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recommendations for managing recurrent disaster-related shocks and supporting resilience options in Somalia

briefing

Introduction

Somalia's recurring droughts and subsequent famine and conflict need coordinated action by the Somali government, development partners, local assistance providers, other researchers and the private sector, working with each other and with the affected communities. The 2011 famine, the worst in over a quarter of a century, led to the death of more than a quarter of a million people.¹ The 2016 near-famine situation saw less adverse effects – lessons learned from the 2011 crises meant better prepared and coordinated government and assistance providers, clearer plans for better disaster and related risk mitigation, and households better able to employ a varied mix of different coping strategies they had not used (or had used ineffectively) in 2011.

The protracted crisis in Somalia is driven by a long-standing and multi-layered conflict, severe cases of poverty and displacement, a weak governance structure, and the erosion of individual, household and community economic assets and social networks.² Taken together, these complicate an already complex crisis and push affected families to explore survival tactics not previously used.

This policy note summarises the key lessons drawn from a study that examined how different people responded to and survived the recurrent shocks between 2011 and 2016, the drivers of marginalisation or exclusion and how these are maintained, the influence that external actors³ had on the coping strategies used by different communities, and the seeming usefulness of chosen strategies. The study uses a participatory approach⁴ to integrate knowledge from affected people and communities.

Study approach

Reviewed literature was coupled with detailed field consultations in four study locations: urban Kismayo, rural Kismayo, Baidoa and Beledweyne, and a deductive analytical approach assessed and validated all the data collected. These study sites provided diverse livelihoods and experiences of risk, vulnerability and resilience. A total of 256 respondents were interviewed: 108 from Kismayo, 68 from Beledweyne, 66 from Baidoa, and 14 diaspora respondents living in Kampala, Uganda. Respondents were interviewed in groups and as key informants and included women, youths, older people, people with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Lessons from the 2011 and 2016 crises

The crises had positive and negative effects. Positively, compared with 2011, fewer people were displaced in 2016 and the government and humanitarian agencies were more prepared. Households recovered after the 2011 crisis by diversifying their income in ways not previously explored. These included menial labour and out-migration for job-searching men, and handicrafts, hunting and gathering for rural dwellers, and paid domestic and other menial work for women. Negatively, both pastoralists and agro-pastoralists suffered considerable losses in assets and productivity, made worse by increasing environmental degradation and movement restrictions due to fenced-off land in some areas.⁵ Some people resorted to sale of charcoal (harmful to the environment), miraa (*khat*) and illicit alcohol – all banned practices.⁶ Exploring the different coping strategies used increases our understanding of the impact the crises had on different population groups. After 2011, more sustainable and holistic drought mitigation government-led approaches in the region were also explored by the Somali government and by NGOs working in partnership with donors and other actors, and this led to better early warning systems, more collaborative disaster risk management plans and an expansion of social protection programmes. However, vulnerable groups like IDPs, ethnic minorities, and some people with disabilities still struggled to cope, and gender inequality and weak female empowerment remained key challenges that hampered resource allocation, including distribution of food assistance and other support.

The following key factors differentiate the 2011 and 2016 drought conditions:

- poorer security and more restrictions in 2011 due to Al-Shabaab
- more and faster humanitarian assistance in 2016/17 and district-level disaster risk management strategies
- more diversified skills and education in communities, increasing opportunities for employment and alternative livelihood options
- better community disaster preparedness in 2016 than in 2011
- better use and perceived value of cash transfers and remittances in 2016/17, enabling households to buy food and invest in assets, education and health
- the curbing of large-scale charcoal production and trade after 2012 which prevented its lucrative profits from funding Al-Shabaab and the war during that period.⁷

Findings from this study showed that, after 2011, displaced people employed new strategies for dealing with their emotional and other psychosocial needs. The most favoured strategies by our study participants were social and organisational, based on strong social networks. A larger network, for instance, meant more stable and accessible grazing pastures and a greater ability to barter livestock or other assets for food/money or to get remittances from family/friends in urban areas or the diaspora. Such social cohesion also meant an opportunity for poorer people to live in better-off households or eat there, and to have a shared platform for better protection, as well as access to resources, information and other decision-making fora. The next favoured category of strategies was spiritual, relying on religious prayer and rituals such as fasting or seeking forgiveness from God to alleviate suffering caused by sin. Rituals included some that pre-date Islamic teachings such as the belief in *jinn* (ancestral spirits that are at times seen as evil). Some negative behavioural strategies were also used, including abandoning children, older or immobile people with disabilities; denying or rationing food for weaker members of households; stealing; and practising prostitution and child/early marriage.

The implications

Strategic and operational needs for policy and programming should focus on a holistic mix of short-term humanitarian and long-term development goals. Context-specific and localised interventions developed in collaboration with local service providers are key.⁸ Further, given the strong possibility that few displaced people may return to their original homes, it is vital that skills and other forms of training to build self-reliance and resilience is provided, especially in IDP camps and urban centres, including for the growing youth population and for displaced and host communities.⁹

Key recommendations

Align objectives and strategies. Humanitarian/resilience agencies and target communities need better aligned objectives and strategies; this can be achieved by helping national and local government institutions become better able to coordinate multiple actors and represent a wider range of population groups. In this, the **Somali national government** should:

1. Improve its strategic leadership and coordination roles, programme implementation and policy coherence, and promotion of suitable climate-sensitive livelihood options and related new skills.
2. Link early warning systems, food security agencies and social protection programmes to enhance the efficacy of assistance provided.
3. Mobilise community involvement in implementing social protection programmes and targeting the most vulnerable people.
4. Enact policies that protect the rights and interests of marginalised populations such as ethnic and religious minority groups, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.

Improve interaction with and support of Somali communities by external agencies. In this, **humanitarian agencies, donors and other international actors** should:

1. Work with a range of local and diaspora organisations, beyond those that are clan driven.
2. Invest more in cash transfer programmes, income-generation activities and/or social protection initiatives that promote resilience and ensure sustainability.
3. Support government to conceptualise, design and finance innovative relief-to-development and/or broader social protection programmes.
4. Help local NGOs address their capacity issues, and/or engage in collaborative programmes like Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS).
5. Work with regional bodies such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and the African Union to support cross-border resilience initiatives, and to draw lessons from these.
6. Use their own wider geopolitical reach to draw lessons from other regions and to share these with actors in Somalia.
7. Support researchers to study political economy issues that will inform the future planning and implementation of sustainable livelihoods programmes, and whom/what to base these on.

Local NGOs should:

1. Explore what works or does not on resilience and newly used coping strategies and livelihood options, documenting lessons for policy and programme uptake.
2. With academics, explore how best to draw on community knowledge – on their use of social capital in conflict and drought conditions.
3. Work with local governments to better integrate NGO projects into national planning frameworks.
4. Prioritise cash transfers as the preferred instrument for reaching the most vulnerable communities via social protection interventions.

Academic and research institutions should:

1. Undertake longitudinal research on vulnerability trends in different population groups.
2. Work with local NGOs and communities to identify and document local knowledge on drought and hunger coping strategies, and to explore how such knowledge may inform national plans for disaster mitigation.
3. Monitor and evaluate progress towards achieving positive livelihood outcomes for local communities.

The diaspora community should:

1. Better coordinate mechanisms through which remittances are made, exploring how to align these with public investments and/or priorities.
2. With central government and donors, establish a repository of knowledge and skills that highlights temporary or short-term technical skills that diaspora community members can provide.
3. Improve members' own understanding of the practical and political realities of present-day Somalis, and how to best support local Somali organisations and communities.
4. Communicate with individual people and groups in Somalia to explore recovery and development alternatives following the 2011 and 2016 crises.

Private sector actors should:

1. Work with donors, development agencies and the International Labour Organization to create employment opportunities for better livelihoods and resilience building for youth.

Addressing gender-based violence. Identify local institutions that can build awareness on sexual and gender-based violence. Develop partnerships between these local institutions, the government, major clans, religious institutions, NGOs and other development actors. The partnerships should initiate prevention systems and when violations occur, swiftly respond to survivors' needs. Such systems could also provide practical advice to anchor emergency responses and humanitarian assistance programmes, especially for IDPs, and women and girls. Engage clan and religious leaders to reshape perspectives on the most harmful gender norms and behaviours. Increase investments in studies on the drivers of sexual and gender-based violence in Somalia, going beyond conflict or drought-prone vulnerability. Use community-based approaches with assistance from local NGOs to address sensitive issues such as sexual and gender-based violence. Such systems are useful also for collecting data on such issues and other reasons why people may be social oppressed, such as ethnicity or sexuality.

Accessible, useable and disaggregated data/information. Invest in collection, analysis and interpretation of disaggregated data on risk and vulnerability to facilitate better disaster mitigation and long-term resilience building. Strengthen the capacity of existing institutions such as the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) to collect, analyse and disseminate disaggregated data and to update data for better planning and implementation of humanitarian and development programmes. Ensure also that data disaggregation happens for cases of sexual and gender-based violence and for ethnic minorities.

Notes

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017. Threat of famine persists. Available at: www.fao.org/somalia/news/detail-events/en/c/1036171/

² Salama, P., et al. Famine in Somalia: Evidence for a declaration. *Global Food Security*, 1:1, 2012, p. 13–19. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2012.08.002>

³ In this paper, and in the context of the Somali humanitarian crises of 2011 and 2016, external actors are those non-Somali institutions, people and groups that intervened in the crises by providing support to local communities and structures, Somali government agencies, NGOs and other Somali actors. By contrast, local and national actors either comprised communities that were directly or indirectly affected by the crises or those who undertook most of the frontline delivery of humanitarian assistance during the crises. The former comprised donors, humanitarian NGOs, commercial companies, researchers etc.

⁴ The study used the vulnerability to resilience framework. See Pasteur, K. 2011. *From Vulnerability to Resilience A framework for analysis and action to build community resilience*. Practical Action Publishing Ltd, UK. Available at: www.practicalactionpublishing.org

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme, 2018. Mapping the devastation of Somalia's drought. Available at: www.unenvironment.org/news-and-stories/story/mapping-devastation-somalias-drought

⁶ The export of charcoal from Somalia was banned, both by a 2012 UN Security Council resolution and by the Somali government, due to its destructive effect on the environment and its exacerbation of conflict and humanitarian crises (<https://allafrica.com/stories/201805090688.html>). On alcohol consumption, Somalia is a majority Islamic country and Islamic Law (or *Shar'iah*) prohibits alcohol consumption or smoking cigarettes (<https://ethnomed.org/clinical/nutrition/food-and-fasting-in-somali-culture>).

⁷ UN Security Council Resolution, 2012. Ban on export of charcoal from Somalia. Available at: www.fao.org/3/i8841en/i8841EN.pdf.

⁸ Somalia Humanitarian Response Plan. 2019. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190104_HRP_SOM_summary_English.pdf

⁹ Department for International Development, 2011. *Defining Disaster Resilience: A DFID Approach Paper*. Available at: www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/dfid_defining_disaster_resilience.pdf



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