

MOVING TOWARDS IMPROVED ACCOUNTABILITY & QUALITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

- An estimated 12 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in East Africa.
- Aid agencies in Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya have reported high rates of acute malnutrition as well as large numbers of livestock deaths and other indicators of livelihood distress.
- Numerous factors, including drought, the protracted conflict in Somalia, rising food prices, seasonal floods and localised resource conflicts are contributing to a deepening crisis.
- Six regions in Somalia have been declared famine areas, and many thousands of people from Somalia continue to flee across borders, seeking protection from both drought and conflict, and highlighting the dual nature of this emergency as both a food security and refugee crisis.

[Humanitarian Accountability Partnership \(HAP\) International](#), [The Sphere Project](#), the [Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action \(ALNAP\)](#), and [People In Aid](#), in a bid to work more coherently, under an agreement made in July 2011 decided to collaborate for a joint deployment to the Horn of Africa for the ongoing famine response. The emergency which with its complex scale and size, covering a number of countries and involving multiple actors, necessitated an assessment mission prior to a full scale deployment. The mission was conducted in between 15 -23 August, 2011 in Nairobi, to ensure that an integrated approach to quality and accountability was developed with a collaboration with the existing regional expertise.

The aims of the assessment as identified and communicated to stakeholders were to:

- survey a sample cross section of responding agencies as to their on-the-ground experience regarding quality and accountability challenges in the response
- identify, through observation and interaction, gaps and priorities in the current response
- gather input and impressions regarding accountability issues in the response from people affected by the crisis and receiving services from humanitarian agencies
- engage with existing networks and assess available skills and resources to be capitalised upon
- investigate possibilities for hosting and logistics, including determining most viable locations and programme sites
- synthesise findings of the mission and make recommendations regarding the overall design and aims of the deployment.
- provide some early advocacy and communications material for all Q&As to report against more broadly with respect to the response

The assessment mission was conducted in Nairobi by HAP, Sphere Project and People In Aid staff members focused specifically on the response in Kenya and Somalia. Due to a number of factors, the team was unable to arrange a visit to affected communities during the short time they were in Kenya, and therefore the achievement of the third of the listed aims, in addition to making contact with a further cohort of responding agencies has been deferred until a later stage.

The team met with representatives of approximately 26 agencies during the 9 days of their stay, including 17 national and international NGOs, 2 UN agencies, 2 donor representatives, 3 interagency network representatives and 2 media development agencies. In addition, they attended 3 interagency meetings and presented the aims of their mission and invited discussion with and contact from additional agencies, both UN and international NGOs.

Some key quality and accountability and related issues raised through the consultations:

- Coordination and interagency information sharing was seen as one of the biggest problems hampering the effectiveness of the response. Ineffective meetings, lack of attendance by the broad range of players, slowness of updating of coordination information, the existence of sub and breakaway groups created partly to compensate for the shortcomings, lack of widely accessible knowledge regarding relevant coordination meetings and mechanisms, and confusion regarding the structures all contributed to a sense of disconnect between players in the response.
- The current response is hampered by management and coordination systems that were not prepared for the scale of the crisis, and humanitarian interventions of varying quality. Many of the good people management processes and practices developed by agencies are considered too long and time-consuming to meet the urgent needs of an emergency scale up, therefore some agencies are skipping critical steps (e.g., reference checks, inductions, etc.), raising risk and compromising quality.
- Additional human resources challenges included recruitment, deployment, meeting training needs, distance management and oversight.
- Many agencies expressed a desire for the donor community at a local and regional level to be more engaged with them in debate and discussion regarding the best approaches to the response, and highlighted the impact of programmes being donor driven.
- Agencies who have worked in the region over many years talked of the potential for a lack of understanding of the specific issues related to the community groups, and in particular pastoralists, and the land they live on by agencies lacking local knowledge. There is some disagreement, for example, amongst agencies as to the longer-term impact of particular interventions, such as water trucking and borehole drilling.
- From the other side of this, a number of agencies discussed pressure placed to establish new programmes in areas where they have not been traditionally operational. Often, people felt this pressure was in response to head offices wanting their staff and logos to be visible where the media were gathering (in Dadaab, or at growing hubs where access is easier, for example).
- Concern was raised regarding the accuracy of reporting on the impact of the famine and the potential for the burial of critical information about established DRR and food security programmes that have indeed been quite successful in reducing risk for the communities they served.
- A variety of innovative accountability mechanisms and projects were reported as being implemented at different projects sites by some international NGOs and their partner agencies. There is a high degree of demand from other agencies to know about these and use learning for their own programming, and frustration was expressed at the difficult of obtaining up to date and context specific case studies and tools.
- Impact of the increasing pressure placed upon the limited resources of the Dadaab refugee complex highlighted many of the above issues as being further exacerbated in the particular circumstances of the camps.
- The lack of physical access to famine sites in Somalia mean that some agencies are selecting and working with partners without sufficient means to establish comprehensive working agreements, monitor progress and accountability. On the other hand, some agencies reported quite robust systems of partner selection as well as some quite sophisticated accountability mechanisms, and it became apparent over the course of the assessment that there are widely varying levels of quality in practice, at times related to the degree of risk that an agency felt able to take.

In light of these findings, a joint deployment, which remains contingent on funding and staff availability, is being planned for the Horn of Africa. The aim of the deployment will be to: *support the humanitarian system in providing accountable programming that meets accepted standards of quality, both in the immediate humanitarian response, and in the development and implementation of organisational and operational strategies for short and long-term recovery and the prevention of future crises.*

[\(Terms of Reference for the proposed joint deployment\)](#)
