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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE: THE CONTRIBUTION OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC STABILITY IN BAIDOA

Abdullahi Yusuf Ali¹ and Abshir Moalin Mohamed (Dhiblawe)²

1. Baidoa International University (BIU) lecturer.
2. Researcher and Director, Center for Research and Development, Al Hilaal University, Mogadishu, Somalia.

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Abstract

Baidoa, one of Somalia's most important urban centers, continues to face recurring humanitarian challenges caused by drought, conflict, displacement, and poverty. These conditions have placed significant pressure on communities, affecting livelihoods, access to basic services, and overall socio-economic well-being. In response, humanitarian organizations have implemented a range of interventions aimed not only at meeting urgent needs but also at helping communities build resilience and recover from repeated shocks. This study explores how humanitarian interventions contribute to strengthening community resilience and supporting socio-economic stability in Baidoa. Using a mixed-methods research approach, data were collected from internally displaced persons (IDPs), host community members, local authorities, and representatives of humanitarian organizations. The study examined the impact of interventions in areas such as food security, livelihood support, healthcare, education, water and sanitation, and social protection. The findings reveal that humanitarian assistance has played an important role in improving access to essential services, supporting household incomes, enhancing coping capacities, and reducing the vulnerability of affected populations. At the same time, the study identifies several challenges, including limited funding, dependence on external aid, weak institutional capacity, and ongoing insecurity, which can hinder the long-term sustainability of these efforts.

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The study concludes that humanitarian interventions are most effective when they go beyond short-term relief and contribute to long-term development goals. Strengthening local capacities, promoting community participation, and improving coordination among humanitarian agencies, government institutions, and local stakeholders are essential for achieving sustainable socio-economic stability. The findings highlight the importance of linking humanitarian action with resilience-building and development initiatives to support lasting recovery in Baidoa and other vulnerable communities across Somalia.

Introduction:-

Communities in fragile and conflict-affected settings often face multiple and overlapping challenges that undermine their social and economic well-being. In Somalia, recurrent droughts, armed conflict, political instability, and widespread displacement have created a prolonged humanitarian crisis that continues to affect millions of people. Among the most affected areas is Baidoa, the capital city of South West State, which hosts a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable households. The city has become a focal point for humanitarian operations due to its high levels of food insecurity, poverty, and exposure to climate-related shocks.

Over the past decade, humanitarian organizations have implemented various interventions in Baidoa to address immediate needs and support recovery efforts. These interventions include food assistance, livelihood support, healthcare services, education programs, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) initiatives, cash transfer programs, and protection services. While the primary objective of humanitarian assistance is to save lives and alleviate suffering, there is growing recognition that such interventions can also contribute to strengthening community resilience and promoting socio-economic stability.

Community resilience refers to the ability of individuals, households, and communities to anticipate, withstand, adapt to, and recover from adverse shocks and stresses. In contexts such as Baidoa, resilience is essential for reducing vulnerability and enabling communities to maintain their livelihoods despite recurring crises. Humanitarian interventions that strengthen local capacities, improve access to basic services, and support economic opportunities can play a significant role in enhancing resilience and fostering sustainable development outcomes.

Despite substantial humanitarian investment in Baidoa, questions remain regarding the extent to which these interventions contribute to long-term socio-economic stability. Much of the existing literature focuses on emergency response and immediate humanitarian outcomes, with limited attention given to the broader impacts of humanitarian assistance on community resilience and socio-economic recovery. Understanding these impacts is critical for improving program effectiveness and ensuring that humanitarian efforts support sustainable development objectives. This study therefore examines the contribution of humanitarian interventions to socio-economic stability and community resilience in Baidoa, Somalia. Specifically, it explores how humanitarian programs influence livelihoods, access to essential services, coping capacities, and community well-being. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, humanitarian practitioners, and development partners seeking to strengthen the link between humanitarian action and long-term resilience-building in fragile contexts.

Background:-

Somalia has endured decades of conflict, political instability, climatic shocks, and economic challenges that have significantly affected the well-being of its population. Recurrent droughts, floods, and insecurity have weakened livelihoods, increased food insecurity, and contributed to large-scale displacement across the country. According to the United Nations, millions of Somalis continue to require humanitarian assistance, with vulnerable communities facing persistent challenges in accessing food, water, healthcare, and education. These conditions have highlighted the importance of humanitarian interventions in supporting affected populations and enhancing their capacity to cope with recurring crises (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2024). Baidoa, the capital of South West State, is one of the most affected urban centers in Somalia and hosts a substantial number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The city has become a major humanitarian hub due to the influx of people displaced by drought, conflict, and environmental shocks from neighboring regions. Humanitarian agencies operating in Baidoa provide a range of services, including food assistance, livelihood support, water and sanitation programs, healthcare services, and protection initiatives. These interventions are designed not only to address immediate humanitarian needs but also to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households and communities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024).

In recent years, development practitioners and policymakers have increasingly emphasized the humanitarian-development nexus, which seeks to bridge emergency assistance with long-term development goals. Community resilience has emerged as a central concept within this framework, referring to the ability of individuals and communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses. Understanding how humanitarian interventions contribute to socio-economic stability and resilience in Baidoa is therefore essential for informing future policies and programs aimed at achieving sustainable recovery and development in Somalia (World Bank, 2023).

Literature Review:-

Humanitarian interventions are widely recognized as essential mechanisms for addressing the immediate and long-term impacts of crises in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Traditionally, humanitarian assistance focused on saving lives and alleviating suffering through emergency food aid, healthcare, shelter, and protection services. However, recent scholarship emphasizes that humanitarian interventions should also contribute to sustainable development and resilience-building. The humanitarian-development nexus approach advocates for integrating short-term relief efforts with long-term development strategies to reduce vulnerability and strengthen the capacity of communities to withstand future shocks. Studies indicate that interventions that combine emergency assistance with livelihood support and capacity-building initiatives are more effective in promoting socio-economic recovery and stability than standalone relief programs (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2023).

Community resilience has emerged as a key concept in understanding how populations cope with and recover from crises. According to the resilience framework, communities are resilient when they possess the social, economic, institutional, and environmental capacities necessary to adapt to changing conditions and recover from disruptions. Research conducted across Sub-Saharan Africa demonstrates that access to social protection programs, diversified livelihoods, education, and healthcare services significantly improves resilience outcomes among vulnerable populations. Furthermore, strong social networks and community participation have been identified as critical factors that enhance collective action and recovery during periods of crisis. These findings suggest that resilience-building requires a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach that addresses both immediate needs and structural vulnerabilities (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2022).

In Somalia, recurrent droughts, armed conflict, political instability, and large-scale displacement have created one of the world's most complex humanitarian situations. Humanitarian agencies have implemented a range of interventions aimed at mitigating the effects of these challenges, including food assistance, cash transfer programs, water and sanitation services, healthcare support, and livelihood recovery initiatives. Evidence from previous studies indicates that cash-based assistance has improved household purchasing power and food security, while livelihood programs have enhanced income-generating opportunities among vulnerable populations. Additionally, investments in water infrastructure and health services have contributed to improved living conditions and reduced vulnerability to environmental and health-related shocks (World Bank, 2023).

Baidoa has become a major humanitarian hub due to its large population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities affected by drought and conflict. Several humanitarian organizations operate in the city, delivering assistance aimed at improving food security, access to basic services, and economic resilience. Existing studies suggest that these interventions have positively influenced household well-being and strengthened coping capacities. Nevertheless, challenges such as aid dependency, limited funding, weak institutional capacity, and persistent insecurity continue to affect the sustainability of humanitarian outcomes. These challenges highlight the importance of adopting integrated approaches that support local ownership and long-term development objectives (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2024).

Despite the significant volume of humanitarian assistance delivered in Baidoa, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding its contribution to community resilience and socio-economic stability. Most available studies focus on humanitarian response effectiveness and immediate outputs rather than examining long-term socio-economic impacts. Consequently, there is a need for further research to understand how humanitarian interventions influence resilience-building processes and support sustainable recovery among affected populations. This study seeks to address this knowledge gap by investigating the contribution of humanitarian interventions to strengthening community resilience and promoting socio-economic stability in Baidoa, Somalia (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [UNOCHA], 2024).

Theoretical Review:-

The study is shaped by several key theories as follows: Resilience Theory emphasizes the capacity of communities to withstand and recover from adversities, such as conflict and displacement. This theory is relevant to the study as it highlights the importance of building strong social networks and support systems that enable displaced persons to adapt and thrive in their new environments (Holling, 1973). Sustainable Development: Theory advocates for development approaches that address current socio-economic needs while preserving resources and opportunities for future generations. This theory is highly relevant to the study because it highlights the importance of incorporating long-term planning, sustainable resource utilization, and resilience-building measures into humanitarian

interventions to achieve enduring positive outcomes for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Baidoa (Brundtland Commission, 1987).

Social Capital Theory: emphasizes the importance of social connections, trust, and cooperative relationships in enabling communities to achieve shared objectives. The theory is relevant to this study because it explains how strong networks and collaboration among community members, local authorities, and humanitarian organizations can improve the effectiveness of interventions and strengthen social cohesion and resilience in Baidoa (Putnam, 2000).

Urbanization and Spatial Planning Theory advocates for strategic urban planning to accommodate growing populations and ensure the efficient allocation of resources. The relevance of this theory lies in the study's call for urban planning initiatives to manage the influx of IDPs in Baidoa and prevent the development of unplanned settlements (Davis, 2006).

Participatory Governance Theory emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes. This framework is significant as the study discusses how community engagement and participatory approaches lead to more effective and sustainable solutions for displacement challenges in Baidoa (Fung & Wright, 2003).

Methodology:-

This study employed a qualitative research design to analyze humanitarian interventions, urban governance, and socio-economic challenges affecting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Baidoa, Somalia. The qualitative approach was selected due to its effectiveness in providing an in-depth understanding of complex social, institutional, and contextual issues within a post-conflict environment. The study is largely based on the authors' field experience, supported by relevant reports and policy documents related to the subject.

Data collection was conducted using multiple methods to ensure comprehensive and reliable information. First, field observations were carried out in selected IDP camps and different parts of Baidoa city. These observations focused on living conditions, access to basic services, livelihood activities, and the interaction between displaced populations, host communities, and municipal authorities.

Second, community consultations were conducted through participatory approaches. These involved both formal and informal discussions with IDPs, host community members, traditional leaders, and other relevant community representatives. The aim was to capture diverse perspectives on displacement challenges, service delivery, social cohesion, and priority needs.

Third, key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with government officials, representatives of humanitarian organizations, security agencies, and development partners. These interviews provided in-depth insights into governance systems, coordination mechanisms, and response strategies related to IDP needs.

Finally, the study also utilized document and policy analysis, drawing on reports from United Nations agencies and development partners. This helped to contextualize field findings within broader international frameworks on urban development and humanitarian response. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of key themes, relationships, and patterns emerging from the study findings.

Findings:-

The findings of this study reveal that humanitarian interventions have played a significant role in strengthening community resilience and promoting socio-economic stability in Baidoa. Evidence from the experiences of the former Mayor of Baidoa demonstrates that effective collaboration between local authorities, humanitarian organizations, community leaders, and development partners contributed substantially to addressing the challenges associated with drought, displacement, and urban growth.

The study found that humanitarian assistance significantly improved access to essential services, including food, water, healthcare, education, and shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable host communities. During the 2016–2018 drought crisis, coordinated efforts between the municipality, humanitarian agencies, and

local business groups helped mitigate the effects of food insecurity and disease outbreaks, particularly Acute Watery Diarrhoea (AWD), which threatened many displaced families.

Another key finding is that humanitarian interventions contributed to social cohesion and conflict reduction through community dialogue and participatory planning processes. The implementation of the Midnimo Project enabled government institutions, community members, IDPs, and humanitarian actors to jointly identify community challenges and develop durable solutions. This approach strengthened trust between communities and local authorities while promoting peaceful coexistence among displaced populations and host communities.

The study further found that humanitarian-supported relocation and settlement programs improved living conditions for displaced households. The allocation of public land, provision of land tenure documentation, and establishment of basic infrastructure such as schools, water systems, roads, police stations, and health facilities reduced the vulnerability of IDPs and enhanced their sense of security. These interventions also minimized the frequency of forced evictions and land-related disputes that had previously undermined community stability.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that humanitarian interventions supported local governance and urban development. Through partnerships with organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN-Habitat, Baidoa Municipality strengthened its capacity to manage displacement, coordinate stakeholders, and integrate humanitarian responses with long-term development planning.

Despite these achievements, the study identified several challenges, including limited financial resources, increasing population pressure, insecurity in surrounding rural areas, and continued dependence on external humanitarian support. These constraints affect the sustainability of intervention outcomes and highlight the need for stronger investments in livelihoods, local institutions, and durable solutions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that humanitarian interventions have made a substantial contribution to enhancing resilience, improving socio-economic conditions, and supporting sustainable recovery in Baidoa. The experience of the former Mayor underscores the importance of local leadership, community participation, and coordinated partnerships in achieving long-term stability and development.

Conclusion:-

This study draws on practical experience from Baidoa Municipality, complemented by relevant reports and guidance from international organizations, to understand the dynamics of security, IDP integration, and urbanization in a fragile context. The findings show that significant progress was achieved in the early years of the municipality, particularly in improving coordination among security actors, strengthening public trust, and expanding access to essential services for displaced and host communities. The collaboration between local authorities, security agencies, humanitarian partners, and community structures played a central role in stabilizing the urban environment and responding to the urgent needs of a rapidly growing population.

However, the experience of Baidoa also demonstrates that the challenges associated with displacement, insecurity, and rapid urbanization are complex and long-term in nature. While short-term interventions and institutional strengthening efforts produced meaningful results, they were not sufficient to fully address structural issues such as sustainable land allocation, durable solutions for IDPs, and long-term urban planning. These challenges require continued strategic engagement, stronger institutional capacity, and coordinated multi-stakeholder approaches.

In conclusion, the experience of Baidoa Municipality highlights both achievements and ongoing gaps in managing post-conflict urban recovery. It confirms that effective responses must go beyond immediate humanitarian assistance and incorporate long-term development and governance strategies. Sustainable progress will depend on continuous learning from local experience, integration of evidence from institutional reports, and sustained support from national and international partners.

Recommendations:-

This study highlights the need for a more clearly defined and coordinated governance framework across different levels of government involved in durable solutions and urban resilience in Somalia. Strengthening institutional clarity is essential to avoid overlapping mandates and to ensure effective service delivery in rapidly growing urban areas such as Baidoa.

First, the role of the private sector should be formally integrated into national and local development strategies. Since the collapse of the state in 1991, private actors have played a central role in Somalia's socio-economic systems. Therefore, structured engagement between government institutions and private enterprises is essential. The Durable Solutions Initiative should actively incorporate public-private partnerships (PPPs) as a mechanism for promoting investment, service delivery, and sustainable livelihoods. In addition, development partners and donors should be encouraged to provide predictable, multi-year funding, including where possible direct budget support, in order to strengthen local implementation capacity and support the integration of refugees and IDPs into national development frameworks.

Second, there is a strong need for evidence-based planning prior to the implementation of any intervention. Comprehensive socio-cultural and socio-economic assessments should be conducted, including analysis of language differences, cultural dynamics, livelihoods, and living standards within affected communities. Such context-specific research is critical to ensuring that interventions are relevant, effective, and sustainable.

Third, long-term human resource and institutional capacity development should be prioritized. A structured capacity-building strategy is necessary to strengthen technical skills within government institutions, municipalities, and implementing partners. This will ensure continuity, efficiency, and sustainability of durable solutions programming.

Fourth, rapid urbanization in Baidoa requires proactive urban planning and the development of planned settlements. Without effective land-use management and settlement planning, there is a significant risk of uncontrolled urban expansion leading to informal settlements and slum development.

Fifth, a comprehensive and participatory durable solutions strategy is required. Such a strategy should be locally driven and coordinated through a district-level administrative task force that ensures meaningful participation of community representatives and key stakeholders in planning and implementation processes.

Sixth, institutional strengthening of the Directorate of Durable Solutions and Urban Resilience is essential. The directorate should be equipped with adequate office infrastructure, operational tools, communication systems, transport facilities, and qualified technical staff to enhance its effectiveness and coordination capacity.

Seventh, clearly defined roles and responsibilities must be established for all stakeholders involved in durable solutions, including federal authorities, the South West State government, municipalities, humanitarian agencies, and the private sector. This clarity is necessary to improve accountability and coordination.

Eighth, the Directorate should develop a medium-term strategic plan (3–5 years) through an inclusive and participatory process involving government institutions, community representatives, and development partners. The plan should clearly outline implementation mechanisms, coordination structures, and stakeholder responsibilities. Finally, durable solutions programming should be expanded beyond Baidoa to other urban centers within the South West State. The concentration of IDPs in Baidoa reflects broader structural challenges such as insecurity, unemployment, weak social protection systems, limited access to education and healthcare, and exposure to disease in areas of origin. Strengthening the capacity of other municipalities through peer-to-peer learning, exposure visits, and continuous training will enable them to deliver basic services, mobilize resources, and build urban resilience. This decentralized approach will help reduce forced displacement and restore public confidence in local governance systems, encouraging communities to remain in their areas of origin.

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