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Displacement-Driven Urban Strain: The Economic and Governance Impacts on Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a Focus on Somalia: Literature Review

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Abstract

The rapid migration to secondary cities in sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most salient features of the urbanization process today; however, many of these secondary cities have limited economic base capabilities and little or no capacity to provide effective governance services to the internally displaced populations (IDPs) they host. A literature review was conducted to examine the impact of displacement-driven urbanization on economic and governance outcomes in secondary cities, with a specific focus on Somalia. Using primary research data from peer-reviewed academic studies, United Nations and World Bank reports, Somali Government Policy Documents, and International Organization Assessment Reports, this paper synthesized the evidence of the structural pathways through which displacement drives the formation of urban strain in secondary cities. It was found that displacement does not function as an episodic humanitarian crisis event but rather as a persistent force driving the transformations of secondary cities. These transformations include the creation of mutually reinforcing structures of economic informalization, governance fragmentation, tenure insecurity, spatial exclusion, and service-delivery overload. These same processes were also identified in Somalia and were further exacerbated by the protracted civil war, climate-related shocks, the use of legal pluralism in land governance, and the continued reliance on humanitarian support as a substitute for municipal service provision. Cities such as Baidoa, Bosaso, Garowe, and Kismayo are recognized as key urban centers in the region, particularly in Somalia. The growing number of displaced populations is putting increased pressure on the fiscally strained urban centers, undermining institutional local capacity and establishing parallel forms of governance. Without the implementation of coordinated city-centered strategies that address displacement, it is expected that displacement will continue to be permanently urbanized in ways that further exacerbate poverty, inequality, and fragility. This paper, therefore, concludes that a shift is needed from short-term response paradigms in disaster relief towards an approach that focuses on development strategies to strengthen municipal governance, improve tenure security, and incorporate informal settlements into municipal planning, development, and peacebuilding interventions. Furthermore, the paper identifies the unique challenges of Somalia's secondary cities and their contributions to the body of knowledge in urban and displacement studies, while offering policy recommendations to advance urban resilience and durable solutions in fragile and climate-affected regions.

Keywords: Displacement-driven urbanization, Migration, Mobility, Climate Change, Tenure insecurity, Secondary Cities, Urban governance, Informal economy, Service delivery, Somalia

Introduction

Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have been confronting a monumental internal displacement crisis over the years, a situation that has fundamentally morphed from a rural phenomenon into an overwhelmingly urban challenge (Nyakabwa, 2009). Once regarded as temporary, displaced communities are now becoming permanent and rapidly increasing, becoming core development and state-building challenges as well as destabilizing urban economies, shaping the future of urban centers in Africa. This urbanization through displacement is no longer a peripheral concern

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but central to the urban development trajectory of many SSA countries, including Somalia. According to (Kiaga & Leung, 2020), unlike the historical urbanization of the Global North, which was driven by an industrial economic base, African cities are expanding in a context of rampant unemployment, creating an immense informal economy that provides precarious livelihoods for up to **60 percent** of the urban workforce (from more than **60 percent** in the **1970s** to more than **70 percent** in the three subsequent decades, until the **2010s**, which saw a sharp increase). This creates the ‘fragile city’: a metropolis with weak administration, struggling public services, significant inequality, and widespread violence (Kiaga & Leung, 2020). The rapid pace of population growth, or "turbo-urbanization," outstrips the capacity of municipal institutions to plan, finance, and deliver essential services and infrastructure.

Urbanization in SSA has outpaced institutional preparedness and infrastructure development, creating conditions of turbo-urbanization in which displaced populations settle in secondary cities ill-equipped to absorb them (Smit, 2018; Taruri et al., 2020; Bello-Schünemann, 2018). Displacement-induced urbanization challenges traditional governance structures, further eroding local municipalities’ capability to deliver basic services or do urban planning (ReDSS, 2021; Mourad & Piron, 2016). This crisis in governance is just as serious. Municipal authorities in secondary cities are overburdened and unable to supply the expanding settlements with basic services like water, sanitation, healthcare services, education, and labour-intensive works for displacement-affected communities and the vulnerable host communities (Tuffour et al., 2025). The fact that 80% of residential areas constructed in the region during the previous quarter-century are informal and unplanned, particularly in quickly expanding secondary urban centers, compounds this (WB, 2013). These trends are compounded by climate change, political instability, and weak economic foundations, forming a perfect storm for urban fragility (Kirbyshire et al., 2017).

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) faces a formidable challenge of displacement and municipal service delivery. Forced displacement has become a defining characteristic of the SSA region, with families abandoning their original homes due to various threats, including climate change and insecurity (Crisp, 2010). This has led to the expansion of informal settlements and increased migration with limited access to basic services (Parienté, 2017; Tietjen, Jacobsen, & Hollander; Wetterwald & Thaller, 2020). Climate-related hazards such as flooding, drought, and heat waves further strain urban areas (Graham, 2020; Mhedhbi et al., 2023; Samatar, 2023). In cities across Sub-Saharan Africa, displacement overlaps with environmental shocks, deepening service vulnerability and structural inequality (Baumann & Kanafani, 2020). According to George (2019), resilience-building strategies, which focus on enhancing food availability and water security, however, climate services remain underdeveloped in African cities (Mhedhbi et al., 2023). On the other hand, population growth and rural-urban migration accelerate secondary-city urbanization, thereby straining resources and infrastructure.

The number of forcibly displaced people in Africa surged over **40 million** as of the end of 2023, up from over **29 million** in 2020, and this accounted for nearly half of the global total displacement and was three times more than it was in 2009 (Amani Africa, 2023; iDMC, 2024). This is an indication of a significant escalation over three years. According to Amani Africa (2023), between 2018 and 2022, there was an increase of over **11.3 million** new internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the continent, rising from approximately **16.7 million** in 2018 to over **28 million** by 2022. In terms of the number of fatalities, between 2018 and 2022 alone, the number of total fatalities recorded significantly increased from **16,603** in 2018 to roughly **126,309** by the end of 2022, a whopping **7.6-fold** increase from 2018. The region of **East Africa**

was home to approximately **9.6 million** IDPs, **4.7 million** asylum seekers, and refugees in 2021, as recorded by OCHA. Above all, there are close to **35 armed conflicts** on the continent involving states and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), while in some cases, NSAGs engaged in conflicts with each other ([Amani Africa, 2023](#)). The above staggering figures are a testament to instability and humanitarian situation on the continent of Africa. These trends suggest displacement is not only protracted but increasingly urban, requiring long-term governance and infrastructure responses ([Kirbyshire et al., 2017](#); [Robinson, 2022](#)).

According to [IOM \(2024\)](#), after five consecutive failed rainy seasons and a likely sixth, the Horn of Africa's 2019–2023 drought, which is expected to get worse in 2023, is the worst in **40 years**. It is longer and more severe than the droughts of 2010–2011 and 2016–2017. More than **20 million** people experienced severe food insecurity by December 2022, out of the total **36.4 million** impacted. Furthermore, **16.3 million** people: **8.5 million** in **Ethiopia**, **5.2 million** in **Somalia**, and **2.6 million** in **Kenya**, lacked enough water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning, necessitating immediate WASH, nutrition, and health assistance interventions. As women and girls must walk farther to gather water, the drought has also increased protection concerns, such as GBV ([IOM, 2024](#)).

On the other hand, Somalia is quickly becoming more urbanized. Urban regions have a comparatively high population growth rate of about **4.3 percent** annually ([UNDESA, 2019](#)), which is higher than the continental average of 4 percent but comparable to rates throughout East African countries ([WB, 2019](#)). However, compared to its neighbors, Somalia is today more urbanized. An estimated **15.9 million** people live in Somalia, with **7.4 million**, or **46 percent**, of them living in urban cities, compared to an estimated **28 percent** in neighboring Kenya, despite the absence of accurate population statistics. Somalia's urban population is expected to triple over the next 30 years, with an additional **3.8 million** people expected to live in urban areas by 2030 and an additional **11.6 million** by 2050 ([WB, 2020](#)).

To understand the magnitude of the challenges facing urban areas, this analysis will examine the governance structures through which municipal and local authorities are dealing with an excessive number of displaced communities, which has led to a decline in municipal capacity, resulting in breakdowns in security, social cohesion, and service delivery. Somalia's secondary cities are an archetypal example of this phenomenon, showing risks that drive fragility. This is particularly evident in Somalia's secondary cities, which exhibit the “fragile city” syndrome: high exposure to displacement and low resilience to absorb population shocks ([Taruri et al., 2020](#); [Kirbyshire et al., 2017](#); [ReDSS, 2021](#)). Mass displacement in the secondary cities in Somalia has stretched infrastructure and shattered the urban economy. Displaced persons arrive in cities seeking economic survival but are caught in structural exclusion and exploitation.

Somalia's mobility and migration landscape is complex, diverse, and dynamic, characterized by not only insecurity but also seasonal irregular and regular migration, and a large IDP population. For instance, mobility and migration drivers in Somalia are multiple and interconnected, with a range of pull and push factors, including climate factors, insecurity, rampant unemployment, a large diaspora population, and environmental degradation ([Samatar, 2024](#)). According to [OCHA \(2024\)](#), Somalia is one of the most protracted and complex humanitarian crises in the world, with over **6.9 million** people in need of humanitarian interventions across the country. Among the **6.9 million** people in need, **80%** are IDPs, **65%** are children, and over **50%** are women and girls ([IOM, 2025](#)). Additionally, according to the [IOM \(2025\)](#) and [Samatar \(2024\)](#), in only September 2024, approximately **3.3 million** people were internally displaced due to recurrent climate change (i.e., droughts and floods), the presence of

non-state armed groups (NSAGs), conflicts, insecurity, as well as forced evictions, making as one of the world’s highest numbers of IDPs.

Displacement Trends Driven by Disaster and Conflicts

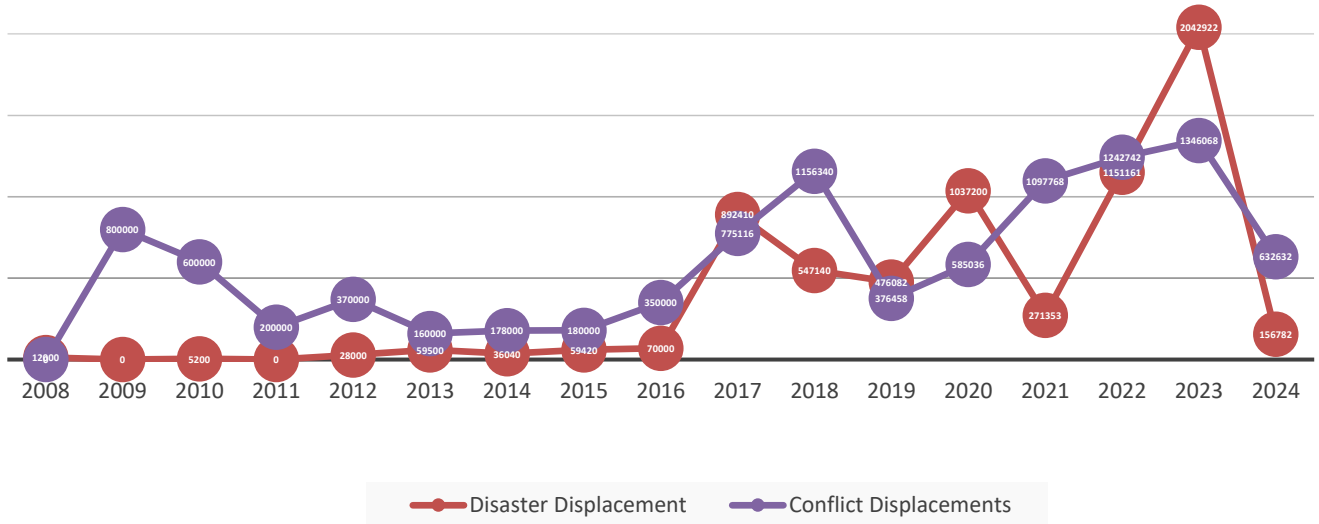


Figure 1 Data Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) (2025)

As **Figure 1** above illustrates, the displacement trends in Somalia from 2008 to 2024 show a cyclical interplay between conflict and disaster as primary drivers of displacement in Somalia, with conflict dominating in the earlier years and disaster-induced displacement from 2017 onwards. Peaks such as **1,156,340 million** conflict displacements in 2018 and **2,042,922 million** disaster displacements in 2023 elucidate how climate shocks, mainly floods and droughts, now rival armed conflicts in terms of scale and impact. These fluctuating numbers align with [IOM \(2025\)](#) and [OCHA \(2024\)](#) conclusions that further explained how Somalia remains one of the most protracted humanitarian crises in the world, as the country hosts approximately **3.3 million** internally displaced persons as of September 2024.

The African secondary cities are expected to double in **25 years**, by an estimated **22 million** people annually ([Commins, 2018](#)). Due to the unavailability of other options, migrants live in unplanned settlements. In Nairobi, for example, nearly **70%** of the population lives in unplanned settlements, which account for **5%** of the city’s total residential area, yet Kenya is not among the top 10 African countries by urban slum population ([Commins, 2018](#)). Therefore, the literature identifies three primary urban risks: (1) turbo-urbanization, which is an explosive growth that exceeds institutional capacity; (2) concentrated vulnerability, where IDPs are pushed into informal settlements marked by land insecurity and exclusion; and (3) informal governance, where non-state actors are exploiting displacement-affected communities for control or rent ([SCC & BRiCS, 2024](#); [Baumann & Kanafani, 2020](#); [International Crisis Group, 2017](#); [Smit, 2018](#)).

Turb-urbanization, which is an explosive and unplanned form of population growth that far

outstrips the city's infrastructure and institutional capacity to cope. The city of Baidoa in Somalia, for instance, saw its population double in just two years, with the number of IDP sites ballooning from **70** to **435** between 2017 and 2019 (Taruri et al., 2020). As of 2020, Baidoa hosts **514 informal settlements**, and the number of IDPs is expected to increase due to climate change and conflicts, where the majority of these settlements are situated on privately owned land without any formal tenure agreements (UN, 2021; iDMC, 2018). Approximately **8,500** households and **55,675** IDPs live in Garowe (Said, 2024), Kismayo has **206** verified IDP sites that host **35,153** households, hosting **209,153** individuals (CCCM Cluster, IOM & UNHCR, 2025), while Mogadishu, the capital city, hosts **1,109,273** IDPs (IOM, 2025). IDPs were forced to shift from pastoral areas and rural villages to large urban towns and secondary cities due to war, armed conflict, insecurity, droughts, floods, and other natural calamities. These cities are marked by weak urban systems that lack land tenure mechanisms, basic infrastructure, and inclusive governance.

This rapid, chaotic expansion is a primary correlate of rising urban insecurity and environmental degradation. The other mega-risk is the **concentrated vulnerability**, where displacement often disproportionately affects the marginalized communities, creating hyper-concentrated hotspot areas of insecure land tenure, exclusion from basic services, and extreme poverty (Taruri et al., 2020). The unplanned and disorderly urbanization reshaping Somalia's secondary cities is primarily driven by displacement. The rapid, unregulated, unplanned sprawl of informal settlements in urban settings occurs without proper guidance, adequate infrastructure, environmental considerations, or urban planning (iDMC, 2018).

These secondary cities are not merely smaller-scale versions of Mogadishu city, but they represent uniquely vulnerable crucibles of urban burden. They are the first point of arrival for displacement-affected communities fleeing from rural distress, yet they do not have adequate resources, infrastructure is poorly developed, and they have limited institutional capacity compared to the capital (iDMC, 2018; Smit, 2018). Somalia's secondary cities, like Baidoa, Garowe, Kismayo, and Bosaso, face compounded resource and governance challenges. As a result, displacement-driven urbanization becomes both a governance and a humanitarian crisis. While IDPs are supported in major urban centers, there is limited attention paid to the small and medium-sized cities that are often the first sanctuary of the displaced population (WB, 2014). These cities are defined as having '**weak urban systems**' that are unable to cope with the influx of IDPs and are ill-resourced and prepared to manage such crises (ReDSS, 2021). Henceforth, a severe and heightened form of urban fragility results from the combination of being a major destination of IDPs and being routinely under-resourced and disregarded by national and international actors.

Without state regulation, a predatory informal economy has developed, dominated by self-appointed "gatekeepers" who manage humanitarian aid and charge displaced families for shelter. This precariousness is weaponized by market forces, leading to trauma, family separation, repeated displacement, and shelter loss. Therefore, vulnerable families become even more marginalized as a result of forced evictions (International Crisis Group, 2017; SCC & BRiCS, 2024; Sinigallia et al., 2013).

Forced evictions have become a phenomenon in Somalia, whereby landlords/ladies and gatekeepers are trading on the displacement. In Mogadishu, in 2018, approximately **228,000** individuals were forcibly displaced, and by 2022, the number of forcibly evicted individuals decreased to **145,000** (UNHCR & WB, 2022). Additionally, forced evictions became a structural problem, creating devastating cycles of secondary displacement (Oostrum, 2025). Although the

Somali Government has adopted the [National Evictions Guidelines \(2019\)](#), many argue that forced evictions still remain a significant national issue, often due to the absence of supporting legal frameworks and the absence of land tenure agreements, as rapid urbanization increases land values, which compounds the already existing challenges faced by displaced people. Further to this, in the labour market, internally displaced individuals face systemic exclusion due to skill mismatches, profound lack of social networks, and clan-based discrimination ([Oostrum, 2025](#)). Digital finance adoption, once seen as a tool for inclusion, has been co-opted by exploitation structures, exacerbated by systemic poverty and systemic immiseration among urban internally displaced individuals.

Literature Review

The literature on urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) consistently underscores how rapid and unplanned city growth is largely driven by forced displacement, which, on the other hand, strains unplanned urban growth, strains city infrastructure, disrupts service delivery, and exacerbates the existing governance gap.

Displacement-induced urbanization in SSA has emerged as a central policy challenge, especially in fragile states like Somalia, where conflict, conflict shocks, and institutional breakdown converge. [Kirbyshire et al. \(2017\)](#), through an extensive policy review and urban risk, emphasize that displacement not only reshapes urban demographics but also magnifies municipal service vulnerabilities. Using comparative case studies, including Somali cities, they find that unplanned growth caused by conflict and climate displacement leads to ‘compound risks’ across shelter, WASH, health, and livelihood sectors. Complementing this, the ([ReDSS, 2021](#)) area-based review in Baidoa and Kismayo combines service audits, stakeholder consultations, and GIS mapping to show that secondary Somali cities are disproportionately hosting displaced populations despite lacking the infrastructure or fiscal autonomy to serve them. [Bile, et al. \(2024\)](#), in its urban profiling assessment, uses spatial enumeration and capacity gap analysis to highlight that nearly **70%** of settlements in cities like Kismayo are informal, with no connection to basic public services. These reports collectively underscore that secondary cities in fragile contexts face an urbanization dynamic driven more by forced displacement than economic migration, leading to non-planned, service-deficient urban growth often beyond state visibility or capacity. Displacement-affected cities often experience governance fragmentation, not simply due to institutional weakness but because of negotiated and hybrid authority systems. [Goodfellow & Jackman \(2023\)](#) describe how urban governance in rapidly growing African cities operates under “hybrid political settlements,” where informal actors perform state-like functions in the absence or retreat of formal institutions. This aligns with the [WB \(2020\)](#) report of “patchwork urbanization,” where municipal authorities coexist with humanitarian and informal actors, resulting in overlapping and inconsistent service delivery. [Sakketa \(2023\)](#) supports this by showing that urban expansion in SSA countries, particularly driven by displacement, typically occurs in contexts characterized by fragile institutions, informal land markets, and governance through accommodation. In Somalia, this is evident in cities like Baidoa and Kismayo, where gatekeepers function as informal authorities ([CCCM Cluster, IOM & UNHCR, 2025](#)), and in Mogadishu and Bosaso, where legal pluralism sidelines municipal governments. Collectively, these studies illustrate that displacement not only strains urban services but also fundamentally alters governance structures, embedding informality and weakening statutory systems.

Displacement-led urbanization in SSA has resulted in widespread tenure insecurity and spatial exclusion, particularly for IDPs residing in informal settlements. In Baidoa, [Taruri et al. \(2020\)](#) found that **89 percent** of displaced people live on private land without legal protection, making

them vulnerable to eviction and exclusion from urban plans. [SCC & BRiCS \(2024\)](#) Confirm that legal pluralism and the absence of a cadastral system obstruct formal settlement integration. [ReDSS \(2021\)](#) underscores how humanitarian aid often bypasses local authorities, reinforcing informal structures. [Haysom \(2013\)](#) shows that displaced people in Mogadishu are denied land rights, worsening their vulnerability, while the [WB \(2020\)](#) identified spatial marginalization of IDPs in fragile Somali cities often places them in flood-prone settlements and underserved zones. Collectively, these sources show that informal settlements may provide immediate shelter but perpetuate long-term exclusion, exploitation, and governance failure.

There are still thematic gaps in spite of these insightful information. With little disaggregated secondary urban cities, displacement data and service indicators are mainly provided at the national or capital city level ([UN-Habitat, 2022](#); [iDMC, 2024](#)). Many institutional assessments, such as those by UN-Habitat or CCCM, remain programmatic and descriptive, lacking analytical depth on how displacement reshapes municipalities. Moreover, few studies systematically compare cities like Kismayo, Baidoa, and Garowe despite their centrality in Somalia's displacement geography. Therefore, this paper addresses these gaps by applying a meta-analysis of academic literature, reports, and field assessments to draw a synthesized understanding of how displacement-induced urban growth affects governance, service systems, and land regulation in Somalia's secondary cities. Lastly, by combining institutional dynamics with demographic and spatial trends, this study offers a sophisticated framework for examining displacement-driven urban fragility, placing Somalia's secondary cities within larger continental trends of unchecked urbanization and governance stress.

The reviewed literature expresses that displacement-driven urbanization in SSA, and Somalia in particular, is both a demographic and governance challenge. Studies such as [Goodfellow & Jackman \(2023\)](#) demonstrate how African secondary cities often operate under *hybrid political settlements*, where informal as well as semi-formal actors co-govern urban spaces, particularly in contexts of rapid displacement. For instance, [Satterthwaite & Dodman \(2016\)](#) further advance the concept of *patchwork urbanization*, showing that secondary cities often lack the institutional clarity to enforce planning, resulting in fragmented and contradictory service delivery systems. This is echoed by [Sinigallia et al. \(2013\)](#), who reveal how Somalia's plural legal order, customary law, Islamic, and statutory, intersect to undermine tenure security and municipal governance. 'The urban consequences of displacement are equally visible in spatial exclusion and tenure insecurity. [Taruri et al. \(2020\)](#) found that the majority of IDPs in Baidoa reside in informal settlements on private land without legal protection, leaving them highly vulnerable to eviction. This claim is reinforced by the [SCC & BRiCS \(2024\)](#), who identify the absence of cadastral systems and persistent legal pluralism as barriers to integration. Furthermore, [ReDSS \(2021\)](#) and [Pavanello & Haysom \(2012\)](#) demonstrate how humanitarian interventions often bypass municipal institutions, thereby entrenching gatekeeper dynamics that substitute for formal governance and entrap IDPs in informality. Such dynamics align with findings by [Tuffour et al. \(2025\)](#), who found insecure tenure and crime-related stress in Ghana decisively shape mobility and displacement risks among marginalized urban households.

Broader regional analyses underscore that displacement is not only a humanitarian issue but also an economic and political driver of urban transformation. [Bello-Schünemann \(2018\)](#) argues that Africa's urbanization is progressing without equivalent structural economic transformation, creating fragile urban growth that is heavily influenced by migration and displacement. Similarly, [Sakketa \(2023\)](#) reviews rural-urban linkages in SSA, concluding that displacement-driven urban growth is often absorbed by weak institutions, resulting in fragmented land markets, informal

governance, and exclusion from services. This aligns with UN-Habitat's (2022) urban profiling of Somali secondary cities, which indicates that up to **70 percent** of settlements in Kismayo are informal and unconnected to services, underscoring that displacement-driven growth exceeds municipal capacity.

Other perspectives extend these findings by linking connectivity, governance, and spatial patterns. Merino et al. (2023) demonstrate how access to digital and physical connectivity influences settlements' viability, with implications for service delivery in fragile urban contexts. Meanwhile, WB (2020) reports emphasize that fragile and conflict-affected states face heightened risks when displacement intersects with poor urban governance, producing enduring social and economic vulnerabilities.

In conclusion, the literature converges on the view that displacement not only reshapes demographic trends in secondary cities but also transforms governance systems, land markets, and service infrastructures. For Somalia, this means that secondary cities such as Baidoa and Kismayo are not just absorbing demographic shocks but are undergoing fundamental shifts in governance, where informal and humanitarian actors increasingly substitute municipal authority. The consequence is a persistent cycle of exclusion, institutional fragmentation, and urban strain that undermines prospects for inclusive growth and sustainable governance in displacement-affected contexts.

Methodology

To investigate the economic and governance impacts of displacement-driven urbanization in secondary cities across Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), with a focus on Somalia, this paper utilises a systematic literature review approach, drawing on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research (Patton, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It synthesizes existing empirical and conceptual studies on displacement, rapid urbanization, urban strain, tenure insecurity, governance fragmentation, and service delivery in fragile urban contexts. Unlike primary data-driven research, the study does not generate new survey or fieldwork data; instead, it collates and analyzes evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports (e.g., the UN and Development Partners), national and international organizational reports, government reports, and case studies relevant to Somalia and comparable SSA cities.

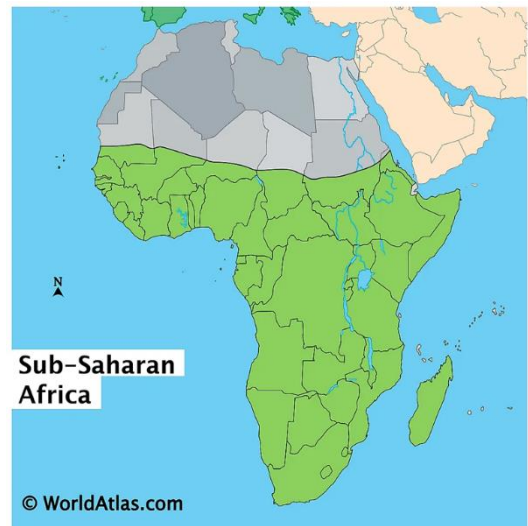


Figure 2 Figure 1: Map of Sub-Saharan Africa. Source: WorldAtlas (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.worldatlas.com/regions/sub-saharan-africa.html>.

The literature was purposively selected from grey literature repositories and academic databases, including publications by the World Bank, iDMC, IOM, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNDESA, ODI, ReDSS, and regional research institutes, supplemented by peer-reviewed studies indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Inclusion criteria emphasized studies published between 2006 and 2025 that explicitly examine migration and urban displacement dynamics, municipal governance, informal settlements, and economic impacts of migration in fragile or post-conflict states. To

triangulate findings and situate Somalia's secondary cities like Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo within broader regional patterns, comparative studies from other SSA contexts were also included.

This displacement-driven urban strain study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap regarding how forced displacement transforms urban governance and service-delivery systems in secondary cities. This methodological choice is particularly important given the scarcity of quantitative panel data on displacement in fragile contexts like Somalia. The literature search did not produce publications on the displacement-driven urban strain in Somalia; therefore, this paper seeks to address this literature gap. The analysis is therefore significant to urban policymakers, local authorities, humanitarian actors, researchers, and development partners, as it provides a consolidated evidence base for deeply understanding the structural challenges and opportunities for building inclusive and resilient urban governance in the secondary cities affected by the influx of displacement-affected communities.

To derive reliable, valid, and sufficient findings, the researcher followed **six steps in the review analysis** (Sylvester, Tate, & Johnstone, 2011; Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2024). According to the authors, a credible review process requires defined study questions or objectives, such as the five questions in this paper, as the **first step** of the process:

RQ1: What are the economic impacts of displacement-driven urban growth on secondary cities in SSA, particularly in terms of labour markets, livelihoods, and access to services?

RQ2: How does displacement affect urban governance structures in secondary cities, and in what ways do informal and humanitarian actors substitute or compete with municipal authorities?

RQ3: In what ways do tenure insecurity and spatial exclusion shape the lived realities of displaced populations in Somali secondary cities such as Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Baidoa?

RQ4: How do the experiences of Somali cities compare with other displacement-affected cities in SSA regarding governance fragmentation and urban resilience

RQ5: What policy frameworks or governance mechanisms have been suggested or implemented to strengthen urban resilience and inclusivity in displacement-affected secondary cities, and what lessons can be drawn for Somalia?

The **second step** involves conducting a structured search for relevant literature across multiple credible sources. This study draws primarily on peer-reviewed articles, United Nations sectoral reports, policy briefs from national and international organizations such as UN-Habitat, the World Bank, UNDESA, the Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), and research outputs from regional research institutions. The search strategy applied a set of keywords and combinations tailored to the study's scope, including but not limited to: ***forced displacement, migration, urban governance, urban strain, tenure security, displacement-affected communities, secondary cities, informal settlements, service delivery, Sub-Saharan Africa, Somalia, and economic impact of displacement***. This process ensured that the reviewed materials directly addressed the intersection of displacement, governance, and economic challenges in SSA's fragile urban context, with the focus on Somalia, while also incorporating comparative insights from other SSA cities to contextualize Somalia's experience.

The **third step** involved screening the collected materials for inclusion in the review. Searches were conducted across academic databases such as ScienceDirect, Scopus, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, alongside institutional repositories including UN-Habitat, UNHCR, World Bank, ReDSS, and other organizations. For accessibility and breadth, Google Scholar provided the bulk

of peer-reviewed sources. The inclusion criteria required studies to be published in the last 10-15 years. Written in English, and directly addressing themes of “*displacement*”, “*secondary cities*”, “*urban governance*”, “*service delivery*”, “*informality*”, “*climate change*”, “*insecurity*”, and “*economic impacts of migration*”. While Somalia forms the primary focus, comparative studies from other Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries were also included to situate Somalia’s experience within a broader regional context and to highlight cross-country lessons relevant to urban fragility and governance under displacement pressures.

In this stage of the selection process, studies employing quantitative, qualitative, and literature review methodologies were included to ensure a balanced and comprehensive perspective. Drawing on diverse methodological approaches strengthened the reliability of the synthesis and increased confidence that the analysis rests on verifiable and contextually grounded evidence. Alongside peer-reviewed journal articles, this review also incorporated reports from credible organizations, including the World Bank, UN-Habitat, the Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS), and policy briefs from Somali government institutions and regional bodies. These sources were particularly valuable in providing the most recent data on displacement dynamics, urban governance, and service delivery, thereby complementing academic findings with up-to-date statistics and policy insights. Integrating this breadth of material built on the previous screening step, ensuring that the evidence base was not only academically robust but also practically relevant to understanding displacement-driven urban strain in Somalia and other SSA secondary cities.

The **fourth step** of the review analysis entailed assessing the quality and relevance of the materials identified in the earlier stages. This step ensured that only methodologically sound, credible, and contextually appropriate studies were retained for synthesis. The assessment considered the rigor of each study, its thematic relevance to displacement-driven urban strain, and its direct contribution to understanding the economic and governance impacts on secondary cities in SSA, with particular emphasis on Somalia.

From this quality screening, a total of **84 studies (n=84)** were selected. These comprised **42 peer-reviewed journal articles (n=42)**, which offered theoretical, conceptual, and empirical insights into displacement, governance fragmentation, tenure insecurity, informality, and economic inclusion; **11 technical reports from international organizations (n=11)** such as UN-Habitat, the World Bank (WB), IOM, OCHA, UNHCR, UNDESA, and ReDSS, which provided recent data, secondary city profiles, and policy frameworks; and **31 government and agency reports or working papers (n=31)**, including those from Somali ministries, regional consortia, and research institutions, which presented localized statistics, institutional perspectives, and policy response.

The diversity of these sources allowed the review to integrate scholarly analysis with policy-based evidence. Academic studies provided comparative perspectives that situated Somalia’s experience within wider debates on urban fragility, while UN and Somali institutional reports anchored the findings in current realities of displacement, service gaps, and governance challenges in cities such as **Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, and Bosaso**. Overall, this **fourth step** established a credible and evidence-based base, ensuring the literature was both academically rigorous and practically relevant for understanding displacement-driven pressures on secondary cities and guiding durable solutions in Somalia and across SSA.

Finally, the **fifth and sixth steps** focused on data extraction and thematic analysis, systematically organizing the relevant information from the selected studies around the paper’s core themes: *economic impacts of displacement, governance and institutional*

fragmentation, tenure insecurity and spatial exclusion, and policy response in secondary cities. Using a **systematic review approach**, the analysis focused on interpretation and synthesis rather than generalization (Sylvester, Tate, & Johnstone, 2011), thereby facilitating the identification of key patterns, relationships, and knowledge gaps (Templier & Pare, 2015). The findings were then structured to highlight both the *economic* and *governance* challenges of displacement-driven urbanization, as well as *institutional strategies* to strengthen resilience and inclusivity in Somalia and other Sub-Saharan African (SSA) cities.

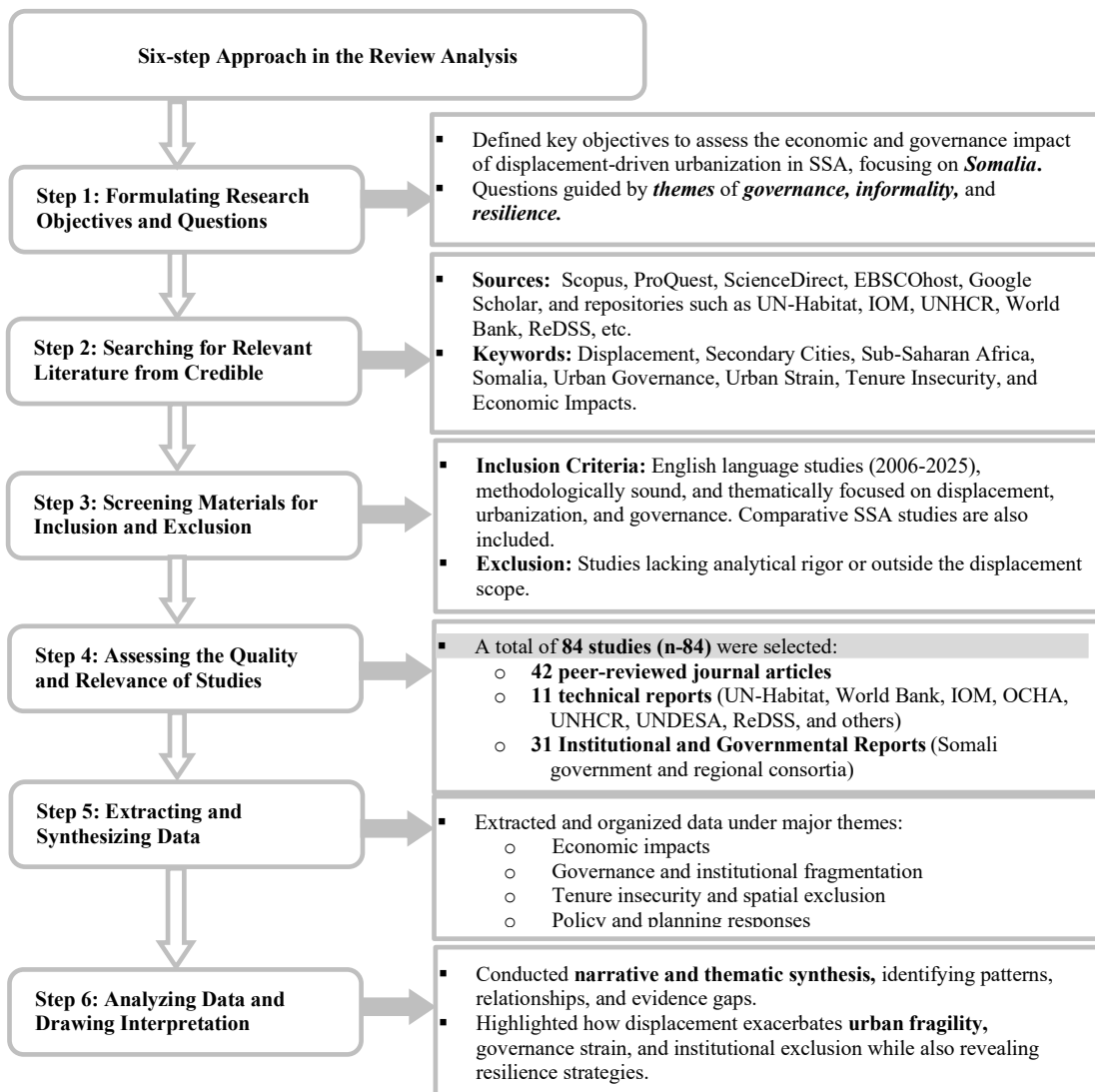


Figure 3: The six-step review analysis framework used in the study “Displacement-Driven Urban Strain: The Economic and Governance Impacts on Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a Focus on Somalia.”
Source: Authors’ adaptation from Sylvester, Tate, & Johnstone, 2011, and Kajiita & Kang’ethe (2024)

Limitations of this Research

The research has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the results. The **first limitation** of this research is that it is a narrative literature review based solely on secondary sources; therefore, no primary empirical data were generated. Although the literature review provides a basis for comprehensive synthesis and cross-validation of data across a wide variety of contexts, this research methodology does not establish causal relationships among variables or quantify the extent of economic and/or governance impacts of displacement in secondary cities.

The **second limitation** of the research concerns the availability and quality of the literature on secondary cities, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings (e.g., Somalia). Most of the Somalia-based evidence used in the research consists of gray literature, that is, reports produced by various international organizations and humanitarian agencies, which, although credible and recent, vary in methodological rigor and scope relative to peer-reviewed academic studies. These differences reflect the broader research gap on fragile states and urbanization; however, there may also be variability in analytical consistency.

The **third limitation** of the research concerns publication and language biases, as only English-language sources were included. Therefore, studies conducted in other languages and unpublished local research may be underrepresented in the findings. The research emphasized including publications from the past decade (approximately 10-15 years) to maintain relevance, which may limit the historical depth of the research on long-term urban transformation processes.

The **fourth and final limitation** of the research is that, although it employed a comparative Sub-Saharan Africa framework, the focus on Somalia may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regional contexts. Variations in political settlement, institutional capacity, and urban governance across countries may indicate that displacement-driven urban stress manifests differently across contexts. However, employing a comparative framework increases the validity of the findings by placing Somalia within the context of regional patterns and avoiding the treatment of Somalia as an isolated case.

In conclusion, despite the aforementioned limitations, the use of systematic triangulation of academic, institutional, and policy-based literature provides a solid and credible basis for examining displacement-driven urban strain in secondary cities, and provides a basis for future empirical research and policy intervention.

Findings: Displacement-Driven Urban Strain in Secondary Cities

The evidence of the reviewed literature shows that displacement is no longer an event (a temporary demographic shock) but a process (an ongoing structural process) of transforming secondary cities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In countries like Somalia, where fragility & conflict exist, displacement combines with already weak institutions, climate-related stresses, and informal settlement patterns to create compounding pressures on both the economy and governance. The results have been categorized into four overlapping areas: the economic burdens, the disintegration of governance, the insecurity of tenure and space, and the inability to provide services.

Economic Strain and Informalization of Urban Livelihoods

In addition to being a key driver of the growth of informal, low-productivity, and risky urban economies in all of sub-Saharan Africa, displacement-driven urbanization has also been shown to be an important cause of the development of undiversified labor markets and non-industrial bases in secondary cities (WB, 2020; Bello-Schünemann, 2018; WB, 2024). As such, displaced people have generally been absorbed into informal economy sectors (casual labor, petty trading,

construction, domestic work, and humanitarian-dependent work), which are characterized by a lack of labor protections (IOM, 2025; UN-Habitat, 2022; Sakketa, 2023). As displaced people enter a highly competitive informal economy sector that is characterized by saturation (i.e., there are few jobs available) and decline in real income levels (due to the low wages paid and/or the lack of job security) and high rates of unemployment, it puts downward pressure on displaced people as well as existing urban residents (Sakketa, 2023). Additionally, Azunre et al. (2022) and the WB (2020) have reported that secondary cities have lower absorptive capacities in their labor markets than the major cities of each country and are therefore especially susceptible to economic pressures created by displacement.

Beginning with Somalia, we observe this dynamic exacerbated by prolonged conflict and climate shock, and by an already weak local economy. It is documented in the literature that recurring drought, flood, and conflict-related displacement have caused a rapid flow of people from rural areas into secondary urban centers, including Baidoa, Kismayo, Bosaso, and Mogadishu, with little increase in private sector job creation, private sector investments, or city-generated revenue (ReDSS, 2021; OCHA, 2024; UNDESA, 2019). Thus, displacement contributes to a chronic state of economic instability in secondary urban environments, where the IDP and host communities compete for limited employment opportunities, market spaces, and humanitarian assistance (CCCM Cluster, IOM & UNHCR, 2025). The literature also indicates that when secondary urban environments experience population growth due to displacement, they typically do not see an increase in taxes or service fees paid on their behalf, because IDPs often live outside formal administrative systems. Therefore, secondary urban environments experience fiscal strain, which results in weakened municipal capacity to provide necessary infrastructure, regulate markets, and deliver basic services to residents, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of poor economic conditions, weak government, and poverty within urban environments (Goodfellow & Jackman, 2023; WB, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022).

Governance Fragmentation and Institutional Overstretch

Governance fragmentation as well as institutional overextension are the primary findings in all the studies reviewed for the purpose of this research. Displacement typically leads to an increase in governance fragmentation in secondary cities due to large-scale, rapid increases in populations, which can occur without being within formally established planning structures. As a result, the governance arrangements created in secondary cities are frequently characterized by overlapping authority amongst multiple stakeholders, including municipalities, humanitarian agencies, customary institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other informal power brokers (Azunre et al., 2022; Goodfellow & Jackman, 2023).

The Somali context contributes to the already fragmented nature of governance due to the legal pluralism and lack of effective implementation of statute law. The literature provides evidence that there are informal actors, such as gatekeepers, clan elders, and land intermediaries, who act as de facto governance agents in IDP settlements and control the means of accessing land, mediate disputes, and control the means of providing services (CCCM Cluster, IOM & UNHCR, 2025; Sinigallia, Kamau, & Bryld, 2013). Although the existence of these informal governance arrangements may be able to create short-term stability and order, they will ultimately contribute to undermining formal accountability and establishing parallel governance systems.

Studies on comparative experiences in SSA further reinforce this trend, demonstrating that many secondary cities affected by displacement have hybrid political settlements, and the degree of informality that exists in them is not solely indicative of a complete absence of government but rather is a component of negotiated governance strategies implemented within constraints of

existing institutions (Goodfellow & Jackman, 2023; Sakketa, 2023).

Tenure Insecurity, Informality, and Spatial Exclusion

Displacement-driven urban strain in secondary cities throughout Sub-Saharan Africa is defined in the literature as a structural dimension of displacement characterized by a single major factor: tenure insecurity. In many cases, displaced individuals are absorbed into informal settlements on private, community, or disputed land. As a result, their occupancy of these lands does not enjoy the support of enforceable legal agreements nor does it receive any state protection (Bakonyi, 2021; UN-Habitat, 2022). Thus, residents of these informal settlements are at risk of chronic evictions, as they remain excluded from formal urban planning processes, public works investment, and local government participation, thereby creating additional barriers to socioeconomic inclusion.

Tenure insecurity in Somalia is exacerbated due to the prolonged period of civil war, which has caused a collapse of land administration structures, destroying or eliminating cadastral data, and the coexistence of statutory, customary (**Xeer**), and religious legal frameworks. These have resulted in fragmented and often conflicting land governance systems that disproportionately harm internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other minority groups (UN-Habitat, 2024; Global Protection Cluster, 2024; OCHA, 2024). Assessments conducted by national bodies have found that there are approximately 4 million internally displaced Somalis living in approximately 3700 informal settlement communities, the vast majority of which are situated on privately owned land without formal lease agreements or tenure protections, which has resulted in the repeated forced evictions and secondary displacement of the displaced population (NRC, UN-Habitat & UNHCR, 2025; UN-Habitat, 2024).

Somali government policy frameworks, including Somalia's National Eviction Guidelines (2019), the National IDP Policy, and the Durable Solutions Strategy, formally acknowledge that tenure security is an essential prerequisite to achieving durable solutions. Nonetheless, the literature identifies a substantial gap between policy commitments and local practice in the implementation of these policies, especially within secondary cities where municipalities lack both the fiscal capacity, the enforcement power, and the technical land administration systems necessary to provide tenure security to displaced individuals (ReDSS, 2021; UN-Habitat, 2024). More recently, the literature emphasizes that although recent urban land law enactments in Puntland, South West State, and Somaliland represent significant legal advancements, their coverage remains uneven and their enforcement remains constrained by limited institutional coordination and ongoing political contestation (UN-Habitat, 2024).

The spatial manifestation of displacement-driven informality has led to a rapid expansion of secondary cities (including **Baidoa, Kismayo, Bosaso, and Garowe**) into environmentally fragile and poorly serviced areas on the periphery of the city. The literature associates this pattern with peri-urban sprawl, unregulated land subdivisions, and the occupation of flood-prone or hazard-exposed lands, which increase the vulnerability of these communities to climate-related shocks and other public health risks (Azunre et al., 2022; Sakketa, 2023; OCHA, 2024). Therefore, informal settlements function simultaneously as entry points into urban life and as long-term spaces of exclusion, in which residents are often disconnected from secure housing, basic services, and economic opportunity.

Political economy studies show that tenure insecurity in Somalia's cities is not only a governance failure but also embedded in power relations and rent-seeking practices. For example, land grabbing, speculative urban expansion, and the commodification of displacement have been documented in strategically located secondary cities that are experiencing infrastructure

investment and port-related growth (Bakonyi, 2021; RVI, 2022). Additionally, displaced populations often lack the political capital, clan protection, or financial resources necessary to assert land claims, leaving them particularly vulnerable to dispossession even where legal protections exist (Cavallaro, 2025).

Studies conducted over time and city-specific show that tenure insecurity has far-reaching consequences beyond housing. For example, in Bosaso, displaced households experiencing tenure insecurity report reduced livelihood investments, reduced access to credit, and social integration due to the threat of eviction, discouraging long-term economic planning and community participation (Cavallaro, 2025). Similar dynamics are observed across secondary cities where tenure insecurity undermines municipal revenue generation, weakens urban planning outcomes, and perpetuates informal service delivery arrangements that disadvantage both displaced and host populations (WB, 2020) (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Gender and minority identities add layers to the spatial exclusion of displaced persons. There have been studies that show systemic obstacles for women, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized communities in being able to obtain land records, inherit property, and participate in formal dispute resolution, especially in internally displaced person (IDP) camps (NRC & UNHCR, 2025) (UN-Habitat, 2022). The overlap of these disadvantages has exacerbated uneven urban citizenship and limited the transformative potential of urbanization for those in displacement settings.

Overall, the research has shown that insecure tenure, informality, and spatial exclusion are interdependent and collectively create conditions for displacement-driven urban stress in Somalia's secondary cities. Unless there is an integrated approach to addressing land governance and reform, developing land tenure systems that are appropriate to the needs of displaced persons, and through inclusive urban planning that incorporates the needs of displaced persons into plans, informal settlements will most likely continue to exist as areas of persistent vulnerability rather than as routes for urban inclusion. Therefore, while addressing tenure insecurity may be viewed as a humanitarian or protective issue, it is also a fundamental governance challenge that is critical to creating sustainable urban development and durable solutions for displaced persons in Somalia and throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

Service Delivery Overload and Humanitarian Substitution

A consistent body of evidence indicates that mass displacement has immediate and long-term impacts on urban service provision and can be particularly damaging for secondary cities in developing countries, which have experienced rapid population growth as a result of displacement but lack sufficient infrastructure to support it. Displacement-driven urbanization occurs rapidly across Sub-Saharan Africa and is overwhelming urban service delivery systems, including water, sanitation, public health, education, and waste management, resulting in a continuing deficit in service delivery affecting IDPs and low-income host community residents (Azunre et al., 2022; UN-Habitat, 2022; WB, 2020). Secondary cities are most vulnerable to these impacts due to their limited financial resources and technical capacity to develop plans to respond to large-scale demographic shifts.

In Somalia, these problems are exacerbated by the ongoing conflict, the displacement of people due to climate, and weak local governments. Research has documented that cities such as Baidoa, Kismayo, Bosaso, Garowe, and Mogadishu have experienced a much higher rate of population growth than their current physical infrastructure can support, especially in informal and rural areas of IDP settlements (OCHA, 2024; UN-Habitat, 2024). Providing safe drinking water and adequate sanitation is one of the most significant challenges facing residents, as well as private

water suppliers and emergency water transport to informal and rural settlements, creating significant public health and environmental risks (UN-Habitat, 2024). Health and education services also suffer from overcrowding, shortages of personnel, and insufficient funding to ensure displaced populations equal access to resources (Cavallaro, 2025; WB, 2020).

Humanitarian organizations have filled this void by serving as service-delivery entities in urban areas affected by displacement. As a result, UN Agencies, International NGOs, and Cluster Mechanisms are often operating parallel systems for water, sanitation, health, education, and camp management within IDP Settlements (OCHA, 2024; IOM, 2025; CCCM Cluster et al., 2025). These humanitarian responses are critical for meeting the urgent needs of the displaced population, but also create concerns that long term humanitarian substitution will erode local government capacity, impede institutional learning, and slow the inclusion of displaced populations in formal urban systems (Del Ministro, 2021; ReDSS, 2021; Bakonyi, 2021). Furthermore, project-based humanitarian funding creates instability in service delivery when funding is terminated, thereby reinforcing dependency on external sources and service fragmentation (Mohn, 2020).

Beginning with recent, long-term policy studies, it is evident that humanitarian replacement needs to be replaced by area-based and system-strengthening approaches. The increasing necessity of integrating IDP settlements into local government service frameworks through incremental development of infrastructure, coordinated funding, and humanitarian/development alignments has been identified as a method of reducing strain on urban areas and supporting sustainable solutions (UN-Habitat, 2022; WB, 2020). Although the literature has highlighted that these methods are unattainable unless accompanied by land governance reform, decentralizing finance, and coordinating among institutions, both in theory and in practice (OCHA, 2024; UN-Habitat, 2024), overall, service delivery overload and humanitarian replacement can be considered as permanent features of displacement driven urbanization in Somalia's secondary cities, as opposed to emergency responses.

Synthesis of Findings

Secondary cities undergo a radical redefinition of their secondary-city nature due to displacement-led urbanization, mediated by interlinked forces of economic informalization, fragmented governance, tenure instability, spatial exclusion, and service-delivery overload. In sub-Saharan Africa, displacement does not operate as a temporary demographic shock on the urban population but as an enduring transformative force in the urban landscape of secondary cities, which are characterized by limited institutional capacity, fiscal resources, and urban planning capacity (Sakketa, 2023; IIED, 2020; Dodman, Colenbrander et al., 2017; WB, 2020). Secondary cities become the primary locations for absorbing displaced populations, yet lack the economic diversification and urban governance structures necessary to manage rapid population growth effectively, leading to prolonged urban stress.

In Somalia, there exist an assortment of factors that contribute to exacerbating the effects of protracted conflict, climate-related shocks, fragmented governance of land, and the lack of robustness in municipal institutions. In addition to this, literature demonstrates that displacement generates rapid growth in informal economies and settlements, and it further hinders the ability of municipalities such as Mogadishu, Baidoa, Kismayo, and Bosaso to generate revenue, enforce urban planning, and provide services to their citizens (OCHA, 2024; Bakonyi, 2021; UN-Habitat, 2022). Displacement-generated populations enter urban systems primarily through the mechanisms of the informal economy, resulting in chronic livelihood instability, insecure tenure of property, and exclusion from formal governance structures and formal service delivery

systems, while humanitarian organizations and informal intermediaries assume de facto functions of municipal authorities (Cavallaro, 2025) (ReDSS, 2021) (CCCM Cluster, IOM & UNHCR, 2025). Overall, the study's findings demonstrate that displacement is a fundamental driver of urbanization in Somalia and in similarly vulnerable states today, and thus require coordinated approaches to urban governance and development that specifically recognize and account for displacement as a sustainable structural issue, not merely a short-term crisis.

Discussion

This study investigated how forced displacement has altered the economic development of Secondary Cities in Sub-Saharan Africa and the manner in which they are governed. The purpose was to examine how displaced populations affected economic and governance activities in Somalia's secondary cities. This research indicates that displacement is more than an occasional problem for humanitarian organizations. Rather, it serves as an ongoing structural mechanism that alters urban structures across fragile states, conflict zones, and regions experiencing extreme climatic conditions (Sakketa, 2023; IIED, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022; WB, 2020). In all cases examined in this study, displacement was found to be a major driver of recent changes to the urban environment, including the rate at which cities expand, are managed and deliver services; particularly in secondary cities lacking the resources, institutional infrastructure, financial capabilities and planning authority of primary cities (Sakketa, 2023; IIED, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022; WB, 2020). These studies challenged previous theories of the "urban transition" that described urban expansion as being based primarily upon the flow of people into cities from rural areas and the increase of industrial activity within those cities, rather emphasizing a type of "crisis-driven urbanization," where population increases outpace the economic transformations and development of the institutions required to manage such growth (WB, 2020).

The flow of migrants into secondary cities has become a common phenomenon across Sub-Saharan Africa, whereas cities are less often able to sustain sufficient resources to cope with the long-term impacts of migration on their populations. Rather than creating inclusive economic development, rapid urbanization due to migration creates an informal economy, precarious income levels, and unevenness in the distribution of space in many cases, especially when there are limited job options available in the labor market and little public money available for investment (Bello-Schünemann, 2018; Azunre et al., 2022). In Somalia, factors such as chronic conflict, recurrent droughts and flooding, environmental degradation, and insecurity cause recurring waves of migration from rural areas to urban centers, overwhelming urban municipalities' capacity to serve displaced populations (IOM, 2025; OCHA, 2024; UNDESA, 2019; UNDESA, 2019). All studies clearly indicate that displaced populations are entering into the economy of urban centers through low productivity informal activities that may provide short term employment and allow them to survive in the short term, however they also create a surplus of labor in the urban area, declining purchasing power and limits for individuals from IDP and host community to increase their socio-economic status (UN-Habitat, 2022; Azunre et al., 2022). Governance challenges also arise from the prevalence of informality, which undermines municipalities' ability to generate sufficient revenue for effective urban management and to establish a fiscal base. The majority of displaced persons do not register themselves formally within the tax base of a city they have moved to (ReDSS, 2021), so when there is an increase in population, it does not result in an expansion of the tax base or service charges (WB, 2020), as was the case in many previous disasters. Therefore, cities are growing in size, but in terms of administrative capacity, financial resources, and the ability to invest in necessary infrastructure and regulate land use, they are becoming less capable. In addition, the existence of weak and

divided government authority and multiple overlapping legal jurisdictions creates a complex and hybrid form of governance in displacement-affected secondary cities (CCCM Cluster et al., 2025; IIED, 2020; RVI, 2022; Sinigallia et al., 2013), where local government authorities operate alongside humanitarian organizations, customary institutions, and other non-state actors and power brokers (Bakonyi, 2021; IIED, 2020). Therefore, rather than simply being examples of state failure or lack of presence, these forms of governance need to be viewed through a political economy lens, which identifies how different levels of authority are negotiated, brokered, and exercised in relation to access to urban land and services (RVI, 2022).

As a result of the process of displacement that creates lasting urban inequality, tenure insecurity is an essential mechanism by which IDPs' displacement is translated into lasting urban inequality. IDPs' living conditions within informal settlements located on private land, communal land, or contested land expose them to continued evictions, and they continue to be excluded from all aspects of planned urban development, including investment in public infrastructure and formalized citizenry rights (ReDSS, 2021; UN-Habitat, 2024; NRC et al., 2025). These living conditions lead to rapid peripheral expansion into increasingly environmentally vulnerable and service-poor areas. They reinforce socio-spatial segregation and further exacerbate climate risk for IDPs and other marginalized populations (OCHA, 2024; Sakketa, 2023). In Somalia, tenure insecurity is more than simply a land administration issue related to land ownership; it is also a matter of politics and institutional structure related to the commercialization of land, speculative urban growth, and unequal power relationships between various social groups with a focus on minority and marginalized groups (RVI, 2022; Bakonyi, 2021). Displaced households will be unable to invest in housing, livelihoods, and community institutions as long as they lack secure tenure and will therefore remain in cycles of exclusion and vulnerability.

Displacement-driven urbanization is placing a substantial burden on service delivery systems in secondary cities and beyond (such as water, sanitation, health, education, and solid waste management), which typically lack sufficient infrastructure to absorb rapid population growth. As a result, these urban centers are experiencing chronic service-delivery gaps for services received by displaced populations (WB, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2022). Somalian humanitarian organizations have increasingly provided municipal-type services to displaced populations in urban areas affected by displacement through the establishment of parallel service-delivery systems within IDP camps/communities (OCHA, 2024; IOM, 2024; CCCM Cluster et al., 2025). While humanitarian assistance is critical for addressing immediate needs of displaced persons, the literature has shown that if humanitarian assistance becomes the sole means of service delivery for extended periods it will erode local government's institutional capacity for managing services and delaying investments in new or upgraded infrastructure while creating long-term dependency on external service providers and thereby making a transition to a sustainable, locally managed system of service delivery difficult (Del Ministro, 2021; ReDSS, 2021; Mohn, 2020). Collectively, the above discussion indicates that the displacement-driven strain imposed on secondary cities cannot be addressed by individual sectors or short-term measures alone. The current body of literature increasingly advocates the use of holistic, area-based urban models that incorporate an incremental approach to providing tenants with tenure security, inclusive urban design, increased municipal financial capacity, and the coordination of humanitarian development activities (WB, 2020; UN-Habitat, 2024). Implementing these holistic approaches, however, will also require reforms in land administration, fiscal decentralization, and inter-institutional coordination, all of which are currently constrained by structural barriers in Somalia's secondary cities. This study synthesized data from multiple fields (economics,

governance, spatial, and service delivery) to contribute to the literature on the effects of displacement on urban development. Additionally, the focus of this study on secondary cities and their unique location within the Somali context has addressed a major void in the existing body of literature while further emphasizing the importance of creating displacement-sensitive urban framework(s) which can effectively respond to the realities of the changing nature of urbanization in fragile and climate-affected environments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions: Pathways to Urban Resilience and Durable Solutions

The massive and unorganized migration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the secondary cities in Somalia has brought about a **convergence of economic, institutional, and spatial crises** for these already severely limited secondary cities. The displacement-driven "turbo-urbanization" of secondary cities like Baidoa, Kismayo, Bosaso, and Garowe has put an incredible strain on the fragile labor markets that exist there; has created fragmentation within governance systems and has undermined the social contract between citizens and the government. Rather than providing opportunities, secondary cities in Somalia have become more defined by informal economies, insecure property rights, a lack of public services, and alternative forms of governance.

The analysis shows that the limited capacity of municipalities to manage rapidly changing demographics as well as the economically marginalized status of internally displaced persons (IDPs), are not just consequences of displacement; however they also serve to reinforce a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty, instability and marginalization. Unless structural changes are implemented intentionally, the displaced risk is becoming permanently urbanized, with greater degrees of inequality and potentially increased tensions among social groups or conflict. Thus, this research has shown that internally displaced people in Somalia are not a short-term humanitarian issue; rather, they are a major aspect of how contemporary urbanization is unfolding and must be addressed through long-term, city-based development initiatives.

1.1 Strategic Recommendations

To reverse the current trajectory and support pathways toward urban resilience and durable solutions, the literature calls for a fundamental shift in policy and practice, moving beyond short-term humanitarian containment toward integrated urban development and governance reform.

First, shift from humanitarian containment to integrated, area-based urban development. Displacement has become a permanent urban condition; therefore, there is a need to transition away from isolated camp-based interventions toward an area-based approach that recognizes this displacement as a long-term urban condition. All of the humanitarian, development, and peace-building investments should be made through local, empowered authorities in shared geographic areas, with priority placed on developing and incorporating existing informal settlements into the urban environment by providing and improving infrastructure, through the implementation of spatial plans, expanding services, etc., rather than creating or maintaining separate, temporary enclaves that institutionalize exclusion.

Second, strengthen and empower municipal governance in secondary cities. Build the capacity of secondary city governments to govern effectively and sustainably; and support these municipalities through direct investment by international partners and the Federal Government to develop and enhance the technical, administrative, and financial capacities of their local governments. The focus of this support should be on core governance functions, such as urban planning, land management, local revenue generation, and the establishment of reliable urban data systems to facilitate decision-making grounded in credible evidence. Supporting the ability of secondary cities to coordinate among a multiplicity of

humanitarian and development actors will also help align short-term (humanitarian) interventions with long-term (developmental) city development goals.

Third, tackle the political economy of exclusion and informality. The Interventions need to target the structural causes of the Economic and Spatial Marginalisation of IDPs. This includes expanding incremental tenure-security initiatives for households living in informal settlements (drawing on positive experiences, such as the **Barwaqo model**) to reduce the risk of eviction and enable household investment. In parallel, vocational training and employment programs targeting IDPs must be explicitly designed to address the current mismatch between the skills IDPs possess and those required by employers in more productive economic activities. Economic initiatives which are inclusive of both IDPs and host communities - e.g., through joint enterprise - can at the same time provide livelihood opportunities and help build social cohesion.

Fourth, operationalize national displacement and urban policies at the local level. The national strategies such as National Durable Solutions Strategy (NDSS) need to be translated into specific, costed, and localized action plans for each secondary city to align the national strategy with municipal realities. The development of these plans will involve a participatory process with all stakeholders, including municipal officials, displacement-affected communities (DACs), host community members, civil society, and the private sector. Developing clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and outlining the resources needed, will convert national policy frameworks into an actionable roadmap for developing durable solutions city by city.

Fifth, establish a government-led urban social safety net. The current system of providing cash to needy individuals relies on a patchwork of humanitarian organizations and therefore has limited sustainability and may reinforce divisions within communities over resources and divert resources to those who are not needy. The government, supported by international financial organizations (e.g., the World Bank), needs to revise and extend its national social protection systems (**particularly Baxnaano**) to create a reliable, government-based system for providing assistance to urban residents. If these national social protection systems target vulnerability based on need instead of the individual's displacement status, and if they include both displaced individuals and the urban poor, then this can help eliminate the competition for resources; prevent the "gatekeeper" effect; and provide a foundation upon which to rebuild relationships between urban residents and public institutions.

Author Contribution: This paper explores how displacement-driven urbanization influences the economic and governance systems in secondary cities, with a focus on Somalia. It emphasizes displacement as a persistent driver of urban change and provides practical guidance for policymakers to enhance urban resilience and governance in fragile settings.

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