Mogadishu's city systems provides a challenge for governance. Many services are managed through a hybrid governance setup and the involvement of an extensive number of non-state actors supplying services across the city. While some systems are subject to existing policy frameworks, the roles and responsibilities of these actors are unclearly defined. Despite improved legislation, the technical capacity and financial resources to monitor compliance and ensure quality are limited in the BRA, as well as in the federal agencies. Service provision process, cost and quality for most systems are not subject to oversight by the authorities.

Domains

> Informal settlements

Many of the informal settlements in Mogadishu support internally displaced people (IDPs), which transforms the methods of analysis and support required. While IDPs and low-income residents are all experiencing high levels of deprivation and limited access to services, there are significant differences – including in terms of access to security and humanitarian aid.

As a result, this research considered IDP settlements and informal settlements, and distinguished between the specific needs of each settlement appropriately.

Informal settlements research in Mogadishu identified important challenges facing residents of these settlements, including **lack of tenure security and access to land, limited access to services, high poverty and unemployment levels, and lack of adequate urban planning**.

Potential informal settlements intervention

In this context, we propose the **formation of a reform coalition of informal settlement representatives and willing Mogadishu-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs)**. This solution would be composed of a coalition of the willing among Mogadishu-based NGOs, who will advocate for informal settlers within the existing informal and formal system. This would specifically focus on **empowering IDP communities to improve their tenure rights within the existing informal and formal system**. Through this initiative, selected informal settlers receive skills training and education on their rights to land, shelter and options for redress.

> Youth and capability development

In Mogadishu, young people face extensive challenges in a context characterised by unemployment, underemployment, an absence of security, limited access to services, illicit migration out of the country, and a lack of political representation. Although young people constitute a majority of the population, they are underrepresented in all levels of government and public decisionmaking, with young female representation even lower than that of their male counterparts.

Our research identifies education as a system with important implications for the lives of youth. The privatisation of education has led to a compromise in quality and the exclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly young women. There is a need for organisations that represent and advocate for youth issues, and advance meaningful representation of young people at all levels of government.

> Safety and security

In Mogadishu, there are inequalities in exposure to various forms of violence. Fear of targeted violence from al-Shabaab remains a concern for some (particularly those affiliated with the state or international NGOs), while others worry about being caught up in large-scale attacks.

We recommend three interlinked interventions, all of which are affected by the overarching capacity of al-Shabaab for political violence, and where further action-based research is needed – particularly to examine the apparent failures of previous initiatives.

Potential youth and capability development intervention

Within the youth and capability development domain, we advocate for the **creation of a new programmatic paradigm that promotes youth development while mobilising young people**. This would focus on a new form of peace education to help mitigate violence and lead to community healing, alongside broader capability development.

Four interlinked approaches would build on each other:

Youth-led social healing
Using a culturally and contextually developed peer-support social healing process through Peace Circles to address the impact of trauma and facilitate youth-led social healing.

Youth-led healing justice
Adoption of informal justice systems to facilitate forgiveness and an acceptable adjudication of justice is critical. Development of community-level, youth-led justice mechanisms (with options for both restorative and punitive sentences).

Advocacy and lobbying
Young people in Mogadishu need to gain advocacy and lobbying skills, so they can promote their issues and become strong stakeholders who can utilise their numbers, unity and purpose. Young people will develop an advocacy implementation plan.

Youth-led civic dialogues and lobbying
Focusing on the notion that once the first three components are engaged, young people will be far more willing to engage in dialogue and collaborative problem-solving on issues salient to maintaining the peace and resolving pressing issues. Young people can mobilise other young people and community members using skills gained from other interventions.

Potential safety and security interventions

> **Police forces appear caught between counterterrorism and community engagement, which are difficult to undertake simultaneously.** Community relations with police forces are viewed in different ways by different people. Police can be seen as both a source of security (closeness of facilities, prevention of crime through visibility) and a source of insecurity (attracting political violence, or accusations that police themselves are involved in criminal activities).

> **Public concern around prevailing security issues in Mogadishu may be shifting towards youth-related gang crimes**, which are preventing many people from moving around the city at night. More research is needed into the ways in which urban inequalities, a burgeoning youth population, youth unemployment, social media connectivity, as well as the involvement and fragmentation of security forces are affecting this apparently new phenomenon.

> **Displaced populations' security vulnerabilities intersect closely with wider issues faced by residents living in informal settlements, around social belonging, discrimination and "minority" rights**. Women in urban camps are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, exacerbated by alleged underreporting and lack of access to judicial mechanisms. Informal community-based security/vigilante mechanisms are in operation among some urban residents, but are inaccessible to most people in camps. More focused research could be done on these mechanisms to assess their intersection with past community policing initiatives and their potential risks/benefits for the most marginalised urban residents.

> Land and connectivity

The land and connectivity domain research in Mogadishu is principally concerned with two areas of interest:

1. The nature of land use, purchasing, tenure and contestations

2. The intersections of digital and road connectivity with the city's contestations over land

Significant and uncontrolled urban sprawl is expanding the perimeters of the city, as urban density increases. Mogadishu's recent development boom is driven by a combination of commercial investment, private diaspora capital and influxes of international aid. Multiple overlapping authorities are involved in the de facto governance of urban land, even as the enforcement and regulation of land usage and ownership is weak.

Potential land and connectivity interventions

Our research identifies **significant problems in Mogadishu, including public land disputes, inadequate road and transport quality, and a lack of urban planning and data**. We suggest three solutions, in the form of action research programmes:

1. **Public land assessment to identify and account for state-owned land**. Much of the land and property owned by the state (at the city and national levels) was rapidly privatised at the start of the urban war. There is a pressing need for a thoroughgoing, systematic accounting of the current state of public land in Mogadishu, and a consultative process to begin the management of public land's future.

2. **Assessment of urban environmental risks related to recurrent urban flooding**. The state of Mogadishu's roads stems from a failure of urban environmental planning and drainage management. Urban flooding significantly impedes urban mobility, as denizens are forced to navigate around roads blocked by standing water. In a city where mobility is already circumscribed by security infrastructures like roadblocks, this causes significant access challenges to the livelihoods of city dwellers. Recurrent flooding damages the built environment, which places informal and auto-constructed homes at particular risk of destruction. This project will assess the causes and consequences of urban flooding in Mogadishu.

3. **Creation of an urban action research network**. Access to relevant, actionable, urban information is a significant problem in Mogadishu and other urban sites across Somalia. The absence of this knowledge makes attempts at strategic urban planning that much more difficult. We propose the development and support of a research network which works independently of, but in tandem with, development and humanitarian organisations. This network would be responsible for curating and producing publicly available urban data, which would be used to guide stakeholder decisionmaking and open a forum for the advancement of the urban agenda in Mogadishu.

About this brief

This brief was produced by ACRC's Mogadishu team to outline research findings and potential interventions, in preparation for the final city uptake workshop in the programme's Foundation Phase (2022-23).

Photo information (by order of appearance):
1. Hamar Weyne market in Mogadishu - AMISOM / Flickr (public domain); 2. An IDP camp in Mogadishu - sadikgulec / iStock; 3. Security forces on foot patrol - AMISOM / Flickr (public domain); 4. Aerial shot of Mogadishu - Maxamed Qalid / Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0).

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