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Charting Sustainable Peace and Growth in Somalia: The Need for an Integrated and Holistic Approach

Introduction

Somalia's interconnected challenges are deeply rooted in broader state-building processes and persistent political disagreements over governance, resource management, and the very foundations of the Somali state. These disputes, often entangled with questions of identity, continue to shape the country's fragile political landscape. While some of these challenges may appear unique, they are inseparable from Somalia's historical and political trajectory, which has continually reversed the course of its statehood since its collapse in 1991.

Despite notable efforts to rebuild core state institutions, Somalia remains far from achieving sustainable stability. Progress has been undermined by an incomplete constitutional process that leaves critical questions unresolved, particularly those concerning power-sharing, resource distribution, and federal governance. Electoral processes have often deepened, rather than alleviated, divisions, feeding cycles of elite competition and undermining national cohesion. In this context, political dialogues frequently stall, yielding superficial agreements that fail to tackle the root causes of instability. The absence of robust legal and institutional mechanisms to mediate power at all levels continues to obstruct progress towards effective governance, durable security, and the construction of a shared national identity.

Today, authority and power in Somalia remain fragmented among federal institutions, member states, clans, militias, and insurgent groups like Al-Shabaab. This dispersion of power reflects the broader challenge of rebuilding a coherent and legitimate Somali state. Moreover, a recurring critique from observers is the lack of a long-term vision among Somali elites, whose political strategies are often externally driven and shaped

by short-term personal gains rather than genuine national priorities. This highlights the pressing need for leadership capable of addressing deep-seated divisions through principled, forward-looking strategies.

Bridging the widening gap between elite maneuvering and public aspirations is critical. While political flexibility can be tactically advantageous, it risks undermining governance anchored in institutions, rules, and accountability. The persistent reliance on transactional politics and power-sharing deals devoid of a broader national vision only reinforces cycles of mistrust and competition. Without recalibrating elite leadership towards prioritizing the national interest, Somalia risks remaining trapped in perpetual political crises.

The increasing dominance of post-truth political strategies—characterized by manipulation, misinformation, and short-term survivalism—further alienates the public and erodes trust in the state. This is especially damaging in Somalia, where rebuilding state-society relations is foundational to any meaningful state-building effort. Restoring trust requires political settlements that directly address historical grievances, ensure fair resource distribution, and confront the structural inequalities that have long fragmented Somali society. Justice, equity, and inclusivity are not merely moral imperatives but strategic necessities for fostering a cohesive national identity.

A lasting peace demands that Somalia embrace its diversity—not merely as a challenge to be managed but as a strength to be institutionalized. Building inclusive political and legal frameworks, not dissolving existing equilibria, is essential to avoid future cycles of grievance, marginalization,

and violence. Such frameworks must be flexible enough to accommodate Somalia's complex clan-based social structures while fostering national unity.

This complex reality calls for innovative, principled, and context-specific approaches to state-building—approaches that go beyond externally imposed models or recycled frameworks from the early post-collapse period. Somalia's challenges cannot be resolved through fragmented or overly securitized responses. This applies equally to counterterrorism efforts against Al-Shabaab, which often focus narrowly on military solutions while neglecting the political and societal drivers that sustain the insurgency.

Addressing Somalia's crisis requires an integrated strategy that simultaneously tackles political fragmentation, economic collapse, and insecurity while rebuilding institutions that are legitimate, representative, and accountable. This cannot be achieved by reverting to outdated peacebuilding models that fail to account for the dynamic and deeply embedded nature of Somalia's challenges. Instead, any new framework must begin with a grounded understanding of Somali society, the entrenched power asymmetries and decentralized state structures with their associated political economy, Somalia's evolving clan dynamics and the fault lines, and the shifting regional and global context.

Against this backdrop, this CDRC Digest seeks to unpack the complex challenges facing Somalia's state-building project. It examines the institutional, legal, and governance dilemmas impeding progress, with a particular focus on unresolved constitutional questions, disputes over resource sharing, and the entrenched mistrust between the federal government and member states. In doing so, it makes the case for an integrated and holistic approach to peacebuilding—one that recognizes the limitations of current strategies and offers a pathway toward sustainable peace, stability, and growth.

Somalia's Political Landscape and Ongoing Contestations

Current developments in Somalia's political landscape reflect a volatile and increasingly fragmented environment, driven by disputes over constitutional amendments, electoral processes, and the balance of power between the federal government and member states. These tensions are fueled by deeply entrenched political, economic, and security interests, often intertwined with clan and sub-clan loyalties. The persistent absence of strong, neutral national institutions capable of bridging these divides or fostering meaningful inter-regional cooperation continues to undermine efforts toward political stability, effective governance, and sustainable state-building.

Somalia's politics operates in unconventional and often counterproductive ways. Despite the shared threat posed by ISIS and al-Shabaab across the Somali peninsula, cooperation among Somali political actors remains weak and fragmented. Instead of forming a united front, each actor focuses narrowly on their own security concerns, inadvertently making it easier for terrorist groups to survive and expand. This disjointed approach defies logic, especially given the existential nature of the threat. Ironically, while Somalia's strong informal institutions and traditional frameworks could be powerful tools against al-Shabaab, political elites continue to fuel divisions and rivalries—fault lines that the group skillfully exploits to sustain its influence.

At the core of this crisis is the failure of Somalia's political leadership—particularly in Mogadishu—to prioritize genuine consensus-building over transactional politics and short-term electoral calculations. Compounding this failure is the gradual unraveling of the institutional mechanisms painstakingly built since 2004. These mechanisms were designed to promote consensus-based decision-making, accountability, and inclusive governance. Their erosion has created an environment of growing uncertainty and accelerated political fragmentation.

A critical turning point has been the federal government's abandonment of the 4.5 power-sharing formula, which for years provided a fragile but functional balance of representation among the four major clans and minority groups. While imperfect, the formula offered a sense of political inclusion and managed longstanding grievances. Its unilateral dismissal—without introducing a credible, inclusive alternative—has reignited old tensions rooted in historical exclusion and marginalization. Mogadishu's continued attempts to centralize authority at the expense of the regions have only deepened these divides. This approach risks further entrenching fragmentation, fueling resentment, and creating openings for al-Shabaab and other extremist groups to exploit governance vacuums, deepen local discontent, and expand their influence in peripheral areas.

Historically, Somalia's indirect electoral model based on clan-based power-sharing was conceived as a transitional mechanism to navigate post-conflict realities and prevent renewed violence. While this system helped avert immediate large-scale conflicts, over time it became a source of dysfunction—entrenching corruption, fostering patronage networks, and marginalizing minority groups. More recently, the federal government's push toward a "one person, one vote" electoral system has been framed as a democratic reform. While the principle holds long-term merit, the process has been marred by a lack of consensus and trust. Federal member states, particularly Puntland and Jubaland, perceive the move as an attempt to undermine their autonomy and sideline their political influence.

This power struggle has escalated into open confrontation. Jubaland severed ties with Mogadishu over unmet promises regarding territorial control and electoral rights, while Puntland withdrew from the National Consultative Council (NCC), signaling a breakdown in national dialogue. The situation deteriorated further when Mogadishu adopted a militarized approach toward Jubaland's leadership, culminating in armed clashes in which Jubaland forces decisively defeated Somali National Army units. This military confrontation has only deepened the political rift,

with little indication of genuine reconciliation or a return to cooperative governance.

Security challenges further complicate the transition to a direct electoral system. Many regions, particularly those surrounding the capital, remain insecure, posing significant obstacles to holding inclusive national elections. Decades of conflict have left Somalia without the institutional and infrastructural capacity needed for a credible "one person, one vote" election. Without substantial investments in security, administrative structures, and voter registration mechanisms, the proposed shift appears increasingly impractical. This environment incentivizes regional leaders to prioritize their political survival and influence over genuine collaboration with federal authorities.

If past patterns are any guide, attempts to push through electoral reforms without resolving deeper constitutional and governance issues may undermine rather than consolidate Somalia's fragile institutional gains. To avoid further political backsliding, electoral reforms must be firmly grounded in a durable constitutional framework supported by resilient institutions that outlast individual administrations. While the move toward direct elections is symbolically important, many observers argue that it risks serving as a political tool for the president to extend his tenure under the guise of reform. This perception only deepens mistrust between the federal government and member states.

A more pragmatic approach, according to some analysts, would involve refining the existing indirect selection mechanisms while incrementally preparing the ground for direct elections. This means working with Somalia's informal governance structures—particularly clan-based mechanisms and customary law—rather than sidelining them. Ignoring these realities risks delegitimizing the political process and destabilizing the fragile progress made so far. Leadership should focus on building inclusive political arrangements that reflect Somali realities, rather than imposing idealized models of democracy divorced from local contexts. Agreeing

on the contested constitutional amendments and reaching consensus on a realistic electoral roadmap are crucial first steps toward long-term stability. Without such an agreement, Somalia faces the real risk of further political fragmentation, weakening the federal system and state-society relations.

Somalia's political dynamics are increasingly shaped by disputes over both the substance and procedure of recent constitutional amendments. The amendment process, widely criticized for its lack of inclusivity and transparency, has triggered strong opposition from federal member states who see it as a direct threat to their autonomy. Puntland has formally withdrawn recognition of the Federal Government, accusing Mogadishu of hijacking the constitutional review process. Jubaland has similarly severed ties, citing broken promises over territorial control and electoral rights.

The demands for autonomy by Puntland and Jubaland are deeply rooted in political history and local governance priorities. Puntland declared autonomy in 1998 in response to Mogadishu's instability, driven by a desire for self-rule. Jubaland, strategically located near Kenya, has maintained relative independence by prioritizing local security and cross-border trade. Both regions assert distinct identities within Somalia and have long resisted centralization, posing significant challenges to federal cohesion.

While Puntland and Jubaland's positions reflect legitimate political and economic interests—often intertwined with clan affiliations—the constitutional process has alienated these states, particularly those representing the majority of the Darod clan, except for the Marehan in Gedo. The Marehan, due to their strategic interests, may seek tactical alliances with the Hawiye-aligned Habir Gedir in Galgudud, rather than fully siding with the Puntland-Jubaland bloc. If the federal government continues marginalizing these member states, Somalia risks consolidating power around a Hawiye-Rahweyn alliance, with the Rahweyn playing a junior role primarily focused on power-sharing gains.

The dismantling of the 4.5 clan-based power-sharing formula further risks excluding the Dir and other marginalized groups. Their future participation may be reduced to individual appointments dependent on personal ties to Mogadishu's ruling elite, rather than meaningful representation rooted in clan-based federalism.

This push for centralization undercuts efforts to build an inclusive Somali state. Balancing regional autonomy with national cohesion is crucial; unilateral attempts to undermine member states' autonomy risk further fragmentation. Moreover, critics—including opposition figures and former President Mohamed Farmaajo—argue that the amended constitution centralizes power in Mogadishu. Key changes—granting the president authority to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, restructure the electoral system, and cap the number of political parties—are seen as undermining federalism. In Somalia's fragile security environment, these political disputes further diminish prospects for a credible and inclusive national referendum.

The accelerating political and territorial fragmentation in Somalia poses a serious risk of creating space for al-Shabaab to further consolidate power. The absence of an inclusive political settlement raises the alarming possibility that al-Shabaab could eventually expand its influence—even in Mogadishu—through military gains or by exploiting political frustrations with the ongoing federal deadlock. Notably, al-Shabaab has already begun moderating its punitive measures against individuals linked to the federal or member state governments, signaling a calculated attempt to present itself as a viable governing authority. This shift mirrors patterns seen in global indifference to the rise of extremist regimes in contexts like Syria and Afghanistan, subtly suggesting that al-Shabaab's model of political Islam might gain a level of tacit tolerance from the international community.

This is especially concerning given Somalia's unique social dynamics. While political tolerance among clans is relatively high, studies show that intra-religious tolerance remains weak. This is

reflected in the persistent tensions surrounding the incorporation of groups like Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jama'a—a Sufi group that fights al-Shabaab in Galmudug, where religious differences continue to fuel instability. Unlike other Islamist movements, al-Shabaab is fundamentally irredentist, rejecting the principles that govern inter-state relations in the region. If it were to seize power, it would likely adopt an aggressive posture towards neighboring states to sustain its rule.

Such a scenario would constitute a catastrophic failure not only for Somalia but for the Horn of Africa as a whole. It highlights the urgent need for a comprehensive national dialogue that addresses the core issues of electoral frameworks, constitutional reforms, and equitable resource distribution—before Somalia's political vacuum becomes a permanent foothold for extremist governance.

While personal ambitions and elite rivalries continue to shape Somalia's political trajectory, promoting sustained dialogue aimed at resolving foundational disputes is essential. This must include honest conversations about national identity, territorial governance, and how to manage Somalia's diversity in ways that foster inclusion rather than division. It also requires acknowledging and addressing the roles of non-state actors who have filled governance and security vacuums left by the state. Strengthening the state's ability to deliver basic services—security, justice, infrastructure, and healthcare—will be critical in pulling communities away from the influence of non-state actors, including armed groups like al-Shabaab.

In sum, Somalia's political landscape is at a critical juncture. Without urgent, inclusive dialogue and a return to consensus-based mechanisms, the country risks sliding further into fragmentation, eroding the fragile gains of the past two decades, and opening space for extremist actors to exploit the resulting instability. As historian Charles Gesheker aptly noted, "There is no solution to Somalia because only puzzles have solutions." Somalia's reconstruction, therefore, must be

understood as a negotiated, iterative political process—one built on imperfect settlements, necessary compromises, and partial victories rather than absolute solutions or fixed timelines. Ultimately, the path forward must be Somali-led, rooted in Somali realities, and driven by Somali consensus. Without this, external interventions and top-down models will continue to falter.

Revamping Somalia's Approach to Security

Somalia's security situation remains highly fragile and volatile. Despite recent counter-offensive gains against al-Shabaab—particularly through the mobilization of community militias like the Macawisley—these victories are neither decisive nor irreversible. The Somali National Army lacks the cohesion and capacity to sustain large-scale operations against al-Shabaab, which remains deeply embedded within clan and sub-clan structures. The national government has yet to supplant clans as the primary providers of security for individuals and communities. As a result, citizens continue to rely on clan networks for protection, conflict mediation, and resource security, rather than turning to state institutions.

Al-Shabaab continues to exploit this governance vacuum and fragmented authority. The group has refined its strategy by embedding itself in local clan dynamics, offering protection and economic incentives to clans that cooperate. In return, these clans help the group mobilize resources, collect taxes, and recruit fighters. Clans that align with al-Shabaab often benefit from protection against rival groups in disputes over resources or territory, reinforcing the group's entrenchment in local socio-political structures. This symbiotic relationship complicates government military efforts, as targeting al-Shabaab increasingly risks inflaming clan grievances.

Despite ongoing government efforts to tighten security in Mogadishu and prepare for broader military offensives, al-Shabaab's resilience—rooted in its deep integration within clan networks—remains a formidable obstacle. In Puntland, the security landscape is further complicated by the presence of the Islamic State

in Somalia (ISS). Unlike al-Shabaab, ISS is primarily composed of foreign fighters with minimal ties to local clans, making them less susceptible to local mediation or negotiations. Their ideological rigidity and outsider status present a distinct, though more isolated, security threat. While Puntland's forces have achieved some tactical successes against ISS, the group remains entrenched in remote, difficult-to-govern areas, continuing to pose a persistent challenge.

Maritime security adds another critical layer of vulnerability. Somalia's vast and poorly monitored coastline has become a conduit for arms smuggling, militant movement, and illicit trade, further undermining stability. There are growing concerns about possible collaborations between Al-Shabaab and Yemen's Houthi movement, though the full extent of this relationship remains unclear. Strengthening maritime domain awareness is crucial. This requires enhanced coastal surveillance, regional naval cooperation, and international technical support, aligned with frameworks like the Djibouti Code of Conduct. Securing Somalia's territorial waters is not only vital for national security but also for protecting the country's emerging blue economy and ensuring sovereignty over its maritime resources.

While military responses are essential to counter Al-Shabaab and other militant threats, an overreliance on security operations without parallel progress in political reconciliation and development risks repeating past failures. Military gains that are not supported by functioning governance structures and community trust are inevitably fragile. Somalia's current approach, heavily focused on security—particularly through urban counterterrorism and maritime operations—tends to sideline the equally critical tasks of institution-building, governance reform, and economic stabilization.

This disconnect between security interventions and broader state-building undermines Somalia's prospects for sustainable peace. International partners often frame Somalia's challenges primarily through a counterterrorism lens, treating security assistance as detached from

political development. Without an integrated strategy that balances military efforts with institution-building and political reform, security gains will remain temporary. A more holistic approach is urgently needed—one that sees Somalia not merely as a battlefield but as a fragile state requiring comprehensive and sustained support for governance, justice, and economic development.

A further complication is the lack of a unified domestic political consensus on Al-Shabaab. While international actors such as the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) identify the group as a primary threat to Somalia and regional stability, Somali political elites do not always share the same concern or the need for cohesion in addressing the problem. Some factions view Al-Shabaab less as an existential threat and more as a political lever in internal power struggles. Without prioritizing reconciliation and governance reforms, military victories will have a limited and short-lived impact.

Moreover, the international community's heavy focus on military solutions has often come at the expense of national reconciliation and transitional justice—both essential for lasting peace. Somalia's decades of civil conflict have created deep inter-clan grievances, yet national reconciliation efforts remain fragmented and under-resourced. A durable peace cannot be engineered solely through top-down processes; it must be rooted in local realities where disputes are often best mediated by traditional authorities, elders, women's groups, and civil society actors. Scaling local reconciliation mechanisms into a national framework is essential to mending the social fabric and rebuilding trust in state institutions.

Reconciliation is arguably Somalia's most urgent and foundational need. Many rural communities continue to rely on traditional elders rather than government institutions for justice and conflict resolution. Alarming, some individuals turn to Al-Shabaab, not out of ideological alignment, but because the group provides more predictable dispute resolution possibility and governance than the state. Without a genuine and inclusive

reconciliation process that engages communities, addresses historical grievances, and restores trust in government, Somalia's security will remain fundamentally fragile.

Additionally, reconciliation must be tailored to Somalia's federal structure. Federal member states are not peripheral stakeholders but essential partners in ensuring long-term stability. A genuine Somali-led process must recognize the autonomy and legitimacy of these regional entities. Regional neighbors—Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti—given their historical, economic, and cultural ties, also have constructive roles to play in supporting, but not dictating, Somalia's path toward sustainable peace.

Somalia's pursuit of security cannot ignore the crippling economic vulnerabilities that undermine state-building and security efforts. According to the World Bank, over half the population lives below the poverty line. Climate shocks, widespread food insecurity, and the disruption of economic activities due to insecurity exacerbate the crisis. Weak governance, poor infrastructure, low female labor force participation, and heavy reliance on remittances further constrain economic growth and resilience. A substantial trade deficit and limited investment in productive sectors undermine efforts to build sustainable livelihoods.

Nevertheless, there are positive developments. Somalia has implemented fiscal reforms, achieving modest budget surpluses and initiating social protection programs such as *Baxnaano*. The government is also making efforts to counter terrorism while expanding economic activities beyond traditional sectors like agriculture and livestock. Embracing digital technologies, enhancing financial inclusion, and fostering partnerships with international donors are pivotal to sustaining this progress. Somalia's untapped oil, gas, and maritime resources, combined with its strategic location, offer real potential for economic transformation—provided that revenue-sharing mechanisms are transparent and equitable.

Despite formidable challenges, Somalia has demonstrated a commitment to structural reforms, including prudent macroeconomic management under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. These efforts align with the World Bank's Evolution Road Map, aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and fostering shared prosperity. If sustained, Somalia has an opportunity to cultivate a resilient economy, strengthen its institutions, and lay the foundation for lasting peace and development. However, for this vision to materialize, security, governance, and economic reforms must advance together in a coherent and integrated manner.

The Future of Multilateral Peacekeeping and Security in Somalia

Somalia stands at a critical crossroads, facing mounting challenges as declining international attention and severe funding shortfalls threaten to reverse years of hard-won progress. The future of AUSSOM—the African Union-led mission in Somalia—and the broader security architecture is increasingly uncertain. Since its launch, AUSSOM has struggled with chronic financial shortfalls, including over \$100 million in unmet funding commitments and an additional \$92 million in outstanding debts to troop-contributing countries such as Ethiopia, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, and Uganda. These arrears, carried over from the previous ATMIS mandate, have severely strained the mission's operational capacity, undermined troop morale, and raised serious concerns about its long-term effectiveness.

The lack of clarity surrounding AUSSOM's operational plan has further diminished commitment from both regional contributors and international donors. Without cohesive operational doctrines or clearly articulated political objectives, large-scale training programs risk becoming costly exercises with limited practical impact. Donors increasingly view AUSSOM as lacking strategic direction and cost-effectiveness, which has eroded their willingness to maintain financial support. This growing skepticism jeopardizes not only the mission's future but also the stability of Somalia itself.

These challenges raise fundamental questions about the viability of the current multilateral framework for ensuring security in Somalia. As AUSSOM grapples with escalating constraints, there is a growing argument for exploring alternative security arrangements. Options may include bilateral partnerships with key regional and global allies or the development of more agile regional coalitions tailored to specific threats such as maritime piracy, terrorism, and transnational crime. However, any alternative model must be anchored in Somali national priorities, with transparent oversight mechanisms that avoid replicating past patterns of external dependency.

The shift in U.S. policy toward Somalia, particularly during the Trump administration, reflected a perception that Al-Shabaab does not pose a direct threat to U.S. interests. This withdrawal of commitment has had ripple effects, weakening broader international engagement. However, experts warn that allowing Al-Shabaab to consolidate its position could have far-reaching implications—not only destabilizing the Horn of Africa but also influencing security dynamics across the wider Red Sea corridor, the Gulf, and parts of the Middle East. A failure to adequately support Somalia's security architecture could produce destabilizing spillovers across neighboring states.

Without a renewed commitment from international partners and a credible strategy that integrates security with political reconciliation, AUSSOM risks becoming yet another well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective mission. The heavy reliance on AU forces over the past decade has, while temporarily stabilizing certain areas, also contributed to a pattern of dependency on external actors and delayed the kind of political dialogue and reconciliation needed for sustainable peace. Somalia cannot afford to continue outsourcing its security indefinitely without parallel investments in resilient institutions, local governance, and accountable state structures.

A sustainable path forward requires an integrated strategy that explicitly links security assistance to governance reforms. Military gains must be

consolidated by empowering local administrations to govern effectively, deliver basic services, and administer justice in liberated areas. Addressing the persistent disconnect between formal state institutions and informal justice systems is critical for restoring the rule of law and rebuilding citizen trust. In parallel, accelerating the finalization of Somalia's constitutional process is essential. Without a coherent legal framework, disputes over power-sharing, resource distribution, and the relationship between the federal government and member states will continue to fuel instability.

Furthermore, security and governance efforts cannot be confined to Mogadishu. The future stability of Somalia depends on meaningful investments in local reconciliation, inclusive governance, and economic development in underserved regions. Strengthening service delivery, creating livelihoods, and empowering local communities are vital to reducing the appeal of extremist narratives and building a state that commands legitimacy from the ground up. Ultimately, the success of Somalia's security future hinges on moving beyond externally driven stabilization efforts toward a Somali-owned, Somali-led framework that aligns security, governance, and development in a unified strategy.

Conclusion

Somalia's ongoing struggle to reestablish itself as a functioning state is deeply linked to broader, complex state-building processes that face persistent and multifaceted challenges. Central among these are unresolved power-sharing arrangements and contentious disputes over resource distribution, which fuel deep mistrust between the federal government and member states. This lack of trust continues to block meaningful progress toward political stability and cohesive governance.

The obstacles Somalia faces go well beyond legal or procedural issues; they stem from a profound deficit in political consensus and the absence of a shared national vision. The contested constitutional amendment process and skepticism

from federal member states toward perceived centralization efforts perpetuate political friction. Disputes over revenue sharing and access to international partnerships further complicate an already fragile political landscape. These tensions are often magnified during election cycles, when competition among elites tends to deepen divisions rather than foster unity.

Addressing these challenges requires revitalizing and transforming the National Consultative Council (NCC) into a genuinely inclusive, transparent, and effective platform for dialogue. Meaningful engagement of all key stakeholders—federal states, civil society, clan representatives, and political actors—is essential. Without broad-based participation, national agreements on security, electoral processes, and resource allocation risk remaining fragile and unsustainable.

Innovative, collaborative approaches to resource-sharing disputes are also crucial. Moving from competition toward cooperation can be achieved through joint investments in infrastructure and development projects that create shared benefits. These initiatives help build interdependence and trust, laying the foundation for durable agreements and institutionalized mechanisms for cooperation. Regional frameworks such as the Horn of Africa Initiative provide useful starting points but must be scaled up to effectively support Somalia's state consolidation.

Restoring the social contract between the state and its citizens is another vital step toward sustainable peace. In many rural areas, trust in formal institutions remains low, while customary law and clan elders continue to provide governance and dispute resolution. Building a functional social contract that integrates traditional governance systems with formal state authority is essential to ensuring legitimacy, accountability, and long-term stability.

Ultimately, Somalia's path to lasting stability depends on achieving a genuine political settlement that addresses the legitimate grievances of federal states, invests in

reconciliation, and secures Somalia's place within a volatile regional context. Failure by Mogadishu to decisively pursue such a settlement risks renewed fragmentation and the possibility of external actors filling the resulting power vacuum. Success will require political courage, skilled diplomacy, and pragmatic engagement at both the national and regional levels. Most importantly, inclusivity and a shared commitment among Somali stakeholders are imperative to reimagine and realize a peaceful and unified future.

Recommendations for Sustainable Peace and Growth in Somalia

Achieving sustainable peace, effective state-building, and inclusive growth in Somalia requires a multifaceted approach:

1. Inclusive and Participatory Political Dialogue

Foster broad-based dialogue involving federal leaders, member states, clans, women, youth, and civil society. Ensuring full inclusivity is critical for rebuilding trust, fostering political stability, and preventing further fragmentation.

2. Revitalize Consensus-driven Institutional Frameworks

Establish permanent dialogue mechanisms between the federal government and member states to address grievances and the root causes of instability. Without such consensus-building, Somalia risks sliding into deeper fragmentation, undoing two decades of fragile progress, and creating vacuums exploitable by extremist groups like al-Shabaab.

3. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Mechanisms

Build robust governance frameworks that enhance accountability, strengthen the rule of law, and unify fragmented authority among federal institutions, member states, clans, and non-state actors. Effective institutions are essential for legitimacy and long-term stability.

4. Foster Visionary and Principled Leadership

Somalia's political elites must adopt long-term, forward-looking strategies that transcend narrow clan interests. Prioritizing national unity and sustainable peace over short-term political gains is crucial for future stability.

5. Develop a Unified Security Strategy

Move toward a nationally coordinated security framework that shares responsibilities between the federal government and federal member states. Somalia cannot continue to outsource its security indefinitely; security sector reform must go hand-in-hand with

investments in local governance, justice, and accountable institutions.

6. Promote Economic Diversification and Strengthen International Partnerships

Diversify the economy beyond livestock and agriculture by investing in infrastructure, trade, fisheries, and renewable energy. Strengthen partnerships with international donors while ensuring that aid and investments are tied to transparent, accountable resource management. Economic growth must be directly linked to strengthening institutions and improving security.