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Remote Programming Modalities in Somalia
Discussion Paper
Drafted by Oxfam International and Merlin *for*
NGO Consortium
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Context

Somalia is currently facing a devastating humanitarian crisis. The security and human rights situation has deteriorated continuously since December 2006.

- There are currently 3.25m million people are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance across Somalia – a 77% increase since January 2008.
- 1.3 million people are currently displaced - 870,000 of these have been forced to flee their homes due to violence and insecurity since the start of 2007.
- Somalia has the highest levels of malnutrition in the world - up to 300,000 children acutely malnourished annually.
- The crisis is *still* dramatically worsening due to a combination of three main factors – extreme and worsening insecurity, deepening drought and hyperinflation causing record-high food prices.

The crisis is compounded by extremely limited access to those in need. Insecurity, targeted assassinations, kidnappings, and threats against international and national staff of INGOs and LNGOs have reduced the ability of agencies to operate and are causing many agencies to modify their ways of working in order to adapt to the current context. This paper sets out some of the options in this regard.

Current programming modalities in Somalia

In the current context of Somalia (in particular South Central) where insecurity prevails in most areas, international actors are using different programming modalities, including distance management, remote partnerships and remote support, to continue their operations and assure a certain level of programme quality. The table below gives an overview of major modalities used by international agencies based in Nairobi and/or Hargeisa:[1]

Remote control	National staff	Verification by intense communication.
Remote support	National staff, Local authorities, and communities	Protocols and procedures, capacity building, short field visits by expatriate staff. Emphasis on reporting and increased national staff capacity.
Remote partnership	National NGOs	Partner capacity building, external monitors and evaluators, triangulation of M&E information, beneficiary feedback.

Remote Control:

There are two situations for which remote control is primarily used in Somalia; first, for one-off distributions of food, cash or NFIs, second, where international staff have had to suddenly evacuate, programmes continue using a remote control modality. Remote control may entail a temporary and partial delegation of authority and responsibility to national staff in the absence of international staff. It is assumed that lines of authority and decision-making will return to

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1 This overview is adapted from *Operational Modalities in Iraq*, by Greg Hansen, January 2008, accessible on: http://www.ncciraq.org/spip.php?rubrique316

normal once conditions have stabilized and international staff can return to the programme area. As conditions allow, international staff regularly visit programmes and stay as long as security allows.

Risks and challenges: Inflexibility, limited delegation of authority, increased local staff security risks, combined with the loss of access to adequate information about humanitarian needs and context, can eventually conspire to undermine the quality of programming decisions.

Remote support:
In this modality senior international managers have national counterparts (national staff, local or national authorities, community representatives) who receive additional mentoring, consistent with planning for eventual handover. In Somalia, the Transitional Federal Government and its ministries are the counterparts of UN organizations, while Merlin is working with Puntland's Ministry of Health. AAH-I is using this approach in its health program in Puntland – long-term engagement in the area has helped to build capacity of local national staff and establish trust with local communities. Capacity of national staff continues to be built through short external courses and exposure visits. International staff provide technical support through short-term field visits (whenever possible) and remote support through daily monitoring and support (by email and skype). The senior national staff are well respected and placed individuals in their own communities and this has helped to sustain good relations with the local communities. They have considerable decision-making autonomy.

Risks and challenges: This approach may be best suited for developmental programmes in order to develop capacity and relations over the long term. In the current highly polarised context of Somalia, working through specific institutions may pose specific risks, for example, working through the TFG may be seen as taking sides with a party in the conflict, which in turn may bring about increased security threats. However, working with localized administration where capacity does exist may be more workable e.g. for health service delivery, where facilities like hospitals and clinics are staffed and equipped.

Remote partnership:
This modality is based on an equal partnership approach with a near complete handover of day-to-day implementation responsibility to the national partner. Some NGOs adopt this as a preferred methodology in all circumstances, e.g. it is not necessarily the product of necessity. The INGO provides support through resource mobilization, capacity building (through technical advisers with a coaching/mentoring relationship to partner staff), advocacy and administrative backstopping, the operational partner focuses on context and operations. The INGO also maintains a financial and strategic oversight role from programme managers based in Nairobi or Hargeisa, in order to ensure a high level of partner capacity and due diligence and accountability to beneficiaries and donors.

Risks and challenges: In order not to pose security risks to partner staff, strong risk management is needed, including a conflict-sensitive approach. Funding is another challenge since donors are reluctant to accept remote partnership. Monitoring must be adapted to the operational realities. The number of sufficiently strong partners may be limited and it takes time to develop working relationships.

Discussion

All the above methodologies have pros and cons and can be applied in different forms – sometimes as a preferred way of working in order to build local capacity or empower local communities, sometimes as a last resort in conditions of extreme insecurity. Generally, the *remote control* modality is a temporary solution as distance management and communication can delay processes and create misunderstandings. In addition, national staff on the ground is not fully authorized to make the decisions that are needed to adapt humanitarian programming to the changing security situation and the changing needs of beneficiaries. This modality will need to be reviewed in light of the extended period of application in Somalia. The *remote support* modality (although still appropriate for Puntland) is often no longer possible in

large parts of Somalia due to the breakdown of counterpart institutions and risks associated but may be applied innovatively with local authorities or community groups.

Remote partnerships may become increasingly practised in Somalia as the absence of international staff becomes protracted. Somali civil society organisations are developing expertise in humanitarian aid delivery and have long-standing relationships with the communities and a conflict-sensitive approach adapted to the local situation which may allow the continuation of aid delivery. The main challenges for the INGO community and their national partners are: (1) to guarantee international programme quality standards; (2) to manage risks; and (3) to convince the donor community that these standards can be monitored and achieved.

Ideas for good practice in monitoring in remote partnerships

Focus on key standards and simple indicators:
Agencies should review their "normal" M&E frameworks and identify a limited set of indicators for basic standards that they would be accountable for monitoring - in difficult situations it may be impossible to do the "whole package", and a "good enough" approach should be encouraged rather than having staff paralyzed because they can't implement a gold standard in terms of monitoring. A few key indicators should be agreed that give basic quality assurance, adapted to the specific context, and be transparent with donors about this.

Develop reasonable log frames that represent a transparent discussion with donors on the challenges, rather than cutting and pasting log frames from other projects developed for other contexts. Pay special attention to the Means Of Verification column in the log frame, and be realistic and transparent about how the data will be gathered and checked.

Keep indicators clear and simply worded, with simplified collection mechanisms, as data is likely to be collected by partners, community members, or other third parties.

Partner capacity:
Make sure the partners' capacity to collect and document data was part of the capacity assessment from the beginning, and any capacity gaps are explicitly stated and addressed. For instance, it may not be possible to undertake remote partnership with partners who do not have at least basic capacity to collect monitoring data.

Monitoring:
When access is limited and/or only partial, the oversight agency should have a verification mechanism where staff will go to the field at key points in the programme implementation cycle to physically verify key or high-value outputs as a complement to partner reporting. This is activity level monitoring, it can also be carried out by a private company contracted for the purpose if agency staff cannot go due to security.

The *how* of gathering monitoring and verification information is as important as the *what* in remote programming situations. Agencies should think creatively using the principle of triangulation, e.g. if data from multiple sources points in the same direction or indicates the same trend we can be more confident in drawing conclusions regarding the quality of programme implementation. Also, it is important to maintain a relationship of trust with the implementing partner by being transparent from the beginning about why triangulation and punctual independent verification is needed. Triangulation of different sources of information seems to be the best way to establish the 'truth' of what is happening on the ground. Options for this, beyond traditional monitoring systems, include external Somali monitoring agencies/consultants and independent beneficiary feedback systems.

Creative possibilities for collecting monitoring data in the Somalia context involve use of mobile phones, digital cameras, and other ICT to speak directly with beneficiaries, the involvement of the Diaspora in monitoring, use of private companies to monitor technical/physical outputs, and the use of local media to gather and share information.