



State fragility and migration in Somaliland: Causes and policy responses

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Executive Summary

Somaliland witnessed massive migration in the 1980s and the 1990s due to wars that affected the entire country. In post-1991, Somaliland went through struggle to restore peace and stability and to re-establish its state institutions from the ashes of conflicts. In current day Somaliland, the state institutions have several weaknesses such as administrative deficiencies which undermine the political stability needed for a flourishing and thriving democratic state. Somaliland's quadruple transition from war to peace, from the rubble and ruins of conflict to reconstruction and reconciliation, as well as a customary form of governance and constitutional democracy has never been without challenges. Those challenges could be overcome through the application of good governance principles and practices.

The weak capacity of state institutions to provide social services and security to the citizens has a direct link with the increasing number of migrants not only in Somaliland but also in the entire African region. The Somali people across the Horn of Africa region are one of the most numerous migrants that cross the high seas to Europe seeking better living standards. The root and immediate causes of this human migration are multi-dimensional and disregard any single explanation. Certainly, there is a clear link between two separate but interrelated factors, which have a constant effect on one another: migration and state fragility as well as development. Analyzing these two concepts and practices from a logical point of view to come up with a valuable outcome is extremely important. This can help decision and policymakers understand the origins of migration and state fragility in Somaliland and suggest policies aimed at developing approaches to strengthen the governance structures in the long-term and promote a mutual relationship between the societies and established state institutions. Indeed, such a relationship would be built on local resources and the capacities necessary to mitigate migration and fragility of Somaliland.

On the other hand, migration is an inevitable social process in any society, and without an appropriate

mechanism to manage migration, it may result in unnecessary outcomes on communities and ultimately bring about both national and regional insecurities. Settling the root causes of migration and establishing a wider set of options and choices within a broadly defined framework, it can help accelerate the process of managing the sources and causes of migration. Reconstituting a framework for progressive and strong political and social service providing institutions is one of the most crucial factors necessary to control the exodus. This requires political commitment and determination. This briefing therefore proposes a couple of recommendations that are expected from the government to implement it. They are:

State fragility and migration in Somaliland are phenomena that demand collective response and action. Therefore, this briefing proposes several recommendations that are expected from the parties concerned to implement it. These are:

- Adopt and implement inclusive policies that are necessary for the development of the state. Those policies will make the state inclusive, transparent, and representative of the citizens' interests.
- The state should address the root causes of migration and enforce policies that deal with migration to overcome the challenges posed by migration on state institutions.

Introduction

The aim behind state creation is to protect citizens from internal and external threats and provide social and security services to the state citizens. The provision of those services to the public by the state in return endorses the citizens' trust in the state institutions thus ensuring legitimacy (Johari, 2006). To carry out these tasks, the state should have the capacity, legitimacy, and authority to implement its policies, strategies, and programs. State legitimacy can derive from a range of sources, including the effectiveness of public institutions in their performance of various functions, such as service

delivery, taxation and social protection systems, and their degree of representation and accountability. Legitimacy does not derive solely from effectively functioning institutions, however. Such institutions must also resonate with societies in order for them to be considered legitimate and to become embedded in society. This involves the penetration of the state into society such that citizens take the presence of the state and its rules for granted; they accept the state's right to rule and its position as the highest political authority (Ali, 2014; Haider & McLoughlin, 2016). The state needs to be both closely linked to and embedded in society, while at the same time maintaining sufficient autonomy to allow it to operate as the overarching authority responsible for making decisions that are binding on society.

Fragile states are threatening both international security and the security of their neighbours, as well as the well-being of their people. The fragility of any state spreads instability across borders and provides havens for terrorists, drug dealers, and weapons smugglers. In addition, it threatens access to natural resources and leads millions to poverty (Kaplan, 2008; Najafov, 2017). The state is the source of survival and well-being of the society; while its absence has a negative impact on human beings; state institutions responsible for providing services to the public determine the legitimacy of the state and the government in power which in return endorses the citizens' trust to the state institutions thus ensuring internal sovereignty.

The central argument of the briefing is that fragility is the major source of the state's inability to provide public services and essential needs to its citizens. There are several determinants that are the central drivers of the state capacity, including human resources, skills and incentive systems, organizational and administrative arrangements including decision making and control structures, procedures, authority relations, the distribution of functions and responsibilities, management style and leadership; and the organization's equipment, capital, and financial resources, to name but a few (Batley & Larbi, 2004). The drivers and the immediate causes of the Somaliland state fragility are linked to several factors that have both internal and external dimensions. This includes tribal politics and misuse of the clan factor that are linked to the Somaliland social and political structures, political, ecological and governance-related factors among others.

This policy briefing analyses two important concepts: state fragility which is an outcome of weak governance institutions both in the region and in Somaliland on the one hand, and migration which is an important trend in a changing world, on the other. The paper examines the implications of state

fragility and migration by raising some critical issues. The briefing seeks to bring a dialogue and discussion on this theme that could be a flashpoint for further debates that may take place between the people in academia, the practitioners and those in the policy and the decision-making circles.

The actors and dynamics of Somaliland state

One of the main elements and stakeholders of the Somaliland state and peace-building processes are the civil society organizations, including women, elders, the diaspora, the media, and religious figures. This is a credit to Somaliland citizens. When the war erupted in 1994, they were opposed to the war and expressed their disagreement and outrage. The Somaliland diaspora, contributed greatly to the peace and reconciliation conferences and building blocks of the state, and was very much distressed by the sad events in Somaliland and sought to end the war by influencing leaders on both sides to end the violence (Farah & Lewis, 1997; Forti, 2011; Phillips, 2020). Considering this, Somaliland citizens have contributed a lot to the peace and development of the country.

Despite these achievements, Somaliland is not without challenges. Some of these challenges were associated with service delivery and provision such as health and education as well as security. Somaliland's physical infrastructure was destroyed by the Somalia military government, posing severe challenges to service delivery and provision of basic services to the citizens. After its withdrawal from the illegitimate union of 1960 and having rebuilt its institutions from the ashes of conflicts, Somaliland has found itself in an entirely discouraging situation due to several factors. These include a lack of financial support from the outside world to help the emerging institutions, a lack of recognition from the international community, and a lack of skilled and professional human capital as many educated and capable citizens were killed during the war, displaced, maimed, or dispersed to other corners of the world (Jhazbhay, 2010).

The massive migration both in and outside the country due to multiple factors has reshaped the Somaliland state economically, socially, and politically. However, in recent times, climate change, the changing environment, and massive urbanization accelerated the rural-urban migration across the country, while those who had previously moved to the cities embarked on a second migration, seeking to improve their lives by moving to the West or the Gulf States. In urban centers, there are several reasons pushing people to migrate, including growing inequalities in wealth and living standards among the citizens, and ecological pressures, among others (Ali et al. 2023). While all those citizens are leaving the country

without exception, the Somaliland government was generally not seen as a central political issue, but it regards individuals who are leaving their country seeking employment opportunities or wanting to acquire citizenship from the Western European and North American countries.

The perception of those who run the state institutions is entirely different. This is a question of capacity, meaning that the state should have the capacity to deliver social and security services to its citizens. This is a serious problem for developing robust indigenous institutions that could promote inclusive political and economic institutions. In Somaliland, the lack of capacity of state institutions is a major issue as it makes them unable to deliver equitable and affordable services to the citizens. The lack of consolidation of the state institutions, promotion of human development, and social well-being of the state citizens are the major challenges this nation is facing. To overcome those social, economic and political obstacles and challenges, the government should put in place an infrastructural development plan to boost the country's growth, and improve the basic services needed by the citizens, to create hope for all. Once this happens, any policy and strategy introduced by the concerned state bodies will be able to overcome the institutional weaknesses and prevent decay and destruction.

State-society relationships are crucial for the survival of Somaliland statehood, as the state is aspiring to acquire the *de jure* recognition it has been demanding since 1991. The state should foster ties with the scholars, intellectuals, and elites that managed to help this nation during the struggle to overthrow the long-time ruler and dictator, the late Mohamed Siad Barre, and during the reconciliation in the 1990s. It is necessary to build the capacity of the state institutions to overcome the very challenges and weaknesses that hamper their work and performance and derail the euphoria of the citizens. Therefore, reforming the existing institutions and fixing the gaps within them, addressing the unequal distribution of socio-economic and political opportunities in the democratic Republic of Somaliland will enable Somaliland to prosper, while effective and efficient institutions will grow and flourish.

The effectiveness of Somaliland's state rests on strengthening the central structure of the state and its political institutions. Several common themes emerge from this briefing, and they include similarities between the causes and drivers of state fragility and migration in Somaliland, the implications of state fragility on migration in the Somaliland context, and the need to make Somaliland state institutions effective and efficient through capacity building packages and programs. To overcome those

challenges and obstacles against the state and its institutions, it is important to address the issues discussed above to make the state institutions work effectively and efficiently.

An outlook of migration–development nexus

Despite the increase in South-to-North migration, this has been neglected in the global policy debate on migration and development (Mkwananzi, 2019). The debate is at least as old as the Industrial Revolution, appearing first in Britain and then repeatedly among others who followed (Hatton & Williamson, 1998). However, the nexus between migration and development has once again entered public debate and academic discourses and dialogues in connection with the mobility of people and issues of economic and socio-political development (Faist & Margit, 2011). Migration has mutated from being a problem for economic development to being a solution. In other words, the claim that development failure produces international migration has given way to the 'new mantra' that migration – that is, migrants – may help to advance economic development in their countries of origin (Faist & Schiller, 2010).

There are three major types of development–migration nexus. These mixed motive games are remittances and return; migration also brings underdevelopment; and brain drain is regarded as the consequences of migration. Also, what one may describe as migration and (co) development in the form of celebration and transnational circulation continues to remain another connection between the two concepts (Faist & Margit, 2011). These types are not necessarily related to out-migration, but they have a link with in-migration, in particular rural-urban migration that can be observed in many parts of the world, especially in regions in the developing world affected by conflicts and natural disasters. For instance, brain drain, one should mention Nigeria has about 14,000 Nigeria medical doctors who were trained in Nigeria but are currently working in the United States, while 10,000 qualified Nigerian academic staff is in the US alone (Callaghy, 2008; Aladegbola & Olaniyan, 2012).

While many of these concerns are not new, the vulnerability of the Somaliland state is obvious. Migration however has had an impact on the Somaliland state since the 1970s, when the best-educated people, skilled ones started to leave the country due to the repressive nature of the Somalia state. Although people were migrating even before that period, for example, Sailors or Seafarers (IOM, 2017); those people (sailors and seafarers) were coming home, and their migration was more of a personal adventure than seeking better living standards. Underlying the debate on the nexus

between migration and development in the aftermath of the state collapse, perhaps between 1991 and 1997, Somaliland neither had a well-functioning state institution that could provide security services to the citizens, nor did it have sought economic opportunities. People from the diaspora indeed were helping their families and sending remittances back home as there was no other means of survival except that money sent from abroad. This contribution kept the people alive and served as the only means for the citizens' livelihood in difficult times. The diaspora was also financing the peace and reconciliation conferences taking place in many parts of Somaliland and contributed to the state-building processes.

Conclusion

Somaliland needs to address the problems and challenges discussed in this briefing by strengthening the existing institutions. To realize this mission, building the capacity of the human resources of the state, and implementing the policies in place would be a key determinant for the state's efforts to develop and prosper. Somaliland can establish responsible governance institutions to serve the citizens and provide social services to those in need both in the peripheries and at the core. Not only social services, but also needs to strengthen the security providing institutions, such as the police, and reform the judicial system of the state which is also in trouble. Rapid social change and transformation through policies and strategies are needed, but positive change with determinant policies and programs is not easy to achieve, without a doubt, it can take root through a generation.

Furthermore, engaging in regional and international forums to present the issue of Somaliland and its quest for recognition is another obligation that the Somaliland government should take as a serious task. However, Somaliland state policy and decision making should take the lead in adopting appropriate policies to ensure that good governance and social justice prevail in Somaliland as a whole. Nevertheless, if Somaliland fails to put in place inclusive policies and social equality, more social and political instability will follow and certainly harm the Somaliland state and its citizens. This finally generates massive waves of migration both legal and illegal thus having an impact on the state and its institutions.

In a nutshell, migration is not entirely negative, but it has the role in development, especially on social and economic fronts. This means that those who migrated to the other parts of the world returned to their homes with knowledge and skills as well as finance, thus managed to establish businesses and develop small scale industries. In Somaliland, when the entire social, political, and economic institutions

collapsed as a result of the war in 1980s and 1990s, migration was a powerful force that saved the people. Many had returned from the refugee camps in Ethiopia are those who migrated to the Middle Eastern countries, Europe or North America. Moreover, repatriated refugees from neighbouring countries and substantial numbers of Somalilanders from the wider diaspora have been returning to Somaliland over the past years to see if they can live in Somaliland again. With various skills and expertise returnees have taken up roles in government, aid agencies, non-government organizations, health care, education, and in business; displaying much effort and resources in the reconstruction of the country.

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About the Paper

This briefing examines the links between state fragility and migration in Somaliland and its impact on citizens. The paper investigates the causes, drivers, and patterns of state fragility and migration in the country. It argues that the presence of weak state institutions that failed to provide basic services to their citizens, lack of political commitment and will, lack of implementation of the policies in place, and introducing other policies that could impact the lives of the citizens remain the major sources of state fragility in Somaliland. Furthermore, and very importantly, lack of transparency and accountability within the state institutions remain at the center of state fragility and massive migrations happening across the region. This paper calls for an urgent response to the challenges against the state institutions. The adoption of policies to improve social and security services are needed to improve the lives and livelihoods of the citizens.

About the Institute

The Laas Geel Institute of International Relations is a world-class teaching, training, and research-intensive institute dedicated to providing quality teaching and training on international relations and diplomacy to Somaliland citizens, interested parties, and government institutions whose work involves international relations, diplomacy and security. Its goals are to produce competent and confident graduates who can work in diplomatic and multinational environments by researching and practicing international relations and diplomacy in African societies and beyond. The Institute graduates are key to advancing the diplomatic relations of Somaliland around the globe. The Institute conducts research that produces policy papers and briefings and provides in-depth analysis of political, economic, social and security issues to influence the policymakers in Somaliland. Moreover, it intends to organize dialogues, workshops, and seminars at home and with like-minded institutions across the globe to create a space for people to convene and share diverse perspectives. Events with a global reach will raise the profile of excellent research being conducted in Somaliland.

About the Author

Nasir M. Ali is a senior lecturer in International Relations and African Political Economy and former Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) at the University of Hargeisa (2015–2025), Somaliland. He has a Ph.D. in Peace, Governance, and Development from the University for Peace, Costa Rica, as well as two master's degrees in international relations and African Studies from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. With extensive research experience in security, governance, state capacity and fragility, recognition, and pastoralism, Dr. Nasir's work has appeared in Palgrave, Routledge, and other peer-reviewed academic journals. In addition, Dr. Ali has solid research management experience and has led and contributed to a number of research projects in collaboration with local, regional and international institutions and colleagues during his tenure at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.

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