



UNHCR: A Humanitarian Case Study of Somalia Grants

Martin Marcelino Mwake
Dorine Adundo

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Abstract: The UNCHR organization has globally assisted in numerous humanitarian crises. However the aid grants as analyzed proves from political case studies that some funds are diverted, mismanaged, or handled by corrupt individuals and the armed conflict militia groups. The analysis aims for futuristic more transparent methods of reaching the desired beneficiaries.

Key Words: humanitarian, Somalia, UNHCR

I. Introduction

The UNHCR organization has provided global standards of humanitarian assistance. Its presence in fragile nations has led to negotiations, high level diplomacy and alleviation of crises and suffering. This paper is a case study analysis of its work in Somalia.

Background

Somalia has been presented both globally and in empirical studies as the worst humanitarian zone with highest humanitarian cases over a long period of time (Menkhaus 2009, UNHCR 2009a).

Two thirds are estimated to have fled from Mogadishu (Lindley, 2009) and while forcibly displaced persons ranged from 200,000 to 400,000 in Afgooye (ICG 2008, UNHCR 2009b).

This scenario presents the country with serious humanitarian needs. The political situation has been worse.

Humanitarian Crisis

The Somali crisis has lasted many decades. The statistics of the early 1990s indicate up to 500,000 people estimated to have died and 2 million people displaced (Ahmed & Green 1995, HRW 2007, Lewis 2008).

F. Checchi further analyzes the Somalia crisis and asserts that 'Somalia's most recent humanitarian crisis (2022–23) was severe, with an unprecedented series of failed rainy seasons leading to widespread suffering and significant excess mortality' (Checchi, 2023).

Further, the UK Humanitarian Innovation Hub reports that,

The drivers of the near-famine – drought, conflict, and fragile governance – were largely similar to previous crises in 2011 and 2017; but Somali society is much changed, and the crisis was less devastating than initially feared. Although the humanitarian response started slowly, it grew in scale, with humanitarian aid contributions reaching over US\$2.2 billion in 2022 and played an important role in addressing humanitarian needs (UK HIB).

Humanitarian Space

The UNHCR has been trying to forge for the above space in the Somalia government. There has been a lack of this space in Somalia. This term is defined as follows in Eric Abild research case study,

Durieux claims that the UNHCR used the term to describe how humanitarian issues could function as a topic that could open a political dialogue between parties in conflict. He described it as *un espacio distension* (a space of „un-tension“ or „relaxation“) where conflicting parties could talk and agree on humanitarian issues as a common ground, a starting point, for a further political dialogue (Abild, RFS).

As a high level and international humanitarian actor, the UNHCR has been trying to engage the Somalia government for dialogue and arrive at humanitarian assistance. The rules from IHL on humanitarian space are tabulated as:

- The authorities – either the state or the occupier – have the clear responsibility to ensure the survival and wellbeing of the civilian population. (Geneva Convention IV 1949:Art.55)
- The primary responsibility is the de-facto authority“, but if they cannot meet this responsibility, they are obliged to allow humanitarian and impartial relief to reach persons in need. (Protocol I 1977:Art.70(1)) The first additional protocol of the Convention states that this is just as paramount if the civilians are belonging to the adverse party in a conflict. (Protocol I 1977:Art.70(1))
- The second protocol states that this is also the case if the conflict is an internal one, between non-state actors. (Protocol II 1977:Art.18(2))



- IHL clearly states that authorities retain the right to control certain aspects of humanitarian relief provided. (Geneva Convention IV 1949:Art.59 (4)). Humanitarian space is about people in need. This makes the humanitarian imperative deeper when the locals are involved in the central mission rather than focusing on the agencies. This is captured here as defined, ‘humanitarian Space is often described as agencies ability to access communities in need, but this is flawed, it should be about communities’ ability to access relief’ (Springett, interview 04.03.2009).

UNHCR Case Study Purpose

Abild reports that,

The purpose of UNHCR review is to bring Somali systems and Somali agency into focus – their respective strengths and weaknesses, how they interact with the more formal aid/humanitarian system, and what can be learned from this interaction for future crises (Abild, 8).

UNHCR Case Study Design

The UNHCR research design is both quantitative and qualitative. The data collection methods were geomobile telephone survey for volatile areas, empirical field studies, community interviews, focus groups, field research and key informants (KIIs). It engages random sampling and longitudinal case studies. The samples ‘respondents were randomly sampled, reached via random digit dialing across 8 regions of South and Central Somalia between 7 July 2023 and 19 July 2023 (UK Hub, 9).

It also uses statistical data analysis as follows:

Overall 2022 saw an uptick in conflict-related displacement with 607,000 people displaced, compared to 554,000 in 2021 and considerably higher than previous year (UNHCR 2023, OCHA 2023).

Survey

To better understand the barriers that people faced in accessing aid and what that meant for mobility, displacement and types of exclusion in the 2022–23 crisis, we conducted a survey of Somalis in the south-central regions...The survey targeted people in south-central Somalia who were excluded from aid access – that is, people who reported having needed aid in the year prior to the survey but not having had access to it (UK Hub, 17).

Community Interviews

The team conducted 81 interviews with Somali and international aid actors (international NGOs, local NGOs, UN and Red Cross), donors, local, state and

federal government representatives, business people, academics, and experts on Somalia. This included,

a) Interviews with clan elders, in order to develop an overview of how their clan/group have been affected and how life and livelihoods have changed over the 10-12 years following the 2011 famine. b) Life-history interviews (individual, clan-based and household-level) focused on how different populations have been affected by shocks (natural and man-made) over the past 10-12 years, and how have they responded at both individual and collective levels. c) Individual interviews were conducted with members of the diaspora in various countries, including members of the business community, to deepen understandings of social networks and their evolution over time (Abild, 9)

Field Research

The team conducted 37 community interviews with clan elders, community members, internally displaced people, and business people. There was a particular focus on the Leysan, Gelidle and Jiddo, three sub-clans within the Digil and Mirifle clan family, who make up the vast majority of internally displaced people and those affected by famine. Interviews were conducted in Mogadishu, Baidoa, Galkayo and Bardera as well as over the phone (Ibid).

Telephone Survey

Telephone survey: GeoPoll conducted a telephone survey for this review in the south and central regions of Somalia to better understand the barriers that people faced in accessing aid in 2022 and 2023...There was a total of 760 responses, from 506 men (67%) and 254 women (33%). The age breakdown of respondents was 22% people aged 15-24, 32% aged 25-34, and 46% aged 35 and above. The survey was carried out remotely, via computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) using live operators speaking Somali (Ibid, 9).

The UNHCR engages the above mixed methods to arrive at well researched empirical data on refugees.

UNHCR Case Study Literature Review

Refugee issues have been addressed traditionally via three methods namely local integration, resettlement and repatriation.

Refugee Mobility

Refugee mobility has been defined as, a centre-piece of transnationalism”, defined as the process by which ‘trans-migrants’ build cross-border “familial, economic, social, organizational, religious and political” activities and networks through “sustained contacts and travel across



national borders (Mahler, 1998, p. 76; Glick Schiller et al, 1992, pp. 1-2; Ahmed et al, 2003, p. 3).

Several scholars advocate for transnational and multidirectional mobility as a key short term solution to the refugee crisis (Monsutti, (2004; 2006; 2008); Horst (2004; 2006a; 2006b) and Van Hear (2003; 2006). Van Hear argues it is an enduring solution (Hear, 2006, 9).

The Somalia case study showed that they have been using mobility as strategy,

A significant reason for avoiding widespread famine conditions appears to be the growing strength and resilience of Somali systems, capacities, and agency. Mobility is an important resilience strategy to maintain and diversify livelihoods and seek out resources. Networks between rural and urban areas are critical in decisions to stay, leave, or return, and are growing in strength, leading to more resilient livelihoods (UK Hub).

Sedentary Measures

Far from mobility strategies, some refugees choose or are coerced into sedentary strategies.

For example, migratory (if not transnational) mobility may be less relevant for the approximate 210,000 refugees who remain in Kakuma and Dadaab camps, and for the estimated five million Afghans who have repatriated to Afghanistan (Crisp, 2000, p. 602).

UNHCR Case Study Results

There has been great developments ever since UNHCR did empirical studies and ground work for the Somalia crises from 1993. The report from UK hub states Somali's response to their humanitarian crises succinctly,

But the international response was only part of the story. Somali capacities to respond to crisis were also vital – and yet they remain poorly understood. Somalia is often seen from the outside as a failed state, home of terrorists and pirates, chronically corrupt, and prone to famine and crisis. But in the decade since the 2011 famine, Somali capacities to respond to crisis have grown, and international aid needs to support those capacities more effectively (UK Hub).

Corruption and Aid Diversion

Serious concerns about corruption and aid diversion have re-emerged in the lessons arising from the 2022–23 humanitarian response. Reputational risks for aid organizations create a temptation to shift accountability to others, especially Somali institutions and individuals such as gatekeepers. The international community and Somali government need to acknowledge diversion of aid as an ongoing

and systemic problem, involving all actors (UK Hub).

Marginalization and Exclusion

Marginalization is double pronged. It comes from the host government and also the aid agency.

Both are hereby stated,

The 2022–23 response sharpened focus on the challenges of people being marginalized and excluded from access to aid. Discussions about social and political drivers of exclusion have become less taboo, and some initiatives have been successfully rolled out.

The humanitarian aid system is still unwilling to reckon with its own role in driving marginalization. Aid itself is a driver of marginalization and that means aid will increase future risk unless it does more to tackle the problem (UK Hub).

Humanitarian action and Al-Shabaab Factor

The displaced people call for humanitarian action. Laura Hammond in her study for displacement of Somalis reports that 'While the largest number of people displaced from Somaliland fled to Ethiopia, over 90,000 refugees – mostly from the Issa clan – sought shelter in three camps in Djibouti (Hammond, 4). They have been internally displaced and also externally displaced.

The Al Shabaab group of armed militia has destabilized the Somali country. It has also created religious extremism where younger boys are radicalized at early ages. It also destabilized UNHCR efforts on humanitarian actions.

'the combination of mobilising clan-based militia and the retreat of Al-Shabaab from areas where it had frozen tensions between groups, has led to the resurgence of clan-based conflict over grazing pasture and water...A second, related, issue concerns the changing power dynamics following the removal of Al-Shabaab from an area, where armed militia from dominant clans have reportedly used the offensives to expand their territorial claims along valuable riverine farming land around the Shebelle River at the cost of marginalized groups in the area' (UK Hub).

To assist the displaced persons on mobility, and who are in serious humanitarian crisis can also create dependency. This trend has been noted by the UNHCR case study,

Displacement is clearly one of the factors that can leave people in need of humanitarian assistance – but there can be a tendency, especially in the heat of responding to prevent famine, to see internally displaced people as dependant on aid resources, and



victims of forced or distress migration and not also as people with agency, capacity and choices. Using mobility as a framing of how Somalis cope with crisis highlights opportunities to better leverage the emergency response, resilience and durable solutions approaches to support positive ways in which mobility strengthens resilience to crisis (UK Hub, 15).

There are also barriers to access the foreign aid. The survey done by UNCR showed,

There were many different reasons why the people surveyed were unable to access aid. When asked for their own understanding of the obstacles facing them, lack of information about what aid was available, and where, was the most common answer, suggesting a gap in the humanitarian sector's communications efforts. The second most common answer was obstruction/corruption by gatekeepers who controlled the aid coming into communities, followed by aid being located too far away (Ibid, 18).

The overall scenario of armed warfare has created also very hard to reach areas. The UK Hub study provided the details,

The 2022–23 response saw a significant push by local and international aid agencies to work in hard-to-reach and extremely hard-to-reach areas. These areas are often those that have significant Al-Shaabab control or are contested (Reach, 2022).

Hindered Negotiations

The UN had hard time as it forged diplomatic negotiations,

In 2022–23 there does not appear to have been any joined-up, high-level UN and government discussions or negotiations with Al-Shabaab concerning humanitarian access. This is likely to have been influenced by the government and internationally backed, concurrent counter-insurgency activities, but also a lack of clarity on how to pursue parallel and linked humanitarian, development, and stabilization agendas in a crisis (UK Hub, 25).

From the foregoing, the UNHCR efforts of humanitarian diplomacy and aid have been jeopardized by the political scenario in Somalia and the barriers as discussed. Corruption and aid diversion are real risks for the refugees as beneficiaries.

II. Conclusion

The case study is highly enriching especially for war torn country like Somalia. It opens one's eyes into barriers involved even by high profile diplomats and humanitarian agency like

UNHCR. This particular case study is a high learning tool.

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