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## **The Changing Face of Food Security in Somalia**

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### **Abstract**

*The food security sector in Somalia is perhaps more coordinated, integrated and developmental in its approach than in any other complex emergency. This is largely due to the dominance of one actor, the European Commission, with European Development Funds operating within an established coordination structure. The Commission funds the major food security information system, emergency food relief and a variety of ‘developmental’ food security projects, and is the major actor in terms of policy setting and coordination.*

*While this dominance has drawbacks, it has allowed the EC Somalia Unit to build up a significant technical capacity, which in turn has resulted in the piloting of a number of often imaginative, localized food security projects with significant capacity building elements and progressively longer funding cycles.*

*SC UK has been active in food security information, coordination and implementation for many years in Somalia. This experience and the institutional backing behind it have allowed SC to challenge and negotiate with the EC, in terms of strategy and developmental practice. SC’s food security work has evolved from short-term relief to a recent three-year project with a community-based information component, fixed, and open inputs (to be determined by the information system). Central strategies are to build Somali capacity, encourage gender equity, and transfer ownership to local staff and the community.*

*This paper will explore, through the SC case study, the following themes: the funding and operating context in Somalia; the links between information and response; differences in developmental dialogue; the importance of institutional capacity; and strategies to scale up.*

### **Background**

Since 1991 and the fall of Siad Barre Somalia has been without a central government. While the northeast (Puntland) and northwest (Somaliland) of the country have generally been politically stable, the south has seen chronic political instability continue to this day. The nature of conflict in the south has changed during this time from the relatively clear inter-clan based conflict centred around access to and control over particular resources and geographic areas to, over recent years, localised, intra-clan conflict. Most areas in southern Somalia today can be described as generally unstable but with periods of stability.

Many of the major militia/faction leaders in Somalia have either seen their influence and resources diminish, or have changed the way they work. A recent report states, 'in the past, large aid flows provided warlords with funds, and international mediation efforts gave them political legitimacy. In the absence of external recognition and resources, warlords have seen their influence dim' (ICG, 2002:3-4). The same report suggests that merchants who are now more independent from factional affiliation have moved into more 'legitimate commerce' than was the case in the early 1990s.

The nature of engagement between the international aid community and Somalia changed profoundly after the failure and departure of the UNOSOM peacekeeping operation in August 1995. The influence of international aid in funding the war efforts of Somalia's militia/faction leaders and the security constraints on the ground led to a dramatic change in humanitarian strategy. This is illustrated most clearly in the formation of the Somali Aid Coordination Body (SACB) in 1995. This voluntary body, including NGO, UN and donor bodies, facilitates information sharing, coordinates policy formulation and is designed to avoid the mistakes of large-scale, top-down aid programmes (Le Sage and Majid, 2002).

The mandate of the SACB was to apply a new conceptual apparatus of aid, the notion of a continuum between relief and development practices. In so doing, three stages were used to represent the reality of Somalia as a 'collapsed state'. Most of southern and central Somalia was defined as a *zone of crisis* appropriate only for relief assistance, parts of central Somalia and the northeast (Puntland) were labelled *zones of transition* where 'rehabilitation' could be supported, and Somaliland was termed a *zone of recovery* where development was to be supported. This labelling has been criticized for assuming a linear progression from crisis to recovery and in the case of Somalia the zonal framework has been increasingly replaced in policy papers by less defined descriptions of different parts of the country.

Partly as a result of the huge failure of the UN during UNOSOM times the EC has maintained a significant presence in Somalia, much larger than the usual 'delegation', in the form of the EC Somalia Unit. An additional reason for this presence is the direct mandate that the EC has, to 'act on behalf of the Somali people' thereby gaining access to European Development Funds, which are usually donated to government and are normally kept on hold with countries at war.<sup>1</sup>

In the field of rural development and food security, the three major EC programmes are:

- Food aid allocated through the World Food Programme
- The funding of micro projects with a rehabilitation-development focus<sup>2</sup>
- The Food Security Assessment Unit (FSAU) implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)<sup>3</sup>

Emergency food needs have always been focused on the south of the country, from the famine of 1994 to the El Nino floods of 1997/98 and the severe regional drought of 1999/00. The areas that have suffered most during these and other ongoing crises have been those

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<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a recognized national government Somalia did not ratify the Lomé IV convention, giving access to 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> EDF. As a result, in 1992, the Chief Authorising Officer of the European Development Fund was entrusted with the authority of National Authorising Officer, 'acting on behalf of the Somali people'. Access to EDF 9 resources was granted to the EC Somalia Unit under the Cotonou agreement of 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In 1996, this budget line was developed with the intention of reducing food insecurity through the sale of cereals, oil and sugar. The intention was to increase food supplies and generate funds for the development of micro projects which were to become the focus for some small-scale 'development type' interventions in Somalia.

<sup>3</sup> The FSAU, with partners, is the early warning and food security information system for Somalia. It has experienced food security monitors based throughout the country and a head office in Nairobi.

also affected by years of looting, disruption and occupation. In recent years the regions that remain most vulnerable to food insecurity are the inter-riverine agro-pastoral areas of Bay and Bakool (collectively peopled by the Rahanweyn). They are heavily dependent on rainfed crop and livestock production and have faced some of the worst effects of looting and occupation. The mixed livelihood and ethnic groups of Gedo, who have seen little respite from insecurity and where extremely dry conditions and market isolation are notable characteristics, have also faced high levels of food insecurity.

The most important role the FSAU has played has been in its independent analysis and therefore control of the emergency food needs requirements in Somalia (largely distributed by WFP and CARE). It is noticeable that on occasions this has been in stark contrast to the very high food needs/aid that have been identified and distributed in the neighbouring areas of northeast Kenya and Somali Region of Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup>

As well as the funding of food aid (mainly through WFP) and of the FSAU (early warning and food needs analysis) the EC has also been piloting and funding a variety of micro-projects under the rural development and food security umbrellas.

The types of projects funded, since about 1997/98, have mainly fallen under two types, a) agricultural rehabilitation (mainly of irrigation infrastructure) and b) the development of alternative products/micro-businesses.<sup>5</sup>

The types of projects falling under agricultural rehabilitation vary from large-scale flood canal systems<sup>6</sup> to very small-scale oasis irrigation infrastructure. The nature of these projects has also changed considerably over time. While the initial emphasis was on the rehabilitation of physical infrastructure under short timeframes of one to two years (although several continued through two or three phases), these projects and their staff have increasingly come to incorporate more developmental characteristics, combining participatory and cost recovery aspects within a longer project time-span. The SC case study that follows describes this transition for one such project.

Prior to 2001, the EC funding of these projects was largely a reactive process, of responding to good ideas without a clear strategy. Project funding was also difficult due to budgetary complications and funding was often switched between different budget heads to maintain continuity.

The key criteria used to determine funding were:

- the need to work in rural areas to support livelihoods
- a peace dividend approach that emphasized the North and Northwest particularly.

Only in 2001 did the EC develop its first Somalia Country Strategy (2002-2007).

The micro-projects funded under the food security programme have been praised in several quarters in Somalia for accepting this “high risk” environment, from which other donors have shied away, and supporting projects that pilot new technologies, rehabilitate and stimulate local agricultural production and improve livestock husbandry. While not all of these interventions have been successful they provide many lessons for the future (Gibbon and Majid, 2002).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> From personal experience while working for the FSAU and from discussions with EC Somalia Unit.

<sup>5</sup> These include camel milk pasteurization and marketing, and the processing and marketing of natural products such as oils, incenses and apiary products.

<sup>6</sup> This has been particularly important in the Lower Shabelle area which generates a large proportion of annual staple crop production.

<sup>7</sup> It should also be mentioned that in the same evaluation the management of these projects, by the EC, was criticized for being conservative, with projects tending to be over-burdened by

One of the additional projects funded by the EC has been a support and coordination post for INGOs implementing these micro-projects. It has been pointed out in various literature that not only is the staff turnover in complex emergency environments particularly high but also that staff and agency qualifications reflect logistics and 'deliverables' far more than longer-term (food security) analysis and capacity building (Schafer, 2002). Although this post has served slightly different functions through its different phases, including project screening, project cycle management, logical framework development, baseline survey development, as well as workshops (themes include, constraints in promoting community participation, and, promoting links to the FSAU and its food security analysis), it has been very well received by the INGOs.

Another important project funded under the food security umbrella was a study of the seed sector. Where seed relief had been seen to be an automatic need as a result of any seasonal production failure, this study identified more appropriate criteria, and has certainly reduced the frequency of 'seed appeals'.

In contrast to many agencies working in Somalia the EC Somalia Unit has largely managed to retain a high calibre and continuity of staff, with most having worked in Somalia previously. This has undoubtedly been a major factor in shifting the nature of programming to incorporate more aspects of developmental work, while recognising the constraints of the Somalia operating environment.

The EC Somalia Unit, due partly to this capacity, has also increasingly won the confidence of its Brussels head office in accounting for funds in a very difficult Somali operating environment. One of the results of this has been the increasing funding periods granted, as illustrated with SC's recent three-year Food Security and Livelihood Development Project.

## **SC in Belet Weyn, southern Somalia**

Save the Children (SC) have been involved in Somalia for several decades. Before the collapse of the state in 1991 this was particularly in the areas of health and support to refugee populations. In 1994 the country office was moved from Mogadishu to Nairobi, in common with many other agencies.

SC did not have a presence in Belet Weyn before the war, only starting up there in 1991, but with some staff from the Mogadishu office. However, due to a combination of insecurity, overstretched resources and resultant office closures in other project areas, Belet Weyn was the only project area by 1997.<sup>8</sup>

SC operates only in the district of Belet Weyn in Hiran region. The district has a population of between 30 000 and 63 000, and contains the regional capital, Belet Weyn town, which is an important and thriving trading hub between north and south Somalia and Somali Region, Ethiopia. The population includes urban, riverine, agro-pastoral and pastoral groups.

The region and district are composed of several clans. The dominant clan is the Hawadle, exclusively found on the east of the Shabelle river, in town and the rural areas. On the western side are the Gaal Jacal and Jejele. Along the river, on both sides, and making up the majority of the riverine population are the minority Bantu.<sup>9</sup>

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administrative requirements. In addition, NGO project staff perceived the relationship with the EC on a contractor/sub-contractor basis rather than a more balanced partnership arrangement.

<sup>8</sup> Offices and operations have since been re-started in Somaliland, in 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The Bantu are found throughout southern Somalia, mainly alongside the rivers. They are not of the main five major Somali clan lineages.

There is a relatively good degree of communication, respect and coordination amongst all of the clans in the region, including the Bantu, particularly at the traditional elder's level. Unlike many other areas of southern Somalia, Hiran region does not have a history of large-scale, inter-regional, inter-clan conflict. Arguably, compared to all of the other regions in southern Somalia, Hiran has been the most stable.

However, this is not to say that Hiran or Belet Weyn are peaceful places. Due to the number of clans tension and conflict are ongoing, but are sporadic, low-level and usually localized. Several international agencies have pulled out of the district over the years and the town and region have the reputation for being very difficult places in which to work.

SC would claim that it has often been a positive influence for peace in the region, with its senior staff representing all of the clans, and highly influential at the elders' level. The staff have also indicated over the years how the international agencies are often the destabilizing catalyst in an area, for example in transportation of food relief and the insensitive recruitment of staff.

SC has concentrated its support amongst the riverine population, as they represent the minority Bantu and are considered the poorest by all actors in the district. They were also very badly affected by the flooding of the Shabelle river in 1997/98 when much of their irrigation infrastructure was destroyed. SC has maintained a low profile but constant presence in the district and has chosen deliberately to avoid projects in town, where the risk of provoking instability is greatest.

During the 1990s SC developed a global role in food security analysis through its involvement in and operation of early warning systems. This involvement has centred on the development of the household (food) economy approach. For example in Somalia, SC was a major partner in the creation of the FSAU in 1994, then managed by WFP Somalia, seconding a household food economy specialist for about 6 years, until 2001.<sup>10</sup>

On the ground in Belet Weyn, in terms of food security related interventions, SC was involved for several years in the distribution of free 'seeds and tools'. This emergency relief carried on until late 1997, when the SC Somalia programme in general was characterized by limited expatriate support due to insecurity, limited staff and an overstretched capacity.

By 1997 the programme was questioning the value of free seeds and tools which, it was thought might even have been undermining local coping strategies. As a result a proposal for an Agricultural Support Project (ASP) was developed. A key theme of this proposal was to promote the local multiplication of seeds through the organization of small village groups or sets. These 'village sets' (three to four villages) were the focus for agricultural extension and canal rehabilitation as well as seed multiplication.

This first phase of the ASP had a two-year life span. This period also started with a re-organization and increased capacity of expatriate staff for the whole Somalia programme. The number of staff doubled to four, with two staff members being based in Belet Weyn, an agricultural adviser and a programme coordinator, and two in Nairobi, the Programme Director and a deputy director.

This capacity and the continuity that followed allowed SC to develop a strong role at SACB Nairobi coordination and policy level,<sup>11</sup> as well as vastly increased the capacity at Belet Weyn level. Through the FSAU secondees and the ASP, SC maintained a strong interest in food security analysis and implementation at country and local levels.

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<sup>10</sup> This support was discontinued in large part due to the existing institutional capacity in household food economy analysis that the unit had built up over the years.

<sup>11</sup> SC chaired the NGO Consortium for several years.

The first year of the ASP was difficult with all new members of staff settling in to their new jobs and the unusual Somali context, none having had prior experience of Somalia. Expatriates had not been living in the oppressive environment of Belet Weyn<sup>12</sup> before and therefore there were many administrative and security details and procedures to set up. The national Somalia staff had been running operations on the ground semi-autonomously and a period of adjustment was necessary.

In this fragile, insecure operating environment, personal security is entirely dependent on the national staff. Making and pushing changes in such a situation is very delicate and often very time consuming. Compounding this problem in this case was the different approach that was being brought in under the ASP. Most of the staff were familiar with emergency programming and were not familiar with many aspects of participatory programming.<sup>13</sup>

In 1999 after the first year of the ASP a new project coordinator for Belet Weyn was appointed who also had a strong agricultural background. The coordinator instigated a joint impact evaluation of the ASP, combining SC and FSAU resources. The survey was jointly designed by the Project Coordinator (with his agricultural background) and the Food Economy secondee (with his social science and rural economy background). The survey was very well received by the donor and was used to design the second two year phase of the ASP. This evaluation was noted to be an important catalyst for review and reflection, where the prevailing (emergency) mentality was shaped by delivery as the criteria for success, rather than for example, uptake of improved practices by *all* members of the community.<sup>14</sup>

This second phase of the ASP added a major new component to the first phase – the introduction of small water pumps, to be partly paid for by the receiving community and to be entirely run and managed by the community after a training and handing over period.

This second phase of the ASP also coincided with the recruitment of the third project coordinator (the previous two each staying for about a year), who went on to stay for just over two years – the longest uninterrupted period that any SC staff member has been based in Belet Weyn. This period, covering 2001 and 2002, was also relatively stable, in terms of security on the ground, with few evacuations and no major acute emergencies.<sup>15</sup>

The period 2000–2002, in retrospect, was one of great stability and continuity, allowing much progress and development to take place. In Nairobi there was only one change of senior staff and in Belet Weyn the two project coordinators both had a good agricultural background and were strong managers. Notably, the project coordinators and the programme director were all from developmental backgrounds, with a strong commitment to delegating project responsibility to the national staff and ultimately to the communities themselves.

Two women were also recruited during this period and although recruited under the Water and Sanitation project have been used as community mobilizers and for building community capacity in the different projects including the ASP. Although their recruitment was slow and difficult, with some male national staff members resisting their appointment, they have since cemented their positions and are active, influential and fully accepted by their male colleagues.

This period also saw a great change in the nature of the relationship between SC and the EC in Somalia. The EC, with its strong technical capacity but with a large portfolio of projects and

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<sup>12</sup> The town is small and claustrophobic, expatriate staff are largely confined to the compound.

<sup>13</sup> Such biases also include expatriate placements for which there may be limited choice in such working environments.

<sup>14</sup> The evaluation highlighted that uptake of improved practices was higher amongst the wealthier farmer groups.

<sup>15</sup> Although given the Human Development Indicators for Somalia it is not always clear what the criteria for an 'emergency' are.

organizations to oversee has had an often antagonistic relationship with SC. This relationship has steadily improved, particularly after visits from the EC to Belet Weyn, often delayed for security reasons, and the resultant opportunity to meet staff and visit project sites and discuss areas of disagreement or misunderstanding.

Due to changes in the FSAU the SC secondee position was ended at the end of 2001. Around this time SC itself was re-starting its programme in Hargeisa, Somaliland. As a result of the impending closure of this position the programme was forced to review its relationship with the FSAU and with food security in Somalia. At the same time the FSAU had itself been under scrutiny.

One of the outcomes of this period of reflection and evaluation was the recognition by many parties in the SACB that the FSAU was of limited practical relevance to the previously mentioned micro-projects, including the SC ASP, even though the potential complementarities were huge. The crux of the problem was that the FSAU has a national level coverage with about 20 staff covering the whole country, and focuses on emergency food needs assessments, while NGOs have a more local focus and are looking at non-food, longer term interventions.

This led to SC developing a concept paper, with the FSAU, where it would take a leading role in the decentralization of the FSAU through a field based secondment<sup>16</sup> and expansion of field office presence, and therefore attempt to bridge this gap between information and (non-food) implementation. Funding for this idea was sought through open presentations to a wide variety of donors.<sup>17</sup>

This first concept paper did not lead directly to any envisaged projects, but what followed was a series of proposals, negotiations and revisions of proposals between the EC and SC over several months which finally settled in to the current project for Phase III of the ASP. This is not part of an FSAU decentralization process, although the project is linking with the FSAU. Phase III has the following key components:

- a community based information system
- the development of seed fairs
- the provision of water pumps and their management training
- an open component where money is available for 'livelihood supporting responses' based on the information and analysis of the information system.

One of the strengths of the ASP and the Belet Weyn programme in general has been the increasing delegation of project management and budget holding to national staff as well as the incorporation of women into key roles.<sup>18</sup> The national staff in Belet Weyn are very isolated and are cut off from many learning opportunities. The programme has therefore been very active in taking them out of Somalia to different trainings, workshops and meetings in Nairobi as well as on exchanges with other SC programmes in the region.<sup>19</sup> Staff mention this as a very valuable incentive as well as a critical learning opportunity.

This third phase of the ASP is a three-year project where a large part of the first year is to gain an understanding of what information is already collected at the village level and how

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<sup>16</sup> The previous secondment had been Nairobi-based.

<sup>17</sup> SC has always tried to diversify its funding sources to give it more leverage with the EC, but has found this very difficult due to the lack of donor funds for Somalia.

<sup>18</sup> In the Gibbon and Majid (2002) evaluation SC was the only NGO in the EC Food Security Programme to have nationals and women in such positions.

<sup>19</sup> The weakness of this approach is that it has not been part of a human resource development strategy, often rather the result of opportunities that have arisen.

that is used for planning and responding to seasonal and other events by communities. As of August 2003, three months into this third phase, the main activity has been discussions between villagers and project staff about the types of information that is being collected and the different forum for sharing, analysing and acting upon that information. SC staff 'sit in' on the nightly and seasonal meetings that comprise some of these fora to observe what happens.

The relevant SC project staff have also been briefed on the essential purpose and components of an information system for general guidance, but there is no pre-set system. Very low literacy rates and a high failure rate of such projects means that it is essential that an information system is of relevance and use to the participating villages and that it is designed in a way that they play the major role in the collection and analysis of the data.

The communities have not been informed that they will benefit from any particular interventions as a result of their participation in the information system. However, as part of the project SC will eventually provide water pumps and training to villages (known to be a high priority for any riverine village) and has an 'open' financial component that can be used for any intervention ideas that arise as a result of the outputs of the information system. The idea is that the system should be introduced in a way that builds on existing traditional systems and is not seen as a requirement of further interventions.

It is hoped that SC's long-standing relations and presence in the district will provide the basis and allow the necessary time for the information system to be developed. Communities have indicated the value they place on SC's continuous – although often small – support, in comparison to other large-scale, high value but one-off interventions (e.g. the donation of a large water pump) (Montani and Majid, 2003).

Throughout the years described above insecurity has been a daily concern for all staff members in Belet Weyn. Virtually every working day in Belet Weyn begins with an open meeting at 7:30 with security being the first subject on the agenda.<sup>20</sup>

The organization's success in managing security, which has allowed it to remain and evolve in the district, is undoubtedly due in large part to the presence of all clans within the senior staff and the proactive role that those staff take at the traditional elders' level whenever insecurity issues arise.

Whenever the programme is involved in activities which it feels could provoke conflict or insecurity careful planning is undertaken to minimize any potential threat. Staff recruitment is one example, where every effort is taken to make sure the process is entirely transparent and all stages can be explained and justified and where local authorities are invited to take part in interviewing and short-listing.

SC also has to be prepared to act if acute emergencies develop and to manage a response so as to minimize the insecurity that this may cause. The organization has a reserve fund at headquarters which can be drawn upon within days but will also attempt to source such funds through traditional donors. In 2000, due to the failure of the previous harvest and after early, very heavy rains washed away the first seeds planted, SC obtained funds for a very quick district-wide seed distribution, to take advantage of the very good rains that were falling. Security was a major concern and was dealt with by inviting village committees to visit SC but not telling them what the purpose was (many staff were not told about the distribution to avoid spreading the word). Village committees were then given 'chits' to obtain seed from merchants and they had to arrange their own transport to move them to their fields. Later follow-ups suggested that the system worked well with the community re-distribution system benefiting all.

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<sup>20</sup> SC also coordinates logistics and security at the local airstrip for ECHO humanitarian flights.



In distributing seeds, as with most of its interventions, SC deals directly with villages. As mentioned previously SC has deliberately avoided working in the town and has not explored working with local NGOs and CBOs. This is a recognized weakness but also a daunting challenge as there is considerable suspicion and caution by programme staff about the credibility and motivation of local organizations.

## Conclusions

Several themes are highlighted in this paper:

1. High levels of investment in national staff have been central to SC's success. This does need to be complemented by appropriate levels of support by expatriate staff: the national staff in Belet Weyn stressed the importance of (some) expatriates as teachers but also mentioned they play an important buffer role, reducing the pressure they face from their own communities in difficult times.
2. Continuity of staff over several years in what is otherwise a regularly disrupted working environment has served the EC and SC well, in pushing forward and seeing through developmental programming.
3. Staff with developmental backgrounds appear to have played a critical role in promoting change and are increasingly being seen in projects in Somalia today.
4. The larger agencies such as CARE and SC have advantages in the expertise and programming experience they can draw upon, which ranges across both emergency and development ends of the spectrum. Such agencies also have a strong institutional interest in information systems that potentially allows them to play an important role in linking information and response.
5. Both SC and the EC have quick release emergency funds accessible while they are pursuing their rehabilitation/development objectives.
6. Support and coordination projects/posts have been welcomed by agencies in Somalia.

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