

THE
**HUMANITARIAN
RESPONSE
INDEX 2009**
Whose Crisis? Clarifying Donor's Priorities
DARA



The Humanitarian Response Index 2009

*Whose Crisis?
Clarifying Donor Priorities*



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DARA aims to enhance global efforts to reduce human suffering and inequity and encourage prevention. Our focus is on the improvement of humanitarian action, the promotion of international stability and development, and the reduction of disaster risk.

Headquarters

Felipe IV, 9 – 3º Izquierda
28014 Madrid – Spain
Tel.: +34 91 531 03 72
Fax: +34 91 522 00 39

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First published 2010 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Hounds mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS
and 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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978-0-230-57349-9

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Hobbs the Printer Ltd, Totton, Hampshire





Crisis Reports
Somalia





Somalia at a Glance

Country data

- ▶ Population (2007): 9 million
- ▶ Under five mortality rate (2006): 145 per 1,000
- ▶ Human Development Index Ranking (2001): 161
- ▶ Life expectancy (2007): 48 years
- ▶ Official Development Assistance (2007): US\$384 million

The crisis

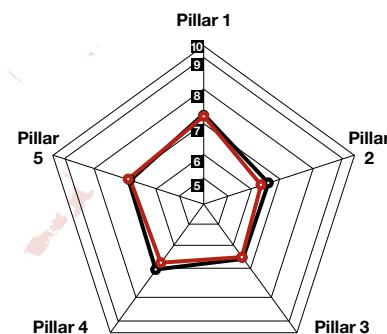
- ▶ Humanitarian situation has worsened since 2006 due to acute malnutrition, droughts, floods, insecurity and rising food prices;
- ▶ Two-thirds of all aid workers killed worldwide in 2008 died in Somalia;
- ▶ Access to affected populations is increasingly dangerous and difficult;
- ▶ Somali refugees currently number half a million, with 1.2 million internally displaced;
- ▶ Humanitarian efforts hindered by political fragmentation and the absence of a stable central government.

The response

- ▶ Humanitarian operations managed through “remote control” outside the country, creating aid accountability and effectiveness issues;
- ▶ Donors have provided US\$ 1.7 billion since 2000, ranking repeatedly among the top ten aid recipients. It also stands at highest number of UN CAP appeals: 8;
- ▶ CERF funds and Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF) introduced but pooled funding reportedly caused confusion among NGOs and donors;
- ▶ Humanitarian space in Somalia has shrunk, but innovative projects such as the Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia (part of the UNFAO) have proved effective in identifying and meeting needs.

Donor performance

- ▶ In general, donors rated poorly in all Pillars of the HRI, particularly Responding to needs (Pillar 1), and Prevention, risk reduction and recovery (Pillar 2);
- ▶ Donors scored highest in survey questions on respecting neutral and impartial humanitarian action, but lowest in questions around the timeliness and transparency on funding decisions;
- ▶ Donors’ mixing of humanitarian and political/security objectives has complicated aid delivery and aid security in Somalia;
- ▶ Donors should focus on addressing issues around access, humanitarian space and remote-control management of operations.



HRI 2009 scores by pillar

- Pillar 1** Responding to needs
- Pillar 2** Prevention, risk reduction and recovery
- Pillar 3** Working with humanitarian partners
- Pillar 4** Protection and International Law
- Pillar 5** Learning and accountability

—○— Somalia
—○— All crisis average

Somalia *In Search of a Way In¹*

Steven Hansch

The decades-long protracted emergency in Somalia grew considerably worse from 2006 to 2008, with a convergence of floods, droughts, increased food prices and an ongoing situation of insecurity. While the volume of humanitarian aid to Somalia increased in 2008 – and the country now receives the most per capita in the world – almost all aid had to be delivered at arm's length as Somalia became the most dangerous location in the world for aid workers. Thirty-seven aid workers were killed in Somalia in 2008,² two-thirds of the total killed worldwide.

Most humanitarian organisations say the worst problem in Somalia is not shortage of food or water, but the disappearance of 'humanitarian space' – that is, the social, political and security opportunities for implementing aid operations. While donors have been generous with unconditional aid, particularly food, they have also contributed aid inappropriately, through what many regard as a heavy-handed political agenda.

Governmental donors in particular have compromised the humanitarian space of operational agencies by bombing Somalis intermittently, supporting invasions by Ethiopian troops, focusing their attention on nation-building funds for Western-allied (anti-Islamic) governments and pushing the United Nations to act as a political actor, taking sides in a complex conflict. UN agencies are now perceived by Somalis as just extensions of political interests of the US Government.

By the end of 2008, an all-time low had been reached in the direct management, supervision, monitoring and accountability of aid programmes within the country – and most aid agencies said that access topped the list of challenges in 2008, and into 2009.

A complex emergency with grave humanitarian consequences

In 2008, a complicated group of hazards joined to further increase the vulnerability and needs of Somalis. After disastrous floods in 2006, poor rainfall and Gu harvests in 2007, and early 2008 led to one of the worst food shortfalls in recent memory.³ Food prices grew as a result of hyperinflation from the over-printing of money, and Somalia's economic stress was heightened by closed borders with Kenya and Ethiopia and a continuing ban on livestock exports.⁴ The country also suffered a cholera epidemic, Rift Valley fever and unknown camel diseases.

Al Shabaab, an Islamic military group which formed following the 2006 invasion by the Ethiopian army, now controls much of Somalia's south-central regions, and there has been new violent conflict between Al Shabaab and the recently deployed international peacekeeping forces, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Al Shabaab also forced two leading NGOs to depart, in one case shutting down a decades-long food pipeline.⁵ Since January 2007 at least 16,000 civilians have been killed in the violence between Ethiopian troops and Islamic militia. Though aiming for suspected Al Qaeda affiliates, US air and missile strikes also hit and killed Somali civilians in 2008, spreading lasting paranoia.

A growing boldness and desperation among some Somalis, who have seen their fishing grounds depleted (in part due to international fishing fleets), has seen them turning to piracy.

Meanwhile, increasing arms shipments and access to small-arms weaponry increased the number of roadblocks and incidents of criminal violence, kidnappings and attacks on aid workers.⁶

As a result of all these factors, the Somali population faces crisis levels of acute malnutrition in all the country's south-central regions. Increased food insecurity led to thousands of deaths from severe malnutrition. Roughly half the population, or 3.2 million people, were estimated by the UN and the European Commission's Humanitarian Office (ECHO) to require emergency assistance, of whom 180,000 are malnourished children. World Food Programme (WFP) operations reached 2.4 million in 2008.

Almost half a million Somalis have fled the country and 1.2 million are internally displaced, with large new displacements in 2006 and 2008. The Dadaab refugee camp, along Kenya's desolate Somali border, has continued to grow since the large outflow during the 1992 famine, with a population of more than 280,000 in 2009.

Furthermore, because of the politicisation of aid and the deep suspicions Somalis harbour towards external actors, no aid agency wishes to be seen as affiliated with any other agency, hampering coordination in the field. Meanwhile, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors have been preoccupied with creating a strong central government since the surge of intervention during and after the 1992 famine.

A fragmented failed state

And yet, in the years since, Somalia has fragmented into three political states, each asserting their own primacy: Somaliland in the north-west (population one million), which has been remarkably peaceful and received some aid, though it has not achieved international recognition as a sovereign state; Puntland in the north-east (population two million), from where most piracy emanates; and the bulk of old Somalia, increasingly now referred to as 'South-Central' (population five million), where most current humanitarian aid gaps occur.

Today, Somalia remains a fragmentation of several states. Indeed, a sizeable portion of Somalis live abroad.⁷ Most of the urgency expressed by aid agencies and of the narrative about humanitarian aid to Somalia that follows focuses on the large 'South-Central' region, hereafter simply referred to as 'Somalia'. This is nominally governed by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which rose out of the 2004 Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) process. However, it has few resources, little presence or control of the capital, Mogadishu, and has been accused by many rights groups as being responsible for police and military abuses against civilians. Somalia remains perhaps the world's most extreme 'failed state'.

Consistently important donor funding

Somalia donor offices are based primarily in Nairobi, Kenya, and there are inter-agency working-group meetings every day in the city.⁸ Somalia has been one of the top ten recipient countries for humanitarian aid three times between 2000 and 2008, and it has been the subject of the greatest number of UN consolidated appeals (CAPs) – eight in all. Known donors provided US\$1.7 billion in donor contributions from 2000 to 2008.⁹ Indeed, with the exception of a single year, 1991, when the government collapsed and aid agencies fled the country en masse, levels of aid to Somalia since the late 1970s¹⁰ have remained consistently high compared with other emergencies. While Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) claims that Somalia is one of the 'forgotten crises' (in terms of major media attention), other NGOs find that it is easier to get funding for Somalia from larger institutional donors.

Weariness, disputes and frustrations

Donor weariness has exhibited itself not through a lack of funding, but in the diligence in tracking it. Many donors ask little from their grantees about the performance or impact of programmes they fund. Many NGOs have also become absorbed in a specific dispute with the US Government which, at the time of writing, was pausing most of its aid to Somalia over worries about aid reaching the Islamic Al Shabaab group.¹¹ And humanitarian aid organisations expressed consistent frustration with the competing donor agenda focused on uncritical support for the TFG, which obstructs and taxes NGOs. One NGO manager claimed: "No question, the donor involvement has caused the crisis," referring to donor fuelling of the ongoing violent conflict.

In 2008, donor funding became increasingly complicated by the rise of pooled funds, such as the Humanitarian Response Fund (HRF). More centralised UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) funding is also being channelled for Somalia (though few could explain where and how). Interviews with NGOs found much confusion about what the relative roles are, or are meant to be, of the different pooled funds through which the local HRF provides many small grants to NGOs. Also now part of the donor tapestry from the point of view of indigenous Somali NGOs are the international NGOs (INGOs), such as Oxfam Novib, which blend funds from different sources to grants they give to local NGOs.¹² NGOs have raised at least US\$34 million of funds from non-governmental sources (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2009).

Shrinking humanitarian space

"The definition of humanitarian is not understood in Somalia," says one NGO spokesperson. Somalia may be the first and only emergency in modern times where access, defined as the ability of expatriates to be based in the areas of assistance, is reduced to zero. The number of full-time expatriates working with NGOs, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or donors dropped from several hundred in 2007 to none at all in 2009. In addition, aid routes for local staff and supply lines are hampered by an unusually large number of roadblocks and checkpoints, compelling aid agencies to track and map Somalia with a new 'access coefficient,' which refers to denial of access. In general, the further south the location, the more difficult the access for aid.

There are a number of factors behind this shrinkage of humanitarian space. First, million-dollar ransoms paid by donor governments for the release of their nationals taken hostage created a market incentive for future hostage taking. Subsequently, the trend towards targeting aid staff continued in 2009.¹³

Second, donor intermingling of political objectives with extensive aid operations has forced the UN system to try to reach all parts of the country while sacrificing its neutrality.

Third, donors are turning a blind eye to abuses and killings the TFG perpetrates, according to many NGOs – thereby creating an ‘accountability free zone’. (Though, since the replacement of the president¹⁴ of the TFG in 2009 these abuses appear to have declined.)

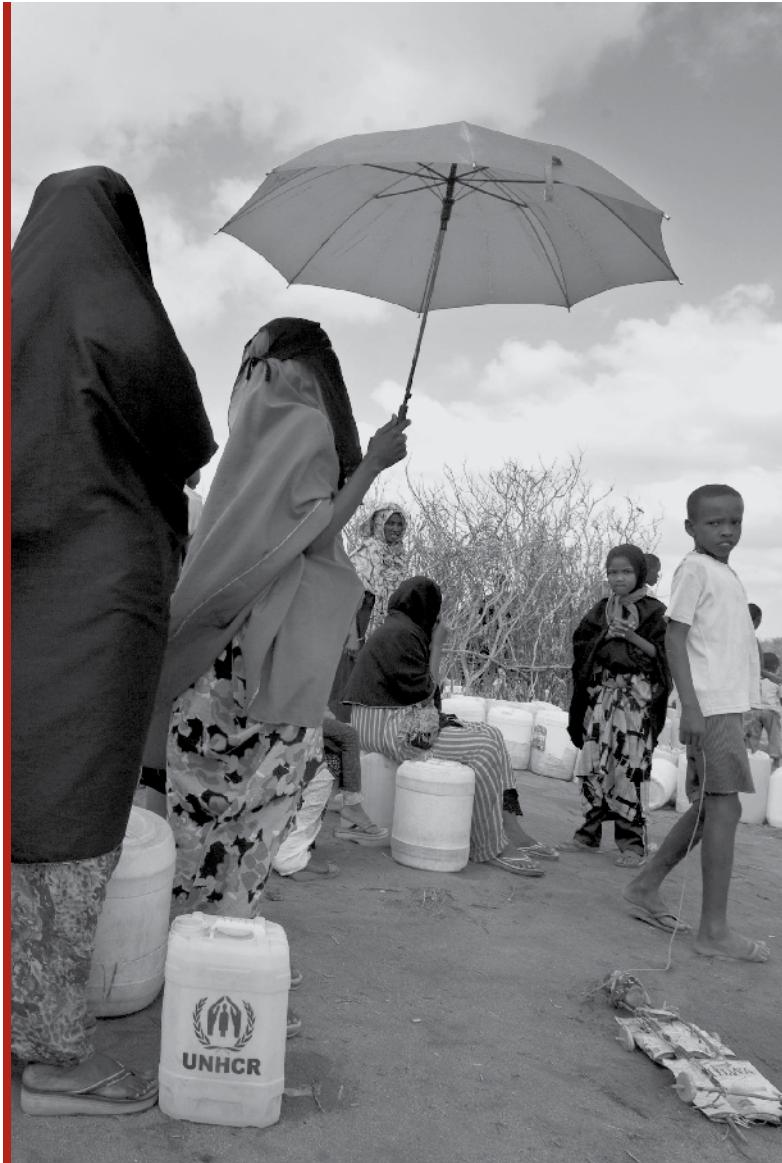
Fourth, the international community feels a perpetual itch to respond to Somalia with military intervention. By and large, Somalis suspect the 2006 Ethiopian military invasion was at the behest of Western powers, and principally the US. More certain were three episodes of US missile attacks on Somali villages during 2007 and 2008. Somalis are now suspicious of anyone carrying global positioning system (GPS) devices. Hence, the work of NGOs has retrogressed with the loss of the IT tools necessary for their own planning, targeting and monitoring.

Remote control

The response to the collapse of humanitarian space has been a dramatic reliance on local partners and the use of management techniques that minimise direct observation or supervision, referred to as ‘remote control’.¹⁵ In other words, local staff work alone, management and implementation occurring without international staff physically present. For example, the ICRC, in Nairobi, contracts the procurement and distribution of food through Somali merchants who agree to bring the food in from international markets and deliver to inland internally displaced person (IDP) sites – a novel method of food distribution designed specifically for Somalia.

The result of remote control is that international agencies lose fundamental control and knowledge of their projects. It also results in less reliable data about programme performance, monitoring and the success or failure of targeting. Aid agencies routinely expressed concern about this.

“The definition of humanitarian is not understood in Somalia.”



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Threats to expatriates have also led to the abandonment of best practices and advances in field work, including the use of place codes, the use of GPS to specify beneficiary locations, and contingency planning. In addition, the lack of field presence has decreased direct witnessing or protection of persecuted populations, making protection difficult.

A reliance on partnerships

Alongside the trend toward remote management, is an increasing reliance on partnerships between international agencies and local Somali organisations. This was originally about building local capacities, but is now more about international dependence on these partners and it takes advantage of the growing number of indigenous Somali NGOs, from whose perspective many INGOs are ‘the donor’.¹⁶ Often this takes the form of sub-grants to Somali NGOs. For the ICRC, this means extensive work with and through the national Somali Red Crescent Society. Other times it takes the form of sub-contracting. The WFP works through dozens of sub contracted partners.

Further upstream, more and more money for Somalia is coming through pooled fund mechanisms and the UN. The consequence is that the aid pathway, which used to be as simple as ‘donor to NGO’ (two steps), is now many more steps, e.g. ‘donor to pooled fund to UN to INGO to local NGO’ (four steps) – with a consequent increase in costs as well as bidding and uncertainty between agencies. Many of the humanitarian aid agencies interviewed found this lengthening chain of intermediaries uses up too many resources without achieving better presence or operational quality. In addition, it favours the UN rather than NGOs when giving resources, and many worry that the stratification further dilutes accountability.

The combination of remote control, lack of field monitoring, over-reliance on local agencies, pooling of funds (between donors) and layers of funding have the overall consequence that it is impossible to track physical milestones accomplished in Somalia against donors’ commitments.

Operational innovation

In response to these extraordinary challenges, aid agencies undertook innovative approaches to the evolving crisis, delivering in 2008 a broadening mix of programmes. Areas covered included micro-enterprise and micro-credit;¹⁷ cash for work and other livelihood support to help build markets; veterinary care for the huge camel and cattle livestock population; food rations and therapeutic care, particularly community-managed (CMAM);¹⁸ borehole rehabilitation and trucking of water to IDP camps; and primary health care, principally control of measles and cholera epidemics and the few newly occurring cases of polio (though – some donors have cut back on decades-old funding for health).¹⁹

There have also been lessons about what to avoid. For example, NGOs have learnt to avoid drilling new boreholes as each new water-point can become a source of violent conflict; and aid agencies have worked assiduously not to create camps, as the management of IDP camps can lead to perpetual dependence and long-term displacement well beyond the aid agencies’ capabilities in the field.

NGOs, UN agencies and donors have come together in one impressive programme, the Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) for Somalia, managed by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), which provides the best information on famine vulnerabilities, and nutrition and mortality patterns in Somalia. No other humanitarian aid information system matches it. Furthermore, during recent years they have pioneered a novel Integrated Phase Classification system which synthesises food security and health issues into one composite tool that maps vulnerability by geographic zone.

Food needs in Somalia are also being met through a push by WFP to distribute specialty ready-to-eat foods for supplementary feeding programmes for the large numbers of moderate-acute malnourished children.²⁰

Meanwhile, in the absence of government or formal banks in Somalia, NGOs have successfully put to good use the informal ‘Hawala’ money-transfer system that is common in many Islamic countries.

Lessons learnt and recommendations for the future

With only a few exceptions, almost all aid experts, NGO representatives and even donor staff agree that donors should stop trying to orchestrate the political or military solution to Somalia's government. Aid agencies would prefer that donors hold the TFG and Ethiopian forces accountable for their actions.²¹

UN agencies should also not be pressured to act as the arms of OECD donors trying to create a Western-style vision of democracy in Somalia. And those UN agencies that are not involved in governance should be allowed to operate separately. As one aid agency representative put it: "The UN Resident Representative – who is funding an army – should not be the same person as the humanitarian coordinator."²²

Donors should recognise that *GHD Principles* imply that each donor should think for itself. One complaint is that too often donors act as a group. With regard to project monitoring and sectoral interests, though, donors do vary considerably. Many were seen as too hands-off and indiscriminate in their approach to working with their partners and Somali organisations. Others, such as ECHO, were seen as extremely engaged. But donors do not appear to share, or even collectively require, accountability in order to learn 'what works' within Somalia.

In recent years, new large funding sources have become relevant to Somalia, including European foundations, the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Saudi Government. These new donors should become engaged with and understand *GHD Principles*.

Aid agencies should also increase their regional communication. Agencies working on Somalia from Nairobi rarely have communications with their offices in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, despite the commonalities of programmes between eastern Ethiopia and Somalia, the porous borders and the extensive involvement of Ethiopia in Somalia.

Conclusions

Part of Somalia's problem, many say, is that the country's economy has been conditioned by several decades of food aid, so that now it is addicted to aid. One of Somalia's greatest disaster risks would be the withdrawal of aid itself. Donors should convene open forums of creative visionaries to find solutions for countries such as Somalia where the reliance on food assistance keeps growing.

Long-term Somali watchers recommend addressing the availability of small arms throughout the population, economic stagnation and decline, and social inequality, i.e. the root causes of Somalia's vicious cycle.²³ Few aid agencies are addressing Somalia's poverty trap; the population is producing the same primary products (camel and cattle meat, basic grains) that it has for centuries. NGOs are not yet equipped to analyse and constructively influence the complex dynamics of economic markets.²⁴

In a few ways, Somalis have learnt to integrate with the global economy: by spreading out globally. Yet humanitarian aid agencies have not come to grips with the powerful role of the overseas Somali community, which sends US\$1 billion each year in remittances to Somalia and Somaliland, many times the value of livestock exports (Ismail 2000).

Donors and humanitarian groups have a particularly hard time framing their interventions for migratory pastoralist populations. New inter-agency livestock guidelines, created by NGOs, should be given attention by donors similar to the Sphere standards.

Finally, donors should convene among themselves and agree on principles for mitigating future hostage taking, which should include individual cases where donors may want to negotiate with hostage takers directly. Many NGOs feel that the best sustainable solution is for donors to agree to allow the NGO, or other employer, to hold the lead role in dealing with hostages.

About the Author

Steven Hansch

DARA Associate, Washington DC

Steven Hansch works in the Washington, DC office of DARA, promoting humanitarian aid reform in US inter-agency discussions, including the revision of the Foreign Assistance Act. Most of his career has been spent working with non-profits in emergencies in Africa, Latin America and Asia. He has led evaluations of the crises in Rwanda, Uganda, El Salvador, the 2004 Tsunami and the 2003 famine in southern Africa. In 1993, he led a team of epidemiologists to document the mortality impact of the 1992 Somali famine. He teaches classes on complex emergencies at several universities, including the American University and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, and is a Fellow at the Georgetown Institute for the Study of International Migration. He also works in knowledge management, coordinating the teaching of microfinance management.

Notes

- 1** Information based on field interviews with key humanitarian agencies in Kenya, from 8 February to 18 February 2009, and 184 questionnaires on donor performance (including 129 OECD-DAC donors).
- The HRI team, composed of Steve Hansch, Fernando Espada, Ana Romero and Daniela Ruegenberg, expresses its gratitude to all those interviewed in Somalia. The opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of DARA.
- 2** Killings continued in early 2009 as well. As one example, on 21 July 2009, a staff member of the Somali Red Crescent was killed in cross-fire in Mogadishu.
- 3** See the briefs published by the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSAU 2008). During 2008, the number of estimated food-insecure grew from 2.6 million to 3.5 million.
- 4** Private printing presses have stepped up their production of the Somali shilling during the escalation in fighting, flooding the market and causing a depreciation of its value by 165 percent in two years.
- 5** CARE International shut down its 30-year-old food aid programme. CARE delivered almost all humanitarian aid to Somalia from the late 1970s until the crisis in 1991, and again in 1993 was one of the largest aid providers. In 2008, its emergency food aid programme in Somalia was its largest in the world. With its ousting, CARE loses not only a large presence in Somalia, but possibly also its expertise and commitment for running any similar emergency food programmes.
- 6** Humanitarian aid agencies monitor the numbers of roadblocks encountered in Somalia, and throughout 2008 the number exceeded 300 for every month, and reached 350 in October and November.
- 7** Somali merchants are very visible in Dubai, London and parts of the US. Significant Somali communities live in Nairobi, Kenya, as well as the Nordic countries.
- 8** By the late 1980s, Nairobi had evolved into a hub for regional humanitarian aid offices, as well as a storage and staging point for launching aid to many nearby countries. A large part of the emergency community in Nairobi was responsible for many years for southern Sudan. As the southern Sudan conflict wound down, with the 2005 peace agreement, many of those aid professionals and their offices switched to Somalia. Many career staff members of donors enjoy being based in Nairobi, which is one of the more developed areas of Africa.
- 9** Extrapolating on data reported by Development Initiatives (2009).
- 10** Since the Ogaden war in the late 1970s, which first pulled NGOs and UN agencies in to assist some 700,000 refugees from Ethiopia.
- 11** Which the US has labelled a terrorist organisation.
- 12** Frequently, the Somali NGO only knows of the INGO as the source of funds, and cannot say where the INGO derived the funds.
- 13** In July 2009, ten gunmen kidnapped two French Government security consultants.
- 14** The presidency of Abdullahi Yusuf was characterised by abuse. The newer presidency is more conciliatory.
- 15** MSF uses the additional term 'shared management', which perhaps sounds more constructive than remote control. Oxfam refers to 'remote monitoring' of resources and partners.
- 16** Over the years, INGOs and the UN have increasingly partnered with local NGOs, creating a market for the creation of local NGOs.
- 17** NGOs and remittances pump funding into small women's groups. Sustainable Microfinance Institutions, or MFIs, are not common.
- 18** New inter-agency protocols for 'community-based management of acute malnutrition'.
- 19** Famously, Somalia was the location where smallpox was, finally, eradicated.
- 20** WFP's move in Somalia into therapeutic foods is noteworthy because these foods were primarily procured and moved by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) in other emergencies.
- 21** With the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops at the end of 2008, humanitarian groups have pulled back on the urgency of their calls for some sort of truth commission on Ethiopia's activities in Somalia, though not entirely.
- 22** In other words, the UN Resident Representative should not be 'dual-hatted', wear both hats or labels at once.
- 23** This is the conclusion and argument of Osman, A. (2007) in his paper "The Somali Internal War and the Role of Inequality, Economic Decline and access to Weapons."
- 24** The FSAU (2008) publishes gaps in knowledge, detailing how little is known about livelihood trends in Somalia: "There is a lack of data to better analyse trade flows and other macroeconomic indicators such as import-export, volume traded, remittance, cross-border trade flow, etc."

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