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Improving aid delivery through localization in Somalia

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Key points

- After decades of being at the frontline of the humanitarian aid agenda in Somalia, the international community acknowledges that it is time for a Somali-led approach and is committed to work with local NGOs to realize this.
- Although increased humanitarian funding from various actors have enhanced humanitarian response in Somalia, local actors still experience challenges in accessing funds, staff retention and capacity development.
- The Risk Management Unit recommended that local actors engage with international NGOs in the process of developing a standardized capacity assessment model, which will improve their chances of accessing funds, and also strengthen their capacities.
- Evidence shows that developing partnerships between local and international actors, particularly through capacity building, improved accountability systems and long-term collaborations, enhances the ability for local actors to respond.
- The appropriateness of 'Remote Management' as a model to monitor activities on the ground has been questioned given the current humanitarian context in Somalia.
- Humanitarian actors to challenge the perception of aid in Somalia by being more innovative in their response to crises.

Introduction

Almost three decades after the start of the Somali civil war, the country still struggles with recurrent humanitarian crises, characterized by insecurity and recurrent droughts, despite receiving substantial amounts of foreign aid and achieving significant improvements on the political front.

In 2011, following one of the worst famines experienced in the region, an estimated 250,000 people died in Somalia, directly attributable to the famine and the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands more were destroyed. In 2017, six years after the devastating famine, humanitarian responders are working hard to prevent another famine, with drought-induced food insecurity, significant increases in acute malnutrition, major disease outbreaks and internal displacements being reported in parts of the country. While remarkable progress has been made by a broad range of actors—including non-traditional donors such as the private sector and the diaspora—in averting a deterioration of the situation, local responders feel that there is a lack of recognition of their role and are looking to assume a leadership role in the process.

On 6 September 2017, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of the Federal Government of Somalia in collaboration with the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the Office of the Deputy Representative of the UN Secretary General, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia and the Somalia NGO Consortium convened a half-day workshop in Mogadishu with local and national responders from Somalia, titled *Improving Aid Delivery through Localization in Somalia*. Acknowledging that in many humanitarian situations the local responders are fundamental, the workshop provided a platform for humanitarian actors to find durable solutions to the challenges

facing partnerships between local and international actors.

Journey to localization

This meeting followed a similar two-day workshop held in Nairobi in May 2017, where Somali-led NGOs and international actors discussed the various challenges facing the humanitarian space in Somalia and the localization agenda. Both workshops aimed to serve as key steps towards realizing the policy commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 through the Grand Bargain.

The following commitments were made during the May 2017 workshop:

- To work towards a further standardization of capacity assessments, and the adoption of a standardized model by the UN agencies, INGOs and donors.
- For Somali NGOs to prepare a policy brief to be presented to the international community at a dedicated forum, outlining concerns raised by local and national NGOs with regards to the localization process.
- To work together to develop a set of partnership principles that will articulate an aid localization framework in Somalia, and devise a collective definition for what is meant by the term 'aid localization'.

The Mogadishu meeting—which brought together participants from the Somali government, the private sector, youth-led social media campaigns, local and international NGOs, and donors—explored ways in which actors could work better together to improve aid delivery in Somalia, taking into account the commitments made in May 2017 and the Grand Bargain.

The Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Dr Mariam Qasim, lauded national and international actors for their efforts in averting famine in Somalia. In recognizing the constraints that exist, she called for a greater involvement of local actors in funding, adding that the federal government was committed to establish a disaster management fund, which would welcome contributions from all stakeholders, including local actors.

State of humanitarian funding in Somalia: Challenges and opportunities

There have been noteworthy improvements in the humanitarian response in Somalia since 2011, thanks to the collective efforts by local and international actors.

Local actors have played an especially major role in reaching the most vulnerable populations, with significant support from the Somalia Humanitarian Fund (SHF) as well as the non-traditional donors such as the diaspora and the private sector. Of the $45 million programmed to-date under the SHF in 2017, 38 percent has been channeled directly to national NGOs.

Efforts by the international donors have been greatly complemented by private sector companies such as Hormuud and Dahabshiil. In addition, youth-led online networks like *Cawiwaalal*—meaning 'Help a Brother and Sister'—have been able to raise funds through social media campaigns to support victims of drought across Somalia since the beginning of the crisis.

While acknowledging the progress made, local organizations expressed frustrations over the failure of most donor-funded programmes to cover their overheads and other administrative costs, rendering the projects unsustainable for them to deliver. To counter this, they advocated for a 10 per cent overhead rate as a means to support their continuity and ability to retain qualified staff. Another funding concern was capacity development and investment in capacity, which requires long-term investments rather than short-term engagement. Local actors also recommended donors to reduce the earmarking of funds to promote flexibility in disaster preparedness and emergency response.

Local organizations are sometimes unable to access funds due to the number of capacity assessments being carried out by different donors. The Risk Management Unit (RMU) reported that it was aware of the challenges of meeting the requirements of different actors and had been exploring how a standardized capacity assessment model could be developed. It is committed to continue to engage with UN agencies in exploring the development of a model that meets all agency requirements. With respect to the development of

this model by INGOs, the RMU recommended that local actors engage with INGOs in this process to ensure that their voices are heard in developing the new model.

With reference to successful fundraising by the private sector and local Somali initiatives, local actors were advised to explore other sources of funding to complement those from conventional donors, while thinking of sustainable solutions. While pointing to the success of *Cawiwaalal's* initiative that raised over USD 100,000 following social media campaigns, all actors were encouraged to challenge the perception of aid in Somalia by being more innovative and improving the communication about their initiatives.

Improved partnerships

To sustain and ultimately maximize the gains achieved so far, Minister Qasim encouraged all actors to maintain efforts through greater partnerships and coordination. This sentiment was echoed by the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (DSRSG), Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Peter de Clercq and the Head of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) in Somalia, Justin Brady.

Most vulnerable populations are based in insecure locations, often inaccessible to international partners. The role of national responders has thus become indispensable. Even so, national actors often feel marginalized—and when engaged, it is for a short period and on unsustainable terms.

Various efforts have been undertaken by international partners to address this sense of disconnect. One such organization is World Vision, an international organization working in Somalia with over 44 partners to develop their capacities to deliver services to communities. The organization has partnered with the Ministry of Health of the South West State administration to strengthen the health system by improving transparency of recruitment processes, strengthening the capacities of new recruits, developing finance systems and improving management. As a result, there have been improvements in the quality of services provided by the Ministry of Health in South West State as reported by World Vision's Partners Capacity Development Coordinator, Beatrice Githinji.

In respect to such successful collaborations, the workshop participants committed to:

- Building stronger partnerships amongst all actors through coordination mechanisms that will promote long-term engagements.
- Use the existing platforms (and, if needed, create new ones) that will allow for regular communications on needs assessment, implementation of programmes, progress and feedback.
- Create collaborative planning and funding mechanisms that will support the strengthening of the capacities of local actors.

Looking at other partnership opportunities, the actors were urged to work closely with the local media in gathering and sharing information on needs during crises.

Improved capacities

After decades of being in the frontline of the humanitarian aid agenda in Somalia, international organizations acknowledges that it is time for a Somali-led approach. This role, however, comes with responsibilities that require specific management capacities. The international organizations and donors committed to:

- Investing more in the capacities of government institutions and Somali NGOs to assess and respond to humanitarian crises.
- Support the capacity development of government institutions and Somali NGOs through training.
- Investing in long-term collaborations and regular dialogue through coordinated meetings that provide a platform for knowledge sharing and learning between local and international actors, hence improving the capacities of local actors.
- Establish indicators to measure progress on capacity development.

Transparency, accountability and risk management

Workshop participants agreed that the key commitment in the humanitarian response should be prioritizing transparency and accountability in the delivery of aid to the most vulnerable populations. However, since 2011, cases of corruption have framed discussions around humanitarian assistance in Somalia amongst both local and international actors, and by the Somali people themselves. This has warranted for the application of better accountability systems and tools, consequently leading to the institutionalization of 'remote management.' However, it has been questioned whether this form of management is the right approach in the current context. One consequence is that risks are transferred to local actors, who have often found themselves at the center of allegations for mismanagement of funds and resources

Another challenge identified was the fact that programmes may be implemented through multiple actors with little coherence, adding to the complication of managing risks such as corruption and the substandard delivery of aid. To address this, actors committed to:

- Promote existing and, if required, create new open data system where information on needs assessment, implementation of actions and feedback can be widely shared among actors in order to inform decision-making, build accountability and foster trust.
- Continue to develop systems to map and analyze data, for instance through geographic information systems (GIS).
- Strengthen and develop local coordination mechanisms with the support of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, UNOCHA, the NGO Consortium and state-led forums.
- Support the capacities of all partners to understand the basics of risk management.
- Continue conducting regular field visits to monitor delivery through officers on the ground.
- Establish alternative mechanisms to solicit feedback directly from beneficiaries, for example through call centers, and to put the interests and concerns of the most vulnerable people at the heart of all aid activities.
- Work closely with actors such as the RMU who provide risk management training and advice, encourage information sharing and can assist in improving due diligence processes to enhance decision-making.
- Conduct thorough reviews of feedback received from the ground and through other monitoring exercises in order to improve services.
- Work closely with the government to manage risks associated with security. This is in line with a commitment by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management to host national coordination workshops as a platform for actors to share knowledge, convey concerns and learn from each other.
- Continue to lobby for equal representation in all coordination forums.

Integrating humanitarian aid and development

Protracted crises in Somalia have hampered progress on many levels. Despite significant investments in the country, a large part of the population still lives in poverty and humanitarian needs persist. For this reason, the workshop called for durable solutions through collaborative efforts between the humanitarian actors and development institutions by:

- Continuing to strengthen strategies that link humanitarian response to resilience and development.
- Continuing to work towards achieving durable solutions for internally displaced communities and host communities.
- Strengthening national and local systems to build resilience through social protection mechanisms.
- Fostering innovative partnerships with the private sector and other actors such as Islamic institutions.

Conclusion

All actors are committed to work better together to ensure the quality of the delivery of aid in Somalia. There was a general agreement that Somalis should take the lead in the process with the help of international actors, in compliance with the policy commitments of the Grand Bargain.

Specific commitments from some of the representatives included:

Local/Somali NGOs

- To complete and launch the policy brief, outlining concerns raised by local and national NGOs during the May meeting, within a month.

Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management of the Federal Government of Somalia

- To work with existing movements like *Cawiwaalal* and create a pool of volunteers in different parts of the country to work with on disaster preparedness, response and management.
- To establish a disaster management fund.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

- To convene interested stakeholders to commence the discussion on the issue of overhead/ administration costs and related capacity investment.
- Share with partners the lessons learned from its support for the localization agenda through SHF-funded operations

Department for International Development (DFID)

- To step up activities to create a culture of appreciating local organizations more publically.
- To support the localization process in their new business case.

Risk Management Unit (RMU)

- To work with stakeholders in strengthening Collective Risk Management systems across the aid community in Somalia.

Hormuud Foundation

- To consider reducing transaction fees during humanitarian emergencies and humanitarian response.

Save the Children

- To develop a framework (rational plus partnership agreement template) for INGOs to adopt a 3-5 years strategic partnership model for working with local NGOs. Lobby INGOs through the NGO consortium to adopt this model.

The commitments made at the workshop will be presented in a public statement. Another meeting will be organized in six months to review progress.

Credits

This report is based on the record of an event organized by the Somalia NGO Consortium, Somalia's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, the UK's Department for International Development and the United Nations. The workshop was supported by the Rift Valley Institute and the Centre for Humanitarian Change. The rapporteur was Amina Abdulkadir.

The Rift Valley Institute works in eastern and central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political and economic development.

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