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# Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies

## Evidence from Somalia

A FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL CENTER PUBLICATION 

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Cover photo: Pastoralists at well in Wajid District, Somalia, 2008. By Dan Maxwell.

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# Acronyms

**AIM TWG** Assessment and Information Management Technical Working Group  
**AMISOM** African Union Mission in Somalia  
**CDC** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
**DFID** United Kingdom's Department for International Development  
**DOCC** Drought Operations and Coordination Centres  
**ERC** Emergency Review Committee  
**EWEA** early warning, early action  
**EWS** early warning system  
**FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization  
**FEWS NET** Famine Early Warning Network  
**F-HADMA** Federal Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management Authority  
**FRC** Famine Review Committee (formerly ERC)  
**FSNAU** Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit  
**GAM** global acute malnutrition  
**GSU** General Support Unit  
**HNO** Humanitarian Needs Overview  
**ICU** Islamic Courts Unit  
**IDP** internally displaced person  
**IPC** Integrated Food Security Phase Classification  
**NGO** non-governmental organization  
**SAM** severe acute malnutrition  
**SMART** Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions  
**SWALIM** Somalia Water and Land Information Management Unit  
**TFG** Transitional Federal Government  
**TWG** Technical Working Group  
**UN** United Nations  
**UN HCT** United Nations Humanitarian Country Team  
**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
**UNITAF** United Task Force  
**UNOCHA** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
**UNOSOM** United Nations Operation in Somalia  
**UNSC** United Nations Security Council  
**USAID** US Agency for International Development  
**VAM** Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping  
**WASH** water, sanitation and hygiene  
**WFP** World Food Programme

# Introduction

The humanitarian situation in Somalia is among the world's most enduring current crises. The United Nations (UN) Population Fund estimates that about 14.7 million people lived in Somalia as of 2017, though population estimates are challenging given the prevalence of nomadic populations and refugee and internally displaced person (IDP) movements (UNFPA 2018). The majority of the population belongs to the Somali ethnic group (85 percent), with Bantus, non-Somali groups, and Arabs comprising the remaining 15 percent. Almost 62 percent of those living in Somalia are under the age of 25, with an average life expectancy of 52.8 years (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). The country has the fifth highest fertility rate in the world, and the second highest infant mortality rate, topped only by Afghanistan (ibid.).

Somalia has been led by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" and Prime Minister

Hassan Ali Khayre since 2017. Despite progress in building political institutions over the past few years, it is currently ranked the second lowest in the world on the Fragile States Index (Messner et al. 2017). As a result of ongoing conflict and weak governance, the country runs primarily on an informal economy based on livestock, remittances, and telecommunications (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). Agriculture, particularly livestock, accounts for 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Nomads and semi-pastoralists comprise a significant proportion of the population. The country relies heavily on food imports, particularly rice and wheat (FEWS NET February 2017). Imported commodity prices are heavily reliant on international price trends, while local prices of animal products, maize, and sorghum follow seasonal trends.

# IPC analysis

Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis was first introduced in Somalia in the mid-2000s. IPC analysis was intended as a means of graphically representing the severity of crisis in a particular context. It quickly grew into a means of amalgamating different kinds of information into an overall analysis of the severity of acute food insecurity linked to a mapping protocol organized by livelihood zones. The purpose of IPC is to compare the severity of crisis across different geographic units of analysis—and indeed across dissimilar contexts—to enable the impartial allocation of resources.

IPC analysis relies on the current status of three main indicators: the prevalence of food insecurity, the prevalence of malnutrition, and the crude mortality rate (and sometimes a fourth—changes in livelihoods). This information can be provided by a range of humanitarian actors or by the government of the affected country, but increasingly frequently the data for IPC analysis come from two main sources: nutrition surveys using the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions (SMART)<sup>1</sup> methodology usually provide nutrition and mortality information while standardized food security assessments provide information on food security and livelihoods change. In several countries, the food security and nutrition elements are being combined into one standardized survey protocol. In these cases, mortality assessment is rarely included. In Somalia, the food security and livelihoods information come from seasonal assessments bolstered by key-informant information. Nutrition and mortality data continue to come from nutrition surveys. This information is mostly collected and analyzed by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU), although a Technical Working Group does exist and is invited to the analysis meetings. To date, food security data have mostly been collected on a seasonal

basis, representative at the level of livelihood zones. The majority of nutrition and mortality data until recently was also collected seasonally and by livelihood zone. The system has now moved to collect the nutrition and mortality data by administrative area, usually by district.

Although not initially intended as a famine analysis tool per se, IPC has provided both the consensus definition of famine and the means of determining when famine is occurring. A set of thresholds in each of the three main indicators (food insecurity, malnutrition, and mortality) must be breached in the same time period for the same population. At the time of the famine declaration in Somalia in July 2011—the first time that the IPC had been used to declare a famine—the FSNAU wanted to be certain that the results were perceived as peer-reviewed, so they approached an outside group of analysts to review their data before presenting the evidence to the UN Humanitarian Country Team (UN HCT). After a renewed food security crisis emerged in South Sudan in December 2013, the Global Support Unit (GSU) for IPC set up the Emergency Review Committee (ERC) in early 2014 to serve a similar function of reviewing data quality and the rigor of analysis in the event that Phase 5 (famine) might be an outcome of IPC analysis in South Sudan. The ERC itself was set up under Guidance Note #14 “Tools and Procedures for Establishment and Implementation of the IPC Global Emergency Review Committee,” of April 18, 2014. It outlined the role of the ERC as follows:

*The purpose of the IPC ERC is to support IPC quality assurance and help ensure technical rigor and neutrality of the analysis. The activation of the IPC ERC provides an additional validation step for the Country IPC Technical Working Groups (IPC TWG), before the release of IPC results.<sup>2</sup> The activation of*

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, the report refers to such nutrition surveys conducted using the SMART methodology as Nutrition surveys.

<sup>2</sup> Section 4: Building Technical Consensus, “IPC Technical Manual Version 2.0,” pages 23–24, 2012.



*this committee is recommended, especially when there is . . . the potential outcome of an IPC declaration of Famine (Phase 5), [or] a break-down in the technical consensus process.*<sup>3</sup>

The ERC was to consist of four to six global experts on various aspects of the analysis—specifically food security, nutrition, mortality and, more broadly, livelihoods under stress. It was to be independent of the in-country TWG and the GSU, but was to advise both on the technical quality of the information and the rigor and accuracy of the analysis. The ERC (now renamed the Famine Review Committee or FRC) has been mobilized numerous times for South Sudan, but it has not been mobilized for Somalia.<sup>4</sup>

## Information systems in Somalia

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The Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) are the two primary food security analysis and early warning systems in Somalia. FSNAU, managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), began as the Food Security Analysis Unit in 1994, and has since gone through several

phases of funders and foci. It tracks and reports on food security, nutrition, mortality, and livelihoods to offer evidence for both short-term and longer-term decision making. In the 2000s, FSNAU developed the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification in Somalia to facilitate a standardized scale for decision-making using several types of data, thus providing the foundation for technical consensus and a common language to classify food insecurity crises. IPC analysis classifies food insecurity (as minimal, stressed, crisis, emergency, or famine) based on thresholds of four indicators (the prevalence of food insecurity, prevalence of malnutrition, livelihoods assets and coping strategies, and crude mortality) (IPC Partners 2012).

FEWS NET was founded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1985 in response to severe drought and famines in Africa. This resource provides early warning and analysis on food security and emerging crises, drawing from information on weather, markets, agriculture, and nutrition. FSNAU's partnership with FEWS NET commenced in 1995 and strengthened throughout subsequent years. While many of their reports are jointly issued, FSNAU focuses on seasonal assessments and nutrition surveys, and FEWS NET focuses on early warning.

<sup>3</sup> IPC Global Support Unit. 2014. "Terms of Reference: IPC Global Emergency Review Committee," April 14, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the two primary authors of this report (Hailey and Maxwell) serve on the ERC/FRC.

# Background to the current crisis

Somalia has a long history of political instability and conflict. The Siad Barre regime fell in 1991 after 22 years of dictatorial rule. The government's collapse combined with looting and clan violence led to famine in 1992 (Maxwell and Majid 2016). The United Nations formed the United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I) to protect humanitarian organizations delivering aid and monitor a ceasefire agreement reached in March 1992. In November 1992, this was subsumed by the US-led United Task Force (UNITAF), also known as Operation Restore Hope. Despite several successes in gaining humanitarian access, Operation Restore Hope is most remembered for the Battle of Mogadishu in October 1993, and the death and humiliation of US soldiers. This experience drove the United States to withdraw from Somalia and left a legacy of hesitant international intervention. The UN authorized UNOSOM II to promote peacebuilding and development of Somalia's political institutions and economy from March 1993 to March 1995 (Williams 2015).

The Transitional Federal Government (TFG), initially led by Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, came to power in 2004. This represented the fourteenth attempt to build a government since 1991 (Hanson and Kaplan 2008). The TFG's mandate was to last five years, culminating in a transition to a nationally elected, representative government and the establishment of a new constitution; the mandate was extended to 2011 in 2009 (Central Intelligence Agency 2018). However, a lack of cohesion, the influence of clan dynamics, and insurgency rendered the TFG largely ineffectual, despite international support and endorsement.

With the weakness of the TFG, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) briefly took control of Mogadishu in June 2006, with support from members of Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujahideen (Al-Shabaab). The control was short-lived: TFG launched a counterinsurgency

effort in December 2006 with the help of Ethiopian forces and expelled the ICU from Mogadishu.

The Ethiopian invasion and ICU defeat in 2006 radicalized Al-Shabaab members and created fertile ground for further recruitment. In response to this escalation, the United Nations sanctioned the formation of a regional peacekeeping force in February 2007, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). AMISOM and TFG forces continue to clash with Al-Shabaab, causing insecurity and occasional additional displacement.

## The 2011 famine

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The 2011 famine in Somalia was the first famine in the country in twenty years, and the first ever to have been declared in real time based on nutrition and mortality data and a set of thresholds for the declaration (Maxwell et al. 2012). Driven by ongoing conflict and insecure livelihoods and sparked by a severe drought in 2010 and rapid increase in food prices (Maxwell and Fitzpatrick 2012), the famine ultimately led to 258,000 excess deaths between October 2010 and April 2012 (Checchi and Robinson 2013).

FSNAU and FEWS NET began to issue warnings of poor harvests and impending severe food insecurity beginning in August 2010, eleven months before the formal famine declaration. According to Hillbruner and Moloney (2012), these bodies produced a series of escalating alerts citing failed rains and ever more dire predictions, and advocating for preventive humanitarian action. Three multi-agency scenario-building workshops in February, March, and May 2011 also produced reports warning of pre-famine conditions and the risk of famine. A

series of nutrition and mortality surveys in July and August confirmed the predictions, and famine was declared in the Bakool agro-pastoral livelihood zone and the Lower Shabelle region on July 20, 2011. A few weeks later, on August 3, FNSAU and FEWS NET declared famine in Middle Shabelle and among IDP populations in the Afgooye corridor and Mogadishu. By September 5, data was sufficient to confirm a declaration in the Bay region as well.

The crisis had the largest impact in southern and, to a lesser extent, central Somalia. For example, the highest proportion of excess mortality occurred in the areas in which famine was declared. This was largely due to the lower levels of rainfall in an area, compounded by conflict, displacement, and limited humanitarian access (Maxwell and Fitzpatrick 2012). This area was also the epicenter for the 1992-1993 famine, similarly driven by conflict and drought, demonstrating a history of vulnerability. Agriculturalists, agro-pastoralists, laborers, and IDPs also faced disproportionate mortality. Increasing global food prices combined with a decline in rural incomes from the drought limited these populations' access to food in the months leading up to the famine declaration (ibid.).

In 2011, despite clear early warning alerts, humanitarian response to the escalating crisis was delayed by several factors. The Global War on Terror and corresponding counter-terrorism legislation served as a barrier for both humanitarian implementing actors and donors. In 2008, the United States listed Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization; later that year, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1844 placed sanctions on those threatening peace and stability in Somalia (UNSC 2008). Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom followed suit in 2009 and 2010 (Mackintosh and Duplat 2013). With these restrictions in place, humanitarians faced uncertainty as to the consequences should aid fall into Al-Shabaab's hands, while donors were hesitant to provide funding in light of a dearth of geopolitical incentive (Bradbury 2010; Maxwell and Fitzpatrick 2012). Indeed, in 2009 the US ended all food assistance to southern Somalia, which was controlled by Al-Shabaab at the time (Maxwell and Fitzpatrick 2012). These measures also drove Al-Shabaab to expel many UN and non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) from the areas under its control, most notably the World Food Programme (WFP), leaving few parties to facilitate access and address increasing food assistance needs (Mackintosh and Duplat 2013; Maxwell and Fitzpatrick 2012). Though humanitarian exemptions to counter-terrorism legislation were clarified after the famine declaration, continued uncertainty exacerbated the delay in response.

Further, humanitarian institutions were hardwired to be risk averse, with few incentives for preventing crises and high stakes if they raise the alarm and a crisis does not materialize (Bailey 2013). In the Somali context, the country's history of conflict and repeated food security crises has led to a normalization of crisis in the area (Bradbury 1998; Fredriksen 2016). Organizations that were already risk averse due to counter-terrorism legislation and institutional constraints were therefore highly unlikely to act on early warnings, uncertain as to whether these warnings actually signaled a more extreme situation than normal.

A scaled-up humanitarian response, falling cereal prices, and a robust harvest season in late 2011, and the efforts of Somali communities, all served to improve food security and nutrition conditions, and the famine was officially declared over in February 2012 (Hillbruner and Moloney 2012). Though the crisis had abated, almost one third of the population remained in crisis (FAO 2012). Following the end of the famine, the country continued to cycle through droughts and periods of severe food insecurity (UN-OCHA 2017c).

## Background to the 2017 crisis

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Somalia has made slow but steady progress in state-building and stabilization since the famine. In August 2012, Somalia formed its first formal parliament since 1991, ending the rule of the TFG and installing the Federal Government of Somalia. The first presidential election since 1967 was held the following month, resulting in the election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (BBC 2012). The US government formally recognized the government in January 2013, marking a shift in international relations. In February

2017, the country elected and inaugurated a new president, Farmaajo, despite several postponements and corruption allegations (Soliman 2016; Gettleman 2017). Decades of insecurity and instability translate into limited state capacity to provide health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and education services, as well as humanitarian assistance to the population. Systemic corruption and state weakness continue to challenge peacebuilding and long-term security (UNOCHA 2017c).

In the context of continued insecurity, weak governance, and population movement, several consecutive droughts, poor harvests, rising staple cereal prices, and a severe cholera outbreak set the stage for the potential recurrence of famine in 2017. The Shabelle River, a key source of water for personal and

agricultural use in Somalia and Ethiopia, dried up in several places due to drought and over-usage (FAO and Somalia Water and Land Information Management 2017).

In January 2017, FEWS NET and FSNAU issued a pre-famine warning (FEWS NET and FSNAU 2017). Once again, those living in the southern areas of Somalia faced the risk of famine. In 2017, however, several areas of northern Somalia were also classified as Phase 4—Emergency—according to IPC categories. This may be attributed to the shifting impact of the El Niño drought and the Indian Ocean dipole of 2016–2017, whose impact was greater in the north during this time period.

# Humanitarian context and response to date

After the January 2017 alert, the humanitarian community commenced the Operational Plan for Famine Prevention (January-June 2017), “based on the worst-case scenario” projections (UNOCHA 2017a, p. 1). The plan called for a shift from drought response to famine prevention through a scale-up of nutrition, health, WASH, and shelter activities and increased humanitarian access. This included increasing the cash response and advocating at the federal and state levels to expand operational areas. Three Drought Operations and Coordination Centres (DOCCs) were established to improve coordination and information sharing. The revised 2017 Humanitarian Response Plan released in May cites the success of these efforts while continuing to advocate for increased funding, rapid response teams, and cholera control efforts: the funding requirements shifted from \$864 million to reach 3.9 million people to \$1.5 billion to reach 5.5 million (UNOCHA 2017b). Ultimately, 68 percent of the response plan requirements were met, a higher percentage of met requirements than any year in the past decade aside from 2011 and 2008 (see Figure 1).

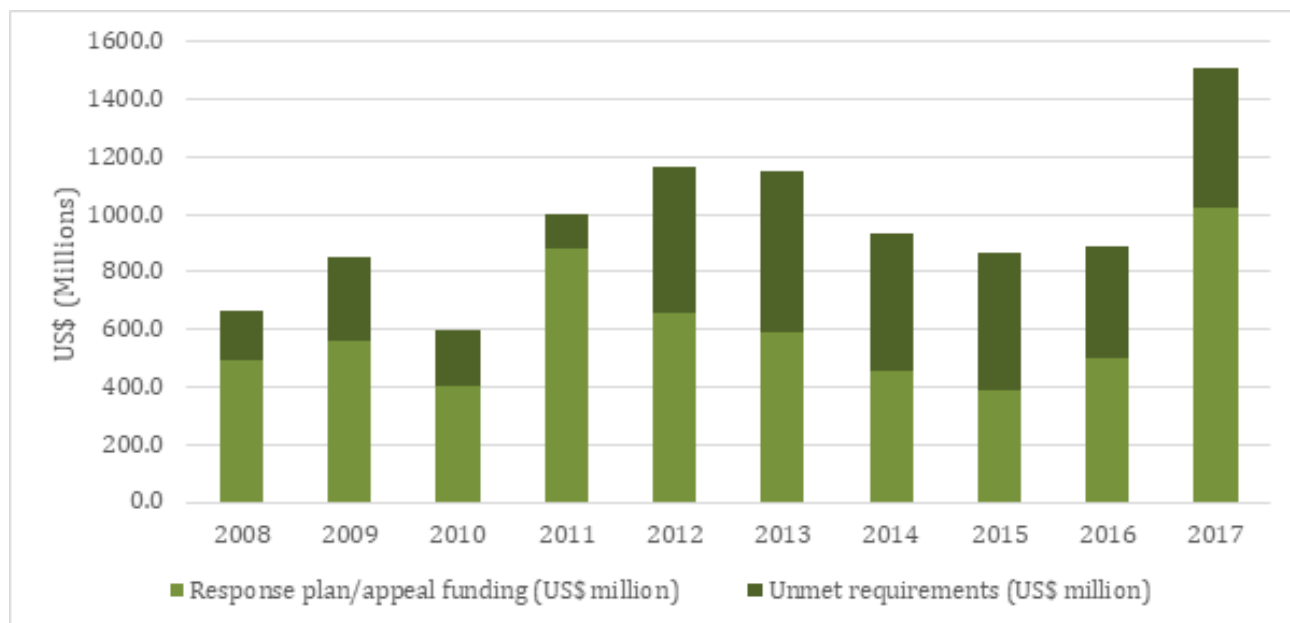
Figure 2 depicts the number of people in need on an annual basis, highlighting the magnitude of the 2011 and 2017 crises.

The famine prevention efforts in 2017 can be largely attributed to innovations in early warning, early action (EWEA) systems. FSNAU collaborated with the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA),

humanitarian clusters, and NGOs to develop a trigger mechanism comprised of two components: an early warning with publicly available, multisectoral data on early warning indicators and an accountability framework ascribing responsibility to key humanitarian actors (Feeny 2017). The dashboard aims to provide data on key early warning indicators in order to facilitate decision making by humanitarian actors. It contains five sets of indicators: climate, market, health, nutrition, and population displacement. These components are monitored at the district level on a monthly basis. Each indicator has a specific “alarm” and “alert” threshold (FNSAU 2017). The question remains as to the ultimate objective of this framework, whether it is to facilitate timely humanitarian response or support early actions based on a forecast.

The UNOCHA 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) estimates that more than 6.2 million people, over half of the population, are in need of humanitarian assistance in 2018 (UNOCHA 2017c). Approximately 2.1 million people, or almost 20 percent of the population, are internally displaced. At 17.4 percent, the global acute malnutrition (GAM) rates continue to be above emergency thresholds, with 22 percent of malnourished children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM). According to the February 2018 FSNAU-FEWS NET Food Security Outlook, the October-December 2017 rainy season was better than anticipated; nevertheless, predicted poor rains in 2018 meant that poor households, particularly pastoralists, could face severe food insecurity between March and June (FSNAU 2018), but that did not come to pass, as the rains were better than predicted.

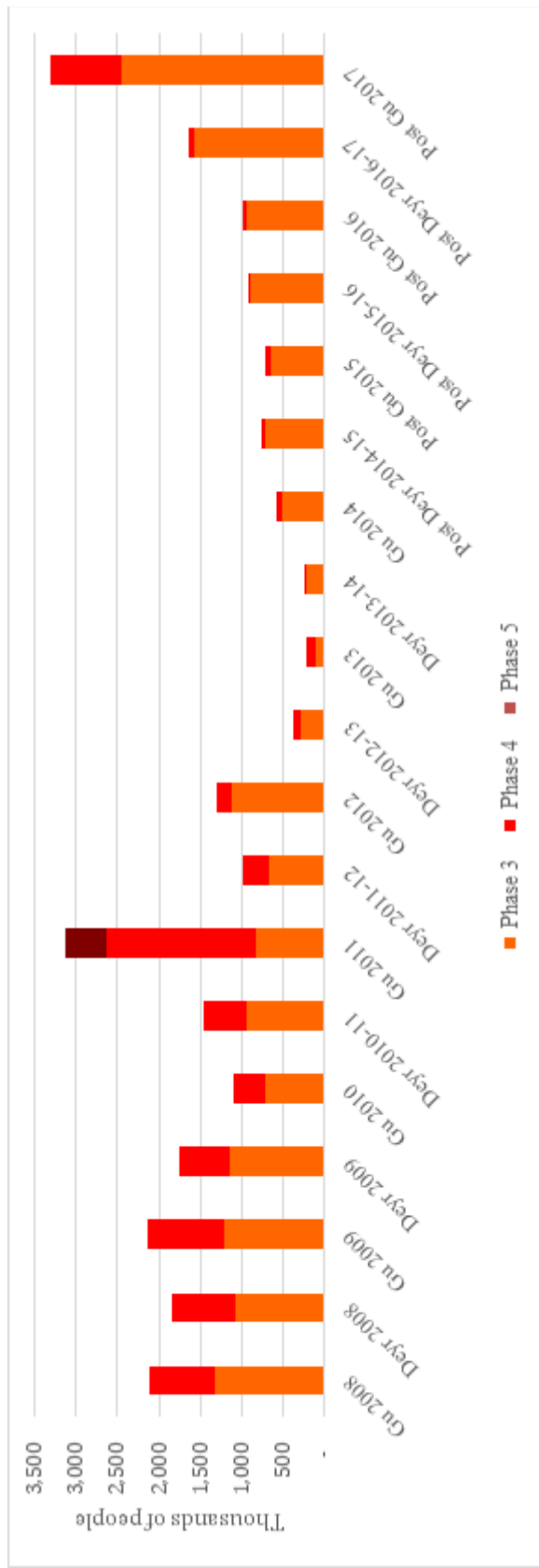
Figure 1. Humanitarian Funding for Somalia (2008–2017)



Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Response plan/appeal funding (US\$ million)	490.6	559.0	400.1	879.9	657.3	586.1	457.9	386.0	498.2	1,026.1
Unmet requirements (US\$ million)	172.0	292.9	196.0	123.4	510.4	567.0	475.2	476.6	387.0	482.7
Total requirements (US\$ million)	662.5	851.8	596.1	1,003.3	1,167.7	1,153.1	933.1	862.6	885.2	1,508.8
Unmet requirements (%)	26	34	33	12	44	49	51	55	44	32

Source: UNOCHA Financial Tracking Service, 2018

Figure 2: Numbers of People in IPC Phases 3-5 (2008-2017)



Figures in thousands	Gu * '08	Deyr* '08	Gu '09	Deyr '09	Gu '10	Deyr '10	Gu '11	Deyr '11	Gu '12	Deyr '12	Gu '13	Deyr '13	Gu '14	Deyr '14	Gu '15	Deyr '15	Gu '16	Deyr '16	Gu '17	Deyr '17
Phase 3	1,318	1,074	1,201	1,145	720	933	826	667	1,116	278	113	209	511	717	655	890	948	1,561	2,444	
Phase 4	787	775	929	606	368	524	1,813	317	182	107	98	27	62	34	61	22	28	83	866	
Phase 5	-	-	-	-	-	-	494	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Phases 3-5	2,105	1,849	2,130	1,751	1,088	1,457	3,133	984	1,298	385	211	236	573	751	716	912	976	1,644	3,310	

\* Gu rains are the long rains typically falling in April through June while Deyr rains are the short rains typically falling in October through December.

\*\* No urban population estimates available.

\*\*\* From this point forward, IPC analysis begins to incorporate IDP populations into its estimates.

Source: FSNAU

# The aftermath of the 2017 crisis

Al-Shabaab, among other actors, continues to cause insecurity and drive conflict. Advances against the organization resulted in the reclamation of significant territory in 2012-2014, and the US has escalated strikes against the group. However, the group's activities continue to destabilize the country. For example, Al-Shabaab is widely believed to have engaged in two truck bombings in Mogadishu in October 2017, killing more than five hundred people (Felter et al. 2018). More recently, several local and international news sources cite clashes between Al-Shabaab and Somali military convoys, as well as continued threats of attack during the month of Ramadan (Reuters 2018; Ndunda 2018). According to ACAPS, humanitarian access to many parts of the country remains limited due to Al-Shabaab operations and blockades (ACAPS 2018).

The Federal Government of Somalia is also reclaiming its place in providing humanitarian assistance, a

role that largely fell to the international community in the past few decades. The newly elected government launched a National Development Plan in 2017, addressing issues ranging from governance to economics, health, and resilience (Federal Government of Somalia 2016). After the Mogadishu bombing in October 2017, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management led an emergency operation to collect and share information regarding casualties and the attack fallout (IOM 2018). In January 2018, the ministry launched an official National Disaster Management Policy, which aims to improve response to early warnings, preparedness, and humanitarian action following crises (Ali 2018). They also collaborated with the UNOCHA and AMISOM to evacuate people from flooded areas after severe heavy rains in May 2018 (Mumbere 2018).



# Methodological note on the study

This study is one in a series of comparative case studies examining the availability and quality of information and the complexities and constraints of analysis. Case studies include four currently famine-affected or at-risk countries: Somalia, South Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen. Four main questions drive the research: The first is about the availability and quality of data, chronic “gaps” in data and why those gaps persist. The second is about the constraints or influences on information collection and analysis of humanitarian emergencies. The third is about the way in which missing or unreliable information is managed and the impact of missing information. And the fourth is about improved processes for information management and the management of influences on collecting and analyzing information predicting severe humanitarian emergencies and documenting the good practices that emerge.

This report synthesizes information from a comprehensive desk review and key-informant interviews. First, a research assistant at Tufts conducted a review of the literature on the crisis in Somalia. Second, a team from the Feinstein International Center and the Centre for Humanitarian Change conducted interviews, either in person or via Skype, with respondents from the donor community, UN agencies, international and local non-government organizations, and members of the government of Somalia who oversee or are directly involved in the IPC process. During these interviews, inquiries were made regarding the technical aspects of the data collection and analysis process to, in particular, attempt to identify potential gaps in upcoming analyses that might be addressed by quick donor action in advance of the next IPC analysis. These interviews were conducted mostly in May and June 2017. Third, the field

team visited both Nairobi and Mogadishu in April 2018 to conduct in-person interviews with key-informants in the government of Somalia, UN agencies, international NGOs, local organizations, and specialized food-security information agencies. Follow-up interviews were subsequently held with staff of regional offices or key informants who had been outside the country at the time of the field team visit. Feedback to key stakeholders of initial findings was facilitated through a series of meetings in June 2018.

For all key-informant interviews, respondents were identified either on the basis of their positions and engagements with the IPC analysis or via snowball sampling based on earlier interviews. In person and by Skype or telephone, the team conducted 46 interviews, with a total of 62 people. During each interview, detailed field notes were taken, noting phrases and terminology used by respondents to capture their narrative. Questions were open-ended to avoid leading respondents to particular responses.

Interview notes were coded using the qualitative analytical software NVivo Version 11.4.2. An iterative coding approach was developed with codes determined both deductively from study instruments and inductively from transcripts. Emergent themes were then used to draft the initial outline of this report, with coded information categorized and synthesized accordingly. The Tufts University Social, Behavioral, and Economic Research committee granted Internal Review Board clearance for the overall research program on May 31, 2017, and renewed on May 25, 2018. Sources in the analysis below are noted by reference to an interview number in parentheses. No interview respondents or their respective agencies are identified in the report.

# Challenges and constraints of information and analysis in Somalia

A number of constraints and challenges emerged from the interviews. Some of these are largely technical in nature. Some are related to the causes of the crisis and the external influences on the analysis.

Two Somalia-specific issues are important to note. First, unlike other country case studies, one dominant actor in information management and the analysis of famine—FSNAU—is present in Somalia. Second, in contrast to earlier crises—especially the 2011 famine—Somalia in 2017–2018 had a much more representative and capable government, and their leadership in the information collection and analysis process had become an increasingly salient issue. These two issues are discussed first, followed by analysis of the technical constraints and challenges. Finally, issues related to access, causal factors, and external influences on the process are analyzed before presenting a summary of the lessons learned and recommendations.

## One dominant actor: FSNAU and its partners

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Somalia is unique in that there is one single dominant actor in food security and nutrition analysis—the Somalia Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU). Similar to other countries, multiple partners come together to conduct the survey and review the analysis, but the FSNAU remains the lead in the collection of information, the principal analyst of that information, and sometimes a source of contention about whether the process is adequately participatory.

FSNAU was initially started in the 1990s because of recurrent food crises in Somalia and the absence of any national food security early warning system at the time. It was set up to meet donor requirements for a steady source of reliable and independent information. Over the years, FSNAU (or FSAU as it was originally known) has pioneered many innovative forms of analysis, including the mapping of the country into livelihood zones, the use of livelihood baselines as the comparator for current status analysis, and of course, the development of the Integrated Phase Classification tool to map and compare the severity of food insecurity. More recent innovations include the early warning “dashboard” which aggregates and counts different forward-looking indicators—also linked to a mapping protocol. FSNAU has a strong analytical team and long-standing field relationships. However, the dominance of FSNAU in this arena leads many partners to see themselves as excluded from the process (005, 006, 010, 020, 022, 029).

Throughout much of the 1990s and early 2000s when warlords ruled large parts of the country, FSNAU had a relatively free hand to collect data and conduct analysis. In its original form, the IPC tool was a mechanism for amalgamating all kinds of information into an integrated analysis (hence the name) and the information came from numerous sources. However, concerns about data quality, coverage, completeness, and timeliness have ultimately led—in Somalia and elsewhere—to consolidated data-collection processes that rely less on multiple sources of information and partnership and have become more centralized and with hierarchical control of the process. NGOs and other actors that produce additional information now complain that their information is not incorporated into the process, and

indeed many protest that their voices and experience—although on paper are represented in the process—are actually little heard in the analysis. Much of the detailed analysis is conducted by FSNAU staff and presented in the analysis workshops, to which other partners are invited. But the bulk of the information and much of the core analysis is done by FSNAU and FEW SNET, not the other technical stakeholders in the IPC process (003, 006, 011, 020, 024, 029). This increasing centralization of all steps of the IPC process is increasingly challenged—by donors, agencies, and particularly the government of Somalia—as no longer being fit for purpose.

FSNAU and FAO-Somalia—which runs FSNAU as a project—argue that this kind of consolidation is necessary to protect the independence and quality of the analysis, and argue that they welcome greater participation from partners. They note that although invited, some partners simply don't show up for meetings and workshops or don't send the right people with the necessary technical capacity and experience. Partners note that the reasons for this is that even if they show up, their information and their analysis are often not incorporated into the process; sometimes their data are disqualified on the basis of criteria with which they disagree and in general many partners feel their information is ignored by the process (006, 014, 021, 023). FSNAU respondents often point out that the data presented by partners do not use IPC protocols and are often found to be of poor quality. The current project document—which sets directions for the three years from 2018 to 2020—emphasizes partnerships as a key focus (002), so this is an area of high concern not only to other humanitarian actors in Somalia, but also to donors. And of course, it is an area of major concern to Somali government partners.

FSNAU is involved in multiple partnerships. Its longest standing partnership is with FEWS NET, which typically handles early warning but also engages with the IPC analysis (003, 004, 006). Many of the outputs of both FSNAU and FEWS NET are jointly produced and jointly labeled (002, 003, 013). The other major partner is the government and this implies many different partnerships in the Somalia of today (see next section). Given the supervision of FSNAU by FAO-Somalia, there is a close link with the

Somalia Water and Land Information Management Unit (SWALIM). FAO considers the two very closely linked (002, 027). Other partnerships include UN agencies—particularly WFP and its Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM) unit; the Information Management Unit of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which keeps track of population movements; and UNOCHA, the Nutrition Cluster and its information working group and a wider information management working group (017, 018). And finally, of course, there are multiple partnerships with NGOs—both those negotiated locally and those that are global IPC partners. Some of the complaints about exclusion from the process come from NGOs, but many come from within the UN agencies as well as government. While Somalia has the information system that many people have described as the “Cadillac” of food security analysis, the centrality and dominance of one actor comes at a cost.

The second strategic direction for the current project document emphasizes the independent, evidence-based analysis of food security in Somalia (002). A Technical Working Group (TWG) was revitalized in 2016 to address both of the strategic directions (analysis and partnership). But many respondents noted that this mechanism is also not really having the intended effect. Many partners said that FSNAU views food security analysis as its “turf” and “doesn't welcome other sources of data or analysis” (024, 029, 030). The close control over the analysis process in the name of independence and quality led a number of respondents to equate the release of IPC analysis results with the secrecy around the Academy Awards, referring to the release of IPC results as an “Oscar's moment” (009, 023). FSNAU is a highly trusted source of analysis, and everyone in the humanitarian community relies on its results. But the reported weaknesses in information sharing and degree of real participation results in the risk of having no credible cross check on the analysis, and some respondents fear this is slowly eroding FSNAU's credibility and trust (029, 030). FSNAU respondents point out that they are forced to treat data with utmost confidentiality, because information is power—so information has to remain solely in the hands of an independent analysis unit and “leaks” of that information must be avoided. As one

non-FSNAU respondent put it, “Humanitarian aid is very competitive. The business model is competitive. Data is a commodity” (009). These two competing demands (independence and transparency) have not yet come together into a workable compromise that suits both goals and the diversity of partners with whom FSNAU works. Many donors view humanitarian information as a public good (008, 009, 019) and put pressure on FSNAU to be more transparent in both the analysis and sharing of the raw data.

The complex demands of the situation only become more complicated when relations with the multiple layers of government in Somalia are factored in. The combined challenge going forward for FSNAU is to develop stronger partnerships with the government and address the demands for transparency, while ensuring the quality and independence of the analysis. It will be very difficult to fulfill all three completely. Ironically the present situation, where independence and quality of the analysis appear to dominate over transparency and quality participation, seems to be resulting in stakeholders expressing more doubts about the independence and quality of the analysis.

## A more representative and capable government of Somalia

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During the 2011 famine, there was little in the way of a functioning state in Somalia. The fledgling TFG controlled only a small area of Mogadishu and spent most of its time in Nairobi. It certainly had no capacity in data collection or analysis—indeed little if any capacity in any technical area. This is no longer the case. The Federal Government of Somalia, and the six Federal Member States today have functioning technical ministries in many areas that deal with questions of food security analysis and early warning, as well as with prevention, preparedness, and response. These include ministries of health, agriculture, planning, water, finance, and in most cases, disaster management authorities. At the federal level, the Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management Agency plays a key coordinating role. But one key informant recognized at least 28 different bodies in state or federal government that could claim some

kind of a role in humanitarian and food security data collection and analysis (006). In parallel, a combination of development, peace-keeping, and humanitarian partners are encouraging the government to take up their accountabilities and responsibilities for leading the response to shocks. So, it not surprising that various bodies within the government of Somalia are beginning to demand greater responsibility for a task that for much of the past three decades has been left almost exclusively to the international community.

Despite the various criticisms raised about FSNAU above, a large majority of stakeholders still trust FSNAU analysis and express fears about the independence of the analysis if FSNAU (or the processes it has managed) is taken over by government. On the other hand, government respondents are very clear that food security analysis is a both a sovereign right and a responsibility, and are increasingly impatient with external control over the process (014, 016, 027). Donors agree that the governance context in Somalia is radically different now than it was even a few years ago, let alone in 2011. Donors, and many other stakeholders are heavily invested in the success of the current government and tend to insist that the government must, at a minimum, play a greater role in information and analysis. In the long term, there is little doubt in the minds of most donor respondents that the government of Somalia will exercise the same kind of authority over data collection and analysis related to food security and famine as do its counterparts in Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia (005, 009, 019, 029).

Sorting out exactly how this will happen is still very much a work in progress. The general agreement is that there are gaps in technical capacity of current government bodies, and indeed a major component of FSNAU’s work plan is to train greater numbers of civil servants in IPC and other kinds of analysis. But, there is a lack of clarity and agreement on a plan for how to phase in the greater use of this capacity. Government officials complain that FSNAU treats them “like NGO staff!” (014). Drought Committees played a very important role in coordinating the response at the local level in 2017, but the disaster management authorities at higher levels are not yet fully functioning. The Federal Humanitarian Assistance and Disas-

ter Management Authority (F-HADMA) was only formed in 2017. There is both increased capacity and increased demand for a stronger—some would say controlling—role in information and analysis. Government bodies have memoranda of understanding with FSNAU, and FSNAU consults on the timing of assessments, sampling, field access, and instrument development. But control over the process clearly remains in the hands of FSNAU for the time being. Government officials often register complaints about FSNAU to other UN bodies and donors (O18).

Some in the international community fear that FSNAU would be “gobbled up” by government, thus undermining the independence and integrity of the analysis, if there are not strong protections for it (O27). It is not clear whether in the long term, the idea is to transfer FSNAU to government oversight, or transfer the process of analysis (along the lines of IPC Technical Working Groups in other countries in the region) to government leadership. FSNAU has such a good track record of analysis (not to mention more than twenty years of constant data tracing enabling long-term trend analysis that is rarely matched by other countries in the region) that many observers would prefer to keep FSNAU intact; others would like to see it adapt into or be replaced by a more decentralized, but more participatory, kind of analysis entity. As noted above, achieving the ambitions of all parties involved will be difficult. But it should be noted that while the Somalia case is different in that it has long had one dominant (and external) actor in this arena, it is by no means unusual: a kind of “tug-of-war” over information and analysis is frequently part of the dynamic between and within the international humanitarian community and host country governments in many countries.

## Uses and purpose of IPC analysis in Somalia

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The IPC is meant to offer an overview of a situation. It is not mandated to present operational recommendations. This fact is clear to all respondents. Donor

respondents state that while they want agencies to use the IPC to justify where to intervene, it is insufficient as the only means of information presented in a proposal. Donors require agencies to demonstrate a greater contextual knowledge than only that described by the IPC. Yet there are also questions about whether the FSNAU has a role in conducting assessments and analyses and at the same time assuring the quality and independence of more frequent and specific geographic analyses (e.g., analysis of the impact of covariate shocks at a level lower than national analysis) or problem focused analysis (e.g., displacement, in addition to the present focus on bi-annual seasonal centralized survey approach). At times FSNAU already does these ad hoc assessments but its core business remains the bi-annual seasonal assessments. The population numbers “in need” generated by the IPC are used for planning purposes for national-level targets for the food security part of the expected nutrition caseloads.<sup>5</sup> At times the population numbers classified as in Phases 3 and 4 for food insecurity are also used as headline figures for the overall humanitarian need. IPC classifications are also used to prioritise geographic areas for programming (i.e., emergency funding is restricted to areas which have been classified as in Phases 3 and 4). Yet respondents expressed concerns that the timing of the major analytical products were not fully in sync with the humanitarian response planning process. The IPC in Somalia remains a powerful tool for funding, advocacy, and big-picture geographic targeting, where an agency or local authority is rewarded with higher budgets if the map shows red (O09). However, there are opportunities for the IPC processes to be better linked with the Humanitarian Response Plan process to ensure more coherent analyses and avoid confusion about assessed needs and targeting (O19, O23). Agencies, are under pressure to strike a delicate balance between leveraging funding for the future and showing the impact of previous humanitarian investment. Consequently, the FSNAU analysis is also used as a scorecard of previous humanitarian interventions.

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<sup>5</sup> For nutrition caseloads, the Cluster uses FSNAU GAM/SAM prevalence with a standard incidence rate to determine expected caseloads.

## Capacity constraints among partners

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Limited technical and operational capacity and the high turnover of staff continue to impede national, international, and governmental partners' ability to fully engage in the IPC process. FSNAU works with local partners to assist in data collection and assessments, especially in areas where access is limited for international partners. However, local partners often lack the technical and operational capacity to manage data collection and analysis exercises to generate information that can meet FSNAU's quality requirements. Due to the fragile and complex context, operational needs in Somalia are always high, with NGO teams often in "firefighting" mode. Although partners understand the need and value of collecting and reflecting on data, they feel these activities must be balanced with the humanitarian priorities of live-saving undertakings. Engagement with all steps of the FSNAU process requires resources (technical people, time, etc.) that is often not budgeted and is judged against the opportunity costs of the partner's other interventions. Once data have been submitted by partners, several respondents noted that the data just disappeared and they were unaware of if and how the information was used in the IPC analysis (106). FSNAU respondents also reported that the data from other partners were often of poor quality or did not follow IPC protocols.

While stakeholders have an open invitation to participate in the analysis workshops, there is limited participation by local, national, international and government partners in the analysis and consensus-setting process. Partners note that they have "few technically empowered personnel" (011). Partners' limited understanding of the process and lack of technical capacity, in turn, limit their ability to genuinely engage in the discussion to influence the technical consensus and final phase classification (006, 012, 020). One respondent from the government noted, "People who challenge the findings of the IPC are the internationals. If I don't know everything from scratch, then how can I question?" (016) High turnover of key personnel (e.g., qualified and

trained study enumerators and managers) as well as government personnel (e.g., in ministries and coordination groups, although this is expected to stabilize in the near future) continue to hamper partners' capacity to engage in the IPC process.

Moreover, there is a sense of ambiguity about the value partners (with exception of UN food security agencies and coordination agencies such as OCHA) place on the FSNAU process and, in turn, the time and resources they invest into participating and supporting the data planning, collection, and analysis process. This point also relates to the way that stakeholder's use the data in their own processes. Many stakeholders refer to the value of the data as being only a general overview. In Somalia, ample opportunities exist to further invest in national, international, and government partners' technical and logistical capacity to ensure their understanding of and engagement with the IPC process.

## Data planning and collection

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In Somalia, FSNAU leads the IPC data planning, collection, and analysis. Each year, limited changes are made to the data plan, informed largely by physical accessibility or funding constraints. After FSNAU creates the data plan, government, national, and international partners receive requests to contribute resources (e.g., staff and logistics) to support the planned surveys (105). While national, UN, and international NGOs plan and carry out their own assessments for localized situational analyses and operational purposes, such data are rarely incorporated into the IPC analysis. FSNAU has voiced concerns over sample sizes used by NGOs (e.g., that they are too small to be representative, as NGOs tend to use smaller administrative zones while FSNAU analyses are based on livelihood zones) and the overall quality of the data collected in such assessments. In a few cases, FSNAU partners with an international NGO, often with the support of the cluster, that they trust to conduct a SMART survey or reviews trend data from health facility or nutrition sites. With the exception of these cases, FSNAU plans, collects, and analyzes the majority of the data used for the IPC analysis.

Partners voiced that opportunities are ample to make the data planning and collection process more participatory and collaborative. While the Nutrition Cluster has established a comprehensively budgeted survey plan, for both quantitative and qualitative assessments, how these assessments—especially those qualitative in nature—contribute to the IPC data matrix is not clear. Moreover, stakeholders noted that their assessment priorities shift in response to the rapidly changing context and such real-time data would be valuable in triangulating and supporting the IPC analysis. However, the perception was that FSNAU was unwilling to use existing data or had high standards for data acceptability (024). Coordination with Food Security and Nutrition Clusters can be improved, including to identify and employ local and national partners and fill in data gaps, especially in areas deemed inaccessible for FSNAU.

## Analytical processes

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Data for the IPC process are first analyzed in decentralized regional workshops in Somaliland and Mogadishu. All stakeholders are invited to participate in the regional workshops where there are back-and-forth discussions about indicators and data whereby stakeholders come to an agreement about the IPC designations. These regional workshops are perceived to be fairly inclusive, but questions remain about their membership and the capacity of the many partners to fully understand and, in turn, genuinely participate in the complex analytical process (004, 006, 010, 012, 013). Those with institutional capacity do not always make it to the workshops. Also, the perception is that often the “loudest voice in the room” can overtake the discussion, at times with observation anecdotes trumping data on hand (004, 021, 024, 027). Respondents noted that food security and nutrition data were analyzed in separate working groups (006, 021, 029). FSNAU is working on a method to better incorporate nutrition results into the food security assessment but the nutrition sector is not yet fully incorporated into the food security analysis. The almost-final analysis is then “validated” in a meeting in Nairobi and increasingly also in Mogadishu.

A national-level process is subsequently held in Nairobi where FSNAU and FEWS NET-Somalia are responsible for the final IPC phase determination. Respondents perceived phase classification to be a closed room “secret” process (106) with decisions made sometimes only 24 or 48 hours before the final announcement. The pressure to announce results is enormous—often results are released just a couple of days after classifications are determined. The need to rush from data collection to announcement of the results can further hamper consensus-building efforts (007). The urgent need is to strike a better balance between transparency, quality, and speed (009). Stakeholders are not clear about what data are included in the analysis and how the final classifications are determined by FSNAU and FEWS NET.

Several efforts have been made to ensure greater transparency in the data collection and analytical process. As mentioned, the online dashboard maintained by FSNAU allows partners to access the data. Seasonal FSNAU data are made available but reportedly this happens some time after the results announcement. Nutrition assessment protocols and data generated by FSNAU are externally validated by the Nutrition Cluster’s Assessment and Information Management Technical Working Group (AIM TWG) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Despite these efforts, the overwhelming perception continues to be that the IPC analysis process lacks “data transparency” (018, 020, 029). Respondents noted that data are often not shared in a timely manner and postulated that this was potentially due in part to a fear of critical scrutiny (009). Analysts did not have sufficient time to assess the information and, in turn, partners could not effectively question the outputs prior to the analysis workshop and the pre-briefing session before the “Oscars moment” of the technical release (012). There was also a sense that FSNAU was set in their position and opinion and was not open to feedback from other stakeholders (030, 110).

This seeming lack of transparency at the end leads to suspicion and doubt of the final classification, with some respondents going as far as to say that they are beginning to have doubts about outputs (106, 107). While partners are offered opportunities to

participate in the data collection stage, they do not feel adequately engaged in the data planning and phase-setting stages. As such, although partners are invited to the analysis phase, many regard the IPC as a FSNAU/FAO product (105). Many, in turn, lack the enthusiasm and time to invest in the process. Other respondents noted that if partners do not make time to participate in the analysis, they are not in a position to question the phase setting. Moreover, the perception is that partners dispute phase classifications without any solid evidence due to their concern of how the phase changes affect their resources. Overall, the lack of transparency and engagement at the phase classification stage are hampering trust and ownership of the findings. Efforts have been made recently to increase transparency and time for consultation on each step of the process but while respondents acknowledged these efforts, dissatisfaction with the processes continues.

## Data messaging and linkage to response

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Respondents noted the critical importance of getting the post-analysis IPC communication strategy right, and striking the right balance between “dry facts” and the “messaging” (004, 005, 006, 009, 010, 012, 018, 019, 022, 024, 029, 030). Some noted the success of the 2017 messaging which helped to leverage the appropriate resources in a timely manner (019). Yet, many others noted the technically dense nature of the IPC presentations, which are often poorly received, if at all, by the mostly non-technical audiences who did not fully understand the differences between the phases and the different indicators or the cut-offs required for each phase (012, 018). The sense was that opportunities exist for messaging to be manipulated for funding and advocacy purposes, without contextualizing the phase classification and noting data quality limitations (012).

Moreover, a “common” message is critical to ensure timely action. Sometimes, different messages coming from these two groups (technical and operational) have created confusion. As one respondent noted, “The common message was the most important

part—if they are different, it creates confusion. And in the worst case, paralysis, when we really need action” (029). Without the common message, especially in cases of Phase 4 and Phase 5 classifications, donors do not have a clear message for their headquarters, resulting in a lack of forward momentum for humanitarian funding (029, 030). In addition, the sense is that FSNAU is not keen to synchronize communication messages prior to the press release; they were regarded by some as being set in their position and opinion and inflexible to the feedback of other stakeholders (030). FSNAU respondents felt that the risk of leakages and potential dilution of the independence of the analytical message was a justification for the lack of time and priority given to synchronizing messages.

## Data challenges

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Several challenges relate specifically to data and data collection. These include the timing of data collection, missing data, and data quality.

*Timing.* The IPC analysis is theoretically conducted on data collected after each of the two main rainy seasons—post-Gu (long rains, April-June) and post-Deyr (short rains, October-December). However, due to the large volume of information required and the centralized role FSNAU plays in the process, data are collected in waves that span more than one season (024, 108, 111). For example, in the latest Gu assessment, the IDP nutrition surveys in some locations were conducted during the lean season while for other livelihood zones it was later. Given these timing issues, the data incorporated into the analysis actually may represent significantly different seasons and not be representative of the current situation (024, 111). This is important, as analysis of the data might not adequately take into account timing of data collection.

Between seasons, there are updates and many other products (e.g., market and climate updates produced by FSNAU between each seasonal assessment). At times, there are also ad hoc updates on specific themes (e.g., on IDP’ or extra updates at times of crisis). However, there is no comprehensive situa-



tion assessment. The highly changeable situation in Somalia means that, frustratingly, comprehensive analysis of the situation seldom occurs. Some causal factors of food insecurity and under-nutrition are not strongly seasonally influenced, and an increasing number of the most vulnerable populations are to be found in urban areas, including in IDP camps, where seasons have a variety of different and often weaker impacts on food insecurity and malnutrition.

*Missing information.* Information is often missing from the analysis. Security remains a key constraint to data completeness and representativeness. Access issues can lead to extrapolation of data, which has many weaknesses, especially with changing security and displacement in Somalia. This issue is not unique to Somalia. A lack of access leads to an overconcentration of surveys in accessible areas and areas covered by international partners. Several areas have not been surveyed for five or six years due to accessibility issues.

A lack of accessibility is particularly problematic for collection of nutrition and mortality data, as it is logistically demanding and requires direct access to beneficiaries for anthropometric measurements required for nutrition's strict case definitions. Therefore, the nutrition map produced by FSNAU after the seasonal assessments often has blank areas where conducting the requisite nutrition surveys was not possible. This is in contrast to the IPC map, which does not have unclassified areas.

It is unclear to a number of respondents how the IPC analysis framework considers data that are not strictly related to food security, prevalence of acute under-nutrition, and mortality. FSNAU is not really able to account for some major changes in GAM (seems inconsistent with food security data) as it is strict about admitting other types of data into the analysis (108). Given that acute under-nutrition is not solely related to food security, some felt that other sources of information, especially health data, which can indicate a declining humanitarian situation, should be taken into greater consideration in the analysis (109).

Respondents also noted that several key factors affecting the humanitarian situation are missing from

the IPC analysis process (004, 006, 019, 021). Underlying issues—in particular, conflict, clan issues/marginalization, and gender—are under-represented in the analysis as there is no guidance or protocol within IPC for how best to collect, analyze, or include them. One respondent also felt that the predictive modeling for food security lacked flexibility in its ability to accommodate new information. For example, Bay/Bakool was reclassified from IPC Phase 4 to Phase 3 in the post-Gu 2017 assessments, because of the probability that the rains will be sufficient for planting. However, the analysis does not appear to consider whether agro-pastoralists have been displaced (013). In addition, the same respondent believed that the agricultural potential of the Shabelle was going to be compromised by high off-take of water from the Shabelle river in Ethiopia in the coming season (013). FSNAU did not include this prediction in its analysis. It is not clear how the IPC process is using SWALIM data to enrich the analysis.

Furthermore, the acquisition, use, and interpretation of humanitarian assistance information in the IPC analysis remain a concern. Respondents noted that limited (timely) data sharing by agencies, lack of clarity and guidance on how to assess humanitarian assistance as a contributing factor in the analysis, and potential reliability issues (e.g., FSNAU inquiring whether respondents received humanitarian response, and failure to triangulate this information with other non-FSNAU sources) all contributed to confusion about how to interpret and rely on the exclamation marks noted on IPC maps (004, 006, 019, 029, 030).

Finally, concerns are ongoing about population and displacement numbers used by FSNAU (004, 005, 009, 010, 012, 013). UNICEF and UNFPA are releasing updated census numbers but the FSNAU at the time of this case study said it will not use them. This means that different UN agencies will be using different population numbers. The numbers reportedly differ by at least one million, having major implications for resource allocation and geographic targeting. In recent months, an effort has been made to reconcile the key figures (017).

*Data quality.* The AIM WG of the Nutrition Cluster validates all the raw data sets from the SMART

surveys that FSNAU conducts. The data sets are also shared with the CDC. The verification of age in a fragile context like Somalia is very complex and therefore the age data sets are sometimes rejected (due to not passing plausibility checks), which means that stunting data cannot be validated (112). One agency conducted a survey in the Mataban district of Hiran region in May and June 2017 and found a GAM rate of 37.2 percent. The results were published before full clearance from the AIM WG, although subsequently the data was found to be of good quality. Several partners including the government disputed the results. As a result, the Ministry of Health in Somalia released a circular to all partners indicating that any nutrition survey with a GAM over 30 percent needs independent verification through another survey. The prospects for a quick repeat survey, however, are low due to time and financial implications (112).

Representativeness of data is often called into question in Somalia (014, 015, 021, 101, 103, 104). Despite assertions that poor accessibility is a diminishing issue, the July 2017 nutrition map from FSNAU still indicated several areas of southern Somalia were not accessible for nutrition assessments. While the lack of access for nutrition assessments is more transparent on the part of FSNAU, partners strongly question the representativeness of assessed clusters in areas that are “accessible” (104, 114). Some respondents expressed strong concerns that FSNAU engages in a certain amount of extrapolation with nutrition data by using data collected in one part of a livelihood zone or administrative area and extrapolating to the whole livelihood or administrative zone (which may not all be accessible).<sup>6</sup> It was suggested that this may cause an underestimation of the humanitarian situation as those remaining in the inaccessible areas are likely worse off than those who are able to access services (101). However, FSNAU has clearly stated this is not the case, and it does not extrapolate the nutrition data. In the light of the concerns about transparency, the doubt around

<sup>6</sup> If the clusters assessed for a SMART survey are chosen based on a random selection within [??] all settlements in the area, then it is valid to say it is representative of the whole area. However, if a certain part is inaccessible (for example, rural Dinsoor in Bay region), those settlements are excluded from the random selection process. Then it would not be valid to say that the data are representative of Bay region.

this issue contributes to the wider doubts about the analysis.

The nature of food security data is such that there can be some flexibility in data collection methodology. Therefore, in inaccessible areas the FSNAU has established a methodology of telephone calls to conduct key-informant interviews and remotely facilitated focus-group discussions. However, when it comes to the IPC analysis, these telephone calls are given a lower reliability score than household survey methodology.<sup>7</sup> While FSNAU relies heavily on such *qualitative* information collected from inaccessible areas, and at times turns such information into quantitative IPC outputs, challenges remain with the rigorous analysis and inclusion of such qualitative information in the IPC framework. Doubts were also expressed about the independence and representativeness of this data from key informants in the inaccessible areas.

## Hotspots and early warning

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Many respondents complain that Somalia does not have a true early warning system (EWS). There are certainly many early warning mechanisms: FEWS NET has long operated in Somalia, in close collaboration with FSNAU. As noted, FSNAU developed the “dashboard” as an attempt to corral forward-looking indicators into a single data “signal” that would indicate a worsening situation. FEWS NET and FSNAU accurately predicted the 2011 famine (Hillbruner and Moloney 2012) and accurately predicted the rapid deterioration in the food security situation that began in late 2016. They jointly issued the “pre-famine warning” in early 2017 that led to a much more robust and earlier response in 2017 than in 2011. It is, in turn, not entirely correct to say that there is no EWS in Somalia.

However, many stakeholders felt that the standard practice of IPC, with a current status assessment and a projection that gave estimated conditions three

<sup>7</sup> While mobile sampling may be one of the only ways to collect information in inaccessible areas, it places a significant amount of trust in certain key people, with little chance to cross-reference what they are saying. The same type of flexibility is not granted to nutrition data where more stringent protocols are applied.

to six months out was not adequate for planning or early intervention purposes. Lessons learned from the 2011 famine suggested that a tool was needed to provide a more regular snapshot of the situation, that would be connected to triggers for decision making, and that was easier to understand by decision-making bodies such as the UN HCT. So, some donors encouraged FSNAU to develop the dashboard to track some twenty indicators (described above) to help improve early warning (002). Given the amount of trend data that FSNAU has, these indicators can be tracked in relation to trends, and flagged if the current status is significantly out of line with long-term trends. The number of flagged indicators then gives a “signal” of how good or bad the situation is. Several of these are truly forward-looking indicators; some more accurately reflect current status. Nevertheless, the dashboard accurately picked up the downturn in food security and nutrition status trends in late 2016 and was an important component of the “pre-famine” warning in early 2017. FEWS NET uses FSNAU data to construct forward-looking scenarios, but most are not at such a granular level as the dashboard.

So, when respondents complain that Somalia doesn’t have a functioning EWS, what they really mean is that no system combines the scenario-based forecasting that FEWS NET does with the granularity of the dashboard system to produce an evidence-based forecast. Currently, no system can provide relatively detailed information about what is likely to happen in a given district or livelihood zone in adequate time to prepare an appropriate mitigation and response plan and put it into action. Likewise, no mechanism explicitly ties more-detailed assessment capacities to locations where a more-detailed assessment is predicted to be needed. Several respondents noted that donors and operational agencies really want this kind of information, but that although it was a step in the right direction, the dashboard does not provide it—rather, like IPC, it tends to give a snapshot—albeit a snapshot that is more forward looking than the seasonal assessments (005, 013, 018).

On the other hand, some respondents noted that the whole discussion shouldn’t be about tools or even systems, but rather about what is “good enough, quick enough” information in a context subject to

rapid change—sometimes on a very local scale (009). As it is now, the link between early warning (and assessment!) and governance has the incentives backwards: “Local authorities (and agencies) are rewarded (in terms of budget and resources) if the map for their area is red; they should be rewarded in the map is green or yellow” (009). The maps (whether IPC or dashboard) emphasize impartial allocation of response resources rather than good governance and preparedness.

## Access, independence of the analysis, and managing the influences

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In contrast to other cases, there is less direct interference in the analysis of famine in Somalia. At this moment, famine is not a “forbidden” word with the government of Somalia (as it is in South Sudan or Nigeria). First, famine is not an unusual experience in Somalia and, second, as one respondent noted, drought and other “natural” hazards play a much larger role, and the man-made role in the threat of famine is largely attributed to Al-Shabaab and other non-state actors, making the government less fearful of the term (009).

Nevertheless, there are threats to the independence of the analysis. FSNAU field staff had to deal with local insecurity and local attempts to interfere with the process. With the rise of Al-Shabaab in the late 2000s, the situation became more fraught, but even up to and including the 2011 famine, FSNAU field teams were able to negotiate reasonably good access to affected populations for analysis. However, Al-Shabaab’s worries about espionage and its fears that the humanitarian community was part of a Western anti-Islam agenda. This factor is exacerbated by the rise of cellphone and tablet technology for data collection—technologies that Al-Shabaab cannot control and does not trust. These have led to increasing constraints on access. Currently, in many areas of Somalia conducting good-quality and representative assessments of current status is simply not possible because of access constraints imposed by Al-Shabaab—and in some cases, other groups.

Access is probably the biggest single constraint to analysis—to say nothing of response.

And fears are that local authorities will try to interfere with results in order to increase the flow of resources to their areas. There is a good deal of controversy and disagreement over population and displacement figures and a good deal of incentive to inflate both figures: population figures because of the upcoming elections, and displacement figures because of the resources allocated to IDPs (017).

Some respondents noted that significant resource allocation questions ride on the analysis, and agencies with different programmatic agendas may have an interest in influencing the maps in that direction (red = humanitarian assistance; yellow = resilience programming). But while no real evidence of this kind of influence emerged, this is one of the arguments that FSNAU uses to insist that the analysis has to remain predominantly in its hands. A number of respondents referred to “the loudest voice in the room” having the greatest say in the analysis, so some of the influence is not necessarily overtly to be found in any record of the process (024, 027). And concerns exist that moving the analysis process more under the control of government would magnify some of these problems, while doing little to reduce the problem of access to Al-Shabaab controlled areas (see previous section). On a side note, several Al-Shabaab areas were classified in Phase 1 in the

post-2017 Deyr analysis, even though the areas were inaccessible. FSNAU justified the classification on the basis of key-informant interviews; several respondents suggested it represented pressure to depict Al-Shabaab areas in a way that ensured no resources were allocated for them. About 25 of the 73 districts in Somalia are currently fully inaccessible to humanitarian actors (024), with more only partially accessible. Several respondents noted a concern about clan influence on analysis (022, 027) or local politicians who need to show that they are bringing resources to their constituents—even humanitarian resources (023).

The main concerns regarding influences on the outcomes of the analysis therefore can be summarized as limitations on access, the heavy reliance on a few key informants to determine current status in areas of limited access, agency agendas, and the hidden influence of clans. The main concerns regarding trust in the outcomes of the analysis have to do with the perceived lack of transparency in the process and the fact that the “consensus” outcome is largely determined by one party in the process with few cross checks. But overall, there were fewer concerns expressed about influences on the analysis in Somalia than in other case study countries. However, many respondents expressed concern about the independence of the process if controlled by the government, even while recognizing that the government must play an increasing role.

# Conclusions and lessons learned

Several conclusions can be drawn from this case, falling largely into the categories of the transparency of the process and trust in the results, the changing role of the government (both Federal Government of Somalia and Federal Member States), and the changing nature of the partnership among all the actors engaged in food security analysis in Somalia. These are, to some degree, overlapping concerns.

## Positioning FSNAU

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The difficulties of conducting regular, high quality, and nearly country-wide assessments cannot be underestimated, and much to its credit, FSNAU has consistently produced a high-quality and independent product. A characteristic of producing good-quality analysis over a long time in a complicated environment is the difficulty of finding time to reflect on assumptions about the optimum way to collect and analyze food security, nutrition, and mortality data. At one time, FSNAU was the undisputed global leader in food security analysis and the foundations for its methods and processes were established. The context in Somalia and the options for collecting new and more data in new and innovative ways have changed considerably since then. The proliferation of actors in food security and nutrition analysis as well as many innovations in collection and analysis of data is an opportunity to be seized by FSNAU if it wishes to take the lead in convening, coordinating, and testing the next generation of food security analysis.

## Trust, transparency, and the independence of the analysis

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Technically, most respondents trust the process. But many complain that it is not transparent and inclusive. Technical, transparency, and inclusion improvements could be made, but improvements to date are seen as far too much under the control of one actor. This is slowly eroding the high level of trust that FSNAU enjoys.

The discussions on greater transparency and inclusivity in the process are balanced by a shared desire to maintain trust in the quality and independence of the process: if the balance is not perceived to be right, trust in the system is eroded. This dilemma applies to the relationship between FSNAU and other stakeholders, but is a particular focus in the conversation on how the Somali government increasingly takes up its responsibilities for food security and nutrition analysis. The pressure to find a better balance between transparency and inclusivity with quality and independence is increasing and is unlikely to go away, particularly in relation to the role of the government. This problem is manifested, for example, when analytical discussions occur even though some stakeholders lack access to the data and analytical reports, or when the perception is that the real decisions about the analysis are being made by a limited number of participants.

Although some fears exist about protecting the independence of the analysis, actually this study has found relatively less overt political influence over the analysis in Somalia than in some other countries in the case studies. That is not to say it doesn't happen, but it is often reflected in the competition for resources or the use of IPC data as a reflection of programmatic "success," rather than to cover up an on-going crisis or to make it look less severe than it actually is. Some respondents argue that negotiating over the analytical outcomes sometimes results in pressures to push classifications downwards, to show effectiveness of aid, or upwards, to mobilize funding and resources—a tendency that donors are aware of (001, 006, 009, 011, 012, 013, 018, 020).

Our findings from this and other case studies is that regardless of the independence of the actual analysis, the interpretation and communication of the analysis is highly political across all stakeholders. Transparency and inclusivity in the process seem to be the key mitigation strategies to limit the risk of political distortion of the evidence-based decision-making process.

## Towards a partnership for analysis and action

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There are multiple pressures on data collection and analysis processes in Somalia more broadly. The food security and nutrition analysis/early warning space in Somalia includes many actors, and that number is growing. While FSNAU has long been the premier institution for food security analysis for over two decades, this is increasingly less the case. In addition to its role of collecting and analyzing data and presenting the analysis, FSNAU has acted as a convener and coordinator of food security and nutrition

analysis. The new phase of the FSNAU project offers many opportunities to strengthen this convening and coordination role, based on stakeholders' trust in its independence.

Several respondents noted that even though IPC was "born" in Somalia, some of the procedures now being followed don't add up a true IPC process. In particular, the process needs to be made more collaborative in terms of who brings the information, how the quality of that information is assessed, and how it is incorporated into the analysis. A Technical Working Group for Somalia exists, but it doesn't function the same way as in other countries—either in terms of the engagement of other agencies or the leadership of the government.

The Somali government is demanding (and being encouraged by donors and others) to take more of a lead and accountability across all areas of development and governance in Somalia. Food security and nutrition analysis is not isolated from this positive process. Some fears were raised that more involvement and leadership of the food security and nutrition analyses might compromise the independence of the process, but ways must be found to balance the twin imperatives of government leadership and independent analysis. It is a balance that has to be sought in any country where a government agency convenes a technical working group for food security analysis (IPC or any other). Our case studies of other countries in the region show that positive and negative lessons are learned in guiding this inevitable process. Among government and development stakeholders, FSNAU remains a trusted interlocutor. Therefore, FSNAU is in a unique position to learn and guide this process in such a way that all its objectives of quality, independence, transparency, and inclusivity are balanced and maintained as part of a process towards increasing the leadership and accountability of the Somali government.

# Recommendations

Recommendations can be broken down into those that relate to the governance of the process and those relate to the technical quality of the data and the analysis.

## Governance recommendations

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*Inclusivity and partnership.* There may be fears about the independence and quality of the analysis if FSNAU were to become a government project, but perhaps the best protection against that is to build an analysis system that ensures that *all* voices are heard in all stages of the planning, data collection, analysis, and messaging process. That means convening a negotiated partnership process in which all stakeholders are at the analysis table and all are heard (this includes FSNAU or whatever institution succeeds it, government departments, and UN agencies as well as international and local NGOs). A strengthened TWG or similar mechanism is needed in which the government is the convener, but all perspectives are included. More radically, what can be done to ensure the “voice” of affected communities is heard in an emergent partnership?

*Transparency.* Humanitarian data collection and analysis is a service provided for the entire humanitarian community. Humanitarian data, irrespective of who collects and analyzes it—and irrespective of who is paying—should be treated as a “public good.” That means making it available to different analysts to analyze and use for various planning purposes. While from one perspective this creates a problem of managing the “message” coming out of analysis, it also ensures that multiple perspectives on the analysis can be addressed on the basis of the evidence. This issue is not specific to Somalia—it arises in all cases included in this study.

*Capacity building.* Much more emphasis is needed on government capacity building—and capacity building has to go beyond training. Training is fine, but needs are real for physical facilities (vehicles, computers, etc.) and especially for the necessary administrative, coordination, leadership, and accountability structures to enable full participation—a necessary prerequisite to the previous recommendation. Learning by doing has been shown to be a more powerful capacity building process than training alone. Greater involvement of government staff in all aspects of the FSNAU process—and greater devotion of FSNAU staff time to working with government—will enable greater capacity transfer and at the same time greater partnership and transparency of the process.

In a context of ever increasing needs and increasing demands for resources across all sectors of development in Somalia, FSNAU food security and nutrition analysis plays a pivotal role in Somali evidence-based decision making, helping to prioritize needs and balance investments across the country. If FSNAU is to continue to play this role, it needs to invest far more in convening, coordinating, and capacity building of partners—government, international, national stakeholders, and local communities. These activities require resources in addition to those solely used for analysis.

## Technical recommendations

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*Participatory review of timing of FSNAU analysis.* Greater flexibility in the timing of data collection is needed to conduct analyses between bi-annual seasonal assessments. This could be accomplished by a participatory review of the process. For example, analysis procedures should take into consideration the timing of key decision points in the development of the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO). This approach has resource implications but potentially

makes the analysis more relevant in influencing the HNO, in the timing of early action, and in the focus on contextual analysis in Somalia. This joint review of the objectives and timing of the FSNAU technical analysis should be undertaken, and if necessary the timing of various elements of the FSNAU analysis process should be adjusted. Ensuring that this review is participatory and inclusive will contribute to stemming the drift towards doubting the quality and independence of the FSNAU-led analytical process.

*Strategic approach to increase participation and ownership.* If all stakeholders agree that participation in, transparency of, and ownership in food security and nutrition analysis are important, then a joint budgeted plan is required. FSNAU, government and clusters (see below) should facilitate the development of this coordinated approach to food security and nutrition analysis.

If data are to be treated as a public good, the protocol for sharing data among partners needs to be clarified—particularly for information shared prior to the analysis and validation workshops. Due to the capacity gaps discussed above, this information sharing protocol should prioritize an agreement with other key technical leads such as FEWS NET or WFP/VAM.

Prior to the technical release of an analysis, a process that includes senior decision makers and their communications staff needs to be better established. This process should aim to facilitate agreement on a common message that does not modify the technical outcome while at the same time communicating a message that will influence operational decision-making, including funding decisions.

More time should be given between pre-briefing and release to ensure that all stakeholders are adequately briefed and brought up to speed on the latest release and its limitations or qualifiers (data gaps, reliability of data, etc.).

*Greater accuracy in reporting.* Access constraints and/or reliability of the data should be made clearer on the IPC maps generated, both for acute food insecurity and nutrition. For example, if the data collection process for food security had to rely heavily on telephone calls for key-informant interviews, then

that should somehow be reflected (e.g., by hatching over the IPC phase color). Nutrition surveys that do not have representative clusters in all parts of the administrative or livelihood zone should make this clear on the map for which the data is representative. Representing minority views in final messaging would make reporting more transparent.

*Linking to broader trends.* Greater effort should be made to investigate emerging evidence on unexpected patterns of under-nutrition, mortality, and food security. This will require more emphasis on causal and aggravating factors for nutrition. Overall there is a lack of minimum information on key sectoral indicators like health and WASH as well as inadequate use of qualitative data, which could enrich the analysis. This means that the focus is around food security and drought, with other key issues affecting the humanitarian situation getting less attention. This can also narrowly focus thinking around drought response. While food is critical, issues of health, water, security, marginalization, and gender play a big role as well.

## Synthesis

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Somalia and the FSNAU are the birthplace of IPC analysis, and other notable innovations have been instituted in Somalia as well. There is little doubt, for instance, that the pre-famine warning in early 2017 mobilized adequate resources early enough to prevent the recurrence of the famine of 2011. Somalia is unique in that one dominant institution has led the process and that institution was, for many years, outside of government control or leadership. But now both Somalia and the agencies engaged in data collection and analysis face new challenges: of leadership and partnership, as well as technical capacity. This case study has found fewer instances of overt influence over the analysis process than other cases, but a lot of worries about the future independence of the analysis and ownership of the process. While strengthening technical capacity is one means of ensuring independence, building trust among the various partners—governmental, UN, and civil society, both international and local—is likely to be the challenge for the future.



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