



Migrants on the Margins:

Tackling Urban Displacement in Hargeisa, Somaliland

The Migrants on the Margins project, carried out between 2016-2019 in Hargeisa, Somaliland as well as Harare Zimbabwe, Colombo Sri Lanka and Dhaka Bangladesh, sought to better understand the drivers of displacement, the experiences of rural to urban migrants, and the responses of the municipalities within which newly urban residents were settling.

The Migrants on the Margins project was led by the University of Sussex, with UK partners at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) University of London and University of Durham. In Hargeisa, research was led by the Observatory for Violence and Conflict Prevention at the University of Hargeisa.

This policy brief provides the main findings from Hargeisa, Somaliland, where Research was carried out in three sites: Camp A and Digaale, situated at the eastern edge of the city, and State House, a settlement located in the heart of Hargeisa city. Methods used included two surveys (conducted one year apart), life history interviews, community walks, focus group interviews, and the 'Q Method' (used to determine people's perceptions and priorities about their lives).

Three Urban Settlements

The three sites studied are very different from each other, and important lessons can be learned

by looking at each of them separately, and then comparing them.

State House

State House, the oldest of the settlements, has been in existence since the mid-1990s, when people started to return to the city after the devastating war between Somalia President Siad Barre's forces and the Somali National Movement of 1988-91. It is named for the fact that it is situated on the grounds of the former British colonial administration building. Many of the first residents were returned refugees who had fled Somaliland to Ethiopia during the war, and returned to find that their homes had been destroyed. Over the years, the settlement has grown in population, with new waves of people coming in from rural areas as a result of drought and destitution; they have also been joined by a number of Ethiopians, ethnic Somalis and Oromos, who have either fled persecution in their country of origin or else have come to the city seeking economic opportunity. State House is not served by social services, and people have continued to live in temporary shelters for more than twenty years. They remain in the site because they have no alternative to leave, but also as the city of Hargeisa grows, they hope that they will be given a new plot of land and access to services as part of a relocation plan when the city eventually decides to reclaim the valuable land on which the settlement sits.



State House, Hargeisa 2002



State House, Hargeisa 2018

Camp A

Camp A became an informal settlement in 2010-11 when a serious drought gripped the region. Many rural pastoralists lost their livelihoods and their herds and came into the city destitute, looking for a way of supporting their families in the urban economy. Camp A sits in an area just beyond the Egal Airport, about a 2 hour walk from the centre of the city, and the land is privately owned. Some residents report that they pay rent to the landlord, while others say that they have not yet been asked to pay. The site is not on an access road, and no public transport is available. Nor are any social services available – water is sold from a tanker and there are no health or education services. Houses are traditional *aqals*. People support themselves by crushing stones from the surrounding area and selling them as gravel to the construction industry in Hargeisa.



Camp A, Hargeisa

Residents in Camp A say that they are reluctant to invest in the site, to build better houses or to dig wells, because they fear that they may be evicted at any time. Enhancing the value of the land may, they are worried, make it more likely that the owner(s) of the land may want to

reclaim it for themselves or may increase their rents.

Digaale

Digaale is in many ways a model settlement when compared to the Camp A and State House sites. Digaale was created in 2013-14 when a government initiative was established to relocate the displaced into more permanent settlements. With support from the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and the Norwegian Refugee Council some of those living near Camp A were assisted to move to a new site and were



Digaale, Hargeisa

provided with corrugated iron sheets, latrines, communal water tanks, a primary school, and a health post. Most importantly, residents of Digaale were given a title to the land they were settled on. This piece of paper, which guarantees them the right to stay where they are, makes all the difference to them. It means that they no longer have to worry about being evicted or moved. They can invest in their housing and in the surrounding community, and have the assurance that they need to be able to send their children to school.

Comparing these three sites provides some important findings which can be helpful to municipal and central government planners as they think about a solution to urban displacement.

Recommendations

1. *The key to getting people to feel more settled in the city is to give them secure access to tenure by ensuring that they are settled on land that they can be given title to.*

The main obstacle to feeling settled and secure, and to looking forward to a future in the city, is a lack of secure land tenure. Residents of Camp A and State House lack such a title, but residents of Digaale were given titles when they were moved to the site. Respondents in State House and Camp A referred to the residents of Digaale as being fortunate, and indicated that what they wanted was to be able to live under the same conditions as those in Digaale.

2. *Selecting the sites for relocation is crucial to a successful outcome both for the internally displaced but also for the municipality and government of Somaliland.*

Despite the poor conditions in which they live, people in State House and Camp A are playing a waiting game. They want to be able to take advantage of relocation, but they also are anxious about what its terms might be – will they be moved to an area that is very far from the city centre, making it difficult to get to sources of income and services? Will the new site be supplied with health care and educational facilities? Will they be given title to the land and assistance to build new houses? If the new sites are too far from the city or do not provide the support that people need, they are likely to return to the informal settlements which at least have the advantage of being close to what few income earning potentials there are.

3. *The same solution will not suit everyone – needs of Ethiopian nationals and those displaced from Somalia should be taken into account.*

While most urban displaced would benefit from registration with a view towards granting them title to land or housing, others might lose out. This includes Ethiopian nationals living within the displaced settlements as well as people displaced from southern and central Somalia who live in some of the settlements. In considering solutions, attention should be given to these individuals' protection needs and arrangements should be made to support them.

4. *To prevent creating a magnet whereby many more people from rural areas come into the city, support must be directed to both urban and rural areas at the same time.*

Supporting rural communities, particularly during times of drought, will help rural residents who still have their herds and farms and who do not wish to move into the city to remain there. In some instances it may also help those who would like to be able to return to do so, but this is not expected to be a large part of the urban displaced population. But it will also reduce the pressures on the newly urban dwellers who are often obliged to send support to their rural relatives. Herd protection, drought management, and drought recovery activities in rural areas will help reduce the impact of environmental hazards with positive benefits for the cities as well.

The Migrants on the Margins research team will be presenting their findings at the Hargeisa International Book Fair in July 2019. They will also be showing an exhibition of comics drawn from the research's life history interviews. The team stands ready to assist the government of Somaliland in any way to help develop more secure futures for the displaced people of Hargeisa.

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