

Amplifying community voices in humanitarian action in Somalia, 2019



Photo credit: UNHCR

This report contains summary recommendations for the humanitarian community in Somalia on improving accountability to affected people. It is based on an analysis of key findings from three initiatives (Africa's Voices Foundation (AVF), Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) and REACH) in Somalia, coupled with feedback from more than 40 participants from various implementing, donor, and coordination agencies in Somalia during workshops and consultations in Nairobi and Mogadishu in October 2019.

Key summary findings

1. People need more information

71% of affected people surveyed by REACH² say they do not have enough information to enable them to access humanitarian aid. Greater access to information was also the third most common need mentioned by participants in an AVF radio show discussion.³ This included a demand for aid agencies to conduct more needs assessments and/or gather more census data in order to identify the specific needs of the most vulnerable population groups, as well as to improve citizens' access to information about their rights and available support.



“The best way to overcome this situation is by first gathering information from the community on where the actual problems lie.”

Female respondent, Kismayo (AVF)

What is accountability to affected populations (AAP)?

AAP is an active commitment to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people humanitarian organisations seek to assist.¹

Overview of initiatives

AVF - a rich, plural and diverse conversation with citizens across Somalia built through two interactive radio shows in August 2019.

GTS - perception surveys with internally displaced people (IDPs) voluntary migrants, and citizens affected by crisis who received aid within the last 18 months in July 2019.

REACH - Joint Multi-Cluster Need Assessment with IDP, non-displaced, refugee and returnee households in June-July 2019.

REACH JMCNA²: What were the main concerns you had in accessing humanitarian aid in the past 3 months/90 days? (n= 10487)

71% Not enough information

¹ Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP): A brief overview, International Agency Standing Committee

² REACH's Joint Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (JMCNA), July 2019

³ AVF received 11,713 messages from 5,309 individuals who answered the question 'What do you think are the most important solutions for addressing humanitarian needs in your community?' in August 2019

When it comes to aid recipients, around three-quarters of people who received humanitarian assistance surveyed by GTS⁴ feel informed about the aid and services available to them, but residents affected by crisis report lower levels of awareness (72% mostly or completely aware) than internally displaced people (IDPs), who generally feel more informed (83% mostly or completely aware).

As in the 2018 survey, affected people say they need more information on the types of aid and services available to them as well as how to access assistance.⁵ When asked about the main barrier to accessing information, 81% said they lacked the necessary connections in the community to be informed of humanitarian assistance available. This highlights the need for greater accountability and transparency amongst aid agencies in order to ensure that aid activities reflect the real needs of communities and also provide accurate, reliable information more frequently.

2. Humanitarian solutions involve reducing aid dependency

Of the people consulted by AVF, 19% of citizens identified community organisation as a solution to the humanitarian situation⁶, making it the most commonly mentioned suggestion. Citizens commented on social cohesion and identified community-led initiatives as the most desirable. This strong emphasis on community organisation indicates that citizens aspire to autonomy and empowerment, and that they have an implicit desire to avoid or reduce dependency on aid. Among people surveyed by GTS there is a tendency to feel negatively about their prospects for self-reliance, with nearly half saying the aid they currently receive does not help them to live without humanitarian assistance in the future. Cash recipients surveyed report feeling more empowered (38% mostly or completely) by the humanitarian support they receive than the non-cash recipients (28% mostly or completely).

Do you feel the support you receive helps you to become self-reliant?



3. Accountability and transparency in aid delivery needed

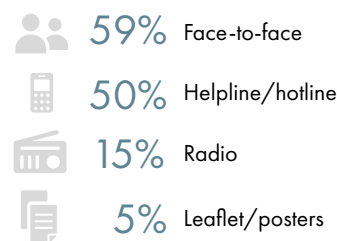
Almost half (43%) of aid recipients surveyed by GTS say that important needs remain unmet, highlighting cash, food, and health services as insufficient. Most respondents (79%) are aware of the aid and services available to them, and 65% say aid goes to those who need it most. In an AVF radio show discussion⁷, 11% of participants called for improvements to aid agencies' accountability and transparency, making this the second most commonly mentioned theme. They called attention to the need for anti-corruption mechanisms, bypassing gatekeepers, and improving assistance targeting.



“First, the aid agencies should distribute the aid directly to the people, because the middlemen they use are not honest. If they cannot do this, they should find honest people, like mosque leaders/imams or Muslim scholars.”

Male respondent, 26 years, Afgoye (AVF)

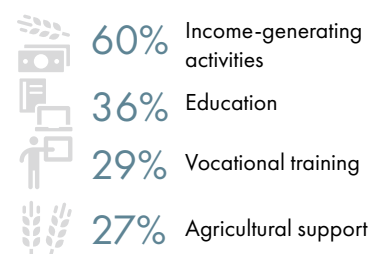
GTS Survey: How would you prefer to receive information?* (n=539)



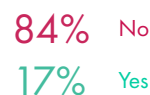
“They should be aware of the needs of the community so that they can help them to be self-reliant.”

Male respondent, 19 years, Wadajir (AVF)

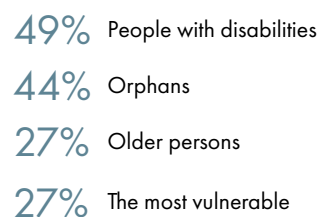
GTS survey: What would help you to become self-reliant?* (n=234)



REACH JMCNA: Has your household been contacted by humanitarian workers regarding the type of aid you would like to receive in the past 3 months/90 days? (n=9880)



GTS survey: Who is left out?* (n=59)



*Only the top four responses are shown. Percentages do not total 100 because respondents could choose multiple options.

⁴ Ground Truth Solutions, Somalia: Strengthening Accountability to Affected People, September 2019

⁵ Ibid

⁶ AVF received 9,957 messages from 4,687 individuals who answered the question 'What can aid agencies do to help Somali citizens become more self-reliant?' in August 2019

⁷ AVF received 11,713 messages from 5,309 individuals who answered the question 'What do you think are the most important solutions for addressing humanitarian needs in your community?' in August 2019

Progress already made

1. Across the response, there has been a general willingness to scale up accountability in 2019. This has been expressed in numerous ways, including standardising AAP in design and monitoring, cluster-level moves to formalise structures, and OCHA's openness to strengthening AAP via the coordination system.
2. In the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) workshop on 8 October 2019, OCHA stated that AAP would be scaled up and strengthened across the response, building on the combined efforts of AVF, GTS, and REACH. Perception indicators will be included, as per the HPC 2020 process, to ensure that community views are taken into account when monitoring progress towards the Strategic Objectives.
3. OCHA has tabled a new community engagement structure with lead agency support from the Food Security Cluster/WFP, which will link to inter-cluster coordination and be tasked with following up on specific action points identified via AAP project efforts.
4. A response-wide AAP indicator has been tabled which would track AAP under the umbrella of Protection Mainstreaming.
5. With support from AVF, GTS, REACH, DFID, and OCHA, a concept for a collective AAP service is in development and will be tabled with the donor group, who have already expressed an interest in championing AAP across the Somalia response.
6. In all consultations, donors have expressed their determination to strengthen their AAP efforts through more coherent collective work.
7. Consultations in Mogadishu and Nairobi have identified several areas for further bilateral or agency-level action (specific examples include follow-up on key findings by the protection cluster).

Key recommendations

Structural

1. Humanitarian actors and organisations must have a widely understood working definition of AAP, one that includes the activities associated with listening to communities and acting on what they say.
2. A proportion of the SHF should be dedicated to supporting collective accountability efforts in line with the HRP's focus on AAP.
3. Donors must act on their determination to improve AAP and increase collaboration. As such, they should collectively a) increase funding for AAP activities and b) incentivise agencies, clusters, and coordinators to follow up on the feedback they receive. They should also explore the possibility of standardising community engagement information across their Third-Party Monitoring systems, perhaps via standardised indicators. This could take the form of alignment of compliance indicators among donors, as has occurred for cash coordination.
4. The ICCG should be used to support clusters in better understanding how and when to push and take action on specific AAP findings.
5. The proposed AAP working group should be formally linked to the ICCG and used as a vehicle for following up on specific activities and linking them to agencies, clusters, and the humanitarian coordination structure. It should be a support structure designed to connect humanitarian activities to community voices and should not be perceived as an additional mechanism.
6. The government of Somalia should be briefed more frequently on accountability issues and opportunities to engage.
7. Information from community engagement, surveys and consultations should be incorporated in cluster reporting mechanisms (for instance, through the 4Ws) and supported by the IMWG. This would enhance the shared understanding of who is doing what and where with regard to AAP and would also help to reduce any overlap between different AAP programmes (especially at the partner and implementing-partner levels).

Programmatic

1. Address information gaps across Somalia

- Aid response plans, targeting criteria, and actionable information on how to access humanitarian assistance should be widely communicated. (This MUST include communication with people who do not receive aid, especially those who are considered particularly vulnerable).

2. Assess and address gaps in community feedback mechanisms

- A secondary analysis should be conducted to determine why people do not feel they can complain or provide feedback on a humanitarian response.
- All operational agencies should be encouraged (with cluster support) to proactively communicate with affected people about what mechanisms exist and how to access them. This should be coordinated with other agencies so that communities are not inundated with conflicting or confusing information, or a plethora of mechanisms.

- Aid recipients' ability to access feedback mechanisms should be tracked periodically to check for improvement.

3. Dig deeper into community perceptions of and ideas for durable solutions; communicate these ideas to development actors and close the loop with affected communities

- Better engagement between aid actors and affected people is needed at all phases of the response. Aid agencies need better information to improve targeting, and affected people need better information about the aid available to them.
- Community feedback must be systematically communicated to development actors and groups specifically working on durable solutions (eg. Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat).
- Closing the loop with affected people to communicate the action taken as a result of their feedback and suggestions.

Brief overview of each project

Africa's Voices Foundation (AVF) - africasvoices.org

In August and September 2019, in partnership with REACH and OCHA, AVF delivered an innovative AAP intervention in Somalia, in parallel with the JMCNA. The project deployed AVF's Common Social Accountability Platform to disseminate findings from the JMCNA to communities via interactive radio programmes intended to spark a broader public dialogue on the priorities of the humanitarian response in Somalia as well as to gather feedback from affected populations via SMS to inform the 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview.

In a two-week rapid consultation in August 2019, AVF heard from 8,251 people who engaged directly with the programme by sending an SMS. All the SMS messages were free-text, meaning citizens could express their feedback in their own words. AVF consulted people in every region in Somalia, including a few from areas that are inaccessible to the JMCNA.

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) - groundtruthsolutions.org

GTS has been tracking community perceptions of aid recipients in Somalia since 2017. In July 2019, GTS asked 539 IDPs, voluntary migrants, and citizens affected by crisis in Somaliland, Puntland, and South Central about their views on humanitarian assistance in Somalia. This was the third such survey since 2017 – the first took place in 2017 and the second in 2018.

GTS gathers perception data from affected people receiving aid to assess humanitarian responses. Listening and responding to the voices of affected populations is a vital first step in closing the accountability gap, empowering affected populations to be part of the decisions that govern their lives, building relationships with communities, and localising knowledge. This year the findings will inform the HNO and provide a metric for monitoring progress towards the strategic objectives outlined in the HRP.

REACH - reach-initiative.org

The Joint Multi Cluster Need Assessment (JMCNA) is a household survey designed with the participation of the humanitarian clusters in Somalia. Cluster leads outlined information gaps and the type of data they needed to inform their strategic plans. The JMCNA is one of the main data sources informing the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and HRP processes.

Households were sampled at the district level using stratified cluster sampling with internally displaced and non-displaced households as strata, a 90% confidence interval, a 10% margin of error, and a buffer of 15%. Data was collected between 23 June and 31 July 2019. A total of 10,487 households were surveyed in 53 districts across 17 regions. In addition to the cluster-specific questions, seven questions about AAP were added to the questionnaire.

More information can be found in the [REACH resource centre](#).

A joint concept note is being produced based on these recommendations. For more information or to ask how you can get involved in the collective project, contact meg@groundtruthsolutions.org, alejandra.gaviria@reach-initiative.org, or anna.t@africasvoices.org.