

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS SOMALIA

OVERVIEW OF HUMANITARIAN ACCESS IN SOMALIA

Humanitarian access in Somalia remains critical to the country's most vulnerable populations in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and protection (estimated at 2.1 million) - and particularly the large number who reside in south/central region who are extremely food insecure or internally displaced. Unfortunately the drought conditions currently being experienced in southern Somalia in early 2006 have created resource-based conflict - particularly over land and water - and such disputes have already been reported in some regions of south/central during Jan and Feb 2006. On the other hand, in Gedo region, experiencing dire drought conditions, clan conflict appears to have subsided and the community is encouraging access for humanitarian aid - but the situation remains extremely volatile and fluid. In recent years lack of sustained humanitarian access and restricted operating space in south/central have been major factors affecting human survival (as well as limiting operational capacity of aid organizations) in the region.

In 2005, the operating environment for humanitarian relief operations remained varied. Some areas including Somaliland and Puntland experienced political development, economic recovery and relative stability with humanitarian access in general unhindered, although frequent reports indicate that some aid workers have been targeted in Puntland. Other areas in south/central remained dangerous and unstable with attempts to provide assistance and protection to the most vulnerable groups mostly ad hoc and event driven. Responses in south/central were often delayed as the humanitarian community struggled to negotiate access with local authorities. Access was further complicated by flooding and poor road infrastructure.

Since the outbreak of civil war in 1991 and the massive humanitarian operation launched in its wake, aid in Somalia has been highly politicised. Trends show there have been moves to divert, block and attempt to control, directly or indirectly, the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection in order to strengthen the power bases of faction leaders, usually along clan lines. As a result the provision of aid can be as much a source of conflict, as well as a source of relief; the outcome being that its delivery has not always been possible or has been interrupted due to the fact that the safety and security of humanitarian relief workers cannot be assured. Faction or freelance militia with an interest in a geographical area either 1) prevent aid from reaching opposing or minority clans; 2) prevent the rehabilitation of and access to natural resources such as water and land required for survival; 3) influence agencies to hire staff and provide contracts for goods and services that favour their own kin or allies.

A series of serious security incidents in October/November 2005 including the murder of a Somali National working for UNDPSS in Kismayo; piracy of ships carrying humanitarian relief off the south coast and a recent wave of assassinations in Mogadishu worsened access in south/central. This has implications for the delivery of aid to the most vulnerable populations identified as being in Humanitarian Emergency, Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis or displaced. . On March 1 2006, during a UNICEF/OCHA visit to Lower Juba to consult with partners on the ground and identify quick impact priority interventions to be undertaken, the mission was ambushed in Afmadow by armed militia and a UNICEF international staff detained. Direct negotiations with the TFG and local authorities were immediately commenced to seek the staff member's quick and safe release - which after intense consultations occurred 30 hours later. The mission to Lower Juba would have enabled progress in the drought response in the region. Lower Juba is one of the worse affected regions yet also one with the smallest presence of aid organisations.

Between March and November 2005 more than twenty boats were hijacked off the Somali coast and the trend does not appear to be decreasing. Kenyan vessel owners are becoming very reluctant to use the southern Somali waters and are asking for armed escort to deliver World Food Programmes (WFP) commodities or UN relief. The temporary halt of sea transport is also impacting on the availability of fuel in south Somalia, directly affecting the humanitarian flights into the area. The southern Somali coastline is one of the most dangerous in the world and WFP's operations in southern Somalia have felt the consequences. The Agency has looked into alternative transport routes, including overland from Kenya and via Djibouti to reach those in desperate need of food assistance.

The situation has been further complicated by reports indicating that extremist groups pose an increased threat to humanitarian workers. This has led to the need to improve security standards and is likely to impact on humanitarian operating space. Mines are still being laid in southern Somalia, and the ongoing insecurity in the region has hindered a comprehensive plan to deal with them.

Since late 2005, OCHA has been leading the UN's initiative to maximize access opportunities in south/central where authorities have shown commitment to engaging (assisting with access) with humanitarian organizations. In mid-January 2006 the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Prime Minister in which the TFG committed itself to cooperating with the UN to enhance unhindered access and to assist in the dissemination of the MOU's principles at the local level. UN agencies have also produced a statement for local authorities and communities to adhere to basic humanitarian principles and which is being disseminated. The TFG has also created a Technical Committee which among other things will look into access issues. Where it proves difficult to access vulnerable groups in south/central in 2006 the humanitarian community will also be looking to work closely with local Somali partners and empower them to carry out the implementation and monitoring of humanitarian activities.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW (MARCH 2006)

Somaliland

The establishment of relative peace and stability in Somaliland has facilitated access by the humanitarian community to the most vulnerable populations in most parts of the region. The killing of four aid workers disrupted operations in 2003/2004 but this is not the norm. Access is most commonly restricted by poor road conditions, particularly during the rainy season, mainly in the regions of Awdal and Sanaag. The most vulnerable are those displaced by drought and conflict, including displaced from the south, especially minorities, and destitute households living in drought affected areas - they are all accessible except in the Puntland border area of Sool/Sanaag. **There are currently no access problems in Togdheer but FAO/FSAU report that 40,000 people face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis.**

Somaliland's Special Protection Unit (SPU)

UNDP was selected by the Somaliland government and humanitarian and developmental partners as the focal point for the Special Protection Unit (SPU), which is part of the Somaliland Police Force, and has been set up solely for the protection of the premises and staff of international non governmental organizations and diplomatic missions. The 300-strong unit provides round-the-clock security to offices and staff residences, as well as security patrols after dusk, a quick reactive response in emergencies and armed escort for staff travelling around Somaliland. In addition a 24-hour radio room has been established in the Somaliland Police force and staffed by members of the SPU. **A similar programme has been established by UNDP in Puntland.**

Sool and Sanaag

Despite standing agreements between the UN, Puntland and Somaliland authorities to allow unimpeded access, access to parts of this region (border areas) is not always guaranteed. On 24 Nov 2005, the Acting President of the Puntland State of Somalia released a decree requesting aid agencies to access and channel aid into the contested regions from Puntland alone. On 9 January 2006, local authorities in Las Anod confiscated vaccines coming from Hargeisa intended for the joint UNICEF/WHO measles campaign. The incident resulted in the suspension of the campaign in Sool region and was condemned by the Somaliland authorities who advised UN agencies that all assistance in Somaliland – including Sool and Sanaag – should be channeled from their side only. So far nothing has been received in writing but advocacy for unimpeded access in eastern Sool and Sanaag will clearly need to be maintained. **FAO/FSAU report an estimated 105,000 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis.**

Puntland

A Memorandum Of Understanding with this largely homogenous regional administration ensures relatively unimpeded access to populations. However, some local elements, including rogue or informal militia, the latter in protest of the government's inability to pay them, have sometimes harassed humanitarian workers. Lack of infrastructure also complicates access to hinterland and coastal areas. Humanitarian priorities are the assistance of communities hit by the tsunami and the drought, new and long-term IDP's and destitute pastoralists in remote areas. **FAO/FSAU report that In Bari region 45,000 people face an Acute Livelihood Crisis. In Nugal 20,000 are in Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and 3,000 in Humanitarian Emergency.**

South/Central

Mogadishu : More than a dozen factional leaders actively compete for control of the city's sixteen districts and due to this insecurity access to the civilian population is severely restricted. Among the most vulnerable are about **250,000 displaced people, living in IDP settlements – who often fall victim to harassment and extortion from self-proclaimed gatekeepers, known locally as 'black cats' who offer protection in return for money or large portions of their aid rations; they are known to deny humanitarian workers access to IDPs and divert resources targeted to them.**

Bay and Bakool : There are regular outbreaks of localized conflict close to Baidoa and Idale in Bay region and Rabdhure and Attol in Bakool region. The two regions host thousands of inaccessible IDP's and other destitute populations. Since the announcement of the TFG to hold the first Parliamentary session in Baidoa on the 26 Feb 2006, preparations have been ongoing in Bay and Bakool to enhance security. Local reconciliation between the Digil and Mirifle has also resumed and both these initiatives could provide new opportunities for access. **FAO/FSAU report that in Bakol 45,000 face Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and 105,000 face a Humanitarian Emergency.**

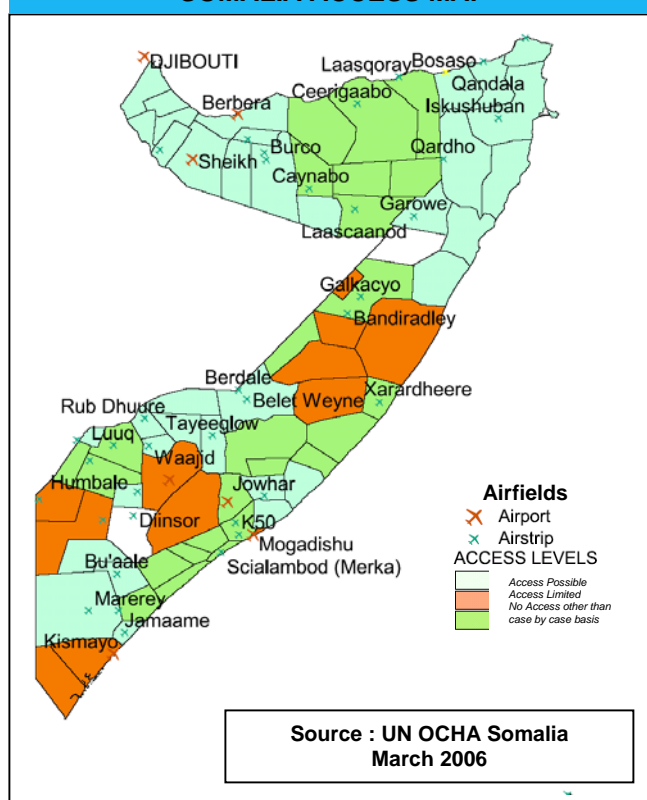
Galgadud, Southern Mudug, Hiran and Middle Shabelle : Localized conflicts, the threat of clan violence and poor infrastructures are the main hindrances to humanitarian access in these regions. Mistrust is also high between local authorities and the aid community. Conflict related displacement (although not on a large scale) and drought and flooding are the primary causes of humanitarian distress. Mudug/Galgadud remained tense and volatile with repeated incidents of fighting reported in January 2006 over pastoral land, water rights and revenge killings. **In Galgadud 40,00 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and in Mudug 20,000 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis(FAO/FSAU).**

Lower and Middle Juba : Insecurity perpetuated by freelance militia and the lack of local authorities are the greatest factors affecting access in these neglected regions. Kismayo, with its busy sea and international airports has the reputation of being one of the most insecure towns in Somalia. Tragically in October 2005, a Somali national working for UN Department of Safety and Security was deliberately shot dead in Kismayo. It remains unclear what the motive was but the incident only underlines the precarious and unpredictable operating environment in much of south/central. **In Lower Juba 60,000 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and 115,000 are in Humanitarian Emergency. In Middle Juba 50,00 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and 120,000 are in Humanitarian Emergency (FAO/FSAU).**

Gedo : Local administrations are weak and often cannot ensure the safety of the civilian population and humanitarian workers. **Due to drought conditions, clan conflict appears to have subsided and the community is encouraging access for humanitarian aid - but the situation remains extremely volatile and fluid and there are also reports of an increase in roadblocks and the activities of freelance militias due to the harsh conditions.**

Humanitarian operations in Somalia rely on airstrips remaining open with unhindered access to humanitarian aircraft (UNCAS and ECHO). The following major airports/airfields/airstrips are used for scheduled flights: Hargeisa, Bossaso, Garowe/Conoco, Jowhar, Beletweyne, Wajid, Mogadishu/K50 Minor airfields (non-scheduled) used : Erigavo, Las Aanod, Hafun, Galkayo, Eyl, Eel Dheere, Daynile, Esaley, Hoddur, Jamaame, Marerey, Kismayo, Garbaharey.

SOMALIA ACCESS MAP



Recurrent clan conflict compounds the difficulties of sustaining access and programming. Most of the region's residents are displaced within it, some for more than a decade and others by more recent conflict and drought. Of the approximately 33,000 displaced, an estimated half are minorities with multiple vulnerabilities. **In Gedo 80,000 face an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis and 180,000 are in Humanitarian Emergency (FAO/FSAU).**

IDPs

In South/Central IDPs are largely concentrated in Mogadishu (250,000) with another estimated 90,000 concentrated along the Shabelle river and in Lower Juba. Its also estimated there are up to 33,000 residing in Gedo as a result of conflict in 2005 as well as significant numbers in Bay and Bakool. In early 2006, movements of people related to the drought were reported.

There may be potential resentment from the host community if IDPs are prioritized in relief interventions. Provision of aid is further complicated by the need to ensure equity among opposing clans.

ACCESS COORDINATION MECHANISMS

An access working group in Nairobi has been established with a mandate to advise on issues related to priorities regarding access to populations in need of assistance, to recommend on UN support to and involvement in on going local reconciliation initiatives - and to rethink ways of conducting assistance and protection activities, in light of new emerging extremist threat. **The working group is currently chaired by OCHA and composed of UN agencies and a broad range of NGOs. This access Working Group makes up one of seven clusters forming the Inter-agency standing Committee on Somalia (IASC) designed to strengthen humanitarian response capacity. In 2006 OCHA Somalia will produce Monthly Reports to measure improvement or deterioration of the humanitarian operating space.**

UN OCHA SOMALIA

7th Floor, Kalson Towers, Crescent Street, off Parklands Road, P.O. Box 28832, 00200 Nairobi, Kenya
Tel No: (254-20) 3754150-5; Fax No: (254-20) 3754156

Updated March 2006