

Social capital and resilience among IDPs in Borama, Somaliland: Implications for humanitarian policy

SoCap Policy Brief

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Key points

Over two-thirds of both IDP and non-IDP respondents reported no-one at all provided support when they recently experienced a shock, and among those who did receive support, immediate family were the most common source.

In our pilot study, several respondents described moving to areas where family was already present, as one potential explanation for the relative importance of family ties. Nevertheless, the high share of respondents reporting no support at all points to limits of social capital and support even where systems appear relatively formalised. Aid donors should therefore consider funding organisations that support facilitation, trust-building, and local coordination alongside service delivery. This includes recognising neighbourhood-level and community-based support mechanisms as legitimate resilience-building assets. This approach aligns with donor commitments to localisation and people-centred aid.

Organised social capital in Borama is relatively strong, but access is uneven and shaped by poverty, contribution requirements, and social position.

Our preliminary research suggests that Borama has a dense ecosystem of organised social structures, such as savings groups, IDP committees, and religious organisations. Women's savings groups emerged as widely trusted, and generally cross-community, associations – but financial barriers serve as a key basis of exclusion, meaning their benefits are less likely to reach the most vulnerable. Strong organisation can coexist with systematic exclusion. 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. Funding frameworks can support this by prioritising feedback loops and adaptive programming, consistent with donor commitments to accountability and inclusive governance.

Residents in Borama participate in community structures, but report limited and mediated influence over decisions, and land insecurity and the risk of eviction remain major shocks that undermine the durability of social capital among IDPs.

Our pilot findings point to the fact that even among those actively involved in groups, fewer than half reported confidence that their opinion will be taken into consideration. Meanwhile, eviction disrupts savings group membership, severs neighbourhood ties, and forces the rebuilding of social networks from scratch. Participation without influence does not strengthen social capital and may undermine trust. Funders should therefore support integrated approaches that build social cohesion and livelihoods programming alongside efforts to ensure tenure stability and reduce eviction risk, treating land insecurity as a core resilience constraint.

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



BACKGROUND

In Somaliland, the Role of Social Capital in Urban Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts (SoCap) project asks how various subgroups of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borama 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 Somaliland involves a mixed-methods design combining telephone surveys, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews. Between September and November 2025, the team conducted eight focus groups and key informant interviews with community members, clan elders, religious leaders, women's group representatives, and NGO staff, alongside 149 survey responses from IDP (92) and host community (57) respondents in Borama district.

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:

Over two-thirds of respondents reported no-one at all provided support when they recently experienced a shock, and among those who did receive support, immediate family were the most common source.

Over two-thirds of respondents reported that no-one supported them during a recent impactful shock.² Among those who did receive support, immediate family were the most common source (10%). Support was typically informal, small-scale, and short-term, such as sharing food. The high share of respondents reporting no support at all suggests that even where family and neighbourhood ties exist, they function unequally among the population.

What does this mean for policy?

Family ties and neighbour-based support help households cope in the short term, but offer little protection against repeated shocks or longer-term crises.

FINDING 2:

Organised social capital in Borama is relatively strong, but access is uneven and shaped by poverty, contribution requirements, and social position.

Borama has a dense ecosystem of organised social capital. One-in-four respondents reported household participation in an organised group, rising to one-in-three among non-IDP respondents. Women's groups were widely described as effective and trusted, providing emergency support, loans, and collective responses to crises. However, access is uneven: many savings groups require regular contributions that the poorest households cannot afford. As one participant noted: **"When we say the community is connected, it's only about 50 percent. There are people with special needs who cannot afford to join the mothers' networks or make contributions."**

What does this mean for policy?

Organised support allows households to pool resources and respond more predictably to shocks, but even where these structures are relatively established, their reach is uneven – leaving those outside with few coping options.

FINDING 3:

Despite active participation in community groups, respondents report limited and mediated influence over decisions, with limited voice compounded by land insecurity and the risk of eviction.

Of those active in organised groups, only two-in-five reported confidence that their opinion will be taken into consideration in decision-making. While marginalised groups may be intentionally included in formal structures, their voices tend not to carry in meetings. Access to official authorities is also uneven: 66% of respondents (including both IDP and host community participants) reported no connection to government whatsoever. As one female IDP noted: **“I don't have any relationship with the local government. Maybe the community members of the IDP meet and tell our needs.”** This is compounded by land insecurity. Eviction disrupts savings group membership, severs neighbourhood ties, and forces households to rebuild social networks from scratch.

What does this mean for policy?

Participation without influence limits people's ability to address structural risks, and land insecurity compounds this by actively eroding whatever social capital communities manage to build. Funders should prioritise feedback loops and adaptive programming – and treat tenure insecurity as a core resilience constraint, not only a shelter issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings above are drawn from an initial pilot phase of a multi-year and multi-sited research project. Below, we present preliminary implications for policy stakeholders. In Borama, the social infrastructure on which displaced and host communities rely – uneven, informal, and often family-based – is not well 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, and avoiding assumptions about integration that may not hold in practice.

Consider funding social and relational capacity alongside services and infrastructure.

Our preliminary findings indicate that resilience in Borama depends heavily on informal social support, while formal institutional links remain weak. Aid donors should therefore consider funding organisations that support facilitation, trust-building, and local coordination alongside service delivery. This includes recognising neighbourhood-level and community-based support mechanisms as legitimate resilience-building assets. This approach aligns with donor commitments to localisation and people-centred aid.³

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

Pilot data points 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.⁴

Preliminary evidence supports treating land insecurity as a core resilience constraint.

Initial findings indicate that tenure insecurity undermines long-term outcomes. Eviction is experienced not only as a housing and shelter issue, but as a recurrent social capital shock disrupting social and group ties, forcing IDPs to rebuild relationships in less familiar areas. Funders should therefore support integrated approaches that build social cohesion and livelihoods programming alongside efforts to ensure tenure stability and reduce eviction risk.⁵ Approaches that support IDPs who have experienced multiple displacements, alongside increased advocacy around land tenure should be supported.

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. Respondents self-identified the nature of the shock which had the biggest impact on their household over the last 12 months.

3. 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*.

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

5. See examples in Kirubi, S. (2022) 'Pathways to stability: Best practices on securing land tenure for urban displaced communities in Somalia,' Danwadaag Consortium.

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.

The research team includes Jessica Hsu, Haiti Impact Group, and Louino Robillard and Rubson Brumaire, Gwoup Konbit, Haiti; Manar Zaki, Brenton Peterson and Angus Williams, Consilient, Somalia and Somaliland; Dr Kelsey Gleason, University of Vermont; Dr Ronak Patel; and Dr Caitriona Dowd, Jothsaïna Pierre and Abdulkadir Adan, University College Dublin.

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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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