

# Governance Models for Large-Scale Urban Disasters: *Policy Options for Hargeisa Market Fire*

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**Abstract:** *The main market in Somaliland was destroyed in a fire. Over five thousand business were lost, costing an estimated USD 2 billion dollars. Successive governments have traditionally appointed Ad hoc Committees to aid in the country's response to and recovery from disasters like droughts and, more recently, the COVID19 pandemic. The public's faith in these committees has been called into question, and the most recent one, COVID19, was widely panned. Not only was public accountability ignored, but millions of dollars in COVID19 response operations and COVID19 test expenses collected up to this day were never properly recorded and reported. Now, Hargeisa Market Fire response and recovery is in progress, but the road remained unclear for about three months. No national direction as the President did not ratify the governance structure of the Committee set for managing the response and recovery effort. Hargeisa local council regarded the response and recovery process as a local government role, but the Ministry of Public Works, Land and Housing saw it as a national disaster and sees itself as the lead institution. The government has put a USD 2 billion recovery appeal, yet response and recovery efforts are now handled without clear governance structures. To counter this, the brief proposes establishing a new Commission through Presidential Decree, followed by an act of Parliament. With this new body, the government can set suitable organizational structure and appoint credible leadership and technocrats to steer the process. This policy recommendation demands financial transparency, public accountability and putting trust building and public confidence at the heart of the recovery programming. Scaling up the role CSOs and media scrutinizes the work of the Commission and keeps them accountable. The policy considers any attempt to overlook setting up dedicated institutions as a "political suicide" which may have negative political and economic implications.*

**Keywords:** Waaheen, Market fire, Hargeisa, Urban Disaster, Governance

## Policy Recommendations

### The Way Forward

- The President declares the Hargeisa Market fire as a "National Disaster" and create a new **Commission** to direct the response and recovery operations, as this is beyond the capacity of Hargeisa local government and the Ministry of Public Works, Land and Housing. Its establishment act should be drafted and submitted to the Parliament for review and approval as soon as possible
- Building trust and gaining public trust is crucial in this time of crisis. Both the leadership and the technocrats of the new Commission should be chosen on the basis of merit.
- Fund management should remain with the new Commission, IFMIS must be used, and in order to speed up the disbursement process, the Ministry of Financial Development must set up a special window in accordance with PFM laws and guidelines.
- Review and approve the establishment act and the supplementary budget of the new Commission with immediate effect
- Establish an ad hoc committee from the various House of Representative's committees to oversee the work of the new Commission and report to the House and the general public
- Development partners mobilize financial and technical assistance for the new Commission. Supporting the market recover plan is an area where international support is crucial.
- Timely and coordinated communication mechanism, financial transparency through full access to outsiders and compliance with national procurement laws are critical to building trust and gaining public trust.
- House of Representatives sets up special committee to oversee the overall process.

- CSOs and media takes greater role, supporting both affected communities and the new Commission in disseminating truthful information while holding the Commission accountable.

### Executive Summary

The main market in Somaliland was destroyed in a fire. Over five thousand business was lost, costing an estimated USD 2 billion dollars. Successive governments have traditionally appointed Ad hoc Committees to aid in the country's response to and recovery from disasters like droughts and, more recently, the COVID19 pandemic. The public's faith in these committees has been called into question, and the most recent one, COVID19, was widely panned. Not only was public accountability ignored, but millions of dollars in COVID19 response operations and COVID19 test expenses collected up to this day were never properly recorded and reported. Now, Hargeisa Market Fire response and recovery is in progress, but the road remained unclear for about three months. No national direction as the President did not ratify the governance structure of the Committee set for managing the response and recovery effort. Hargeisa local council regarded the response and recovery process as a local government role, but the Ministry of Public Works, Land and Housing saw it as a national disaster and sees itself as the lead institution.

The government has put a USD 2 billion recovery appeal, yet response and recovery efforts are now handled without clear governance structures. To counter this, the brief proposes establishing a new Commission through Presidential Decree, followed by an act of Parliament. With this new body, the government can set suitable organizational structure and appoint credible leadership and technocrats to steer the process. This policy recommendation demands financial transparency, public accountability and putting trust building and public confidence at the heart of the recovery programming.

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## 1. Introduction

Over half of the world's population already resides in urban areas, and that number is expected to rise to 75% by the year 2050, according to forecasts. More than 80% of the world's GDP is produced in cities, making them crucial to national economies (UNDESA, 2018). But now African towns are witnessing the true effect climate change, with floods, pollutions, and other environmental risks putting their economic progress at risk. As a result of skyrocketing land prices, many families have been forced to relocate to less secure, more remote places ((Wilkinson et al, 2021). There is a growing danger of natural disasters in many parts of the world, and Somaliland, as a nation in the Horn of Africa, is no exception. The rate of urbanization in Somaliland has been rising recently. With a rate of 4.23 percent each year, the country has one of the highest urbanization rates in all of Africa, with 53 percent of its people now living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2018; MoNPC, 2017). This is sustained by several factors, including the natural increase of urban population and migrations driven by repeated droughts. In Hargeisa, where the cost of living is rising, breadwinners, mostly women, have created stalls at the heart of the major cities, while the previously existing markets are overrun by small and medium-sized companies. In contrast, Hargeisa has been experiencing a series of sudden disasters including floods and fire. Hargeisa is prone to severe flooding during the rainy season, which has often ruined roads and the city's oldest bridge. Fire destroyed Waaheen Market on April 1, 2022. It was the biggest market in Somaliland and the fourth largest in the Horn of Africa.

A blaze that engulfed more than five square kilometers of land has been called the worst natural catastrophe in Somaliland's recorded history. Over five thousand establishments were impacted. The earliest estimates of the damage put the loss between USD 1.5 and 2 billion, or 20% of the GDP of the Country (UNSOM, 2021). Given the its scope, Hargeisa Market fire is a “**large-scale disaster**”

### BOX 1: LARGE-SCALE DISASTER

**Disasters** are a type of hazardous event in which there is significant disruption of the function of all or part of society. The impact of the disaster is often widespread and could last for a long period of time. The impact may test or exceed the capacity of a community or society to cope using its own resources, and therefore may require assistance from external sources, which could include neighboring jurisdictions, or national or international levels.

**Large-scale disaster:** A type of disaster affecting a society, which requires national or international assistance.

**Source:** UNISDR, 2015

Cities host over 50% of the World's population and projections indicate that this figure goes up to 75% by 2050. Cities are an integral part of the countries' economic growth; they generate more than 80% of the global GDP (UNDESA, 2018). However, African cities are now experiencing the real impact of the climate change, as floods, pollutions and many other environmental hazards, among others, are exposed their economic development to a greater risk. The increasing land values is disproportionately pushing many households to the peripheries and high risky areas (Wilkinson et al, 2021). In Somaliland, as a country in the Horn of Africa, is among countries facing increasing disaster risks. Notably, Somaliland is witnessing higher urbanization. The country's urban population is 45% with annual growth rate of 4.23%, marking one of the highest in Africa (UN-Habitat, 2018). This is perpetuated by natural increase of urban population and migrations driven by recurrent droughts, amongst others. The living standards is getting expensive and in search of livelihoods, breadwinners, mainly, women have opened stalls at the heart of major cities, whilst the already established markets are overcrowded by small and medium businesses – this is typically Hargeisa. On the other hand, Hargeisa had been facing acute shocks including floods and fire. During rainy seasons, heavy floods hit Hargeisa and, in many times, damaged road networks and the oldest Bridge of Hargeisa. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, a devastating fire broke out Waaheen Market – the largest in Somaliland and the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in the Horn of Africa. An inferno that extended over five square kilometer has been classified as the most devastating disaster in the History of Somaliland. More than 5000 business were affected. Per the initial assessment reports, the loss is established between USD 1.5 to 2 Billion, equivalent to 20% of the Country's GDP (UNSOM, 2021). Given the its scope, Hargeisa Market fire is a “**large-scale disaster**”.

### Rationale for Action on the Problem

There is a need to proactively assess and revisit the governance structure of the relevant institutions in light of the rising risks of urban disasters. It helps in the endeavor to be ready for, respond to, and recover from these unexpected shocks, allowing for sustainable urban growth to reach its full potential. In Somaliland, the relevant institutions are mainly designed to function best when everything goes as planned. However, urban catastrophe hazards may often

occur as unexpected shocks and trigger crises. When such institutions are unable to adapt to the new normal that natural catastrophes bring, it becomes very difficult to effectively react, and recovery takes much longer than expected. It might have repercussions that go beyond the initial area of effect. However, Somaliland formed the National relief and Support Committee for Waaheen Market before conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the success of comparable committees established for relief and disaster responses. Furthermore, the Committee for Waaheen Market's preliminary actions exposed flaws in its governance setup. The next paragraphs explain them in detail.

#### BOX 2: NATIONAL DROUGHT COMMITTEE

**Composition:** 17 Members (7 Government officials including Vice President, 5 businesspeople and 5 religious' leaders)

**Chairperson:** Vice President

**Fundmanagement:** Religious leaders

**Portfolio:** USD 1,708,000

**Establishment:** Through Presidential Decree

**Term:** 11<sup>th</sup> February 2016 – 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**Financialreport:** Detailed financial report published and aired in the National Television

Source: Abdihakim, 2021

**Legal and policy instruments missing:** There is no comprehensive law in place to address disaster preparedness in general, much alone in urban areas. There is therefore a complete muddle concerning who should be in charge of urban disaster response and recovery activities. This has led to a reactive approach to disaster management in the country. Committees are formed on an as-needed basis, and the same Committees do not set policies and standard operating procedures for emergency response operations. Regarding the policies, Somaliland's National Disaster Management Policy (2019), NADFOR's five-year strategic plan (2019-2023), a standard operating procedure (SOP) for disaster risk management, and a policy on climate change are all relevant documents (draft). These are still sitting on store shelves, and no one, not even the officials at the municipal level, is aware that they might be put to use. In addition, the instruments do not address the issue of accountability and transparency in the use of emergency funds, procurement and implementation of recovery projects.

**Local government has just started to work in Disaster Risk Management:** There are no mechanisms in place for local governments to deal with the dangers posed by urban disasters, with the exception of certain emergency-related duties tasked to the Department of Social Affairs. It is still in its infancy, so it is difficult to assess how much it will aid the municipality in spearheading recovering efforts after the fire at Hargeisa Market.

**No clarity of who is leading the response and recovery operations and role conflict has already erupted:** The President has not issued a Decree for the establishment of the so-called "National Relief and Support Committee for Waaheen" as he has in the past for nominations of similar sort. The Hargeisa Council and the Ministry of Public

Works, Housing, and Land, two prominent public institutions, immediately erupted inconflating opinions on who is directing the process. Despite claims from key council members that this is a local government-led process, the mayor has acted like Laissez-faire in the very beginning (Somali Cable, 2022; Foodhaadhi, 2022). On the other hand, the Minister of Public Works, Housing, and Land has the guts to label the event as a national disaster requiring intergovernmental collaboration, for which no one institution is responsible (Saab, 2022). The Ministry has issued an official directive reiterating its support for the Hargeisa market recovery plan. In fact, there is a national issue demanding a national dialogue, although its significance has been downplayed in the past months.

**Millions of dollar funds are raised without proper financial management system** – To yet, the National Relief and Support Committee has not implemented any transparent mechanisms to more effectively collect, handle, and disburse the money that has been donated. The Somaliland diaspora rallied together, prominent Somaliland citizens and others who are spearheading crowd funding, and government officials traveled to other countries to meet with Somaliland communities and businesspeople in order to raise money for the recovery efforts. It is unclear at this time who is in charge and what financial management system is in place. During the COVID19 pandemic, the National Committee for COVID19 bypassed the prevailing government financial management system and failed to report to neither the public nor responsible government institutions including Auditor General and Accountant General (Abdihakim, 2021). There is considerable concern within the National Relief and Support Committee that the same pattern will be repeated if the current policy trajectory is not altered.

#### BOX 3: NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR COVID19

**Composition:** 7 Members (5 Ministers appointed in the first Presidential Decree, the Vice President and Minister of Finance were added at a later stage. Vice President served as a chair 7 Government officials including Vice President, 5 businesspeople and 5 religious' leaders)

**Chairperson:** Initially led by the Minister of Health and later by the Vice President

**Fundmanagement:** National Committee for COVID19

**Establishment:** Through Presidential Decree

**Portfolio:** USD 2 Million (USD 1.5 Million by the government and USD 500,000 by the businesspeople).

This is the only reported figures, which falls short of fund under the control of the Committee. The Committee received in-kind contributions and collects COVID19 test charges at the main hospitals that are not reported since the Committee's establishment

**Term:** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020 - Now

**Financialreport:** No detailed financial report ever published

Source: Abdihakim, 2021

**Trusting and confidence is at stake** – In both COVID19 and its predecessor, the National Committee's performance was criticized. A genuine "disaster," the COVID19 Committee failed to provide accurate reports, show

transparency, or make itself available to the public for accountability; moreover, the whereabouts of a million dollars are still unknown (Ibid). If comparable Committees are established for the Waaheen market and its recovery, one may reasonably doubt the amount of trust and confidence that will be engendered. On the other hand, those who want Hargeisa's mayor to take the reins see him as someone they can trust and respect, which is why many think that the city council should take the lead instead.

**Government alone is steering the process and overstressed the technical dimensions only** –The Ministry of Public Works, Housing, and Land in Hargeisa formed a task group of 15 people, including architects and engineers and officials from Hargeisa City Council (Foodhaadhi, 2022). The task force's mission was to assess the site and develop an appropriate architectural plan. However, details such as the roles and responsibilities, the chain of command, etc. are unclear. Not to mention, the process is still limited to the government. There was no participation from business, non-profits, the impacted community, or any other branch of government, including the legislature.

**Oversight role of the Parliament is missing** –Despite the fact that the Hargeisa Market Fire destroyed thousands of businesses and cost billions of dollars in damages, the House of Representatives had decided to continue its break for another 20 days. In Somaliland, ad hoc committees are seldom subjected to the same level of scrutiny as Ministries, Departments and Agencies (Ibid). If this is allowed to continue under the current parliament, the National Relief and Support Committee for Waaheen will be able to carry out its mission without interruption, giving it unchecked discretionary powers with potentially disastrous political and economic consequences.

#### BOX 4: NATIONAL RELIEF AND SUPPORT COMMITTEE

**Composition:** 5 Members. The members serve different capacities including Chairperson, Deputy, Speaker, International Relations focal point and accountant (Except the chairperson, the names and the designations of the members are not known).

**Chairperson:** Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowment

**Fundmanagement:** Two parallel structures are in place. One account is managed by the representatives from the main national companies and the other account rests under the control of the National Committee

**Establishment:** The establishment procedure is not unclear

**Portfolio:** Appeal: USD 2 Billion

**Term:** Not defined

**Financialreport:** Pledged to release weekly financial status report.

**Source:** Mubarak, 2022; Faysal, 2022; Saban Media, 2022

#### Available Policy Options

There are several policy options to take into account. These alternatives have been extensively researched, and they come with widespread recommendations for use in disaster

response and recovery. Appropriate governance structure is at the center of the policy alternatives available to mitigate effects, speed up responses, and recover more quickly. Using preexisting public institutions, creating a brand-new agency, or establishing a hybrid mode are the three possible approaches to governance (UNDP, 2021).

#### Designate an existing public institution to lead the response and recover operations

Under this scenario, the primary duty would be delegated to a government department at the state or regional level. Their purview extends to the formulation of plans and policies, the administration of resources and the resolution of any conflicts that may arise during implementation. An advisory committee can be established to aid the Ministry in its operations. Representatives from the appropriate Ministries, Departments, and Agencies as well as state and regional officials (such as governors, mayors, and community leaders) make up the advisory committee, which is usually appointed by the Presidents or Prime Ministers. Except for providing technical inputs on instruments introduced by the Ministry or the local government, like policies and plans, their role is limited to facilitation and does not involve direct involvement in implementation. When different tiers of government are in place, it is the local governments that take the lead in disaster response and recovery efforts. It is inevitable that the national government will be involved in disaster response and recovery interventions due to the complexity, volatility, and enormous financial burden associated with such events. The regional governments are the primary tiers to enable effective intergovernmental cooperation and, in this case, the regional governments received funding and technical assistance from the central government and in turn delivers the same to the local governments. Here, the response is a process of implementation led by local government with backing from the central government.

This model integrates the best features of both centralized and decentralized systems. While the principle of subsidiary requires local governments to lead the implementation at very local level, more functions, such as inter-agency collaborations, emergency legislation and policies, resource mobilization, accountability, etc., are concentrated at the central level. Also, generally speaking, efforts to respond and recover from disasters that are limited to a single tier of government are doomed to fail.

#### Establish a new agency

Disaster relief efforts can't be carried out without substantial funding, a committed workforce, and the backing of the highest levels of government. When preexisting public organizations lack the resources to address this need, a new public organization is established to do so. In addition to coordinating with governments, the new public entity will be responsible for formulating policies, strategies, and plans. The new public body might be a temporary institution with a defined lifespan, with the length of its existence often being set by the duration of the reaction and recovery efforts. Or, the agency might be a set as permanent institution positioned to manage the recovery efforts after any urban disaster. A new temporary public agency is preferred in cases when reaction and recovery efforts require just a short time and

responsibility for operations and maintenance is transferred to the most appropriate public institution following delivery. This strategy has the danger of taking far longer than anticipated, hence laws should be put in place to specify the projected duration, necessary outputs, and quality requirements with great precision. But when countries are struck by huge urban disaster, or when such disasters occur so often, a permanent public institution is established. Many countries have made the switch from an ad hoc to permanent institutions after realizing the great job carried out by ad hoc/temporary institutions.

### Hybrid approach

This framework integrates new governing bodies while retaining the advantages of preexisting public institutions. This strategy calls for the establishment of an external commission, new department, or unit are created inside an already existing government entity to oversee the full response and recovery operation. The commission, department, or unit has the power to coordinate all the relevant parties participating in the response and recovery exercise, including but not limited to representatives from the sector Ministries, local government authorities, business sector, and civil society. They have the power to put their plans into action, either directly or through subcontractors. This new setup can be called the International Commission or the Project Implementation Unit. This first option is preferred when response and recovery activities take on the features of a project and use financing from multilateral financial organizations. The process includes deploying a group of specialists who, depending on the disaster's characteristics and scope, will be stationed at the appropriate department headquarters. A PIU may be formed in the office of the President or Prime Minister to capitalize on the prestige and power of such positions, or it may be established at a Ministry.

When disasters have nationwide impacts or have disproportionately significant impact, response and recovery operations involve in funds from extensional bodies, mainly, by many countries. As a result, selecting a suitable policy option depends on a number of factors. Among them are the following:

- 1) Characteristics of the disaster
- 2) Governance structure
- 3) Prior disaster recovery experience
- 4) Convening power
- 5) Credibility
- 6) Capacity

### Policy Recommendations

The examination of the policy challenge presented so far has led to the conclusion that a new commission agency should be created to handle the Hargeisa Market Fire. If the new Commission achieves its goals, it will become an established government agency, and it will be necessary to reconcile any conflicting mandate that might arise from its relations with the National Disaster Preparedness and Food Reserve Authority (NADFOR). This policy option is advocated in the brief.

- 1) **Declare Hargeisa Market fire as a “National Disaster” and establish a dedicated Commission:** The Hargeisa Inferno was really unprecedented in terms of

its cause, scope, and aftermath. It meets the criteria for a national disaster; thus it must be dealt with as such. Furthermore, it is important to remember that in times of large disaster, legal and administrative borders are seldom followed in the rush to respond, mitigate damage, and return things to normal as soon as possible. No one in the Hargeisa council or the Ministry of Public Works, Housing, and Land is equipped to lead such a massive recovery effort, much alone an Ad hoc Committee headed by Ministers. Provision of temporary markets, livelihood assistance and safety net, and large civil works would all be part of its medium- and long-term plans for response and recovery activities. That is why the President needs to call the event as a **“National Disaster with nationwide impact”**. Thus, the Commission can organize itself to handle these situations.

- 2) **Coordinate all funds and channel to the new Commission:** For the new Commission to be legally binding, an act establishing it must be submitted to the Parliament immediately after it is created by the President. The Commission should have authority over, among other things, the administration of all funds received for the Market. Harmonizing and centralizing all financial records under the government's accounting framework is a necessary first step. Since these donations are meant to help those in need, the Ministry of Finance and Development will need to set up a separate section of the IFMIS for these transactions so that they may be processed quickly while still adhering to all applicable regulations. This will require strong will and commitment from the President and the Minister of Finance Development.
- 3) **Tap the potential of the UN organizations, INGOs and LNGOs:** These development partners may contribute more to recovery efforts than ever before. Expertise that may assist the new Commission in implementing policies, rules, and standard operating procedures can be quickly and effectively mobilized and deployed in collaboration with these development partners. The National Urban Regulatory Framework and the National Urban Land Management Law provide a foundation upon which certain development partners may provide support on architectural and urban redevelopment plans of the market. Crucial for the new Commission is networking with cities that have had comparable experiences, as well as other resilience building platforms available via these development partners.
- 4) **Trust building and sustained public confidence:** During times of crisis, the new Commission and the government of Somaliland should alter the narrative and dispel skepticism about the efficacy of government leadership. The new Commission should establish digital communication mechanisms, including both conventional websites and verified social media accounts, to rectify the reputational deficits of previous emergency committees. A toll-free complaints hotline and a clearly designated Commission spokesperson are both necessary for effective coordination of the Commission's messages. It should be standard practice to have public hearings, focusing primarily on those communities most directly impacted. The new

Commission, above all else, must provide its financial data through the traditional channels of communication. The Commission need to ensure complete transparency by making its financial reports available to anybody who wants to see them. The procurement and bidding procedure must adhere to the National Procurement Law and be open and honest to win the trust of the public. Above all, individuals with demonstrated integrity and track records who are dedicated to being honest, responsible, transparent, and trustworthy who are recruited based on merit selection are essential to restoring trust and confidence.

- 5) **Oversight bodies should remain vigilant:** It will take billions of dollars to restore the Hargeisa Market, thus there must be robust control systems in place to make sure the money is used efficiently, openly, and

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responsibly. The House of Representatives should appoint a special committee made up of representatives from each of its sub-committees to supervise the new Commission's operations. Social responsibility is increasing for CSOs and the media. They need to put in place a system to monitor the Commission's actions and report back on their findings. They are in the greatest position to provide a stronger voice to the unheard members of impacted communities and to ensure that the Commission is held to account. They may be utilized for that purpose as well.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the author and should not be attributed to any other party.