Somalia Accountability Programme

UKaid
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Engaging the Gatekeepers

Using informal governance resources in Mogadishu

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tana

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List of abbreviations

DC District Commissioner

IDP Internally Displaced Person

FGS Federal Government of Somalia

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

IAAAP Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme

UK United Kingdom

DFID Department for International Development

MGA Making Gatekeepers Accountable

OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

FGM Female Genital Mutilation

HRW Human Rights Watch

Summary

Gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient local-level governance structures in Mogadishu. Formal stakeholders, including government and the international community need to engage with them proactively if there is to be an improvement in IDPs' protection and livelihoods.

One of the most hotly contested issues in contemporary development policy is the discussion of whether bottom-up approaches to strengthening governance are more effective than top-down interventions. This has led some scholars suggesting the "hybrid political order" as an alternative, whereby formal and informal – or Western and traditional – power structures merge and create a more effective and more legitimate order than either can do on their own. However, practical experience of this hybrid approach has been limited.

In Somalia, important experience is emerging from a new intervention aimed at improving the accountability of gatekeepers in Mogadishu. These informal IDP settlement managers have established themselves as unavoidable actors involved in aid delivery to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Gatekeepers are an informal power structure who have stepped in to provide what the formal power structures – in this case the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) – have not been able to provide in terms of protection and services. However, they fundamentally lack accountability, both upwards to the government and downwards to the IDPs, and have, therefore, been considered impossible to engage with without compromising the authority of the state and the security of the IDPs.

This assessment is now being challenged through the DFID-funded project "Making Gatekeepers Accountable", designed and currently being implemented by Tana Copenhagen – Tana. The project aims to improve the accountability of gatekeepers, and thereby increase the protection of IDPs, through training of selected gatekeepers, increased transparency, and a formal certification process recognising settlements (and gatekeepers) that are making efforts to recognise and adhere to the rights and protection needs of IDPs in their settlements. So far, the project has proved to be a success albeit with some challenges and dilemmas.

By working to create change with this entrenched but informal and unrecognised system in Mogadishu, the project team believes that the prospects of engaging with informal power structures to improve governance are positive. Experience so far indicates that creating real change through an engagement with local power structures is possible, but not an easy or fast exercise. Such engagement must be based on a thorough understanding of the specific political economy, on realistic expectations, and on a pragmatic approach- all of which should be reflected in the project design. Changing and formalising informal power structures cannot be pursued without full acceptance and buy-in from the formal power structures – the goal is a truly hybrid order in which both parts are convinced, hard as it is, that they can coexist and in fact complement each other.

Gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient local-level governance structures in Mogadishu. There are no signs that their presence will diminish, and so formal stakeholders, including the FGS and the international community, will need to come to terms and engage with them proactively if there is to be an improvement in IDPs' protection and livelihoods. Such an engagement requires actors who are risk-willing and have the courage to challenge their own perceptions, which are often the biggest obstacles to change. In this regard, the paper will be of value.

Picture 1: The signboard showing the Gatekeepers' commitments, displayed in an IDP settlement.

Introduction

Picture 2: A settlement visit in June 2016.

Since the collapse of the Somalia state in 1991, there have been numerous discussions around how to assist and protect the huge number of IDPs in the country – a number that is presently estimated to be 1.1 million. Of these, a recent survey indicates that 80,657 households and 464,486 individuals reside in 486 settlements in the 17 districts of Mogadishu. Around 85% of these people are internally displaced and the settlements in which they reside do not have any official status (UNHCR & FGS, 2016).

Common to all humanitarian efforts in and around Mogadishu has been a need to relate to the managers of these informal settlements, the so-called 'gatekeepers'. It is estimated that there are roughly 130-140 gatekeepers in Mogadishu, with each Gatekeeper potentially managing one or more settlements.[1] They emerged as humanitarian conditions worsened during the 1990s, and especially following the devastating famine in 2011/12 when huge numbers of people from all over the country fled to Mogadishu in pursuit of food and protection. This resulted in a huge rise in the number of new displacements that remain unsolved, even though the security in Somalia has since improved.[2]

Gatekeepers act as middle-men (or women) between IDPs and NGOs. On the one hand, they offer the IDPs a plot of land in a settlement on which to live – and in some cases also very basic services such as latrines and access to water trucks – in exchange for payment in either cash or kind. On the other hand, they regulate and restrict NGOs' ability to provide humanitarian relief and the IDPs' freedom of movement. They do this through exercising control over access to and from the settlements, often in concert with local militia, and in some cases also through exercising control over the IDPs' food ration cards.

As described below, the gatekeepers' ability to regulate aid flows is one way they maintain their position. Gatekeepers are therefore quite ambiguous characters within the governance landscape of Somalia. Although they provide IDPs with a level of service and security that the FGS has not been able to match, they do so in an opaque, and in some cases exploitive, way. For this reason, gatekeepers are referred to by some Somalis as mukulel mathow ("black cats"), which, according to Somali mythology, is something to be feared.

Regardless of the negative perception that many people have of gatekeepers, they have proven to be a remarkably resilient governance structure in Somali society. IDPs both fear and respect gatekeepers, recognising them as legitimate service providers who often have been the IDPs' only source of assistance during difficult times. This perception is not shared with anyone else. As gatekeepers are not part of any official governance structure in Somalia, they are seen as the private sector, stepping in to provide what should be public goods. While the FGS, NGOs, and the international community are fully aware of the gatekeepers' existence, very few steps have been taken to interact with them. In the humanitarian community around Mogadishu, gatekeepers have become the elephant in the room. Other development actors see, and are forced to interact with them to provide aid for IDPs –but few, if any, admit that they do so.

In the humanitarian community around Mogadishu, gatekeepers have become the elephant in the room. Everyone sees, and is forced to interact, with them to provide aid – but few, if any, admit that they engage with them.

Situating the gatekeepers

Given how extensively gatekeepers have managed to regulate the lives of the IDPs and the aid flows around them, knowledge of and interest in how they operate is surprisingly low. Two of the most comprehensively research sources on gatekeepers were published in 2013:

- Gatekeepers in Mogadishu. A research study commissioned by The Somalia Cash Consortium and conducted by Tana Copenhagen and iDC Kenya in 2012.

- Hostage of the Gatekeepers by Human Rights Watch.

Aid organisations use the term 'gatekeeper' generically to refer to various levels of power structures and actors around IDPs in Mogadishu (Tana & iDC, 2013). For the sake of clarity and consistency, the term is only used here to refer to the overall IDP settlement leader to whom others within the settlement report to.

Since 2013, a hierarchy has developed among the gatekeepers reflecting their status in the network of IDP settlements. These are usually organised in a so-called umbrella, typically consisting of 5-8 settlements, with an appointed umbrella leader. Several umbrellas (usually 3-10) form a centre (Fig.1).

As such, a gatekeeper can be a leader of a settlement, an umbrella or a centre. In some cases they can be both the leader of a settlement and an umbrella or a centre. People usually become gatekeepers in one of three ways (Tana & iDC 2013: 13):

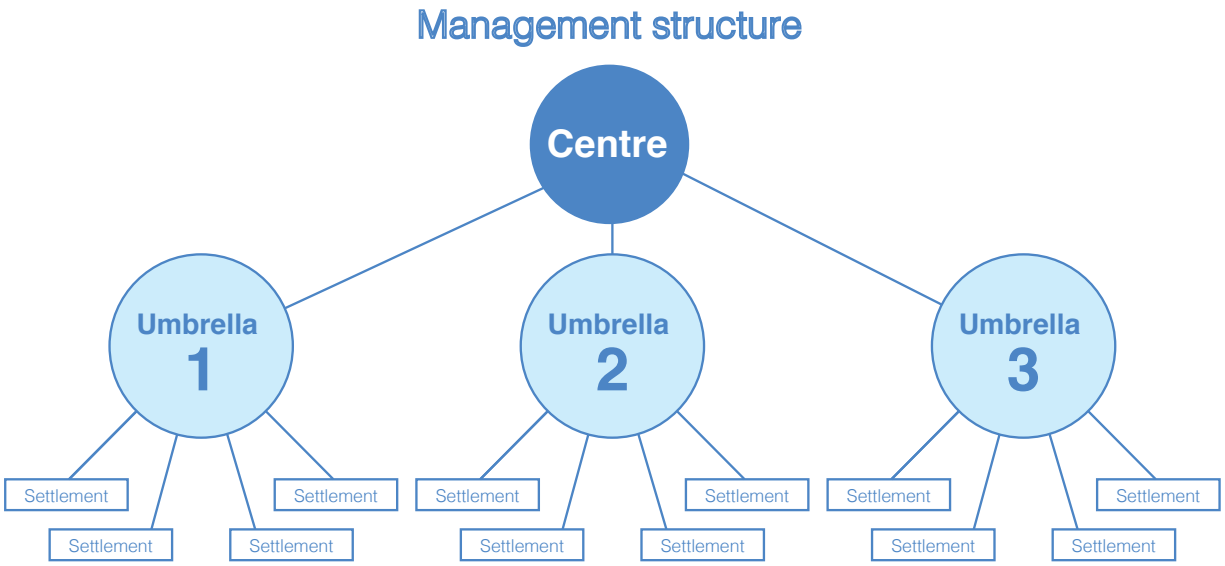
- Inhabitants of Mogadishu who, on a speculative basis, search for and identify an empty plot of land and through connections attract IDPs to settle.

- Existing land owners who (as above) set up sites to attract IDPs and aid.

- Individuals who are appointed to run the daily affairs of a site by the local leaders/officials of the area, most often the District Commissioner (DC), where the site is located. These are often drawn from the local community, but occasionally, in the older sites, they are also IDPs themselves.

The ability of gatekeepers to provide services to the IDPs is how they maintain their position.

Figure 1: The management structure of IDP settlements.



In the last two scenarios, the gatekeepers are often local inhabitants who belong to the dominant clan of that area. When asked about how they came to hold the position they do, almost 45% of the gatekeepers responded that they are self-appointed. A perception that many IDPs also share (40 %). Above all, the ability of gatekeepers to provide services to the IDPs is how they maintain their position.

These services can be divided into three clusters:

- Land
- Security
- Other services

In Mogadishu, land is a scarce resource. Home to the large proportion of the country's estimated 1.1 million IDPs, the situation around land ownership in Mogadishu is chaotic, and IDPs are often subject to the FGS' arbitrary evictions.[3] This is the primary reason that IDPs turn to gatekeepers who provide them with a plot of land in a settlement where they can live with their household. As IDPs are the most vulnerable group in the population, the grave security situation in Mogadishu makes protection another big concern for the IDPs. The gatekeepers' settlements are often fenced in and the gatekeeper affiliated with local militia who serve a dual purpose: providing security for the inhabitants of the settlements, but also enforcing the gatekeeper's rule and settlement norms. The threat of violence to maintain order is very real, though, not explicitly articulated.

Gatekeepers provide land, security, and a range of other services, including: aid distribution, conflict mediation, funeral arrangements, emergency assistance and, in some cases, crowd-funding facilities.

Above all, however, gatekeepers see themselves as service providers.[4] Not only of land and security, but also of a range of other services, including: distributing aid; mediating conflict between the settlement's inhabitants; arranging funerals; assisting in emergency situations such as illness or births; and, in some cases, also facilitating crowd-funding of new facilities such as latrines, fencing etc.

IDPs pay for all these services in either cash or kind and, as such, gatekeepers can be compared to commercial settlement managers. However, unlike commercial settlement managers, they fundamentally lack any formalised accountability or transparency about payments received, and often also respect for human rights.

HRW's report *Hostage of the Gatekeepers* documents a horrifying range of human rights abuses against IDPs in Mogadishu including "rape beatings, ethnic discrimination, restricted access to food and shelter, restrictions of movement, and reprisals when [the IDPs] dared to protest their mistreatment" (HRW 2013: 3). Contrary to the suggestion implicit in the report's title, these abuses were not committed by the gatekeepers themselves but by militias and security forces that, in some cases, were affiliated with the Government, and in other cases, with the gatekeepers. As such, they cannot be blamed wholly on the gatekeepers alone. The title *Hostage of the Gatekeepers* is a quote from an interview with a Somali woman, who explains that her gatekeeper does not allow her household to move – a rule that is not unheard of, but is not enforced by all gatekeepers either – and she therefore considers herself a "hostage" in her settlement (HRW 2013: 5).

Although IDP settlements are often the scene of human rights abuses, this is not necessarily a product of the gatekeeper system, but a product of a collapsed state where the rule of law has broken down, and where few perpetrators are ever held to account. By the same token, gatekeepers should not solely be perceived as greedy or exploitative; they reflect a state – and aid community – that is not able to provide citizens with the most basic of services.

Gatekeepers should not solely be perceived as greedy or exploitative; they reflect a state – and aid community – that is not able to provide citizens with the most basic of services.

Gatekeepers also reflect an expression of the underlying power structures of Somali society, in which the clan is the most salient source of identity, and where a democratically accountable state has not existed for decades. The complex political economy surrounding the gatekeepers explains why they have proven to be such a resilient power structure, and that – despite being shunned by NGOs, the international community and the FGS – they remain unavoidable power brokers in relation to protection and assistance of IDPs in Mogadishu.

Black cats or service providers?

As described, the relationship between IDPs and gatekeepers is based on an exchange of services and goods, although the goods the IDPs provide to the gatekeepers in exchange for services are less openly discussed. One of the driving factors of the expansion of the gatekeeper system during the famine was that dollars were part of aid delivery. The serious security situation in Mogadishu at the time made traditional aid delivery almost impossible. Instead, aid organisations chose to hand out cash for which the IDPs could buy food. While cash helped support local market systems, it also created a market for the gatekeepers. Some gatekeepers did it completely openly with signboards stating the prices, while others denied it (Tana & iDC 2013: 36).

As the security in Mogadishu improved following the expulsion of Al-Shabaab, aid agencies switched back to the provision of food rather than cash, not least to lower the risk of corruption. One result of this is that the gatekeepers are now "taxing" the foods being delivered to the IDPs through agreeing with the IDPs on a percentage of their food rations they hand over to the gatekeepers (usually around 10% of food rations, according to the latest action research from Tana). The gatekeepers then either consume these foods themselves or sell them. Moreover, some Gatekeepers require IDPs to deposit the food ration cards used by aid agencies to manage food delivery with them, perpetuating their control over food distribution (HRW 2013: 43 – 48). With enforcement from local militia, the gatekeepers are then effectively controlling the flow of aid to and from the settlements.

Due to the scarcity of land in Mogadishu, the individual gatekeeper is rarely the owner of the land on which (s) he provides shelter for IDPs. In most cases, they rent the land from landowners using part of the payments they receive from IDPs. In this sense, gatekeepers can be considered similar to a commercial trader.

Gatekeepers have managed to establish a highly-sophisticated system, which is not only maintained through the explicit and implicit threat of violence and suppression, but also through non-violent means such as the control of aid flows and provision of services. Interestingly, a lot of IDPs generally have a positive view of their gatekeepers and highlight all the services that gatekeepers provide for them.

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Nonetheless, in the situation of insecurity in which the IDPs find themselves and with local militia backing gatekeepers, the threat of violence remains, and – just as with the modern state – gatekeepers operate a regime of both violent and non-violent means to maintain order.

This situation, however, is not uniform. There are just as many profiles of gatekeepers as there are gatekeepers. Although the term is used generically, it covers a wide range of persons. At one end of the spectrum are those who are IDPs elected as leader by other IDPs, and who, therefore, care deeply about the wellbeing of the inhabitants of their settlement. At the other end is the speculative gatekeeper whose motivation to make money conditions their considerations of IDP wellbeing and human rights.

The reason that gatekeepers are often regarded as controversial is not that they provide services in the absence of the state, but rather because of their lack of accountability to, and transparency with, the FGS and to IDPs.

The main problem is gatekeeper's lack of accountability to, and transparency with, the FGS and IDPs.

Gatekeepers also present a threat to established local authorities, particularly in locations where a significant proportion of the inhabitants are IDPs (up to 50 %). Gatekeepers enjoy greater legitimacy than local authorities because of the service they are able to provide, undermining the authority of local authorities.

Making gatekeepers accountable

The Making Gatekeepers Accountable (MGA) project is implemented under the Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP), a DFID-funded programme aiming to identify drivers of accountability in Somalia. Tana piloted the project in Mogadishu in 2015.

MGA's point of departure is the need for increased protection of IDPs and an understanding that this should not be pursued in parallel to existing governance structures in the IDP settlements. MGA suggests using the existing management structures of the gatekeeper system with a view to enhancing the accountability of the Gatekeepers towards the IDPs. It builds on the assumption that enhanced accountability will lead to improved protection of IDPs and enhanced transparency in the delivery of aid to IDPs in Mogadishu. There was no expectation that the project would be a quick fix for the accountability of gatekeepers. It aims to influence the gatekeepers gradually through small interventions that, over time, will improve IDP protection.

The project's interventions have included:

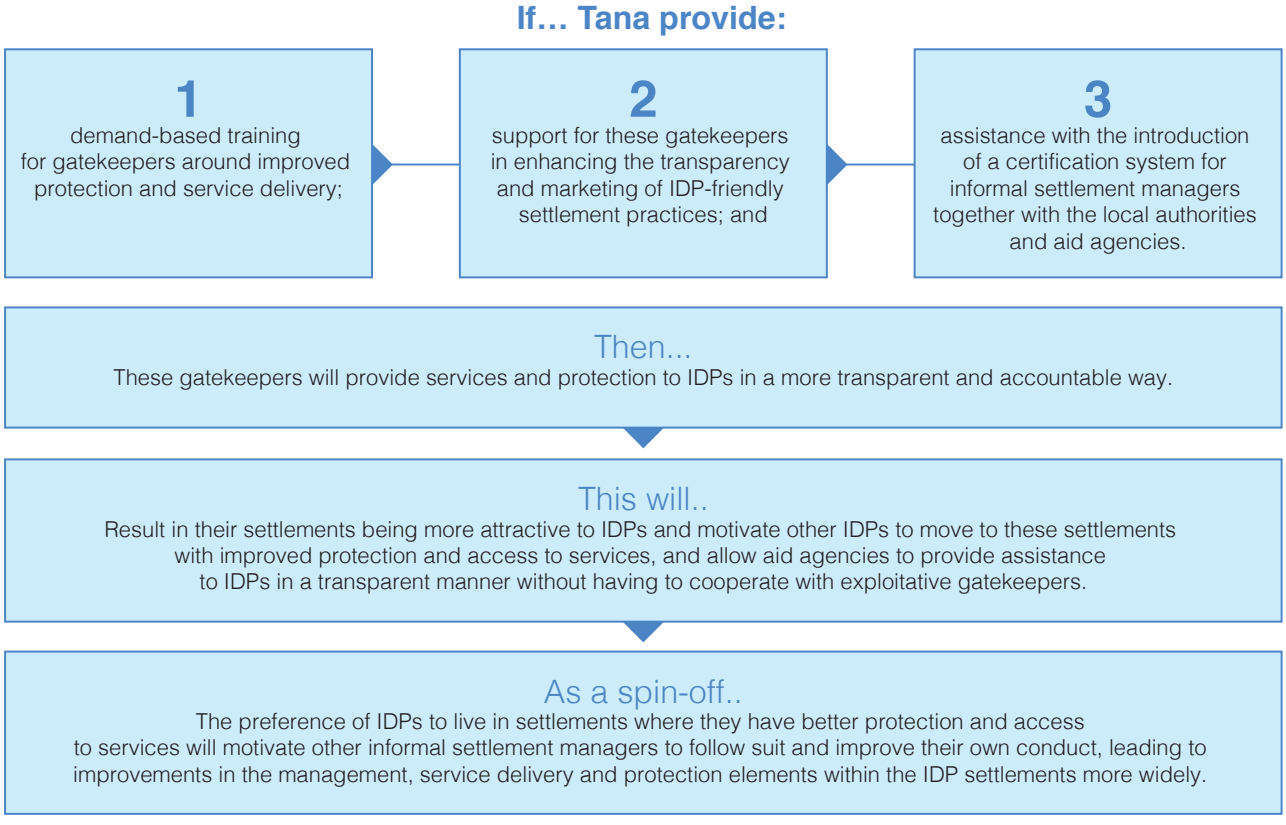
1) Providing selected gatekeepers with training and mechanisms for effective camp management, protection and service delivery to IDPs.

2) Enhancing the transparency of the gatekeepers' IDP taxation (rent), service delivery and protection levels in different camps, with the aim of promoting the most attractive camps to IDPs and aid agencies.

3) Testing a more formalised recognition process of gatekeepers with the local authorities and possibly international humanitarian agencies, involving the formalised certification of informal camp managers.

These interventions are informed by a feasibility study carried out in Mogadishu, which showed that gatekeepers were surprisingly interested in training, just as the Government was interested in being engaged in such a project. The MGA project rests on the assumption that gatekeepers are motivated and willing to participate – an assumption that has held true within the confines of the pilot project but, as we will discuss later, might be less realistic on a broader scale.

Figure 2: MGA's theory of change



In this way, the project addresses different levels of accountability (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Levels of accountability the MGA project addresses

Actors who need to enhance their accountability	Change in accountability expected (tested)	Actor to whom accountability is enhanced
Information settlement manager	Enhanced adherence to IDP needs and protection	IDPs
Informal settlement manager	Enhanced adherence to local government regulations and requirements	Local government
Local government	Enhanced demonstration of ability to govern jurisdiction	Somali citizens
Aid agencies	Transparency in aid delivery and increased adherence to humanitarian principals in aid delivery	IDPs
Aid agencies	Aid delivered according to humanitarian commitments	Somali citizens, taxpayers, and other concerned citizens (electorate)

Aside from the primary assumption that gatekeepers are interested in participating in the project, the wider effects of the project were informed by several secondary assumptions:

- IDPs have the ability (and willingness) to move between settlements in Mogadishu to seek the best opportunities;
- Local governments can see the benefits of participating in the exercise to increase oversight of the settlements in their jurisdiction; and
- Aid agencies and, in particular, NGOs can see the benefits of participating in the exercise to work with settlement managers who promote protection, improving their ability to deliver in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Gatekeepers participating in the pilot were those who aid providers considered less exploitative and easier to engage with.

The pilot phase involved a group of three gatekeepers, with the intention that, if considered successful, it would be rolled out to a larger group of seven. It should be stressed, however, that participating gatekeepers were those who aid providers already considered to be less exploitative and easier to engage with. To say the MGA project approached the easier side of the gatekeeper spectrum, where the interventions would have less of an impact on behaviour than with those who run settlements with greater issues of accountability and human rights abuses, is a valid one – the consequences of which are discussed below. However, full buy-in from participating gatekeepers in the project was considered an important aspect of ensuring their behaviour would benefit the IDPs. The participating gatekeepers who participated in the training were offered no kind of reimbursement for their participation.

In the first part of the intervention, the gatekeepers exchanged knowledge and experiences, discussed challenges in their settlement, received an introduction to OCHA's humanitarian principles, and were asked to rank their own skills in different areas. Throughout, the gatekeepers were asked to reflect on the needs of the IDPs, keeping in mind how they could best assist them. They were also asked to perform a short, improvised role play, which they set up themselves based on their own ideas about challenges in their camps – a task which they undertook with great enthusiasm. Afterwards, the participating gatekeepers were asked to summarise the most important lessons from the role-play.

To improve the gatekeepers' understanding of transparency, in the second part of the intervention, the gatekeepers developed five commitments for their own settlements based on their reflections from the training. For the pilot phase these were:

1. No harming of IDPs
2. No child marriage
3. No female genital mutilation (FGM)
4. No gender-based violence
5. Engaging with the IDPs in the management of the settlement

Picture 3: The gatekeepers developing their five

The five commitments were transferred to large signboards erected at the settlements, both as text and drawings – the latter catering to Somalia's very large share of non-literate people. Visualising the commitments is intended to provide a basis for the inhabitants of the settlements to understand the commitments made by the gatekeeper so they can hold their gatekeeper to account. It also serves to advertise the commitments to other IDPs, motivating them to join the "better performing and more accountable" settlement, and creating a market for accountability by the IDPs 'voting with their feet'.

Picture 4: The gatekeepers discussing sketches for the signboards.

The third part of the intervention – the formalised recognition process of the gatekeepers – was aimed at creating a fully transparent and scalable grading of the settlements, which could also be advertised like the commitments of the settlements. This intervention follows the same market logic as the commitments. However, unlike the signboards, the creation of an official grading system is a broader operation that needs buy-in from both the government and NGOs, who would need to commit themselves to (officially) engaging with the gatekeepers in order to recognise them. This part of the intervention was the most difficult.

Key findings from the pilot and action research

"No one has ever shown interest in us."
Gatekeeper

The pilot found that the assumption that gatekeepers are interested in participating in training and in making change held true:

The participating gatekeepers explained that they had never had a chance to participate in such training before. While the issues of human rights, gender equality and OCHA's humanitarian principles were news to the gatekeepers, they could easily see their relevance. The awareness of such principles apparently made it easier for the gatekeepers to argue against issues such as child labour and gender-based violence in their settlements. Interestingly, the gatekeepers themselves added an extra issue to the programme which was not initially included, but was of great concern to themselves: female genital mutilation (FGM). This was included as one of their formal commitments and, on their own initiative, the gatekeepers arranged various awareness-raising events in their settlements where an imam informed IDPs about how the more brutal form of the practice is against the teachings of Islam. According to interviews in one of the settlements, six people out of seven disapproved of FGM, with younger respondents speaking out most against the practice.

The formal training seems to have been both relevant and successful. Post-pilot research highlighted the positive effect of these events, with participants of a focus group interview with IDPs from each of the three pilot settlements explained how the negative perception of FGM is now more widespread.

The post-pilot research also found that the training on accountability has affected gatekeepers' behaviour, who have since made efforts to liaise between themselves, the IDPs, settlement committees, and DCs.

"My gatekeeper listens to our complaints and works with the community of elders and committee members."
Female, 43 Gatekeeper

"My gatekeeper has changed a lot recently. She organises meetings and discussions on many issues."
Male, 65

Findings from the pilot project indicate that the market dynamic intended at driving wider change beyond the pilot settlements seems to be stuck. This is due to two factors:

i. IDPs in less accountable and more precarious settlements are not free to leave. One informant in the NGO community said that IDPs can only swap between settlements if an agreement is made between the two gatekeepers, and that it would usually involve a cost for the IDPs to "buy themselves free".

ii. Moving between settlements involves surprisingly high transaction costs for the IDPs, and so very few consider it as an option. The IDPs in the pilot settlements – where the IDPs consider themselves free to leave – explained that they had heard about people moving camps, but that this was usually due to severe conflicts with other inhabitants.

"You know, we have no government, so we are the government."
Gatekeeper

The gatekeepers' urge for formal recognition has emerged as another driver of change. The participating gatekeepers spoke at length about how all their good efforts for the IDPs were not recognised by anyone. The training was therefore considered an acknowledgement of their function as legitimate service providers.

The appearance of a District Commissioner at the training added to the gatekeepers' perception of recognition. One of the participating gatekeepers noted this as the single biggest achievement of the training.

"I have never seen the DC of my district before. Now he knows who we are."
Gatekeeper

"This has been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."
Gatekeeper

The emergence of this driver of change led to the erection of the signboard as a public event, at which the DC and local media were present. In the pilot settlements, the gatekeepers were transformed from "black cats" to recognised service providers.

Another central finding highlighted that gatekeepers see deal making as their main purpose. They know that their position is dependent on their ability to set-up deals with NGOs in order to service their camps, as this is the most critical aspect against which IDPs will evaluate them. When asked about what they would do differently if they were gatekeepers themselves, one IDP responded that all IDPs probably thought they could perform better by setting up more deals with NGOs (and added that few of them probably could), just as the gatekeepers mentioned that the training could be improved by introducing them to NGOs in the same way they were introduced to the DC. This would provide an added incentive for the gatekeepers running their settlements in a transparent and accountable way. However, it would require the NGOs' willingness to openly engage with gatekeepers and acknowledge them as legitimate service providers.

The biggest challenge for the project has been developing the formal recognition process of the settlements.

Developing the formal recognition process of the settlements has been the biggest challenge for the pilot project. It quickly emerged that no formal approval process of the settlements could be initiated without buy-in from the local authorities, which is difficult to obtain. Within the FGS, it appears that there are strong supporters of the idea, but equally strong forces working against it.

A primary concern of the FGS is the 'illegal' settlements on valuable FGS-owned land in Mogadishu. Certification may make these settlements more permanent and give legitimacy to what is considered to be a predatory system. In the long-term, this creates issues of access for FGS as the administration grows and, in the shorter term, complicates economic opportunities for FGS land.

Furthermore, there are concerns that legitimisation would counter FGS efforts in returning IDPs to their place of origin. This illustrates the limited influence of IDPs in the political sphere in Mogadishu. While some IDPs occupy public land, they are all Somali citizens that the FGS should serve (as any other Somali citizens), and IDPs living on private land that is 'rented' to them by Gatekeepers are therefore considered legal residents of Mogadishu.

There is an increased focus on settlement monitoring committees for the pilot group of gatekeepers.

The difficulties experienced in pursuing certification mean that the project has had to change its course as it is too early at this stage to be a successful option. The project is focusing on other means of enhancing accountabilities instead, such as an increased focus on settlement monitoring committees in the pilot group of gatekeepers.

The concept of a committee is not alien to the IDPs or to the gatekeepers, as settlements already have so-called 'settlement committees'. Unlike the existing settlement committees, however, the monitoring committee is not grounded in one single settlement. Instead, settlement monitoring committees oversee developments in several settlements to increase the engagement of local government so that the committee has a greater stake in the system. In this way, the monitoring committee would be chaired by a DC and include representation from IDPs, clan leadership and gatekeepers. As such, it can be seen as a gradual step towards improved accountability, which allows for testing accountability mechanisms between the different stakeholders in the power structure. As part of the monitoring committee's function, it will visit the targeted settlements bi-annually to assess progress on a range of different parameters. The results will be gathered in a monitoring sheet and posted outside of the settlement. The monitoring committees are an important step towards establishing trust and mutual recognition between the local authorities and gatekeepers. Involving the DC as Chair of the committee acknowledges their privileged position in relation to the gatekeepers, and also puts them in charge of leading change. This is an important step in the longer aim of providing formal certification for the gatekeepers.

Gatekeepers as an under-utilised resource of governance?

Despite their poor reputation and lack of formal recognition, gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient informal local-level governance structures in Mogadishu.

Despite their poor reputation and lack of formal recognition, gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient informal local-level governance structures in Mogadishu.

They have survived and thrived through government changes, forced IDP movements within Mogadishu and hostile attitudes from national and international agencies. There is little evidence that the gatekeeper phenomenon will go away within the short- or medium-term, and so it is a reality that the formal government (and the international community) must come to terms with and react to proactively.

Based on findings so far, it is evident that there are gatekeepers that do provide vital services to the IDPs, and are willing to enhance their accountability to the formal government structures in return for recognition of their work. The gatekeepers involved in the pilot project have been the individuals who have a documented interest in improving the conditions for IDPs in their settlements and shown a willingness to change. For them, the formalisation process sustains their role and acceptance among the IDPs, and provides them with a sustainable income base. The question remains whether this approach is also viable with the less constructive gatekeepers, who have little interest in the well-being of the IDPs and exploits their situation. In principle, however, these gatekeepers could be targeted from two sides: either through direct engagement, or indirectly by changing the market around them through increased enrolment of "good" gatekeepers in the project. The most effective approach remains to be seen.

The Tana project team will follow-up to test the assumption that improved recognition of the constructive gatekeepers and a continued approach aimed at enhancing gatekeepers' accountability to the local government structures will motivate those gatekeepers who are less positively motivated to change. Such change would not only improve the conditions in the IDP settlements by enhancing service delivery and security, but would also contribute to strengthening the formal local government structures in Mogadishu and assist with enhancing their legitimacy as well.

For this change to happen, the project team will need to work more extensively on changing the attitude of the FGS and the international community towards gatekeepers, to allow for strategic interaction and dialogue, rather than the current rejection of their role in Mogadishu society.

More work on changing the attitude of the FGS and the international community towards gatekeepers is needed for improved strategic interaction and dialogue

Long-term engagement with gatekeepers, in which their formal endorsement plays a key role, presents the possibility of creating real change for IDPs that the FGS are not able to deliver any time soon. As the challenges with the certification process show, there are still many actors who refrain from engaging or even addressing the issue of gatekeepers, leaving IDPs vulnerable to unaccountable gatekeepers and less protection.

Lessons learned

Making Gatekeepers Accountable aimed to improve the protection of IDPs through enhancing the accountability of existing governance structures. More broadly it tested the viability of improving governance through endorsing a hybrid political order that merges formal and informal power structures. The experiences of the project so far, show that it is possible to find proactive means to find entry points into a predatory system and transform elements of it that can be used positively to enhance governance and accountability at local level.

Factors which have determined the success of the MGA project so far:

- A thorough political economy analysis that identified appropriate entry points, including informal power structures.
- A project design that recognises and works with existing power structures, rather than introducing external formalised systems, to motivate (slow) change.
- An adaptive approach that allows for a re-think of the theory of change based on a change in context and new evidence emerging.
- Formal and informal authorities seeing a role for themselves and the benefits of their participation.

The MGA project adapted to the realities on the ground and to emerging evidence and have started enhancing accountability of the gatekeepers to the local authorities. At the start of the project, the gatekeepers did not have clear lines of accountability to any authority, except for the (important) financial linkages with landlords and within their own gatekeeper umbrella organisation, which were neither formalised nor transparent.

Power dynamics are starting to shift because of the pilot. Gatekeepers are more open to outside scrutiny and approval of their actions. By agreeing to have the DC chair the monitoring committees and including IDPs in the monitoring sessions gatekeepers are moving in the right direction of improved upward accountability that will, in turn, improve downward accountability.

The formal governance system is examining the behaviour of the gatekeepers for the first time, and, in having them chair the monitoring committees, the gatekeepers have agreed to the hierarchy of authority the DC represents.

The new interactions created through the pilot mean that:

1) formal authority can now be extended to gatekeepers, introducing a level of accountability that did not exist in the past;

2) gatekeepers are willing to trade power for legitimacy, confirming the adapted project theory of change;

3) there is an opportunity to add activities to extend the accountability process further, continuing to entice the gatekeepers into a 'web of accountability.'

These changes relied on the acceptance of existing informal power structures, working with the gatekeepers rather than around them. Gatekeepers consider themselves dealmakers, realising that their position is crucially dependent on their ability to successfully set up deals with NGOs for the benefit of the IDPs. Formalising such deals is a way of enhancing the accountability and transparency of the system – but the aid community's willingness to recognise the gatekeepers is a pre-requisite, potentially placing themselves in a more exposed position in view of the poor reputation of the gatekeeper system and the mixed values of the gatekeepers concerned.

The biggest challenge to long-term prospects for improving arrangements involving informal IDP settlements for the benefit of inhabitants remains the negative perceptions of gatekeepers held by the international community, NGOs and the FGS. Willingness from them to recognise and engage with gatekeepers is needed for longer term aims to be successful.

References

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Tana and iDC. (2013). Gatekeepers in Mogadishu. Research consultancy. Copenhagen: Tana Copenhagen.

UNHCR, FGS; et al. (2016). Internal displacement profiling of Mogadishu. Somalia: UNHCR/FGS.

Endnotes

[1] Tana project team estimate.

[2] There has been a gradual increase in the number of returnees making their way back to their villages/ regions of origin, but many are still constrained by the lack of livelihood options after losing their assets (crops, seeds and livestock) to the famine.

[3] For decades, when there was no functional government in Mogadishu, many IDPs resided in government buildings and on public land. With the set up of the FGS in 2012, a wave of reconstruction started in the city and many IDPs were forcefully evicted from the buildings without being provided agreeable alternative locations. These have in most cases found space in new IDP settlements established by gatekeepers.\

[4] Interestingly, the Gatekeepers themselves dislike the term and instead prefer the title 'informal settlement managers' which Tana has since used throughout the programme. Similarly, the title of the project has been changed to Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS).

Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP) is a four-year UK Aid-funded programme aiming to generate and promote a robust evidence base that will inform, influence and support a broad range of Somali and international actors to hold government more accountable.

MOTT MACDONALD

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