IAAAP
Somalia Accountability Programme

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Accountability in informal settlements in Somalia

Tana Copenhagen has been working to improve accountability in informal settlements (AIS) within the Somali context for several years. Underpinned by robust research and applying an adaptive approach to implementation, over the past two years the project has made incremental – but important – steps towards enhancing the transparency and accountability of Informal Settlement Managers (ISMs) to local authorities and to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) themselves. Findings and lessons learned suggest working with both state and non-state actors to improve the lives of vulnerable members of Somali society is possible and measures should be taken to ensure the sustainability of the progress made so far.

This Policy Brief is based on the testing phase of Tana Copenhagen's Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS) project, first implemented in Mogadishu and then adapted for Kismayo and Bossaso. It draws on a synthesis report which included the documentation of end-line interviews with local authorities, ISMs and IDPs across six settlements. For a more detailed overview, see the earlier research paper and policy brief about the project in Mogadishu. The AIS project was supported by IAAAP – a UK Aid funded programme working to generate evidence for action around greater accountability.

The Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS) project

The Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS) project, first piloted in Mogadishu, has also been rolled out in Kismayo and Bossaso, based on a political economy analysis (PEA) of the two locations – that both contexts have their own peculiarities that required an adaptation of the original approach used in Mogadishu.

In the three locations, the project had three different interlinked work streams:

1) Providing ISMs with training and mechanisms for effective camp management, protection and service delivery to IDPs;

2) Enhancing the transparency of the ISMs' commitment to service delivery and protection levels of the different camps through public signboards and meetings;

3) Establishing Informal Settlement Monitoring Committees (ISMCs) chaired by the local authorities, where the ISMs report to the IDPs and the local authorities on how they have improved the situation in their settlements.

Mogadishu (Duration: 24 months)

The ISMs have a tight hold over the IDP situation in the city. They provide living premises (a plot of land) and basic services to the IDPs inhabiting their settlements in return for payment – in-cash or in-kind. ISMs act as intermediaries between IDPs and NGOs, often adversely regulating and restricting NGOs' ability to provide humanitarian relief, and in some cases, even hampering IDPs' freedom of movement. For many years, the Somali Government, NGOs and the international community made little effort to recognise the role of ISMs due, in part, to existing and contested power dynamics; but also, because of the reputation of ISMs as being predatory.[1]

ISMs were willing to work on enhancing their accountability if this would lead to greater recognition. Tana Copenhagen's research revealed that the ISMs' motivation for being involved as enthusiastically as they were in the project was driven by the need for recognition of the role they play in providing vital servicers to IDPs, not by profit, as assumed in the original theory of change (ISMs were not provided with financial incentives to take part, only tea was served at meetings). ISMs' ability to set up deals with local authorities and NGOs is central to their ability to retain their position and is the most critical aspect against which IDPs evaluate them.

Power dynamics within Mogadishu complicated the planned certification process. The pilot project originally worked towards enhancing the visibility of ISMs who showed tangible progress towards enhancing accountability in their settlements through a certification process. However, this proved too much too fast for the administration in Mogadishu. Formal recognition of ISMs would, legitimise them and, in turn, the IDPs occupying their camps. Land and clan power dynamics are key factors here. The latter would be skewed if IDPs were to be recognised as official Mogadishu residents, and the former complicates FGS efforts to returning IDPs to their place of origin.

Tana Copenhagen introduced a different final stage of the project to counter-act these difficulties. They revised the final stage of the approach and instead tested, and then rolled out, settlement monitoring committees (ISMCs). These still served the purpose of providing the recognition craved by the ISMs while, at the same time, allowing the local authorities to increasingly engage with the ISMs and IDPs, and be seen by the IDPs as the authority of the city. Bringing together district authorities and ISMs in this initiative served to establish mutual trust and recognition, laying the foundations for greater collaboration but also increasing the accountability of ISMs directly to the authorities.

Prospects of greater local authority engagement look promising. Continued engagement with the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA) culminated in a request to support the municipality in developing a policy that would include institutionalising the AIS approach in enhancing accountability of the settlement managers, and the collaboration between them and the BRA.

Kismayo (Duration:12 months)

Local authorities have control of the IDP situation in Kismayo. The 'gatekeeper' phenomenon was also present in Kismayo (though not as deeply entrenched as it is in Mogadishu), until the Jubaland Refugee and IDP Agency (JRIA) stepped in for the Mayor's Office. The JRIA is mandated to carry out the registration of IDPs, control the settlements, and oversee service delivery, for example, in working with the settlement managers to identify who among the IDPs should receive humanitarian assistance. Unlike the situation in Mogadishu, JRIA, with support from UNHCR, has effectively diminished the former 'gatekeeper' system.

In its place, the JRIA hired five former ISMs as community facilitators/mobilisers to control the settlements. In principle, this allows the JRIA to hire and fire non-performing mobilisers. Each settlement has a settlement manager who is appointed through a selection process among the IDPs – a process which is sometimes facilitated by the community mobilisers. After the selection process, the manager is appointed by the JRIA. For accountability, the JRIA introduced a system of direct communication between the JRIA and the IDPs - a complaint hotline to the JRIA.

Management systems became the focus of the AIS project in this context, rather than improving upward accountability. The introduction of the project was not as difficult in Kismayo as it was in Mogadishu, because the situation is largely in the hands of the authorities already. The aim of the project was not going to challenge existing lines of authority between the authorities and the settlement managers. The PEA and engagement with settlement managers revealed that the approach of the AIS would have to pay more attention to the management system within the settlements; streamlining it to enable both the ISMs and the JRIA to offer equitable services to the IDPs.

Management was still perceived as ad hoc and ISMs had limited support in their roles beyond the main management committee, despite the involvement of the JRIA. As a result, in the pilot settlements the AIS project helped to establish various sub-committees of the main management committees, such as disability committees, child welfare committees and women's committees.

There was a lack of interest in engaging in the ISMC meetings because the JRIA was already a recognised authority with both the IDPs and the ISMs, unlike in Mogadishu where authorities were perceived to have limited legitimacy. This led to a shift in focus from the ISM-local authority relationship to ISM-IDP relationship, where dialogue between the ISMs and the IDPs was enhanced through a variety of public awareness-raising activities around issues of interest, such as: child marriage, child labour and education, gender-based violence (GBV), migration and sanitation.

Bossaso (Duration: 12 months)

In a similar situation to Kismayo, **Bossaso's local authorities – the local government – has strong control over the IDP situation.** In 2011, in response to an alleged rise in insecurity in the IDP community in the city, the municipality decided to forcefully relocate the majority of IDPs to better organised settlements outside of the city proper. At the same time, the municipality tightened its control over the management of the settlements, including overseeing a relatively open selection of ISMs with involvement of the IDPs, resulting in a cadre of ISMs who were deemed to be more acceptable to the IDPs.

However, the 'gatekeeper' phenomenon still remains in some contexts within the city. This process is said to have largely eliminated the original rogue elements of the phenomenon but analysis found that it continues in a number of locations; most openly where some IDPs are

still located inside the city on private property.[2] Further, in the eight years since the selection process of ISMs was overseen by the local authorities those selected have been able to amass some degree of power. However, in principle, the local authorities are accessible to the IDPs, so any mistreatments and abuse of power can be reported directly to the Mayor's office where the authorities can intervene and remove the culprit from his/her duties. Evidence suggests this happened on at least two occasions.

As in Mogadishu, **the scarcity of public land in Bossaso constitutes a significant challenge regarding settling IDPs.** The authorities, with support from aid agencies – the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), for example, have been able to negotiate with private landlords to secure land and tenure for IDPs for periods ranging between five and seven years. In turn, the authorities waive taxes due on those properties for the duration of the agreement. In this way, unlike in Mogadishu, evictions in IDP settlements outside of town are minimal, and when they occur, the authorities are deeply involved in negotiating solutions.

Enhancing downward accountability and settlement-level management became the focus in this context, because the working arrangements between the settlement managers and the authorities are well established. Engagement with the ISMs revealed that there was a need for greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of each of the sub-committees of the settlement management structure. The process of agreeing the signboards that communicated the ISMs commitments proved a valuable platform for both ISMs and the authorities to tackle the issue of mutual accountability.

Lessons learnt from all three contexts

- Analyse the political economy robustly to identify relevant power dynamics, existing socio-economic arrangements, and potential entry points.

- Engage with, rather than alienate, existing power structures. This takes time and close ongoing engagement to build trust, which can increase costs at the outset, but it is likely to foster more successful outcomes, especially when working on institutionalising new approaches.

- Clearly demonstrate the advantages of engagement and collaboration to opposing and even rival actors. This involves continuous and rigorous documentation of what is working and what is not, and sharing these findings, on a regular basis, with the various stakeholders (macro, mid-level and micro).

- Motivate (slow) change, as opposed to introducing external formalised systems.

- Adapt and adjust as the context changes and/or new evidence emerges to make the most of opportunities and address challenges –a live theory of change can help here.

- Document emerging learning to ensure that such approaches can inform future, similar work.

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