

## Humanitarian Accountability in Somalia Summary of NEP meeting

25 July 2007, Nairobi, Kenya

### BACKGROUND

On 31<sup>st</sup> of May 2007, focal persons of HAP member agencies held a teleconference to discuss challenges and identify opportunities for strengthening their accountability in the Somalia context. It was agreed that in order to meaningfully move this agenda forward, it is important to bring together both HAP member agencies and non-members that are operational in Somalia in a meeting in Nairobi. This meeting took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007 under the agenda of the New Emergencies Policy (NEP).

### AGENDA

1400-1430 *Brief introduction* - to HAP, NEP to date and the background to the current meeting

1430-1515 *Brief agency presentations* - Key challenges/opportunities in running quality and accountable programmes (using HAP Standard as a framework for analysis); share some ideas/examples of being accountable in the Somalia context.

1515-1530 *Wrap up of presentations* - Key issues in relation to quality and accountability in the Somalia context

1530-1600 *Advocacy on accountability and the role of other actors* - Advocacy on accountability; the role of other actors; inter-linkages with the Joint Operating Principles and other initiatives; is there scope for collective / coordinated lobbying?

1600-1700 *Planning session and ways forward* - Collective/bilateral accountability activities as well as specific roles, responsibility, timeline and budget; what support can the HAP Secretariat / Field Team offer?

### PARTICIPANTS

CARE: Mohamed Qazilbash, John Miskell, Mohamed Khaled, Gary McGurk

Christian Aid: Stuart Katwikirize

Concern Worldwide: Reiseal Ni Cheilleachair, Leslye Rost van Tonningen and Geraldine McCrossan

DanChurchAid: Mads Frilander

Danish Refugee Council: Hugh Fenton

Horn Relief: Fanta Touce

Islamic Relief: Shihab Babika

Jubbalandese Charity Centre (JCC): Rose Mugeni Nzyusyo

Lutheran World Federation: Lavendah Okwoyo

Muslim Aid: Mohamed Dahir

Norwegian Refugee Council: Qurat Sadozai

OCHA, Catherine-Lune Grayson; and Reena Ghelani (*observers*)

Oxfam Novib: Robert Maletta

Save the Children UK: Toby Kay

Soma Aid: Irad H Warsame

World Vision International: Foday Sawi

*From the HAP team:* Monica Blagescu; Zia Choudhury; Emily Rogers.

*Apologies from:* Benoit Delsarte, ACF

**A. Key challenges/opportunities in running quality and accountable programmes in Somalia** – Agency presentations and discussion facilitated by Monica Blagescu and summarised by Hugh Fenton

There was wide recognition of the diverse interpretation of agencies' existing policies and commitments, which expose humanitarian workers to risks and pose a question mark on the integrity of the entire international humanitarian presence in Somalia. It was mentioned that agencies have consistently failed to deliver, particularly in South and Central Somalia, and that we have a duty to the Somali people to find better, more consolidated approaches to addressing existing challenges.

Much of the discussion evolved around the need for humanitarian agencies to take responsibility and be held accountable for their actions and the impact they have on local communities and the wider Somali context (from "are our resources fuelling the conflict?" to "should we withdraw?"); the need for transparency and better coordination between humanitarian agencies at the local level rather than in Nairobi; the need to understand the local context, power politics, clan disputes; the need to understand the local interpretation (and existing lines) of accountability within the community; how to balance the duty to provide staff security with the duty of accountability to communities; how to deal with gate keepers when engaging with the communities; the importance of having competent and well trained staff and making better use of existing knowledge on the ground; the need to empower communities (but also to establish mechanisms that enable agencies themselves) to monitor compliance with commitments made.

A number of participants mentioned that current circumstances – particularly the need to improve staff security – dictate the need to be accountable and to work closely with communities (i.e. communities themselves can warn agencies against security risks when and if there is a high level of trust between the two). Other participants, on the other hand, mentioned that their agencies find it hard to balance accountability to beneficiaries with the duty to ensure staff security. All this is context specific and timebound.

Below is a summary of some of the other main challenges and some of the opportunities mentioned:

1) Clan politics

- The relationship between clans is extremely complex; clan rights prevail over individual rights. Understanding this, the hidden power structures, and being in a position to carry out work within this context poses a real challenge for humanitarian agencies.
- In Somalia, aid is seen as a resource to control and is closely linked to power and politics. Agencies are often pawns in inter-clan disputes, with rival clans preventing aid activities to revenge other clans (e.g. closing hospitals, stopping food convoys etc). In addition elders / traditional leaders will often stand in the way of aid if it presents a conflict of interest (e.g. blocking drilling of a bore hole requested by women as elders profit from selling water to the community).
- At times, there is a lack of respect among aid agencies for traditional leaders; usually this is because traditional leaders tend to represent the needs of limited factions of the society (primarily men), and this is seen to conflict with agencies' values and internationally accepted norms of gender equity, etc.

Suggestions:

- Before engaging in a new area, there is a need to understand existing clan disputes.
- In order to operate, in order to operate, agencies need a rigorous analysis of power structures and need to work through knowledgeable local staff. In this way, agencies will be closer to the problem but also be able to better contribute to the solution. To minimize the negative impacts of this, agencies need clear policies to guide processes and minimize clan bias.
- Be prepared to discuss strategy options with the communities, be clear on operating principles, and identify ways of working by engaging communities. Identify key persons in the community who share the same vision with the agency, and can build links between the agency and the community.

2) Understanding of accountability within the community and by agencies

- There is a tendency among agencies to think accountability can be achieved just by forming community committees.
- Participants mentioned a lack of understanding within humanitarian agencies of how Somalis themselves define accountability. While the fragmented nature of local communities weakens traditional structures, the strength of the clans suggests there may be lines of accountability within clans. It is not known, however, if Somalis see any value in community committees, for example, which many humanitarian agencies believe will drive accountability.

#### Suggestions:

- In addition to using community committees to assess whether services are reaching intended beneficiaries, agencies should keep in mind that informal channels may also yield valuable information.
- Some agencies represented at the meeting have successfully used committees (elected by the communities they represent) to identify beneficiaries. This was felt to be more effective than geographical targeting.

#### 3) Protracted intervention in highly fragile environment

- Agencies do not have time to fully evaluate and plan programmes, as emergencies are varied and come in quick succession. As a result of the rapidly changing circumstances, the results of needs assessments are out of date by the time it comes to implementation, but are acted on as agencies have already made commitments to donors and communities.
- Due to long-term crisis in Somalia, communities and authorities are very tuned in to aid, and how the aid system works. On the one hand, communities will respond to agencies' requests in order to receive aid (e.g. by forming committees etc, but these will often not render meaningful results), on the other hand, communities perceive humanitarian agencies as continuous providers of resources, and thus have little interest in contributing to the solution and ending the need for humanitarian aid and relief.

#### 4) Staffing: skills and competencies

- There is a limited availability of qualified national staff; existing ones often work under pressure due to the insecure environment and the expectations to deliver results.
- As it is often necessary to take into account clan balance in workforce, it is not always easy to employ best staff on the market.
- Due to clan issues, employment of new staff poses very real security threats to existing staff. This threat is magnified when it comes to laying off staff, when rather than the whole organization being targeted, the person doing the firing is often personally threatened with violence.
- Linked to point 3 above, it was mentioned that too often, practices normally deemed unacceptable among humanitarian staff (driving with armed guards, etc) have become the default way of operating; there is a need to work closely with staff and remind them of the principles that should guide their practice.

#### 5) Monitoring and impact measurement

- Lack of access, especially in the south-central areas, makes monitoring especially difficult. Although national staff are working with intended beneficiaries, it is very hard to monitor the information given, or modes of communication, to ensure that it is accurate and of a good standard.
- Access and capacity of national staff (see above) mean there is often a lack of skills and time to look at the impact of programmes.

#### 6) Transparency and trust

- Transparency is crucial in Somalia. It is imperative that an agency does not mislead Somalis if the agency wants to continue its operations.
- There is a need to build trust so communities know agencies do not have a hidden agenda.
- Agencies are giving out very mixed messages; on one hand they want to work with communities and build trust but on the other hand they often travel with armed escorts, etc
- The only way to build trust is through transparency, and communities must feel part of both programme design and implementation.
- Agencies must clearly communicate their expectations and reciprocate that by listening to what communities need.

#### 7) Coordination

- Aid coordination in Somalia is problematic as it is mostly done at Nairobi and/or sub-state level.

#### 8) Do 'less' harm?

Several times the question of whether agencies are feeding this conflict by continuing activities was raised, but there was uncertainty over where to draw the line in terms of level of harm, and how this should be determined. Any debate on this also needs to consider reasons for not withdrawing such as the humanitarian imperative, local staff security etc, and how agencies can operate as best they can in order to minimize negative impact.

Agencies need to consider their collective responsibility to say they cannot respond, run a programme in a given area etc, (rather than pretend they can) if their presence there is more harmful than beneficial. Questions were raised about the ability of humanitarian agencies to withdraw.

## ***B. Advocacy on accountability and the role of other actors***

Facilitated by Robert Maletta, Oxfam Novib.

While it is important to start small (e.g. at village level) in order to successfully improve accountability, it is also important to think about the larger picture and longer-term goals. Agencies also need to ask themselves what their role is as a collective in engaging with bilateral donors, and individually through the advocacy arms of their organizations. Agencies have different perspectives which can mitigate against collaboration – so a few strategic areas of cooperation are to be focused on.

### 1) Government policies - lack of coherent approaches among the international community

NGOs often have to intervene due to the failure of the international community to responsibly engage with reality in countries such as Somalia. There is often a lack of understanding in the international community about the history and current situation in Somalia. Governments are often seen as fueling the war by supporting different sides, but also fund humanitarian agencies to respond to the resulting crisis. Some donor and agency engagement with Somalia in the past has undermined national institutions (by fueling corruption, cronyism, and conflict). Bad donor practice in Somalia can have negative humanitarian effects across the region, as such participants highlighted the need to rethink the ways of engagement with Somalia to make sure that it is conflict-sensitive. Also, whilst donors are often aware of the impact their policies have on a country like Somalia, their geo-political agendas are at times in contradiction to their humanitarian funding. Participants highlighted the need to ask donors to publicly recognize that accountability is multi-dimensional and this should be reflected as such in their policies.

The need to carefully consider the priorities of donors and to be realistic about what we can expect from them was raised by participants. Donors may act in accordance with the best interests of their own country rather than the recipient country; and new national priorities, for example the war on terror, are likely to dictate foreign policies and overseas engagements.

### 2) Donor funding

The nature of donor funding came up repeatedly, with regard to the short-term nature of humanitarian funding and lack of long-term commitment.

- Short-term donor funding has a number of impacts:
  - Short-term projects result in agencies moving in and out of Somalia, operating without in-depth local knowledge or an understanding of the complex clan issues, and not drawing on lessons learnt (thus repeating the same mistakes).
  - Short-term grants put increased pressure on staff to meet donor deadlines, alongside ongoing programme work.
- Lack of donor commitment poses challenges in dealing with local communities without raising expectations, for example during the assessment stage the mere presence of an agency would raise hopes of an intervention even though the agency may not yet have the funds to respond. This also requires more openness from agencies to local communities regarding the funding situation.

### 3) Humanitarian space

The neutral space in which humanitarian agencies can operate has shrunk, to the extent that agencies going into new areas now run the risk of being associated with the current regime in power. This is a key issue for agencies advocacy, as respect for agency neutrality by all parties to a conflict is vital to keep humanitarian space open. A key part of this problem lies in the already noted issue of donors providing support to one warring party whilst also providing humanitarian funding.

### 4) Approaches to humanitarian work

- Enabling vs survival model - Humanitarian agencies often fall into the trap of working on an enabling model, whereas the beneficiaries they are trying to reach are working on survival model. As a result, communities want to get as much as possible out of organizations during the time they are there, rather than planning for the longer-term. As humanitarian agencies, we often make huge demands of intended beneficiaries, by asking them to plan months ahead when the situation dictates it is impossible to plan more than a day ahead.
- Lightweight vs heavyweight approaches - It was suggested that as a humanitarian community we

- may need to explore different approaches to the traditional heavy operational one. An example was given of a successful lightweight intervention that had no logistical support, but by placing trained people within existing local structures was able to achieve a lot in terms of community engagement.
- Humanitarian values vs valuable resource - In Somalia, humanitarian agencies are perceived mainly as a resource, and as a result clan leaders, elders and authorities seek to control, manipulate and market them to their advantage. As communities' and aid agencies' perceptions of the role of humanitarian aid differs so radically, it is important to engage in a more open dialogue about indicators of progress and impact.

#### 5) Joint Operating Principles

It was mentioned that when the Joint Operating Principles (JOPs) were first discussed many organisations felt they would not be able to adhere to them due to the Somali context, however, in all other countries they would seem reasonable.

The JOPs are currently being assessed to determine how feasible they are in the different areas of Somalia, and as there is some similarity with the HAP Principles of Accountability it may be possible to see how they can be linked together.

### ***C. The way forward – facilitated by Zia Choudhury***

HAP members should look at doing simple things together, and focus first on issues that can be controlled by agencies on a day-to-day basis rather than larger more complex issues.

Participants split into five groups (as below) to highlight a key issue that they can tackle in the coming months AND provide suggestions for ways forward. The points below highlight the main issues proposed by participants and include preliminary suggestion for areas of support from the HAP team. Please discuss these within your agency with relevant SMT/field staff, make more appropriate suggestions and feed these back to the HAP team:

#### 1) Staff management and competencies

A few good practices were shared with regard to hiring and firing of national staff but there was no suggestion for joint action.

HAP SUGGESTIONS:

- i. **HAP to produce learning-materials to support with sensitisation of field staff on issues of accountability, for example DVDs, interactive electronic training modules, integration of accountability elements in already existing professional/technical training. These will be user-friendly and practical.**
- ii. **Consider joint inter-agency induction and orientation for staff. HAP to provide staff induction packages, etc**

#### 2) Transparency: Information flow to beneficiary communities and other relevant stakeholders

- a) Joint regional focal point for information sharing among agencies, but primarily from agencies to local communities, authorities, etc.
- b) Agencies need to agree a minimum level of information about themselves and their presence on the ground to be publicly shared with communities/authority etc

HAP SUGGESTIONS:

- i. **HAP to map out types of information currently disseminated and modes of communication by agencies to different stakeholders.**
- ii. **Work with agencies to make communication more effective: identify what type of information is required by different local stakeholder groups, in what format and through what media this is best communicated.**
- iii. **Explore the opportunity for implementing a joint beneficiary information system.**

#### 3) Monitoring and compliance to commitments that we make

- a) Remind all staff what is normal and what isn't; what widely accepted humanitarian worker practices are.
- b) Whenever someone is hired, ensure they are aware of their responsibilities and the agency's commitments and obligations; this can be done by integrating an element of accountability training into staff induction; ensure there is regular refresher training.
- c) Establish a self-monitoring tool but also ensure that communities know what the reporting

mechanism is and what external body could verify compliance with commitments made. HAP could play a role in this.

- d) Baselines on the extent HAP is being adopted at field level would be useful to assess current quality of practice with regard to beneficiary accountability.
- e) It would make sense to include aspects of HAP in the Joint Operating Principles.

HAP SUGGESTIONS:

- i. **Ensure all organizational values and standards are presented in an easily understandable manner, translated into local languages and shared in appropriate format to raise the awareness of intended beneficiaries of their rights and entitlements (linked to point 2.ii above).**
- ii. **HAP to support managers with accountability self-assessments of Somali programmes; identify existing good practice, highlight areas of improvement and contribute to the development of action plans to address existing gaps. This could be tailored for individual agencies.**
- iii. **HAP to support with a review of JOPs to ensure they fully consider and integrate elements of humanitarian accountability – offering suggestions on how agencies could be held to account for complying with the JOPs.**
- iv. **HAP to contribute to an agency-led process of testing joint complaint-handling mechanisms.**

4) Participation: How can we listen better to communities and beneficiaries

- a) HAP members to conduct a joint context and stakeholder analysis to improve the understanding of beneficiary communities, then document beneficiaries' views on the concept of accountability and their understanding on the role of aid agencies.
- b) Review and share best practices in listening to and engaging with communities.
- c) Ensure accountability reporting is added to the agenda of coordination meetings.

HAP SUGGESTIONS:

- i. **HAP to work with agencies to support with the design and commission of the reviews proposed under point 4 a, b and c.**

5) Advocacy with donors and others on accountability issues

- a) Engage more closely with donors to identify ways for ensuring multi-dimensional accountability and not just one way (i.e. communities, agencies, and donors are all accountable to each other at different levels).
- b) As a group, explore how we hold donors accountable and contribute to enabling donor accountability for how funds are being assigned and used.
- c) Advocacy approaches will need to consider the diverse mandates and values of different agencies.

HAP SUGGESTIONS:

- i. **Develop and implement a strategy for communicating the results of beneficiary reviews (see 4) to the donor community (who to lead on this?).**
- ii. **HAP to approach Oxfam GB to share report on donors in Somalia (currently being prepared); HAP members to discuss the possibility of drawing from this work as part of advocacy activities.**

6) Other suggestions:

- i. **HAP to develop a template that agencies could use to document good practice and propose ways for sharing this across the membership (Applicable to wider areas of accountability; these records could then be easily incorporated in already existing reporting mechanisms).**

**D. Follow up:**

- HAP to send minutes to all participants on **Friday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2007**.
- All participants to discuss the report (the proposed action and the HAP suggestions for support) within their agencies to collect additional suggestions and identify level of interest and commitment; feedback to HAP by **Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2007**. It was agreed that the HAP team will pursue participants to secure a response.
- HAP team to map areas of interest and consolidate in a proposal to be discussed at a future meeting in Nairobi, **date tbc**.