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Inclusive Urban Mobility in Fragile Contexts:

Assessing Mobility and Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

in Mogadishu



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Abstract

While Mogadishu is expanding and experiencing significant economic boom, one group of citizens are left out in this promising story, people living with disability (PWD). According to the Somali National Disability Agency, there are over 11 percent of Somalis living with disability. Although the study showed that a marginal majority live in rural areas, significantly, many also reside in urban areas like Mogadishu. The mobility and accessibility gap for People Living with Disability has been highlighted by different reports including the National Disability Report (2024) by the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics. These challenges not only inhibit socio economic and political opportunities for the PWD but also infringe on their human rights. This study sought to identify barriers and obstacles that PWD face in Mogadishu within the urban mobility context, exploring weaknesses and opportunities that are available. The finding shows a significant scale of barriers affecting PWD. Firstly, many buildings are generally inaccessible, lacking basic conveniences like ramps and other structural considerations to cater for PWD access. Most roads have no signages for visually impaired people thus constraining and risking their road use. The community attitude, especially within the public transport sector, is ostracizing and the transport facilities or vehicles are not conducive for the PWD. Although the government has developed several policies and commitments to respond to the needs of the PWD, resource constraints and weaknesses in enforcement lay these policies ineffective. Somalia is emerging from conflict and these dynamics also impact the situation and readiness to respond to the needs of PWD in many ways. The study proposes a raft of recommendations including enforcing polices on accessibility of buildings in Mogadishu, creating walkways for people with disabilities including supporting structures at critical places like zebra crossing and significant investment in community awareness. It also stresses the need to mainstream policy within the transport sector to promote inclusivity, incorporating the needs of the PWD in the entire development planning process, policy formulation and a call on all stakeholders and development actors to set aside resources to promote and support initiatives related to PWD.

1.0 Introduction

Somalia is currently experienced a significant level of comparative stability given the level of peace, statebuilding and institutionalization taking place across the country. With an internationally recognized Federal Government and relatively stable institutions, the country is projected to witness unprecedented economic and political development in the coming years. The country's capital, Mogadishu, is the embodiment of this progressive growth and development. The city is currently bustling with different kinds of economic activities. The construction industry is one of the most conspicuous endeavors with high-rise buildings emerging everywhere. Retail and hotel business are seemingly providing an anchor platform for this economic enterprise. One of the critical concerns of the reconstruction of Mogadishu in particular is the urban planning and management. Concerns have been raised that without proper planning; Mogadishu's urban core could stifle mobility which will also impact its economic potential and make it unattractive to investors.

Currently, the main thoroughfares such as KM5, KM4 and Maka al Makurama roads among other important arteries have been jammed with different kinds of structures, the tricycles, locally known as bajaj, and businesspeople. The city administration- Banadir Regional Administration (BRA) has developed the urban planning policy to provide a regulatory framework for the urbanization of the city. But given its post-conflict experience, Mogadishu has to grapple with establishing structures that align with good practices while also providing provisions for security and safety.

At the core of the debate and concerns around the urban planning is the accessibility by Persons with Disabilities (PWD). This comes at a time when a report called the National Disability Report by the Federal Government shows that approximately 11.3 percents of people in Mogadishu live with different kinds of disabilities. The National Disability Startegy (2025 – 2029) also confirms that Somalia had around 11.7 percent of its adult living with disability. The challenges facing PWD in the Somalia conflictual context is particularly concerning given the correlation between disabilities and physical, and emotional impact during active conflict. Many PWD are prone to different kinds of injuries and even deaths in war tone contexts. As such the National Disability strategy put significant focus on the social disability model which effectively shifts responsibility from individuals to the environment – a strategic approach which this policy review also embraces.

According to the Disability Needs Survey (2023), conducted by the Federal Government titled “*Dignity Disrespected*”, in Somalia’s urban centers mobility impairment was the gravest impediment to the PWD. This conflicts with the Somali Disability Rights Act of 2023 which emphasizes and codifies a rights-based approach to development planning across Somalia. As a requirement, cities are encouraged to establish structures and urban planning framework that respond to the inclusionary needs of all her citizens including express with disability. This should include two important aspects; *mobility* and *accessibility*.

These two components have been elevated as rights-based approach to urban planning and developments such as provision of water, electricity, integrated waste management and other provisions. The question of whether Mogadishu is cognizant of this requirement is the basis of this study. Already, the government through different state institutions and policies have shown strong commitments. This research was done to provide a specific finding on the state of urban mobility for people living with disability in Mogadishu, paying attention to systems and structures that accommodate different forms of disability. It adopted a mixed methods, employing a participatory approach to data collection that not only leveraged quantitative and qualitative studies, but also phenomenological aspect of the lived experience of different Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Mogadishu. The policy remit will further debate on the need to strengthen policy and infrastructures to enhance accessibility while also elevating the debate to different aspect of accessibility for the people with disabilities. It is part and parcel of an advocacy and lobbying endeavors by Independence House which emphasizes the fundamental rights of everyone in Somalia including people living with disability.

1.0 The study looked at the current mobility and accessibility conditions within Mogadishu, exploring barriers and limitations while also reviewing the current policy and infrastructural reforms needed in Somalia. While the literature review focuses on the entire Somalia, the study focused exclusively in Mogadishu within the October, November 2025 time period.

2.0 Literature Review

The urban planning ecosystem and the post conflict Mogadishu doesn’t inspire much confidence in urban planning to accommodate people living with disabilities. In post-conflict contexts such as

Mogadishu, mobility is absolutely essential not just for people living with disability, but for everyone. Yet for PWD, the situation is exacerbated by lack of strategic planning to allow people with disability to feel accommodated. There are no specialized walkways either structure, road signs or any other facility one would expect in a typical city. Although some buildings have ramps to allow people with wheelchair to access the facilities with ease, these facilities nonetheless do not have requisite installations to foster meaningful accommodation and participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWD).

The Somalia government developed the National Disability Agency (NDA) with the primary responsibility of spearheading policies and reforms towards a more inclusive society. Part of their mandate also involved working with other stakeholders to ensure PWD are recognized and included not just at all levels of decision-making process but also have enabling environment and inclusive mobility across public spaces. A study conducted by the agency in 2023 title “Dignity Disrespected” sought perceptions and priorities of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in Somalia. The study approached the assessment from the Washington Group Questions (Short Set) which focused on seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, communication, and self-care. The study showed that the “most frequently reported single domains of difficulty were mobility at 23.8%. These findings underscore how mobility challenges have significantly contributed to low productivity and human rights abuse among PWD across the country with Mogadishu cited as one of the most rights infringements sites.

The National Disability Report (2024) by the Somalia National Bureau of Statistics showed that sight and walking impairment are the two most common types of disabilities in Somalia. On frequency of difficulties by functional domain, mobility challenges remains the most common form of disability across Somalia. Furthermore, the report showed that women have 12.6% distribution of disability incidences than men at 10.5% Given the other challenges facing Somalia women including entrenched patriarchy, poor perceptions and other challenges, the gaps within this space highlight that Somali women have significantly more obstacles to surmount in emancipation.

The Somali National Disability Strategy (2025 – 2029) provides a robust framework for policy and reforms within the government meant to enhance meaningful and practical inclusion of people

with disability in the governance process and creating systems to enhance accessibility to public services at all levels of the government. The policy has 14 specific objectives covering mainstream disability across NDA's work, implementing procedures that guarantee social, access to inclusive education, employment opportunities, and professional development, access to quality healthcare, equal access to the physical environment, public information, and services, participation in social and economic development initiatives. The strategy also singles out public education and awareness-raising campaign, integration throughout the Humanitarian Planning Cycle, legal protection and humane treatment, active participate in political and public life and respect for the rights, dignity, and diversity of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) as well as integrated management system for the coordination of data collection, disability planning, implementation, and monitoring across all government spheres and sectors. These ambitious steps are means to mainstream policy and all government and private sector programs into the lens of PWD.

Although the Federal Government has a commitment to inclusion of PWD at different levels of decision-making process, it is believed that limited resources and capacity for enforcement have constrained the implementation of policies and reforms meant at enhancing achievement of the broader goal of a perfectly and meaningfully inclusive society. Somalia has not experienced stability and as such all its polices including the Disability Framework have been developed from scratch and will require time of implementation, learning and iteration.

Somalia's challenges are diverse and deep. The country lacks empirical data on the status of people with disability with the only few quoted statistics provided by the government. Weak policies or lack of altogether as well as hostile environment to conduct and collate meaningful research have served to limit the amount of information about people with disability. Moreover, insecurity has made urban planning more responsive to the human safety as opposed to the urban mobility. This has further complicated the sector and impeded desire to design and implement a meaningful accessibility principles in line with good practices. The government enforceability of urban planning and road use, for example, has made matters worse for the people with disability. Yet the rights of people with disability especially mobility within urban spaces are now at the center of conversations about rights-based approach to governance and inclusivity in governance.

3.0 Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

Scholarship has averred that the Social Model of Disability proffers much on the barriers that society has catered which exacerbate impairment, but not improving the ecosystem for the Persons with Disabilities (PWD) to thrive. It is Mike Oliver, a known advocate for the rights of PWD and scholars who coined the term by positing that disability is not necessarily an individual deficit, but an emergency of the barriers and oppressions created by the society. Oliver's work pointed out that rather than focusing on the nature and type of disability that the community face, the focus should be on how the social patterning has visualized and exacerbated the perception through exploration of barriers, social prejudice and systemic lack of inclusion at policy and action level. As a result, this theory has been global adopted by different rights groups to provide foundation for advocating for reforms and policy change within the PWD groups. At its core is the emphasis that government should establish structures to promote Sustainable Urban Mobility Framework (SUMF) in a manner that is cognizant of the needs of the PWD.

The Accessibility Chain Framework is an essential component of the SUMF given its consideration of all the states of the transport framework-from the origin, and transport to the destination. This framework as such evaluates the policy and actual practical provision by the duty bearers.

A strong correlation has been developed that demonstrated a relationship between the urban accessibility facility to social exclusion and this is the framework upon which this policy has been developed.

Urban Fragility → Infrastructure Gaps → Accessibility Barriers → Limited Mobility → Social Exclusion.

4.0 Research Methodology

This research adopted a participatory mixed method that integrated both qualitative and quantitative aspect. The study specifically focused on Banadir Regional Administration or as is

locally known, the urban and immediate peri-urban of the city. The study population were people living with disabilities and the government and other social service providers like the transportation companies, and city planning department. A purposive sample was designed that focus on disability states, gender, location and responsibility in the disability policy and reform ecosystem.

Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires as well as through Key Informant Interviews and the field observation. Quantitative data was analyzed using the charts while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. For ethical consideration purposes, informed consent was sought.

5.0 Results / Findings

5.1 General Findings

The study showed that 86 percent of respondents reveal the existence of systemic barriers that impede inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWD). Nearly eight in ten responses (79%) said that the bus stops and public transport onboarding and disembarking points are inaccessible.

Another 95 percent of the respondents said that the public transport vehicles lack special spaces for wheelchairs and other supportive devices.

On the other hand, only 4.7 percent of respondents agreed that there are adequate road and pedestrian areas which are suitable for PWD. These findings reflects testimonies and feedback captured during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) which also affirms systemic lack of supportive framework for PWD within transport system;

“Mogadishu is chaotic and terrible for PWD. You can just go outside and see where and how people are boarding vehicles and tell me whether it is conducive for PWD,”

Omar, a respondent living with Disability during interviews.

These testimonies also echo what has been covered in different policies including the National Disability Strategic Plan (2025 – 2029), moreover, the study showed that 88.4 percent affirming

that their neighbourhood do not have sidewalks that are accessible by wheel chairs. Furthermore, 97.7 percent reported lack of curbs at crossings whereas 93 percent of respondents indicated lack of tactile paving or audible pedestrian signals which makes it difficult for navigation by people who are visually impaired.

5.2 Physical Barriers in Urban Infrastructure

The findings from the study about physical barriers in infrastructure is stultifying. 79 percent of the respondents said that bus stops are inaccessible, 95.3 percent indicated no (adequate) space for wheelchairs whereas because of poverty and marginalization, 79.1 percent of the PWD said the fares imposed were unaffordable to them.

On the social interactions, 53.5 percent of the respondents indicated that there are persistent recurrences of verbal abuse within the transport system itself whereas untrained drivers and conductors lack knowledge and skills to support PWD.

Within the focussed groups, there was reiteration by different respondents that Mogadishu does not have adequate pavements. Uneven high curbs and ramps are either unavailable or unable. Within the marketplaces within Mogadishu, the paths are narrow and crowded , considered dangerous even for people not living with disabilities. This makes it exceedingly difficult for PWD to access these facilities and makes using them dangerous.

"It seems these roads were built for cars and not PWD in mind. Now PWD are forced to use the middle of the street because they have no better places to use. You can remember what happens to the PWD during rainy seasons when the roads and sleepers are dirty, slippery, mudded and sometimes inaccessible."

5.3 Transportation and Mobility Services

The study has demonstrated an exclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) in the private transport system – Somalia does not have a public transport system. For public vehicles used by everyone, the exclusion is even more excruciating given the operators' lack the necessary knowledge and skills to manage and embrace people with disabilities.

Moreover, poor perceptions have served to worsen the situation. Vehicles and motorcycles as well as tricycles routinely refuse passengers with disabilities and are often viewed as nuisance.

During FGD discussions, one of the respondents narrated how he was forced to disembark from a public service vehicle mid journey due to traffic congestion. It was also revealed that there is only one wheelchair access van in Mogadishu which was donated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). That vehicle is currently being used by the National Disability Agency.

“Can you imagine someone telling you in the middle of the road to disembark, promising that they would not stop at the nearby stop, twenty meters from where you are? Those are the challenges we face here in Mogadishu, a disturbing pattern of insensitivity to the challenges of PWD.

5.4 Access to Education and Employment

The study showed that accessibility challenges go beyond the roads and the facilities in Mogadishu but also within institutions of learning. For example, it emerged that without Braille materials or ramps, visually impaired students are forced to take oral exams while employers in some of the institutions are not keen enough to embrace PWD as employes or create conducive environment for PWD to thrive.

“Can you imagine that one time I could not access a facility of a prospective employer’s office because there was no ramp. I had to be carried to the place where I was expected to work. Even before the interview I knew I would not get the job because no one would carry me daily to the office for work just because there were no ramps. The humiliation e sometimes face is crushing”
Response during one of the FGDs.

It is painful living with disability in Mogadishu because everything that could go wrong is wrong, including that that we believed could not go wrong.

Community awareness is extremely low with 81.4 percent of the respondent’s cited unawareness of any policy initiated by the government to respond to and support programs of accessible mobility while only 17 percent indicated they have been consulted at the planning level. Of the few consulted, 93.2 percent of the respondents felt their pleas and proposals were ignored at the planning level.

5.5 Cultural and Religious Participation

The research revealed that majority of institutions like mosques in Mogadishu do not have provision for people living with disability. Although the teachings involve and encourage inclusion and empathy, this has not been translated into a meaningful action through provision of ramps and many worship centres still have stairs.

“Imams speak of equality, but the mosque steps remind us that we are not part of the congregation.”

The systemic exclusions of the PWD from places like religious and cultural centres is seen by many as the last nail in the coffin of urban mobility challenges facing PWD in urban Mogadishu.

5.6 Institutional and Attitudinal Barriers

Participants reported that district authorities rarely consult them in planning or design processes. Urban projects proceed without disability audits or public participation. Stigma and ignorance compound exclusion; many PWDs described being treated as dependent or incapable. This echoes the National Strategy’s finding that attitudinal barriers are as significant as physical ones, requiring awareness campaigns and representation in decision-making.

6.0 Discussions

It is undeniably evident that People Living with Disability (PWD) in Somalia face exacerbated challenges in urban mobility especially in Mogadishu where various systemic, infrastructural and structural challenges continue to abound. This has significantly abused the rights of the PWD and limited their participation in the socio-economic development and inclusion in the decision-making process. The social perception has been seen as a greater influence in the issues and activities that impact the accessibility and mobility by people living with disability. This also agrees with the assertions of Oliver that the issues affecting PWD should be viewed from the social norm lenses and not individual lenses.

For example, the study showed that roads in Mogadishu have no provision for people who use wheelchairs, neither does it have signals for visually impaired at zebra crossing and other points. The human perceptions especially within the public transport has also exacerbated these challenges

with many public service providers avoiding PWD in totals thus fomenting a system that inherently seek to disenfranchise the rights and privileges that this important constituency should enjoy.

Given the fact that Somali is recovering from post-conflict experience, weak governance and inadequate resources, the country continues to face limited commitment to the actions that addresses subjugation in the mobility for people with disability in Mogadishu. Additionally, significant focus has been placed on protecting businesses throughs security measures and as such large barriers can be found within hotels and other establishments which limits provisions for accessibility for people living with disability.

The study finding also agrees with global trends which affirm that countries emerging from conflict have significant uptick in violations of the rights of people living with disability including weak systems and resources to plug any deficit.

7.0 Policy Implications and Recommendations

The following policy recommendations should be considered in order to progressively improve urban mobility in Mogadishu metropolis:

7.1 Infrastructure improvement

There is an urgent need to make buildings and facilities accessible by people living with disabilities through construction of walkways, ramps and other systems that allow PWD to make move conveniently within the Mogadishu metropolis without any kind of hindrances. The government should work with the business community to improve these systems. This should also be done in other place including mosques and cultural place to enable PWD access these locations.

7.2 Community sensitization and awareness;

The study showed that most community members have poor perceptions which ostracizes people living with disability. There is need for strategic community awareness through meaningful behavior change communications strategy in a manner that integrates PWD as normal members of the community.

7.3 Policy on Public Transport

Given the study findings, there is need for the government to introduce policies that make it mandatory for the public transport system to take into account the needs for people living with

disability by adjusting the public transport facilities and improving the spacing to accommodate such persons.

7.4 Capacity-building

There is need to train and capacity build public officials, leadership of business community, the local authorities, policy makers and duty bearers on the rights of PWD. Through this strategy, they will be able to understand the unique challenges PWD face in their communities.

8.0 Integration into development priorities

It is necessary that the needs of PWD be understood and integrated in the development proprieties of the country including the urban mobility concerns. With the right government policies, it is possible that people will be able to progressively understand the needs of different PWD and include them in the development planning process.

9.0 International donor communities and agencies

The international community should put more efforts in ensuring their programs critically incorporates the needs of PWD in the development planning. This will include working with the government and other stakeholders in the development space.

10.0 Conclusion

The findings from the study show that PWD are greatly disenfranchised in the urban mobility systems in Mogadishu. In fact, it can be authoritatively claimed that Mogadishu has absolutely no system in place to help people living with disabilities. The structures, infrastructure and public perceptions are the biggest hindrances to PWD in Mogadishu. Poor road networks and planning and the insecurity situation arising from post conflict expedience have been cited as a major cause. Limited government resources and subjugation and ostracization of people living with disability have also inhibited the enhancement and protection of PWD. The need for the disability inclusive urban mobility in Mogadishu has never been this great, yet the reconstruction agenda has missed this important necessity, hence affecting a significant constituency which the government's own findings show, represent at least 11 percent of the total population.

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