



## **Engaging with the grassroots: Humanitarian decision-making, conflict sensitivity, and Somali ‘non-state actors’ platforms**

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### **Summary**

There is a perception amongst many Somalis that decisions that affect their lives are often internationally driven, with little local consultation. This lack of ownership impacts negatively on the effectiveness of aid programmes, undermines Somali civil society, and contributes to a sense of alienation among Somali communities from the decision-making processes that affect their lives. All of these elements only serve to perpetuate Somalia’s conflicts.

EC- and DFID-supported ‘non-state actors (NSA) platforms’ provide a mechanism for increasing grassroots civil society engagement with international and national decision-makers. UN humanitarian actors can improve the effectiveness of their programmes and contribute to laying the foundations for peace in Somalia by engaging these platforms in dialogue on policy-making and conflict analysis.

### **The need for grassroots engagement in humanitarian decision-making**

Humanitarian need in Somalia is largely a result of, and certainly exacerbated by the high levels of insecurity experienced in many parts of the country. This insecurity is a complex product of multiple factors, but a perpetuating factor is the enduring divide between legitimate, representative Somali civil-society and national and international decision-makers.

Members of Somali civil society believe they can make a positive difference in the lives of their fellow citizens and on the broader security situation if they are more substantively involved in decision-making and implementation of development and humanitarian programmes. Recent dialogue between Somali civil society and the EC revealed a long-standing frustration among many that donor money is channelled largely through international NGOs, while local NGOs play the role of implementing partners and have limited opportunities to influence planning processes or proactively set the agenda. The exclusion of Somalis from many key decision-making processes contributes to their lack of ownership over policies that directly affect their country and their lives. Local partners should therefore be given a chance to input into policy priorities as well as to contribute to the delivery of programmes.

### **Conflict sensitivity beyond ‘do no harm’**

The humanitarian community have long recognised the need to ensure that interventions ‘do no harm’ (DNH) in relation to the conflict dynamics of the contexts in which they operate. Saferworld welcomed comments from the Somalia UNCT at their December 2010 meeting with the Bond Conflict Policy Group in London that humanitarian intervention has the potential to go *beyond* DNH, whilst retaining a focus on meeting humanitarian need and operating well within the humanitarian principles.

Saferworld has considerable expertise globally in the areas of conflict analysis and conflict sensitive approaches. We believe that it is important that the analysis that guides the UN’s work in Somalia be informed by the real needs and perceptions of people ‘on the ground’ – including not just INGO staff, but Somali communities affected by, and a part of, conflict and insecurity. The UNCT could build on their commitment to conflict sensitise their humanitarian work by involving Somali civil society in its decision-making, as above, but also in the development and maintenance of their conflict analysis.

### **Somali ‘Non-State Actors Platforms’**

In both engaging grassroots Somali voices in humanitarian decision-making and ensuring that humanitarian interventions are most successful in helping to lay foundations for peace in Somalia, there is a potential role for Somali ‘Non-State Actors Platforms’.

The EC and DFID fund Saferworld to support three platforms of ‘non-state actors’, one in each of the three regions of Somalia<sup>1</sup>. The platforms are comprised of a broad range of actors whose voices are not often heard in the international policy arena – including local business leaders, the media, traditional elders, professional associations, and women’s / religious / youth groups.

The platforms’ legitimacy stems from diverse geographic, clan, and sector representation; a consultative approach which gives platform representatives a strong mandate at policy dialogues; and a secretariat and board that are accountable and responsive to the membership.

The platforms aim to analyse and engage with decision-making across a range of sectors, including health, education, security, humanitarian issues, and with a unified voice across national level policy issues.

Through the platforms, information is fed both ‘up’ to policy makers and ‘down’ to members (and through them to broader society). Information, translated into policy positions, is thus fed to policy makers from those who are best qualified to speak about the situation ‘on the ground’, and information about decision-making processes and their outcomes is fed back to a broader section of society than is usually informed about these processes.

The NSAs therefore provide one structure that the international community can engage with to ensure increased communication with broader Somali society. The NSA platforms provide a bridge between non-state and state actors and facilitate ongoing dialogue. Crucially, they ‘translate’ between the language and lexicon of the international community and that of the local community.

This helps begin to address the perception, widely held amongst Somali society, that decisions related to Somalia’s development are made either in Nairobi or in western capitals, without a full appreciation of what is happening on the ground or the participation of those that the decisions most affect.

Finally, the platforms represent the possibility of ‘bottom up’ decision-making – the generation of policy priorities through local consultations and representative organs that set agendas based on a nuanced understanding of the needs and aspirations of local communities.

Recent and upcoming activities of the platforms include:

- consultation with the EC on its education strategy, and participation in the Health Sector Committee in Nairobi – both signalling increasing recognition from the international community that non state actor voices are important in sectoral decision-making and an acknowledgement that these voices are not necessarily best represented by INGOs alone
- the platforms plan forthcoming dialogue on election processes in Somaliland, constitutional consultations in Puntland and South Central, and the broader democratisation process
- Saferworld is supporting the platforms to develop websites which will help improve both internal and external communication, particularly with regard to disseminating policy positions to national and international actors.

**Saferworld encourages the UNCT to look at regular engagement with the platforms and provide feedback on how this consultation might influence its decision-making.**

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<sup>1</sup> Somalia South Central Non State Actors (SOSCENSA); Puntland Non State Actors Association (PUNSA); Somaliland Non State Actors Forum (SONSAF)