

Social capital and resilience among IDPs in Banadir, Somalia: Implications for humanitarian policy

SoCap Policy Brief

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Key points

Approximately two-thirds of IDPs surveyed reported no-one at all provided support when they recently experienced a shock, and among those who did receive support, neighbours were the most common source.

Our pilot findings indicate that neighbours – primarily fellow IDPs – were particularly important when coping with short, sudden shocks such as food shortages, illness, and childcare needs. While family and clan are important, many respondents explained that relatives live far away or are struggling themselves. This shows both how important neighbours are, and how limited this kind of support can be. Humanitarian funders should therefore consider supporting facilitation, trust-building, and local coordination alongside service delivery to invest in the local systems and relationships that connect people to information, opportunities and support during crises. This includes supporting community facilitators, strengthening feedback and referral mechanisms, and creating regular opportunities for collective action between communities and local institutions.

IDPs in Banadir have uneven participation in organised groups and report relatively limited voice and influence in decision-making.

Our pilot findings point to the fact that participation in groups such as cooperatives, livelihoods or women's associations was relatively low, with three-quarters of respondents reporting no involvement. Even among those who were active, very few felt confident their voice was influential. Women's qualitative accounts highlight an additional challenge: even when women are deeply involved in community activities, their voices are often sidelined. Donors should therefore facilitate and encourage partners to demonstrate how community input affects programme decisions through meaningful and quality inclusion, alongside measures of the existence or number of consultation mechanisms. Participation without influence does not strengthen social capital, and may undermine trust.

Bridging social capital between IDPs and hosts in Banadir remains weak, transactional, and poorly institutionalised.

Our preliminary research suggests that in many parts of Banadir, IDPs and hosts live close to one another, but relationships were often presented as functional – such as host community members hiring IDPs for casual labour – rather than relational. They tend to centre on work or coexistence, rather than trust, joint decision-making, or a sense of a shared future. Policy frameworks and funding instruments should support programming that builds sustained relationships across IDP and host community lines, with funding decisions informed by evidence of social inclusion, voice, and access, which may vary over time in different ways.

This policy brief outlines findings presented in more detail in a SoCap Research Brief, available at:



BACKGROUND

In Somalia, the Role of Social Capital in Urban Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (SoCap) project asks how various subgroups of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Banadir build resilience toward shocks and stresses through differential access to social capital.

Social capital – the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation – has demonstrated value for resilience across different stages of the disaster cycle.¹ Understanding its role in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is, however, challenging: stressors are protracted, cyclical, and severe; conflict-related divisions can entrench or undermine social bonds; and more insular forms of social capital can reinforce distrust and undermine long-term resilience.

The SoCap project in Somalia involves a mixed-methods design combining telephone surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Between September and November 2025, the team conducted five focus groups and eight key informant interviews with community members, leaders, and NGO staff, alongside 157 survey responses from IDP and host community respondents, in Daynile and Kaxda districts of Banadir.

This policy brief outlines findings presented in more detail in a SoCap Research Brief, available at:

<https://www.concern.net/knowledge-hub/social-capital-and-resilience-fragile-and-conflict-affected-urban-contexts>

What is social capital?

Social capital can be broadly understood as the networks, relationships, norms, institutions and social trust that facilitate interactions, exchange, coordination and cooperation within and between social groups.

FINDING 1:

Approximately two-thirds of IDPs surveyed reported no-one at all provided support when they recently experienced a shock, and among those who did receive support, neighbours were the most common source.

68% of IDPs surveyed reported that no-one provided support during an impactful shock in the preceding 12 months. Among those who did receive support, immediate neighbours were the most common source (12%). Support is typically informal, small-scale, and short-term: sharing food or helping during sickness. As one female IDP recounted, “My neighbours help me when I face severe hunger.” However, there are limits: **“They can't help beyond that, because they have so little themselves.”**

What does this mean for policy?

Neighbour support among IDPs helps households cope in the short term. However, even where it is provided, because this support is informal and small-scale, it offers little protection against repeated shocks or longer-term crises.

FINDING 2:

IDPs in Banadir have uneven participation in organised groups and report relatively limited voice and influence in decision-making

Three-quarters of IDPs surveyed report no participation in organised groups such as community committees, savings or livelihood groups. Among those active in such groups, two out of three perceive themselves as having very little real influence. As one female IDP noted: **“So far, I haven't seen spaces where I felt my voice is heard.”** 66% report no connection to government at all, and where connections exist, they are usually indirect and mediated. Religious leaders and clan elders play an important but uneven role – their support depends heavily on personal relationships and cannot be accessed by everyone.

What does this mean for policy?

Without meaningful voice, IDPs remain dependent on intermediaries. Presence in consultation processes does not equate to influence over decisions.

FINDING 3:

Bridging social capital between IDPs and hosts in Banadir remains weak, transactional, and poorly institutionalised, even after extended periods of displacement.

Living near each other does not automatically result in strong social ties. Relationships between IDPs and hosts were often presented as practical and transactional – centring on labour or coexistence rather than trust or collective action. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that time alone does not lead to wider networks nor stronger social capital overall. As one IDP stated: **“If I am in a stable situation, I can make friends. But if I am living a difficult life where my children are hungry, I cannot build social connections.”**

What does this mean for policy?

Weak and transactional relationships limit access to livelihood opportunities, durable sources of support, collective problem-solving, and protection. Resilience focused programming aiming to leverage social capital must be well-designed and invested in changing entrenched dynamics. Resilience-focused programming must be designed to change entrenched dynamics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these preliminary findings, in Banadir, the social infrastructure that IDPs rely on could be better captured by standard funding frameworks. These frameworks and requirements shape what kinds of support get resourced, what counts as meaningful participation, and which populations are considered ready to transition out of humanitarian programming. Funders therefore have an important role in ensuring that these frameworks reflect the realities of displacement, recognising relational and social capacity as legitimate programme inputs.

Consider funding social and relational capacity alongside services and infrastructure.

Our pilot findings indicate that IDPs in Banadir often report receiving no support at all during shocks, and that which they do receive depends heavily on informal social support, while formal institutional links remain weak. Humanitarian funders should therefore consider supporting facilitation, trust-building,

and local coordination alongside service delivery to invest in the local systems and relationships that connect people to information, opportunities and support during crises. This includes supporting community facilitators, strengthening feedback and referral mechanisms, and creating regular opportunities for collective action between communities and local institutions. This includes recognising neighbourhood-level and community-based support mechanisms as legitimate resilience-building assets, while supporting these to be more inclusive. This approach aligns with donor commitments to localisation and people-centred aid.²

Support investment in, and monitoring of, efforts to ensure meaningful participation translates into influence over decisions.

Our pilot findings point to the fact that participation without influence does not strengthen social capital and may even undermine trust. Donors should therefore facilitate and encourage partners to demonstrate how community input affects programme decisions through meaningful and quality inclusion, rather than focusing on the existence or number of consultation mechanisms. Funding frameworks can support this by prioritising feedback loops and adaptive programming, consistent with donor commitments to accountability and inclusive governance.³

Do not use duration of displacement as a proxy for readiness to transition.

Our preliminary research suggests that long-settled IDPs in Banadir may be more disconnected from institutions even than newer arrivals. Funders should avoid assuming that duration of displacement translates directly into integration, resilience or reduced humanitarian need. Instead, funding decisions should be informed by evidence of social inclusion, voice, and access, which may vary over time in different ways. This aligns with donor recognition that durable solutions are conditions-based rather than time-based.⁴

1. Putnam, R. (1995) ‘Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,’ *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 65-78, p. 67; Rhude, K., et al. (2025) *A Review of Evidence of the Impact of Social Capital on Resilience*, SoCap Research Brief, No. 1.

2. EU/DG ECHO (2023) *Guidance Note: Promoting Equitable Partnerships with Local Responders in Humanitarian Setting* *Guidance on Equitable Partnerships*; Government of Ireland (2024) *Irish Aid Annual Report 2023*.

3. Government of Canada (2024) *Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada’s International Assistance 2023-2024*.

4. EU/DG ECHO (2022) *Addressing Displacement and Migration Related to Disasters, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation*; Government of Ireland (2019) *A Better World: Ireland’s Policy for International Development*.

About the SoCap Project

The Role of Social Capital in Urban Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (SoCap) project is a three-year research project funded by Irish Aid and undertaken in partnership with Concern Worldwide. It systematically analyses the interactions between social capital, resilience, the urban environment, and conflict and fragility among marginalised urban populations in Haiti, Somalia and Somaliland.

This mixed-methods research aims to understand how pathways that translate social capital to resilience among marginalised urban groups are both fostered and thwarted, to identify practical leverage points for operational and policy actors.

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For more about the SoCap project, please visit

<https://www.concern.net/knowledge-hub/social-capital-and-resilience-fragile-and-conflict-affected-urban-contexts>



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