Engaging Somali Citizens in Humanitarian Decision-Making
Somalia 2018

Somalia has experienced repeated cycles of humanitarian crises in the last three decades; the result of drought, protracted conflict, and natural disasters. As the emphasis shifts towards building resilience in light of recent progress, humanitarian agencies are increasingly drawing on sophisticated informational tools to better inform their actions, such as the Joint Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (JMCNA) run nationwide by REACH. Nevertheless, there is a palpable gap on the extent to which affected populations’ perspectives are heard in decision-making around humanitarian response. Addressing this accountability gap is challenging in the Somali context.

Deploying interactive radio to address the gap in Accountability to Affected Populations

AVF, in partnership with REACH and ECHO, piloted an innovative tool to support the operationalisation of effective Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP), that synchronises the deployment of AVF’s interactive radio approach (radio in tandem with audience feedback via SMS) with the JMCNA process. By linking the two processes, Somali citizens were able to be informed on the current humanitarian situation, as well as hear from other stakeholders (OCHA, the Somali government) on the findings and implications of the data gathered from their communities. At the same time, audience feedback to interactive radio shows presented the opportunity to gather rapid and open feedback from citizens on humanitarian priorities at scale. The project was structured around two key outcomes:

1) Citizens feel included in the JMCNA process and humanitarian decision-making;

2) The humanitarian community has a new source of accessible and actionable insights on citizen perspectives for use in decision-making.

Key achievements

87% of participants indicated the consultations made them feel included in decision-making

Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019
Insights from public opinion were fed into humanitarian decision-making, including the Humanitarian Needs Overview for 2019

Consulting communities through interactive dialogues

8955 participants

35% IDPs

42% women

59% youth*

19% rural

*16-24 years old

Age of participants

Local language radio stations

0 10 20 30 40
15-19 20-24 Over 40
Many Somalis perceive the humanitarian crisis to be a product of poor governance, conflict, and a weak accountability system.

- Citizens perceive humanitarian crisis in their communities as the product of broader governance issues. This was especially true of men, the elderly, and those in urban areas.
- Women were more likely to raise immediate household needs, such as health and hygiene. In Somaliland, the emphasis was on the need for good governance in contrast to respondents in the South who prioritised peace and security.

*“I feel the most important solutions to the humanitarian needs are 1. To work on issues to do with justice, and 2. To enforce the law.”*

Man, Mogadishu

*“Most important is to find a government that is working for its people. Only then will we have everything needed.”*

Man, Mogadishu

*“To find leaders and officials that are just and transparent and free from corruption.”*

Man, Bosaso

**Recommendation:** Humanitarian interventions ought to be grounded in robust conflict/political economy analysis. Furthermore, where appropriate, it is important to ensure that humanitarian activities are linked with peacebuilding and governance programming, or at the very least, that they are sensitive to approaches in these sectors.

### Variations in priorities by gender

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>% of participants holding perspective</th>
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<td>Good governance</td>
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<td>Peace and Security</td>
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Citizens demand stronger accountability from humanitarian actors, increased involvement in the activities of NGOs and government, and the opportunity for greater community organisation to address humanitarian needs

- The demand for more community organisation ranged from calls to greater social cohesion to the need to establish committees for planning and oversight of humanitarian information and planning.
- This perspective was more likely to be put forward by younger people. Older people who were more likely to call for strengthening formal governance institutions.
- Many voices in the conversation, especially male, called for greater accountability and transparency in the humanitarian response, including consulting citizens in the design of programmes and analysis of assessment data.
- Partly, this included a concern with the fact that aid was distributed unfairly based on clan and kinship networks.

**Recommendations:** Efforts linking humanitarian activities with support for government institutions should be carefully balanced against communities’ own demands to organize themselves and solve problems with greater autonomy. The suggestions by some participants that local communities should be part of planning and monitoring of aid activities, gives support to this modality of implementing aid. By the same token, the grievances evidenced in the data around unfair distribution of aid highlight the need to have robust feedback mechanisms in place that are capable of adjudicating the fairness of aid distribution.

The provision of health and education services remain important, especially in rural areas and amongst IDPs

- Many people highlighted the need for education and health services as key to addressing the humanitarian crisis.
- Those who spoke about health highlighted the need to increase the availability of services, whilst those referring to education raised the unaffordability of school fees as the key barrier.
- Those from rural areas were more likely to talk about health and education compared to those in urban areas. IDPs, despite largely living in urban areas, were also more likely to talk about the need for health services, highlighting how IDPs remain a particularly vulnerable population.

**Recommendations:** Whilst healthcare likely requires an extension of coverage of existing services, some of the data suggested that education outcomes could be supported by stimulating demand through interventions such as cash-based assistance. The increased vulnerability of IDPs was also clear in this regard, both from the concerns raised by their fellow citizens, but also from their lack of access to critical services such as healthcare despite often being located in urban areas. Unveiling the reasons behind this is vital to addressing this vulnerability.
Lessons learned

1. There is a clear convergence with existing data sources and assessments such as the JMCNA, highlighting the credibility of the findings presented in this report.

2. This AAP intervention should be more effectively sequenced with the humanitarian programming cycle to maximise impact on decision-making.

3. The project points to the value of having a pool of participants engaging with an existing media brand for enabling rapid one-off consultations with communities.

4. A more long-term accountability intervention would enable more questions to be asked as a part of the process, including a “deep-dive” into a specific topic of importance.

5. More robust question-testing would increase the reliability and validity of the insights as well as the proportion of relevant messages in the dataset.

“...The use of radio has proven particularly efficient and effective in Somalia, especially in hard to reach areas. As was the case at the height of the drought in 2017, the collecting of feedback from radio listeners across the country enabled people, even from the most vulnerable communities, to share their concerns and views, consequently allowing the humanitarian community to make associated adjustments. Interactive radio programmes and SMS messaging by African Voices Foundation additionally garnered feedback from 8,955 individuals across every region in Somalia. An extremely high proportion of respondents (87 per cent) indicated that they felt the consultations had made them feel more included in decision-making, and the same proportion further reported that they would like to see this process repeated in the future. This should be fully taken into account in community engagement planning in the HRP.”

2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview