

December 2019

EASTERN SOMALILAND GENDER & PROTECTION BRIEFING NOTE

The intense and persistent drought which began in 2016 has devastated Somaliland and wiped out millions of livestock, the key to rural livelihoods. Erratic rains and abnormally hot and dry conditions in the first half of 2019 further exacerbated the drought crisis, and over 594,000 people have been displaced since 2017. Recovery remains elusive, as drought conditions continue and people lack the resources needed to rebuild livelihoods. Existing gender inequalities increase women's and girls' vulnerabilities when a crisis hits, and are exacerbated in the emergency. Protracted displacement and recurring clan-based conflicts amplify protection risks, as competition for resources increases. This briefing note is a synthesis of two research pieces: a protection assessment and a rapid gender assessment, both completed in 2019.

PRIMARY PROTECTION RISKS

Rape

Rape was mentioned as an issue affecting women and girls in all the communities. Women felt vulnerable at water points, open defecation areas, livestock grazing areas, homes (lack of safe shelter and lighting), areas where they collect firewood, and the roads to market. Perpetrators are men both from within and outside the community. Working and moving around either in groups or accompanied by a male relative, sleeping in groups, not going to open defecation areas after dark, elderly women collecting water or looking for missing livestock are some of the coping mechanisms. Many respondents told researchers that there is no confidentiality when there are GBV cases in the community, the police are unable to protect women from GBV and that the informal court system imposes small fines on perpetrators who are then released back into the community, whilst the formal systems are inaccessible due to distance and cost.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence was reported in most locations and was attributed to economic stress linked to the drought. Men felt disempowered, having lost their traditional roles, which led to an increase in domestic disputes over control and use of resources within the household. Qat use was reported as often leading to domestic violence.

Forced and Early Marriage

Being "asked" to marry by their family was a major fear raised by girls interviewed. A trend found in the analyses is that early marriage increases in droughts as a means of income, whilst it decreases in conflict due to a feeling of instability in the community. The age varied considerably across locations and respondents.



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Farhiya and her daughter are collecting firewood. Women and girls are usually responsible for the collection of water and firewood.

Harmful practice of female genital mutilation (FGM)

There is a mixed picture regarding how the drought has affected female genital mutilation rates. FGM was mentioned as a practice in all communities. There does not appear to have an increase, in some communities it has stayed the same and in others it has decreased, or girls are sent for the less severe and more hygienic form of FGM in a clinic. In some areas there has been a decrease as people cannot afford the associated cost, however several respondents mentioned that this spending is prioritized over food. In other areas, FGM rates have stayed the same. Women said they sacrifice other things to be able to pay for the practice, but less nutritious food is given to the girls in recovery.

Revenge killings of men and killings related to clan conflicts

The threat of conflict, violence and insecurity has significant impacts on men's daily activities and life and there are some instances where women are also directly affected. In some locations armed groups limit freedom of movement, and 30-60% of respondents in all villages said they had felt or feared insecurity in the previous three months. Often men can't even go to the other side of the village for fear of revenge killings and several groups mentioned livestock grazing as being a dangerous activity, as well as travelling outside villages. Men stay away from homes at night, either sleeping in hiding, staying awake in shifts, or sleeping outside and posting guards. Many men carry guns for their protection, travel in groups, use torches and keep in touch to warn each other of issues.

One respondent told a story of a woman whose husband and brother were from opposing clans. Both were killed in the conflict, and she doesn't feel safe staying with either side as she is suspected of spying. She feared for the safety of her three-year-old son if she took him to her brother's funeral, due to his clan identity.

Evictions and IDP and host community conflicts

The fear or threat of evictions was reported to be affecting three locations targeted for the analysis, where land owners or host community clans do not want IDPs to stay. One effect of this has been that the local authorities and landowners in these locations have refused to allow any permanent infrastructure, including latrines, to be

put on the land. This means that insecurity and risks linked to shelter and sanitation will be perpetuated either until this policy is changed or until the IDPs are moved.

Relationships between IDP and host communities were often reported as either bad or very bad, with resource conflict the principal cause. Some village committees have as a result begun to allocate specific areas of land to new IDPs to solve these problems and to resolve conflict. In some areas resource conflicts exacerbate previous clan-based conflicts.

Other risks

There are a number of other risks which were also reported, such as children falling into wells and drowning and animal attacks especially on children. People, mainly women are at risk of conflict, verbal and physical abuse due to not being able to repay debt taken on to cover household expenses.

VULNERABILITY TO THREATS

All categories of people are vulnerable to different threats in the areas targeted by this analysis. Women and girls are vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence, to domestic violence, to forced and early marriage, and to FGM. Men and boys are vulnerable to conflict and to revenge killings, especially in areas which were prone to conflict and violence and in places where there are more than one clan in a village. Minority clans were reported to be among the most vulnerable, related to their ability to access assistance, as they can be excluded and discriminated against. People with disabilities were also vulnerable to issues of accessing assistance. IDPs are vulnerable to risk of eviction.

PRIMARY GENDER EQUITY ISSUES

Women: Involuntary Superheroes

Care and domestic work, which are women's and girls' responsibilities, have become more demanding and time-consuming. Young women feel their workload has doubled, but say this is also because they are weak from hunger. Women get tired and thirsty



Village chairwomen, committee members and Oxfam staff jointly conducting community awareness sessions in IDP camps.

while collecting firewood as it is very heavy, some communities mentioned distances of 5 to 10 km and this task often taking half a day. In some places, men used to collect firewood in a car but since they can no longer afford fuel, women carry it on their backs. Women and girls are responsible for collecting water, which used to be through rain water collection, but since the drought has meant walking and carrying heavy water storage bottles of 20 litres and more, on their back from wells or water points. Girls sometimes miss school because they are queuing for water. Young girls felt that it was unfair that they were asked to do more than their brothers, but they didn't want to complain because they would feel ashamed or feared consequences.

Women and girls food security, health and education is suffering

Women are often the most malnourished, particularly pregnant and lactating women. Children, the elderly and the man in the household generally eat better than the woman. When there is not enough food to go around, this has the biggest impact on women. Women are now more susceptible to different illnesses due to their malnourishment. The main barriers to accessing health services were the distance to the hospital and a lack of transportation. This particularly affects women who are physically weaker due to malnutrition and who need their husband or father's permission to leave the community. Often men also stop women from coming to health care facilities, as they are not seen as a priority.

Access to education has decreased, especially for girls. Whilst some girls said that they cannot go due to the large number of duties they have to do daily, some said that parents cannot afford to register both boys and the girls in the school, so they just send boys. The ratio of boys to girls sent for secondary education is 5:1.

"My brother and I used to attend schools in Lasanood. When my father got sick, he was taken to Burao to have an operation. I was taken out of school to care for my father. I have been back in the camp for three years whereas my brother is still attending the school" (Girl, Oog IDP camp)

Women's participation in decision-making is very limited

There has been very little change in terms of the community structures between pre and post – crisis, for example there are still hardly any women in village committees. Elders, community leaders and religious leaders (all male) make the decisions and the clan structure is also a barrier to women's participation. As one group said: ***"even rape cases are managed by men and are never punished or are there any actions to prevent it."*** Often if the woman reports it to the police the police arrest the man, the clan elders come to talk to the police and the perpetrator is released. In NGO programmes related to food security or water, hygiene and sanitation, some committees included women, but they often had limited participation. Although all communities which Oxfam had established a women's forum agreed that this had made a difference to women's participation in village committee matters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All actors

- Prioritise meeting urgent food security needs, either directly or through advocacy in order to reduce the negative effects on women and female-headed households in particular;
- Promote any activities and policies which lighten women's workload related mainly to firewood and water collection. An example is the distribution of wheelbarrows to encourage men to take on some of this work or cooking stoves;

- Reduce GBV and its effects through initiatives such as
 - more provision of GBV services;
 - access to justice in rape and GBV cases, support to women to access legal services and to know their rights;
 - introduce programmes which work to reduce Qat consumption
 - better lighting in IDP camps, involving women in selection of WASH facility sites;
 - mass awareness on GBV;
- Support to traditional leaders around peace and reconciliation
- Carry out advocacy towards service providers at district, regional and where needed national level and with donors around provision of formal legal, medical and psychological services in rural areas; including possibilities of mobile clinics or courts
- Strengthen women's participation in decision making, especially around humanitarian and development assistance and around justice mechanisms related to incidents which affect them. This should include strengthening women's capacity and confidence to engage, as well as working with men to create space

The government

- Increase women's and girls' access to justice, services and decision-making such as formal justice mechanisms to report rape and GBV, health care, education and finance for small businesses, increase women's participation in civil service and politics;
- Carry out advocacy and negotiation with landowners and host community related to settlement infrastructures where they are currently forbidden;
- Where tensions between host communities and IDPs exist, operational advocacy should be carried out to ensure that this is not affecting access to services, especially for the most vulnerable;
- Take action to minimise forced evictions and where they do occur, provide tailored support to evictees.

Civil society actors, NGOs, UN, Donors

- Consider training government actors on gender in emergencies to build their capacity;
- Continue to increase women's participation in committees, accompany these changes with a strategy for gaining acceptance from the community, especially with men and promote the value of women's roles in these spaces;
- Improve communication of services available, decision-making structures such as women's committees and complaint mechanisms;
- Ensure protection and gender analysis are comprehensive and responded to throughout project-cycles.

RESEARCH BEHIND THE BRIEFING NOTE

This briefing note is a synthesis of two research pieces: a protection assessment and a rapid gender assessment, both completed in 2019, focusing on Sool and Sanaag, where Oxfam's humanitarian response is delivered. Both assessments involved over 20 key informant interviews, over 500 household interviews, observations of interventions and over 50 focus group discussions. Findings are specific to conflict-affected Sool and Sanaag, but likely have broader applicability across Somaliland, due to cultural similarities and comparable drought impacts.



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