

GATEKEEPERS AND EVICTIONS: SOMALIA'S DISPLACED POPULATION AT RISK

There are currently 1.36 million Somalis displaced within their own country. These internally displaced persons (IDPs) face major protection challenges – including abuse and aid diversion by camp gatekeepers, as well as the threat of forced evictions. These vulnerabilities are not new to Somalia's displaced population, but the context is changing. Refugees International recently conducted assessments of IDP settlements in Mogadishu and Hargeisa, Somaliland. In Mogadishu, security and stability is improving, and the election of a new president in September has generated cautious optimism throughout the capital. To the north, the relative stability of the self-declared autonomous region of Somaliland has primed it for long-term development opportunities. Unfortunately, while conditions in parts of Somalia are improving, the country's internally displaced population is at risk of being left behind.

MOGADISHU

Overview

In the year since Al Shabab, a United States-designated terrorist group, gave up control of the districts it held in Mogadishu, life in the city has improved. New businesses are popping up on every corner, local markets are buzzing with commercial activity, and there are traffic jams on the streets again. Certainly, serious risks and challenges remain. Al Shabab continues to carry out attacks, local political leaders

and journalists are being targeted for assassination at an alarming rate, and highly localized and well-armed militias (with a diverse array of connections and motivations) have secured control over particular neighborhoods. But compared to the conditions when Refugees International last visited in October 2011, security and stability in the Somali capital have improved a great deal.

Mogadishu's displaced population, however, is not benefiting from the city's current revival. The United Nations estimates that there are around 184,000 IDPs in the city, though the

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ The United Nations and international non-governmental organizations must increase their presence in Somali displacement settlements and improve accountability and monitoring of aid delivery.
- ❑ Donor governments should increase resources for the UN Risk Management Unit, enabling it to enhance aid coordination and mitigate diversion.
- ❑ Donor governments and UN agencies must increase financing for monitoring and evaluation and encourage implementing partners to report aid diversion.
- ❑ The new Somali government, supported and assisted by donor governments, must hold local officials to account for the theft of aid, and prevent any forced evictions of displaced persons or communities that violate international humanitarian law.
- ❑ In Hargeisa, Somaliland, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) must augment its personnel so that it can engage more actively with the Somaliland government to identify gaps in the humanitarian response and coordinate the various actors.

exact numbers are difficult to discern. Tens of thousands of displaced from southern Somalia arrived in Mogadishu last year, seeking refuge from famine and drought. They joined the many others who had been living in the city's camps for years due to protracted food insecurity and repeated bouts of violent conflict. An untold number have been displaced multiple times.

Though some camps are in better condition than others, the majority of IDPs live in dismal, slum-like settlements. All across Mogadishu, makeshift shelters constructed of twigs and sheets are crammed together only a few feet apart. Children play in areas strewn with debris and garbage. Through July, the UN Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) had raised about half a billion dollars for emergency relief throughout Somalia in 2012. Unfortunately, despite security improvements, there remain major challenges to delivering that relief in Mogadishu.

At the Mercy of Gatekeepers

When Al Shabab gave up control of the Somali capital, militia leaders, politicians, and influential landowners re-consolidated their control over various parts of the city. This control extends to the displacement camps where international humanitarian assistance is directed. On site, camp 'gatekeepers,' connected to these local powerbrokers through a complex network of influence, regularly demand a portion of the aid that displaced people receive as 'rent.' Some provide security in exchange for these payments. Others, however, can be merciless – treating the IDPs as commodities for their own personal gain, and even preventing some from returning home if their rent is in arrears. Several humanitarian workers described the system of obligation in some of the settlements as 'quasi-slavery.' As an outside researcher, it can be very difficult to learn from IDPs themselves about the challenges they face since some gatekeepers are known to abuse IDPs who express criticism to aid workers.

The gatekeeper system in Somalia developed and evolved over years of 'remote-control' service delivery, wherein aid operations based in Nairobi relied primarily on service delivery by local partners. Limited oversight and accountability on the part of the aid community, combined with ineffective government institutions, have allowed gatekeepers and their powerbrokers to siphon and steal with minimal consequences (if any). The current system of abuse is no secret and was documented in the latest UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, released in June 2012.

To be blunt, the only immediate action that might end the systemic siphoning of aid from IDP camps is to cut the influx

of aid altogether. This is neither a desirable nor feasible solution, but the aid community must acknowledge that the conditions in Mogadishu make it difficult to abide by one of the key principles of humanitarianism: Do no harm.

That being said, there is far too much need in Mogadishu to abandon the city's most vulnerable. Therefore, more must be done to improve the way aid is delivered in Somalia and to ensure it reaches those who need it. The problems of aid delivery in Mogadishu can begin to be overcome by addressing two issues simultaneously from the bottom up and the top down.

Aid Accountability and Coordination

First, the aid community must be as transparent and coordinated as possible. With security in Mogadishu improving, international aid agencies should be able to increase their presence on the ground, allowing them to learn more about how these gatekeepers operate and to whom they are connected. With this increased knowledge and greater presence, the aid system in Mogadishu can become more open and accountable.

Coordination among aid actors is always a challenge, especially in an insecure and rapidly evolving environment, but coordination in Mogadishu is particularly poor. As such, gatekeepers are able to play aid organizations off of each other. Scenarios of multiple donors funding the same latrine project are not uncommon, as well as 'ghost camps' where tents and latrines are set up with no people living there. As Mogadishu becomes increasingly secure and accessible, more aid actors are likely to establish themselves in the city. As noted above, an increase in presence can lead to better monitoring, but more aid also offers gatekeepers more opportunities to siphon that aid. New aid coming in to Mogadishu must be carefully coordinated through the UN cluster system, with the direct support of the UN Risk Management Unit (RMU). Donor financing for the RMU should be increased so that it can play a stronger role in aid coordination and diversion prevention.

At the Nairobi level, the UN Protection Cluster has increased its engagement with partners and the frequency of its meetings. Also, the Health, Shelter, and WASH Clusters have united in a Tri-Cluster initiative to work collaboratively on improving living conditions in IDP settlements. But the challenge is to translate this increased coordination and cooperation in Nairobi into real progress in Mogadishu. For example, there are a number of different organizations working remotely on protection issues – particularly on the prevention of and response to violence against women. But regardless of how

many meetings are held in Nairobi, there must be an improved coordination strategy at the Mogadishu level in order to develop an effective referral system and conduct joint advocacy activities.

In conflict environments, aid workers often collect sensitive information that must be kept confidential for the safety of beneficiaries and implementers alike. But there must be an improved mechanism for cooperation if the aid community is to minimize opportunities for manipulation. The Tri-Cluster approach, the establishment of the RMU, and exercises to map the location of aid projects throughout the city are all positive efforts toward this end. These activities should be supported and enhanced by donors.

Additionally, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) should lead a Humanitarian Gap Analysis, similar to the recent assessment these agencies organized in Bossaso, Puntland. This should include a profiling exercise that would give agencies a clearer understanding of the IDP population's demographics. While comprehensive profiling may be difficult in Mogadishu, there must be a greater effort to learn more about who is living in the IDP settlements so that their needs can be more effectively addressed.

On the donor side, government funders and UN agencies must encourage implementing partners to report cases of aid diversion. It is likely that some NGOs will be reluctant to disclose aid theft out of concern that their projects will be suspended or canceled. But if implementers and donors are in clear communication about the challenges on the ground, then alternate plans can be devised when obstacles to effective implementation arise. Additionally, donors must provide adequate resources and funding for monitoring activities. Finally, it is worth emphasizing that donor coordination is just as critical as NGO coordination. Major donors – such as Turkey, the U.S., and the European Union – must be in agreement on a framework going forward; otherwise the system is unlikely to change.

The Role of the New Government

The current impediments to effective aid delivery cannot be overcome by the humanitarian community or donors alone. Rather, there must be internal political pressure from the new Somali national government to mitigate the power of gatekeepers and hold accountable those who steal aid.

Whether Somali leaders can effectively address these problems is an open question. There is a great deal of optimism surrounding the recent election of Somalia's new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. As a respected academic and civic

activist, he is a welcome change – both for Somalis and the international community – from the corrupt and ineffectual regime of the former president, Sheikh Sharif.

Of course, President Hassan Sheikh has many monumental challenges ahead of him. But he must act to end this systemic siphoning of aid because maintaining the status quo will be devastating for Mogadishu's displaced population. He has to make it clear to the city's local politicians and powerbrokers that continuing to divert aid will not be tolerated. It is unrealistic that the president could wrest control from these powerful militias and landowners overnight; indeed adopting a confrontational approach toward these well-armed groups would likely be to his detriment. But President Hassan Sheikh must acknowledge that there is corruption in the aid system, including the pervasive physical abuse of IDPs, and work with the international community to devise a solution. For their part, donor governments must make it clear to the new government that improving the conditions and well-being of the displaced population is a priority of the international community.

Land and Evictions

An additional challenge for Mogadishu's displaced population relates to land tenure. As Mogadishu develops, businessmen, returning members of the Somali diaspora, and government officials are all seeking to reclaim land where IDPs have settled. While it is very encouraging to see schools and government buildings being reconstructed, it is often difficult to know where the IDPs evicted from these spaces have gone or whether they received any support (or even notice) prior to their eviction. No doubt, wherever they moved, the gatekeepers likely followed.

The UN HCT has identified protocols to be followed in the case of evictions, but there must be increased engagement by the HCT with the Somali government (as well as donors supporting infrastructure projects) to ensure adherence to these protocols. Notably, adequate notice should be given to IDPs prior to an eviction, and they should be consulted throughout the process. An eviction should not lead to an increase in the vulnerability of IDPs. Most importantly, the humanitarian community must devise a mechanism for tracking where IDPs relocate so that they can receive support in their new settlements. Both Somalia's new government and its donors must ensure that any urban planning and development takes into consideration the impact on IDPs.

HARGEISA

The Uncertainty of Land

Like Mogadishu, Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, is hosting tens of thousands of displaced people. Some arrived recently due to last year's drought, while others were displaced over 20 years ago.

Some IDPs have settled on land that is privately owned, while others live on public land that the government intends to reclaim in the future. RI visited one recently established camp on private land, where most of the residents were pastoralists from the region between Hargeisa and the Ethiopian border. They lost their livestock during last year's drought and then traveled to Hargeisa in search of food aid. There are also arrivals from south-central Somalia. RI interviewed one woman who fled to Hargeisa from Mogadishu after four of her children were killed in a mortar attack.

The aid the IDPs receive is not enough to sustain them, so many work menial jobs such as collecting and selling gravel for construction or sticks for firewood. They pay a monthly rent to the landowner and are concerned that they might be evicted from the site at any point.

RI also met IDPs who have been living in a settlement on government land for over two decades. Many of the residents at this particular camp were once refugees in Ethiopia. In the late 1980s, they were among the hundreds of thousands who fled fighting between forces of the Siad Barre regime, based in Mogadishu, and those of the Somalia National Movement in Somaliland. When the Barre regime collapsed in 1991, Somaliland declared its independence from its southern neighbor, a status which is not formally recognized by the international community.

With peace restored, those who fled began returning to Somaliland. But many had lost access to their land; others were unable to return to their pastoralist livelihoods and were relegated to squatting on public land in Hargeisa. They went from being refugees in Ethiopia to IDPs in their home country. Many of them established firm roots where they settled and have integrated into the local economy, but they live under the constant threat that the government will seek to reclaim the land. The ever-temporary nature of their residency limits their ability to establish permanent structures, while also making it difficult for donors and aid agencies to invest in infrastructure projects.

Government Relocations

The Somaliland government has initiated plans to relocate some IDPs to designated land on the outskirts of town. If this

process is consultative, voluntary, and leads to security of land tenure, than this could be a positive development. But the IDPs will face major challenges if they do not receive support at the new sites, which are far from city schools and health centers. For IDPs who are engaged in economic activities in Hargeisa, any relocation will be a shock to their livelihoods and long-established coping strategies.

The UNHCR – which leads multiple clusters in Somaliland, including protection, emergency shelter, and camp coordination and camp management – must play the lead role in ensuring that IDPs' rights are not violated during relocation. This requires close engagement with the Somaliland Ministry of Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration, and effective push-back against forced evictions that violate international humanitarian law. Regarding the overall IDP response, OCHA must play a stronger role. According to several aid workers whom RI spoke with, coordination is lacking at all levels. As the host government, Somaliland authorities have the ultimate responsibility for IDPs – and indeed the government is currently crafting an IDP policy. However, the government has limited capacity and requires additional support. In particular, OCHA should engage more actively with the Somaliland government to identify gaps in the IDP response and to coordinate various actors. At minimum, OCHA should deploy a high-level international staff person to Hargeisa to lead a more robust coordination effort.

Development Opportunities

Like Mogadishu, Somaliland is in a period of transition. There are emergency needs, but there are also development opportunities. Though there is ongoing insecurity along the disputed border area between Somaliland and Puntland, Somaliland maintains a level a stability and good governance that is absent from much of the rest of Somalia. There is the capacity for increased investment in long-term development that can spur the region's economic development and prevent future displacement. As noted above, many of Hargeisa's newest IDPs were pastoralists who lost their livelihoods due to drought. If they had received adequate support and assistance in their home areas, then it is possible that their current displacement could have been avoided.

In a positive development, the next UN Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) will span three years rather than only one. The focus will remain humanitarian, but it will also include multi-year activities and programs to address early recovery and development priorities. But for the CAP to be effective, donors must also commit to longer-term resources and planning.

Mark Yarnell assessed the situation for internally displaced people within Somalia in September 2012.