



IPCS Briefing

Overcoming State Fragility in Somaliland: Challenges and Prospects

Hebak Guleid Hussein

Executive Summary

This study examines state fragility in Somaliland and its effect on state institutions. It highlights how strong state institutions can tackle many problems facing a society which have political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The major sources of state fragility in Somaliland are the existence of weak state institutions that are unable to deliver basic services to their citizens, along with a lack of political commitment and will, a failure to implement the policies in place, and the introduction of other policies that could impact the lives of the citizens.

When a state fails in providing basic needs to its citizens the bond between the state and citizens is weakened and the legitimacy of the institutions becomes blurred. A lack of transparent and accountable institutions remains at the center of fragility. Furthermore, managing state institutions by unskilled human capital that came into office through power or other influences are critical factors that hamper the effectiveness and efficiency of those institutions which are supposed to provide services to the citizens. This policy briefing calls for an urgent response to the challenges facing state institutions. The adoption of policies aimed to improve economic and social services is needed in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of the citizens.

There is an urgent need to address the challenges hampering the progress of state institutions, thus demanding an agenda for collective responses is critical. In this regard, this policy briefing proposes recommendations that are expected from the stakeholders to adhere to. These include:

1. While the central driver of the state's fragility is the existence of weak institutions which have both human, policy, and economic dimensions, building state capacity to overcome the weaknesses and fragility within state institutions is extremely important.
2. The economy is the engine-room of every state, and reforming the tax collection system and

introducing better strategies in which the citizens can settle their taxes without coercion from government institutions is needed, and;

3. Adoption and implementation of context-specific policies, and/or developing inclusive policies that are important for the development of the state are also crucial. Those policies will make the state inclusive, transparent, and representative to all citizens.

Introduction

State fragility is a contested concept with no accepted definition. Finding acceptable and fact-based indicators to measure fragility, interpreting and predicting fragility, and identifying the drivers and consequences is difficult and complex.¹ State fragility and weaknesses arise because of multi-faceted human-driven factors coming together and reinforcing each other at multiple levels and critical junctures of societies' development. In Africa state fragility has been a defining characteristic since independence due to multiple factors with manifold layers and actors. The origins of fragility vary from one context to another, all multi-dimensional and multi-faceted, but the impact on African states and their citizens remains observable and similar across the continent.

The existing fragility of African states undermines their capacity to provide social services and also affects political institutions and economic facilities. As a consequence, both periphery and core areas are equally affected.² In contrast to state capacity, however, state fragility is not a mere question of inherent capacity, it is more a willingness of the governing regime to pursue constructive policies, strategies, and reforms intended to provide citizens with fundamental goods and services to meet their expectations and developmental needs. Therefore, state capacity is critical to responding to the needs of the citizens and providing essential services.³

The capacity of a state is also a crucial factor in

facilitating, developing and constraining conflict; yet cannot be measured in terms of its military capability. It is instead measured by how it delivers social services, creates economic opportunities, gives hope to its citizens, and also how efficient it is in collecting revenue without coercion.⁴ This argument upholds Stewart Patrick (2011), who argues that a state's strength is relative and can be measured by its ability and willingness to provide its citizens with the fundamental services associated with statehood. Such services include security, the presence of legitimate political institutions, economic management, and social welfare.⁵ The provision of such services to citizens ascertains the legitimacy of the state and the government in power which in return endorses citizens' trust in state institutions and ensures its internal sovereignty.

Many countries in the developing world have critical gaps in one or more of these four areas of governance. The state is expected to maintain security and control borders and territories, ensure public order, and provide safety and security to its citizens. However, the lack of effective and legitimate public institutions with legitimate leaders is another critical challenge African states are facing. Creating economic opportunities for all, civic engagement, and provision of basic services to the citizens would help Africans to overcome the grave and multi-dimensional problems that most African nations face.

Somaliland went through a period of brutal warfare in the 1980s that reached its climax between 1988 and 1991 when hundreds of thousands of Somaliland citizens experienced extreme forms of state repression, including torture and execution. Post 1991, independent Somaliland was subjected to another cycle of struggle, where the international community failed to consider Somaliland's success story and denied the population their political, economic, and social rights as independent global citizens. However, even without international intervention and engagement, both financial and material, Somaliland has managed to restore peace and maintain its stability, and re-establish state institutions from the ashes of the various conflicts. Home-grown, indigenous institutions were used to manage the small and limited revenues generated from the local customs controlled by the Somaliland state. The political strength of Somaliland contributed greatly to the country's resource mobilization and its political stabilization and settlement, such as disarmament, demobilization, and reconciliation among the people of Somaliland.

The central objective of this policy briefing is to investigate the challenges facing Somaliland state institutions, and to explore how the Government of Somaliland implements its policies regarding

the social and economic sectors of the state. The paper suggests the need to enforce the policies and strategies in place that could have a positive impact on the state and citizens.

Effects of state fragility on the economy

Fragile institutions have a negative impact on any state's overall development, leading to corruption and the inevitable success of those who are against the system. In contrast, inclusive political institutions are necessary for states to develop and prosper. Such institutions provide confidence for people (both within the state and beyond) to invest in themselves and their businesses. Such investments create economic opportunities for the population and bring much needed revenue necessary to build state infrastructure.⁶ State fragility and institutional weaknesses are two inseparable concepts that contribute to failure, but those deficiencies usually come from the decisions or actions of human beings. It is the leadership faults across history that have destroyed states for personal gain. In the contemporary era, leadership mistakes continue to worsen fragile situations in Africa.⁷

Revenue mobilization is a crucial issue for a post-conflict situation such as Somaliland, with success in revenue collection decisive to the chances of constructing workable peace. Efforts to raise public revenues and stabilize public finances should be regarded as part of recovery and reconstruction.⁸ Revenue generation depends primarily on three overarching essential elements: tax policy, the revenue administration system, and overall economic activity. Each of these elements is adversely affected by conflict with the major challenge being weak capacity for revenue collection due to longstanding grievances between locally conflicting parties.⁹

Somaliland citizens are not keen on paying taxes on time as a protest against the behaviors of state officials who badly manage the limited resources the state has. This is discouraging to citizens who are enthusiastic about seeing the emergence of transparent and accountable institutions, further reducing the effectiveness of revenue collection and those who are in charge of those institutions. This means that the state loses legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens, and weak legitimacy is understood to be a key defining characteristic of fragility. A solid revenue collection system which increases state legitimacy can be regarded as one of the factors in strong states.

Somaliland has many potential resources from which it can benefit, including water if properly harvested; fishing, since Somaliland has one of the longest coastlines in Africa; fertile land for agricultural purposes; livestock; and, potentially, a flourishing

tourism sector if it was to be fully developed. While the state resource mobilization system is inadequately developed, its efforts to generate enough revenue remain very limited. This has a direct impact on the budget and the national wealth of the country. The country has abundant natural resources that can help enrich its people if adequately developed and effectively managed. Good management of state resources will help the developmental endeavors of the nation.

The practices of state officials, with a particular emphasis on wasting the limited economic resources the state has, are a serious challenge to the state economy. Not only do these practices reduce the capacity of the state to generate necessary revenues to manage state affairs, but it also impacts on the ability to invest in other sectors of the state, such as establishing state-owned industries which could create job opportunities for unemployed youth, and other viable projects which could add to the improvement of the livelihoods of citizens.

State fragility and its effects on social provision

Somaliland has managed to tackle many challenges notwithstanding challenges arising from its non-recognized status, such as being ineligible for foreign aid, and bilateral and multilateral assistance. Despite building solid state institutions which promote good governance and democracy, after almost three decades of independent rule, Somaliland faces challenges which have implications for its ability to provide essential social services, including unemployment, poor health service facilities, poor public schools, and lack of access to water in some cities, like Hargeisa, Odweyne, and Las Anod, and a lack of good roads.

Somaliland aims to provide social services such as health, education, access to clean water to some degree, and security to its citizens. This section focuses on two important services: health and education. In the health sector there are both state-run hospitals and health centers, and there are both hospitals and MCHs run by private organizations and individuals, although the number of citizens and the available health facilities and medical professionals are inversely proportional. Health facilities across the country are struggling to provide the services needed by the citizens. The health sector in the country is inadequately resourced and needs urgent intervention to bring it up to a well-functioning level.¹⁰

Hargeisa Group Hospital is the largest hospital in the country and experiences huge challenges which mean that it fails to serve the citizens adequately. The source of this problem is corruption within the system and weak management in the hospital. The

hospital falls under the supervision of the Ministry of Health which frequently and unnecessarily intervenes in the internal administrative affairs of the hospital. Although the government allocated a substantial budget to improve healthcare facilities in the country, the health sector remains largely underdeveloped and inadequately resourced.

Education is another area of concern, with most Somaliland citizens if not all expressing discontent and dissatisfaction with it at both private and public as well as primary and tertiary levels. Somaliland's education system emerged from the ashes of conflict in which most of the education facilities across the country were either destroyed and leveled to the ground or looted. The education sector at all levels experienced substantial investment in post-conflict period.¹¹ However, one of the major concerns of the citizens is the deteriorating quality of the education service of the country.¹² There is an urgent need to intervene in the sector on two fronts: enriching the curriculum and building the capacity of the teachers, in particular, those teaching at primary and secondary levels.

All the problems faced by all levels of education which hamper the quality of the services are linked to inefficient practices emanating from two interrelated fronts: the right people who are not in the right place and reluctance to implement existing policies. Institutional capacity building that shapes lawful behavior is beneficial to society and institutional change accomplishes little without this component.¹³

Building inclusive institutions for a better Somaliland

The concept of state fragility in Somaliland is inextricably related to the early days of its unification with the Italian colony of Somalia in 1960, the downfall of Somalia's long-time military regime, and the subsequent breakup of state institutions in 1991. In the same year, Somaliland declared its withdrawal from the 1960 union claiming the boundaries it inherited from the United Kingdom on 26 June 1960. Immediately, Somaliland managed to restore peace and order through indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and denying any external involvement in its peace and state-building processes. This denial was aimed at avoiding any foreign influence on emerging institutions.

Of course, Somaliland needs to address the problems and challenges identified above, by strengthening existing institutions. Building the capacity of the human resources of the state, developing new policies that worked in the interest of the citizens, and implementing the existing policies would be key factors that would decisively affect the state's efforts

to develop and prosper. Needless to say, Somaliland desperately needs to establish responsible governance institutions which provide social services to those in need across the country.

Fast-flowing change and transformation through effective policies and strategies are needed, but, positive social change with decisive policies and programs is not easy to achieve and is a long term project. Somaliland state policy and decision making should take the lead in adopting context-specific policies to ensure that good governance and social justice prevail across Somaliland. If Somaliland fails to devise inclusive policies and social equality, more social and political instability will follow and certainly cause further harm. This will have a negative consequence both on the state and citizens in the long term.

Endnotes

- 1 Chanie, Paulos & Olowu, Dele (2016). *State Fragility and State Building in Africa: Cases from Eastern and Southern Africa*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- 2 Cilliers, Jakkie & D. Sisk, Timothy (2013). *Assessing long-term state fragility in Africa: Prospects for 26 <more fragile countries*. Pretoria: Institute for

Security Studies.

- 3 Mac Ginty, Roger & Williams, Andrew (2009). *Conflict and Development*. New York: Routledge.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Patrick, Stewart (2011). *Weak Links: Fragile States, Global Threats, and International Security*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 6 Rosen, Jonathan D. & Samir Kassab, Hanna (2019). *Corruption, Institutions, and Fragile States*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 7 Rotberg, Robert I. (2003). "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators". In: *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*. Harrisonburg, VA: R.R. Donnelley.
- 8 Ali, Nasir M. (2014). *Building State Capacity in a Post-Conflict Situation: The Case of Somaliland*, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (January, 2014), pp. 157–170.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ali, Nasir M. (2015). "The Viability of Pastoral Society in Post-Conflict Settings: Evidence from Somaliland". In *the Intricate Road to Development: Government Development Strategies in the Pastoral Areas of the Horn of Africa* (eds). Addis Ababa: Institute for Peace and Security Studies.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 10.
- 13 Ibid., 6.

About the Institute

THE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES (IPCS) is a teaching and research center at the University of Hargeisa, Somaliland. It was established in 2008 by the University of Hargeisa and Eastern Mennonite University in the United States of America to provide a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing conflict and violence in the Horn of Africa. The IPCS was the first Institute of its kind to engage in teaching and research in areas of peace and conflict studies, and remains the only one in the Somali-speaking region in the Horn of Africa. The Institute provides interested scholars, institute members, and students with the opportunity to engage in intensive interdisciplinary study and research on Somaliland and Somali-inhabited regions in the Horn of Africa.

About the Author

HEBAK GULEID HUSSEIN is a graduate of the University of Hargeisa and the Ethiopian Civil Service University in International Relations & Diplomacy and International Law respectively. Mrs. Guleid has a decade of experience in the legal profession and is an expert in law and legal practice in the

Somaliland justice system at the highest level. Mrs. Hebak works with the Somaliland Ministry of Finance in different capacities and roles. Currently, she engages in legal assessments; strengthening the regulatory framework, reviewing and amending of laws, interpretation of the existing laws, formulation of new legislation in the financial sector to ensure the effectiveness of useful regulatory framework and compliance at the Ministerial level, and compliance with all financial laws. She also carries out legal trainings and capacity building programs through different approaches. Mrs. Hebak is a lecturer at the University of Hargeisa, where she teaches at the College of Law and Legal Aid.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) for funding this study through the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). We would also like to take the opportunity to thank many people for their personal and intellectual support to complete the paper. Without their invaluable contributions, it would not have been possible to complete and publish this informative study.

This publication is made possible by funding from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in collaboration with African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA).

IPCS Briefing
ISSN: 2790-1084



Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Hargeisa
+252 (0) 63 442 7156
+252 (0) 63 442 6417
info@instituteforpeace.org
www.instituteforpeace.org

