



Seeking Acceptance: The Promise of Cash in High-Risk Areas

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Context in Somalia

Somalia is one of the world's most insecure states with a conflict that continues to profoundly affect its civilians. Thirty-two percent of the Somali population is currently in need of humanitarian assistance. The needs are greatest in the South Central regions, an area almost entirely cut off from humanitarian aid due to heavy fighting. Ongoing drought is also impacting the health and wellbeing of the local populations, and when combined with the conflict, the situation is unfolding into a desperate emergency situation. To make matters worse, the recent forced withdrawal of the World Food Program has left a void in the humanitarian response.

Obstacles to Programming

To implement successful cash programs in Somalia, an aid agency must acknowledge any real or potential problems on the ground. In Somalia, the obstacles can seem exhaustive: attempted Al Shabaab taxation, and the risk of money diversion; monitoring despite little access; overcoming community power structures to target the most vulnerable; the logistics of working in an insecure environment; and protecting yourself against the misappropriation of goods, whether cash or otherwise. Not least of all, there is also the problem of advocating for the use of cash programs amidst worries about inflation, and concerns about terrorism. Donors, after all, have to justify spending to publics wary of inadvertently funding Al Shabaab activities.

One NGO's Approach

Analysis of the approach to cash programming used by Horn Relief will demonstrate both its viability, and its promise in high-risk areas like Somalia. The use of local money transfer businesses to transfer funds, and a highly effective targeting methodology, are two crucial components to Horn Relief's success in Somalia.

Despite the civil war and the lack of a recognized government, Somalia is heralded worldwide for the sophistication of its markets and informal banking systems. Money transfer businesses (*hawala*) facilitate remittances to Somalia from the Diaspora around the globe. The *Hawala* transfer money electronically and it is safe, secure and reliable. They are one of the primary reasons any Somalia-based cash program can operate. Further, almost all *Hawalas* have internal mechanisms to ensure compliance with international money laundering and anti-terrorism regulations.

Successful targeting in Somalia can be an extraordinarily difficult task. Clans are important social and political units, elderly men act as community gatekeepers, and there is a societal gender bias against women. Effective targeting acknowledges and works around these cultural obstacles to establish how to reach those in need. Horn Relief's targeting methodology has achieved targeting success of greater than 90 per cent in several of its programs.

In order to fill the current void in the humanitarian response in Somalia left by the withdrawal of WFP, cash programming may be the only viable option. This article will describe the problems associated with delivering humanitarian aid in Somalia and explain in detail Horn Relief's approach to cash programming. It will also elaborate upon why, despite numerous challenges, large scale cash programs must be promoted even in a high-risk environment like

Somalia.

I. Introduction

Somalia is one of the world's most insecure states with a protracted conflict that continues to profoundly affect its civilians. Thirty-two percent of the Somali population – or 2.4 million of its 7.5 million people – is currently in need of humanitarian assistance (FSNAU, 2011a). The needs are greatest in the South Central regions, an area almost entirely cut off from humanitarian aid due to the heavy fighting and repressive central Al Shabaab control. The Al Shabaab is an armed religious opposition group that has been fighting against the Transitional National Government of Somalia for many years. The group currently controls much of the southern and central parts of Somalia, including a large part of the capital, Mogadishu. The group is classified by the USA, Canada and UK governments as a terrorist organization.

The civil conflict paired with an ongoing drought is impacting the health and wellbeing of the local populations, and has unfolded into a desperate emergency situation. According to the UN, the situation will likely get worse. The continuing drought, rising food prices and population displacement could push a country already grappling with enormous problems into an even deeper crisis (FSNAU, 2011b).

This paper will attempt to demonstrate the feasibility of large-scale cash transfers for up to one million beneficiaries in Somalia to address the needs of its local populations. It will delve into the complexities of the current humanitarian crisis, and explain how 20 years of conflict and an ongoing drought are threatening to destabilize even further one of the world's most vulnerable states. It will describe programming obstacles such as limited access, and large swaths of the South Central zone, where food insecurity is greatest, being run by the terrorist-designated

organization, Al Shabaab. This imposes various limitations on the humanitarian community delivering aid there. It will also discuss the problems associated with advocating for large scale cash transfers in Somalia. This paper will also present Horn Relief's field-level approach to cash transfers, demonstrating its viability and the promise in large scale in a high-risk environment like Somalia.

The challenges to aid delivery in Somalia are admittedly as enormous as the humanitarian needs. As a result, the humanitarian community faces a moral and practical dilemma: what is the best response for addressing the urgent needs of a population in this insecure setting?

Traditionally, the humanitarian aid community has accepted the presence of large scale food aid. It is often thought of as being less prone to diversion and corruption than other forms of aid, including cash transfers. However there is growing evidence that large-scale food distributions are also subject to diversion and corruption. The question is - can large scale cash transfers provide a safe alternative to food aid delivery? Can it safely deliver results in an insecure and risk prone nation like Somalia?

Cash transfers have been implemented throughout Somalia for many years, including in South and Central Somalia with demonstrated success. Like any form of aid delivery mechanism, cash programming is prone to risks and manipulation; however evidence shows that cash programs can be implemented successfully in Somalia. However, the current situation requires large scale intervention with a far greater reach than those programs already implemented. This paper will show – by disaggregating the unique problems on the ground in Somalia – that a large-scale cash transfer not only poses less risk, but has the potential to transform the humanitarian landscape in Somalia.

II. The Humanitarian Context in Somalia

Somalia is considered to be one of the longest running humanitarian crises in the world, one that has spanned almost 20 years. As a result, many Somalis are now struggling to survive. Undoubtedly, soaring malnutrition rates and other effects of the ongoing drought are major issues. Deteriorating purchasing power, an enduring civil war, and limited humanitarian space are other principle factors affecting the nation and its populace.

While the drought has very serious immediate and long-term ramifications to consider, one of its gravest effects is the high level of food insecurity. Prolonged food insecurity shows itself in malnutrition rates and the Somali population is currently facing acute malnutrition rates well beyond emergency thresholds, with one in every four Somali children being malnourished (FSNAU, 2011c). In Somalia's southern regions there is a regional acute malnutrition rate of 25 per cent and a severe acute malnutrition rate of 6 per cent (FSNAU, 2011a). These figures are amongst the worst in the world.

The most recent drought resulted in a complete crop failure in southern Somalia; however the previous season's bumper crop means food availability is not the leading concern. Large numbers of internally displaced people have been driven from their homes due to the conflict and pastoralists who have lost most or all of their livestock and are now destitute. While there are food shortages throughout certain areas of the country, high demand has pushed the price of food beyond many people's reach (FSNAU, 2011d). The price of local cereals, for example, recently shot up 80 per cent in the South (FSNAU, 2011e). Any increase to food prices directly affects the purchasing powers of a Somali household, and in turn its ability to feed its members.

In the past, vulnerable households such as IDPs and destitute pastoralists have relied heavily on the World Food Program (WFP) for food assistance. However, in January 2010 WFP was forced to withdraw from most of the South due to attacks by militants and extortion. WFP closed offices throughout the south, including offices in Wajid, Buale, Garbahare, Afmadow, Jilib and Belet Weyne. By doing so, the agency reluctantly left up to one million people in need (Smerdon, 2010), a figure that has grown in recent months. The drought and the resulting food prices, as well as a shrunken humanitarian space that no longer enables WFP's consistent supply of food aid, have had dire consequences for the Somali population.

The drought – one the country has called “a national emergency” (CARE, 2011) has impacted the country's populations beyond limiting their access to food. It has limited the availability of water and driven up the price of what remains. It has also led to many livestock deaths, directly threatening a traditional Somali way of life. For a population that relies heavily on pastoralism, there are both human water needs and animal water needs to consider. Limited water has led to conflict over resources in pastoral areas. In addition, herd collapse has led to livelihood failure, further driving vulnerable households into despair. A Somalia aid group estimated that 2.4 million Somalis are currently at risk of losing their livelihoods (BBC, 2010). Livelihood loss paired with rising food prices means food security is even further out of reach for vulnerable Somalis. As a result, lack of access to water and the resulting deaths of livestock impose enormous stress on the average Somali household.

Not least of all, Somalia is also grappling with an enduring civil war. Islamist insurgents are waging a deadly battle against the transitional government's forces, supported by peacekeepers from the African Union. Somalia has long been acknowledged as a failed state, in large part due to its lack of a legitimate government. The conflict is limited to specific locations but it has far reaching consequences including the lack of services, lack of aid, and widespread displacement of the population, particularly in the country's South Central zone. According to UNHCR, 95,000 people were displaced between January and March 2011, and another 31,000 fled to Kenya in that same period (FSNAU, 2011d). In addition, Somalis are leaving rural areas to search for work in urban centres, while others are leaving the country altogether by fleeing to Kenya or Yemen among other destinations. Without work and without food aid, many of the Somalis that remain in the country are now returning to the violent and dangerous capital of Mogadishu to seek jobs (Migiro, 2011).

One of the most significant results of the civil war is the migration of more than a million Somalis who now live primarily in North America, Europe, Middle East, Australia and East Africa. As a result of this migration, emigrants are able to send millions of dollars in remittances to their families in Somalia. Remittances have played an immense role in providing a safety net to support vulnerable people and they also act as the bedrock of the Somali economy. Remittances from the Diaspora have been a lifeline for the Somali population and are said to promote livelihoods and survival more "than all the international development and humanitarian aid put together" (Waldo Abshir, 2008). Somalia is a country that is highly dependent on remittance. Somalis in the Diaspora make major contributions to the Somali economy and livelihoods by supporting humanitarian assistance, economic recovery and reconstruction

support addressing a range of emergency needs to the value of around US\$1.6 billion annually (UNDP Somalia, 2009). The Diaspora provides and invests heavily towards 80% of start-up capital for Small and Medium Enterprises. It is estimated that US\$ 1 billion in international aid is provided to Somalia annually (AP, May 2011). This figure is less than the total amount sent in remittance annually by the Diaspora. This clearly illustrates that remittances are a critical component of the Somali economy. In addition, it should be noted that an estimated 10% - 15% of the total remittance arrives in a concentrated period of time during the two Muslim holidays of Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha. There has been no indication that these funds (estimated at up to around US\$240 million) coming into Somalia during the Eid holidays, a period of just two months of the year, has caused any inflation in the local economy. Nor has there been any indication that remittances to households have been taxed by warlords or Al Shabaab.

With the onset of the global economic crisis, however, remittances have been significantly cut back in recent years. As the humanitarian crisis increases with droughts every few years, conflict and low agricultural production and ever decreasing amounts of remittances, the state of the populations in dire need in Somalia will continue to worsen. International aid focusing on both short and long-term solutions is needed to address the population's critical needs. At the very least, short term interventions that fill in the food deficit gaps are urgently needed. This is exactly the type of need that can readily be addressed through cash based interventions.

III. Horn Relief

There are many agencies working on successful cash programs in Somalia, using similar methodologies to that used by Horn Relief. However, this paper will mainly focus on Horn

Relief's experience in delivering cash programs in South Central Somalia in order to show what is possible.

Horn Relief is African NGO that has been implementing cash transfer programs in Somalia for nine years and in 2010 launched its first cash transfer program in Kenya. The organization has its headquarters in Nairobi, with four field offices throughout Somalia and another in Kenya. It has emerged in recent years as a leader in cash programming in Somalia and the region, and currently chairs the Cash Based Response Working Group, part of the Somali coordination structure. In this role, the organization's staff members engage in a significant amount of cash transfer advocacy to the humanitarian and donor community. Since 2006, it has been delivering cash based response training to other INGOs, NGOs, UN and CBOs anxious to build their in-house capacity and to launch their own cash transfer programs.

Due to its long presence in Somalia and its strategic employment of local staff, Horn Relief cultivates lasting relationships with its partner communities. This approach aligns with the organization's values, while also providing an element of protection for its staff in a fluid and quickly-changing security environment. Horn Relief has always prioritized transferring lessons learned from one program to the next, and to help with this endeavor it developed Guidelines for Cash Interventions in Somalia in 2010. The document established standards and protocols for organizations implementing cash transfers in Somalia, and it has been adopted by the Agriculture and Livelihoods Cluster along with other food security groups operating in Somalia.

All of these characteristics – the experience, advocacy, trainings, and guidelines – contribute to Horn Relief’s programming success. However, its development and use of the Inclusive Community Based Targeting (ICBT) approach is perhaps Horn Relief’s most notable strength of its cash based programs. A close analysis of its use, paired with an examination of the realities on the ground will support the statement that large-scale cash transfers are a viable form of aid to address growing food insecurity in Somalia’s South Central Zone.

IV. Obstacles to Programming

To implement successful cash programs in Somalia, an aid agency must acknowledge any real or potential problems on the ground. In Somalia, the obstacles can seem exhaustive: attempted Al Shabaab taxation and the risk of money diversion; monitoring despite little access; overcoming community power structures to target the most vulnerable; the logistics of working in an insecure environment; and protecting yourself against the misappropriation of goods, whether cash or otherwise. Not least of all, there is also the problem of advocating for the use of cash programs amidst worries about inflation, and concerns about terrorism. Donors, after all, have to justify spending to publics wary of inadvertently funding Al Shabaab activities.

Despite the lengthy list of challenges, the most limiting factors for humanitarian actors are the constraints on access and the threat of rebel groups such as Al Shabaab. The ongoing conflict, its associated violence and the threat of kidnapping means many humanitarian workers cannot travel freely throughout the country. As it aspires to exert more authority over the local populations, Al Shabaab has also attempted to ‘regulate’ the aid industry. It has imposed bans, taxes and in some cases even taken over aid program delivery from the implementing agencies.

Al Shabaab controls much of Somalia's South Central zone, and has banned many aid organizations from those same areas. In March 2010, just one month following their reluctant withdrawal from the South, Al Shabaab banned WFP from operating in Somalia, totally suspending its food aid operations and putting in peril the people it helped. The U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mark Bowden, told reporters that Al Shabaab refused to negotiate with the U.N. because the group believes food aid is unnecessary (Migiros, 2010). Al Shabaab also kicked out a slate of other international NGOs. In August 2010, they accused World Vision International, ADRA and Diakonia of trying to spread Christianity and banned them from operating in southern Somalia. The UN's Somalia Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimated that 1.2 million people were affected by the ban, most of which were children receiving treatment for malnutrition (OCHA, 2010.) Following the bans, Al Shabaab issued a press release warning other NGOs against taking up the work of the banned organizations, saying they would face "appropriate disciplinary measures" (Blanchfield, 2010). The following month, another 50,000 people lost access to food assistance and health programs after Al Shabaab kicked out Mercy Corps USA. At the same time, they kicked out Horn Relief from the south of the country. Critically, they also banned the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNet) that works to provide early warning on emerging food security issues. These organizations mentioned are just a few of the ones affected; the insurgent group targeted organizations with an obvious or believed American or Christian affiliation, and banned them outright from the South Central zone.

The implementing agencies remaining in South Central region operate within a demanding and complex environment. Many are forced to deal with taxation demands from Al Shabaab as well

as the imposition of arbitrary and changing regulations. The programming climate is so hostile in some places that rigorous monitoring and evaluation is nearly impossible. Partly as a result of this limited access, agencies and organizations are coping with significant risks for aid diversion and corruption.

A brief explanation of one damning incident will demonstrate the seriousness and the scope of aid diversion. In October 2009, the U.S. Government's Office for Foreign Asset Control (OFAC), a body that enforces U.S. anti-terrorism sanctions and monitors compliance with resolutions, decided to implement new conditions for its partners on the ground. USAID funding for humanitarian assistance in Somalia dropped from \$274 million in 2008 to \$189 million in 2009 (IRIN, 2009). The US Government had trouble approving more funding because they could not ensure that aid delivery could continue legally when large parts of Somalia were under the control of armed groups. Experts said that by enhancing the reporting, vetting and due diligence, these new conditions would unlock millions of dollars worth of aid for Somalia that previously did not meet OFAC standards (IRIN, 2009). However, allegations made several months later in 2010 would expose the reality on the ground: aid was being diverted and propping up armed rebel groups.

On March 16, 2010, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia published a report alleging that three of WFP Somalia's primary contractors had been accused of mass corruption. The document estimated that half of WFP's food aid destined for Somalia was being diverted and sold off illegally. For a program whose aid was worth about \$484 million in 2009 (UN Somalia Monitoring Group, 2010: 60), the allegations were shocking. The report says about 30 per cent of

the aid was taken by local partners and WFP staff, 10 per cent by the transporters, and 5 to 10 per cent by the armed group controlling the area (2010:60). The UN Somalia Monitoring Group also alleged the existence of a de facto cartel, and that the three contractors who received the majority of WFP transportation contracts for many years were "some of the wealthiest and most influential individuals in Somalia" (2010: 61). Perhaps even more problematic, the report stated that some of the food aid may have been diverted for use by armed groups. "A handful of Somali contractors for aid agencies have formed a cartel and become important power brokers — some of whom channel their profits, or the aid itself, directly to armed opposition groups" (2010:7). There has been an external audit and an investigation by WFP and they have made extensive efforts to remedy the situation and upgrading their internal controls and systems.

The UN blamed the allegations of corruption on the food distribution system in the war-torn nation; trucks transporting aid have to pass through roadblocks manned by militia and warlords, WFP said in their defence. "The integrity of our organisation is paramount and we will be reviewing and investigating each and every issue raised by this report," WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran promised as news of the corruption broke (WFP, 2010).

Aid diversion is by necessity worrying to donors anxious that every dollar should count towards development and humanitarian objectives. When such high-level corruption takes place in an embattled failed state, some might argue the imperative to fund aid programs is less compelling.

The problem of food aid diversion faced by WFP is just one example of the conditions faced by aid agencies operating in Somalia. Avoiding aid diversion and working with little access in an

insecure environment are significant challenges for all aid organizations. And yet it is acknowledged by all that Somalia is a country with enormous and complex humanitarian problems. The operating environment is constricting and difficult for aid organizations to navigate, therefore any aid solution has to be innovative and inspired in order to be lasting and effective. Nevertheless, questions still linger about what alternatives exist especially with the absence of WFP's food aid, and the increasing food security needs in South Central Somalia. Indeed there is a humanitarian imperative for something to be done and cash transfer initiatives are undoubtedly an appropriate alternative in this case.

V. Cash Advocacy: Optics and Donor Challenges

As any cash programming veteran will tell you, advocating for the implementation of cash transfers can mean confronting prejudices and misunderstandings head on. It is largely an issue of optics. How will the cash be used? What if beneficiaries buy *khat*ⁱ, guns or alcohol instead of food? The international donors have obligations toward their publics; after all, it is their taxes that fund international development, and it is to them that donors must ultimately defend their project decisions.

For an increasing number of donors, however, the presence and authoritative strength of Al Shabaab in Somalia is enough to hamper the flow of funding to the failed state. The U.S. government's decision to analyse its own funding conditions is having a ripple-effect among the Somalia donor community. The American government designated the insurgent group as a terrorist organization in 2008, followed by Australia and eventually the UK and Canada in 2010 (Public Safety Canada, 2010). As their profile grows and international policy changes to

acknowledge the Al Shabaab threat, it is hard to imagine that international funding to Somalia could continue without changes. If other donors follow the U.S. lead and change their funding conditions, this will undoubtedly have a minimizing effect on the already small humanitarian space in the country.

Combine this situation with the existing optics around cash transfers and donors already grappling with the complexities of delivering aid in and around a terrorist organization, and it is no great surprise that donors have reservations. And yet, after looking at Horn Relief's field-level approach to cash transfers and the positive experiences of many other agencies working in Somalia, it becomes clear that this form of aid should be endorsed in a high-risk environment like Somalia. Perhaps it should even be the preferred choice...

A breakdown of the approach will demonstrate how concerns about aid diversion and corruption can be addressed through cash based interventions while still meeting the food basket needs of a population in serious distress.

VI. Preconditions for Cash Transfers

Cash is a flexible, positive response that lends dignity to people on the ground. It is flexible in that providing cash to a household enables them to make their own decisions, and allows households to meet needs that traditional forms of aid would be unable to meet. Alongside its increasing acceptance and use, there is convincing and growing global evidence that cash transfers can address a medley of needs: it can reduce inequality and poverty, increase access to health and education, strengthen household productivity, and can positively influence gender

relations (Arnold, Conway and Greenslade, 2011). As a result of its flexibility, cash based interventions are not only used by the humanitarian community to address food security concerns, but also increasingly to provide for shelter, water, education and nutrition needs amongst others.

Cash transfer programs are also said to have improved gender relationships within households making them a beneficial programming model especially for women. A recent report by Oxfam and Concern found that overall, cash-based interventions provide many positive benefits for women. This included increased self-esteem and confidence to handle money and an acceptance by men that women are capable of handling money. On the whole, intra-household relations also improved as a result of the cash transfers targeting women and there were indications that some of these improvements may last beyond the length of the program (Oxfam & Concern, 2011).

Evidence has also shown that cash transfer programs significantly enhance the local economy by promoting credit systems with a trickle-down effect on trade and by also empowering communities to access basic commodities. This reduces the vulnerability of whole communities and also stimulates local production and trade by presenting a ready market for goods and local produce. In some situations, cash programs can also be more cost-effective and timelier than traditional forms of aid especially when administered in the right circumstances with proper planning and monitoring. Unlike other forms of humanitarian assistance where goods are purchased outside Somalia and therefore benefit communities outside the country, the largest impact from cash transfers is felt by beneficiaries and traders inside Somalia.

The global success of cash transfer programming has led to their inclusion in the SPHERE Minimum Standards for Disaster Response where it is now recommended that cash and voucher transfers may be used for a range of goods or services in food security, as well as for other sectors (SPHERE, 2011).

Cash transfer programming is not, however, a panacea for responding to humanitarian needs. Before deciding on what kind of response is the most appropriate, it is always necessary to gather information about the general context and the situation of affected households. If considering cash, part of that assessment includes scrutinizing the local markets and analyzing possible payment methods. For cash programming to be successful, local markets must be functioning and safe and reliable payment methods must be available.

Somalia is heralded worldwide for the sophistication of its markets and informal banking systems. In this regard, the preconditions needed for cash programming success already exist in Somalia.

Although an environment of conflict with weak local institutions, it is important to note that Somalia has some of the most dynamic and vibrant market systems in Africa. Somalia is a net importer and brings in food from countries including Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia. Even the most rural communities have entrepreneurs and traders, reflecting the citizenry's reputation for resourcefulness and entrepreneurialism. The functioning and integrated market system throughout the country, including in the conflict affected areas, lays the foundations for a successful large-scale cash transfer program.

As well as the functioning market, Somalia has an intricate system of money transfer companies, known locally as *Hawala*. These money transfer businesses facilitate remittances sent to Somalia from the Diaspora around the globe. The *Hawala* transfer money electronically and it is a safe, secure and reliable system. They are one of the primary reasons any Somalia-based cash program can operate, and they could feasibly support the implementation of a large cash program. This system is already capable of transferring large sums of money (around US\$1.6 billion) from abroad to Somalia which means that a large scale cash program would not overwhelm their current capacity.

Given concerns about money diversion and corruption, it is important to note that *Hawalas* have been vetted by the US and European countries for compliance with anti-terrorism and money laundering laws. They have a vested interest in their core business – the transfer of remittances primarily from the US, Canada, Europe and Australia to Somalia and neighboring countries – and, therefore, heavily depend on their ability to operate internationally. This translates to a compelling incentive for the *Hawalas* to mitigate risk by not engaging with certain groups. Unlike local contractors, they could compromise their reputation and ultimately their international business by diverting resources to certain groups. There are approximately 7 major *Hawala* companies that have the scale and network coverage needed to undertake large scale cash transfers. Contrasted with projects employing dozens of contractors and many more sub-contractors, using a *Hawala* means the money passes through fewer hands. And fewer hands translates to a decreased risk of money diversion.

Another form of electronic money transfer system that has gained popularity in Somalia is through mobile telephone companies or mobile money. Currently, there are three large telecommunication companies running services in northern Somalia (Golis in Puntland and Telesom in Somaliland) and in southern Somalia (Hormud). Dahabshiil, the largest *Hawala* in Somalia, with a presence in 24,000 locations worldwide, is also expected to start providing mobile money services in various locations within Somalia along with another telecommunication company, Nationlink. Shortly there could be as many as five providers of mobile money services throughout Somalia, significantly increasing the opportunity to scale up cash transfers through another secure and efficient distribution mechanism. The services are expected to cut security risks posed by carrying cash and also decrease visibility of the cash transfer process, making it an equally viable cash transfer mechanism. Large scale transfers through the mobile phone network have been tried successfully in other countries, including recently, in response to the Haiti earthquake.

VII. Horn Relief's Approach

Given the robust market structures in Somalia, and the existing system of money transfers that have been demonstrated to provide cash to the Somali community through remittance, it is clear that the preconditions to cash programming already exist.

A close analysis of Horn Relief's field approach to cash programming in Somalia will demonstrate both its viability, as well as its promise in high-risk areas like Somalia. The use of the *Hawala* (local money transfer businesses) to transfer funds and its own Inclusive Community Based Targeting (ICBT) system are two crucial components to Horn Relief's program success in

Somalia (Horn Relief, 2008). Horn Relief's ICBT methodology has been widely used all over Somalia and Horn Relief has trained more than 100 local and INGOs (e.g. Oxfam, CARE, World Vision, Catholic Diocese, Save the Children, Danish Refugee Council, WRRS, HADO, JCC, KAAH, AFREC, SAF,) on cash based intervention using the ICBT approach.

Before elaborating on Horn Relief's targeting approach, something to consider is whether or not you actually need targeting in all parts of South Central Somalia. In situations where the majority or even the whole community is in need of assistance, targeting may be superfluous. Universal targeting, or providing assistance to everyone, is a well accepted methodology for food assistance. After a rapid onset emergency like a flood, for example, all households may have lost their possessions. In this case, like for food assistance, it may be appropriate to do universal provision of cash assistance, targeting everyone rather than using a targeted approach. Similarly, in a context where nearly a third of the Somali population is in need of humanitarian assistance – the majority being in the South – it may also be best to consider universal targeting at regional and district levels. For example, the total percentage of food insecure households in the Riverine and Agro pastoral areas of Hiran Region of southern Somalia is 89% and 90% respectively (FSNAU 2011g). This covers almost the entire population in these areas. In instances like this, where almost the whole population is in need, universal targeting may be the best option.

Successful targeting in Somalia can be an extraordinarily difficult task. Clans are important social and political units, elderly men act as community gatekeepers, and there is a societal gender bias against women. Effective targeting acknowledges and works around these cultural obstacles to establish how to reach those in need. It uses various cross-referencing tactics –

including the formation of local committees – to vet beneficiary lists. Various evaluations and Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) surveys have validated the ICBT approach’s success.

Many people are familiar with the traditional method of Community-based Targeting and Distribution, or CBTD. The Horn Relief ICBT methodology is largely based on the CBTD method and it can be broken down into several distinct components: selecting clear targeting criteria, community mobilization, identifying the Village Relief Committee (VRC) and signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), training the VRC members, creating beneficiary lists, cross-referencing beneficiary lists, and designing and distributing beneficiary identification cards.

ICBT involves a certain level of transparency between the aid organization and the beneficiary community. For example, by ensuring the selection criteria are detailed and clear, community members can easily identify the most vulnerable. The different levels of vetting and cross-referencing that are built into the ICBT approach also testify to its efficacy: reading the list in public meetings; sitting with different interest groups separately (an important detail because minority groups and women would probably not publicly criticize a list that is not genuine); and vetting the list with key informants such as traders, money transfer company or *Hawala* agents and religious leaders in the villages.

To ensure transparency, the ICBT approach relies heavily on community consultation. From the moment an aid organization enters a community, it is essential to hold a public meeting with as many community members as possible, including men, women and children. All project

information is shared at the gathering: selection criteria; entitlements (how much each beneficiary will receive for how long and when); the selection of the VRC, who they should represent and their role in the registration process; complaints mechanisms; the importance of adhering to the selection criteria; and the right of the organization to take individuals off the registration list that do not meet the selection criteria. All of this information is critical to establishing a true partnership with the community. It also enhances project targeting because everyone has been informed about the selection criteria as well as the detailed vetting procedures. In this way, people cultivate a sense of stewardship over the registration process, knowing they will play a role in the close examination and investigation of its validity. This does not mean, however, that the registration process will not have its problems. It does however mean that the bar for improved targeting has been set higher by the process.

It is the obligation of humanitarian agencies to go out and find the right beneficiaries and warn communities about the repercussions and penalties if incidents of diversions are detected. If fraud is detected, depending on the context, it may be possible to withdraw support for that community or village and transfer the resources to other communities. A strong monitoring and evaluation system also helps detect incidents of fraud. Less visible monitoring systems so that your monitors could be staff or community members who are not easily associated with the agency and who can be used at various stages of registration, may be required.

Given concerns over aid efficacy and the obstacles in an environment like Somalia, the ICBT approach is a relatively effective targeting methodology that should minimize concerns about ghost beneficiaries and other forms of related aid diversion. Other forms of targeting could also

be explored, such as categorical targeting which includes focusing on specific target groups based on their individual, household or demographic characteristics such as the elderly, sick, disabled, malnourished, or people living with HIV/AIDS. This however may be a more cumbersome process to implement and can disproportionately benefit the non-poor. Experience in Nepal however, shows that categorical targeting can incur significant inclusion and exclusion errors if it is not administered with a poverty focus (Holmes and Uphadaya 2009).

A large-scale cash transfer in Somalia's South Central Zone would likely mean a number of aid agencies working in different geographic locations, but using the same or similar methodologies to provide cash to beneficiaries across the country. It would also likely mean provision of unconditional cash rather than a cash-for-work approach due to both the enormity of the humanitarian crisis and the gender-poor working environment that might prevent women from participating in a cash-for-work intervention. Furthermore, it is difficult for one agency to implement a large cash-for-work program (over 5,000 beneficiaries) due to the logistical constraints involved in managing and ensuring quality cash for work projects. However, the same agency could relatively easily implement an unconditional cash transfer of more than 10,000 beneficiaries and in a shorter time frame.

VIII. Cash Transfer: Risk mitigation?

Even with the ICBT approach and effective targeting, is it possible to do large-scale cash programming in an insecure environment like Somalia? In my opinion the answer is yes.

Large-scale cash programs have been implemented with success in a variety of contexts: 22 million in China under the Minimum Living Standards Scheme; 12 million households in Brazil as part of the Bolsa Familia program; approximately 10 million children through a child support grant in South Africa; and 48 million households through a National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India (Arnold, Conway and Greenslade: 26). A large scale cash-for-work program has also been implemented in Afghanistan as part of the Afghanistan Government's Livelihoods and Social Protection Strategy. The program was called the National Solidarity Program and was sponsored by the World Bank. The program targeted approximately 15,000 households in 7,500 communities in local reconstruction and development involving subsidies of more than \$150 million. (Hofmann 2005). As a humanitarian response, large scale cash programs have also been implemented recently in Haiti, with agencies reaching tens of thousands of people with cash interventions in Port au Prince alone. Humanitarian response to the Pakistan Earthquake, earlier this year, is another example of a large scale cash response to humanitarian needs.

Large-scale cash transfers are the most viable form of aid delivery to address growing food insecurity in South Central Somalia. They are also less risky for donors concerned about aid diversion and corruption because they are less visible, use fewer intermediaries and are in transit for less time than other resource transfers. Further, Al Shabaab and other insurgent groups are not likely to tax the most vulnerable and needy Somalis. They will instead try to tax wealthy and better-off families and business groups whom they think are more obligated to support the poor and less privileged. For example, an aid agency operating in Hiran is doing cash transfers to

vulnerable households alongside a nutrition program; they have been given full freedom to operate without any request for taxation.

Cash transfers are less visible than other resource transfers, whether food aid or provision of non-food items. Money moves from the agency to the bank electronically, and then is collected by the beneficiary. Each beneficiary is free to collect their money whenever they want – no line-ups, or big trucks exposed to looting and taxation at checkpoints. This collection mimics a widespread occurrence in Somalia; picking up remittances from your local *Hawala* sent by Diaspora relatives would be indistinguishable from picking up your cash transfer. Again, it is unlikely that Al Shabaab will have success in getting the *Hawalas* to collude in taxing the beneficiaries or receivers of remittance but rather they may attempt to tax the local businessman who is the agent for the *Hawala* locally.

The operational mechanisms of a cash distribution contribute to a program's risk mitigation, particularly in comparative terms relative to other resource transfers. Once registered, project officers send beneficiary names to the *Hawala*, who then instruct their agents in urban centres to release the money to the beneficiaries. Because beneficiaries will be required to travel to urban and semi-urban areas, the money will be available to them as long as the project can allow, ideally a minimum of one month. This enables beneficiaries to travel from rural areas to collect the cash transfer at their own convenience. By placing distributions in urban and semi urban areas, a cash program can reduce the security risk associated with moving money to rural areas, rendering the transaction even less visible. This scenario means the only possible source of diversion is if the beneficiaries share their resources with unintended recipients.

This reduced visibility is further enhanced by the lack of transporters and warehouses as in the case with food aid. The lack of heavy infrastructure, and the resulting minimized visibility, also provides insurgent groups with fewer opportunities to impose taxes. Fewer logistics, intermediaries and staff members mean cash transfer programs are less at risk of diversion and corruption than most forms of aid delivery. While a certain level of risk should be acknowledged for all forms of assistance in conflict areas, cash can be more secure because it spends less time in transit than in-kind assistance (Horn Relief, 2010). In addition, once it is distributed, cash is more easily hidden by beneficiaries.

Cash transfers appear to be the least at risk of aid diversion. As previously mentioned in the case of WFP in Somalia, food aid has been exposed to be at enormous risk of corruption. Another large-scale food aid program in India, known as the Indian Public Distribution System (PDS), has also been shown to have huge leakage. According to a World Bank study, only 41 percent of the grains released by the government reach the destination households (World Bank, 2011). In its report, *Social Protection for a Changing India*, the World Bank suggests replacing the program – which uses 1 per cent of the country’s overall GDP and targets 25 per cent of the nation’s households – with cash transfers. This way, the aid would be less subject to misappropriation or diversion and would support the rebuilding of the local economy. The World Bank’s recommendation is particularly relevant because aid misappropriation is often the largest stakeholder concern when considering making the shift from in-kind distribution to cash transfers. Through reports and evaluation, it is emerging that cash transfers are an inherently less risky form of aid delivery than large-scale food aid.

Another important factor to consider when assessing the risk for large scale cash transfers in Somalia is a religious sentiment that is likely shared by the insurgent groups. If the questions are will beneficiaries be robbed or subjected to violence? Will they be taxed? The answer is likely to be no.

Due to moral and religious complexities as well as the obvious political incentives, Al Shabaab and other local authorities would be less inclined to tax or steal from the neediest Somalis. If they are strict followers of Islam, then they are forbidden from taxing the people who should be recipients of *sadaqa* or even *zakat*, the recommended and mandatory charitable alms-giving upon Muslims. Aside from their religion, the insurgent group has also been attempting to enhance its own authoritative legitimacy; taxing vulnerable beneficiaries or even their supporting agency would reduce their credibility. In this regard, good targeting that includes only the neediest and most vulnerable Somalis is an effective mitigation strategy to address aid diversion.

Cash transfers can help mitigate the unique conditions on the ground in Somalia: religious insurgents, aid diversion lost through taxation, and rampant corruption resulting from limited access. In addition to these concerns, donors often articulate concern about poor targeting in a context like Somalia when discussing the viability of large-scale cash transfers. The ICBT system is successful in part because it directly mitigates the risks of poor targeting by using various vetting and referencing processes.

One should note, however, that targeting is of equal concern in food aid programming as it would be in cash transfers. And yet the aid community rarely considers the risks of poor

targeting in food aid or even other resource transfers involving non-food items. This is not to say that good targeting should not be a real concern for all aid agencies in all resource transfers including cash. Instead, it should alleviate some pressure from donors who may be placing unrealistic and unfair expectations on cash transfer programs to achieve targeting success not seen in other types of programs or projects.

It is also important to note that regardless of how much due diligence is performed on the ground, it is impossible to eradicate all risk. It is a matter of mitigating risks to satisfy donors, and to ensure aid delivery is as efficient and effective as it can be despite the hostile operating environment. Even the UN acknowledged the inability to balance risk eradication while delivering aid in Somalia. The UN Security Council Resolution 1916 states in Sec. 5 that "...the obligations imposed on Member States in paragraph 3 of resolution 1844 (2008) shall not apply to the payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources necessary to ensure the timely delivery of urgently needed humanitarian assistance in Somalia" (UN Security Council, 2008). This protects the member states by acknowledging an acceptable level of risk in the transfer of resources to vulnerable populations in a humanitarian context.

As cash is still considered to be a relatively new option for providing humanitarian assistance, and to ensure that an endeavor such as the large scale distribution of cash in insecure environments are fully analyzed based on real evidence, the importance of rigor in the monitoring and evaluation of cash programs cannot be overemphasized. A well integrated and thorough monitoring and evaluation process must be a key component of cash transfer programs. This is necessary to ensure that cash distributed is accessed by the target beneficiaries, help us

understand how cash has been used and ensure beneficiaries adhere to the overall purpose of the program.

Monitoring should be carried out at various levels ranging from the household (household decision making, spending methods, impact on family relations, etc.) to the broad economic situation (i.e. inflation, trading activity, terms of trade, etc.) within the target area. Large scale cash transfer programs in particular, require a high level of analysis as well as robust and vigorous monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of cash in conflict areas, including risks to staff and beneficiaries, and also analyze the effectiveness of the targeting methodologies. Cash based programs, like other forms of humanitarian assistance should also carry out a rigorous evaluation process by accurately documenting the feasibility and appropriateness of the approach (Hofmann, June 2005). Monitoring the implementation and outcomes also plays an important role in improving communication to the public and policy makers while evaluations can help in identifying and quantifying positive and negative outcomes of large scale transfers (Arnold, Conway and Greenslade, 2011).

IX. Conclusion

In recent months, it has become clear that many populations in Southern Somalia are under increasing and severe food access stress. The situation has been further exacerbated by the absence of large-scale food aid, as well as rising global food prices, the worsening drought and its impact on agriculture and livestock. A solution is desperately needed, yet the conflict and extreme insecurity in South Central Somalia pose both political and logistical difficulties.

There is strong evidence both from Somalia and other contexts that cash transfers can successfully increase access to food and other basic needs such as education and healthcare and has supported specific vulnerable groups (women, aged, children, orphans, and people living with HIV/AIDS), largely because it is a more flexible resource transfer program. It is also noteworthy that there has already been documented success of cash transfer programs in Somalia proving that this type of response can be administered effectively in highly insecure environments. Humanitarian agencies have proved this by using more innovative solutions to deliver such programs such as the *Hawala* money transfer system and community-based targeting methods to minimize risks.

It is also evident that cash can address a wide range of critical needs therefore scaling up the delivery of cash programming in Somalia's South Central regions – paired with due diligence on the part of aid agencies – is capable of addressing the increasing food insecurity and water needs. Overall it appears that large scale cash intervention is not only viable, but possibly one of the only remaining options to address the needs of the Somali population.

Clearly aid delivery has increasingly been politicized, especially with the growing requirement to promote donor guidelines and checks against terrorism and other forms of diversion. As a humanitarian organization however, we are faced with a number of key questions including: what alternative do we have if we are to adhere to humanitarian principles and code of conducts that compel us to meet serious and critical needs of vulnerable people in South Central? Do we ignore the plight and forget about our partner communities? This is what we may have to do because of reputational and legal risks of being found liable of diversion to ‘terrorist’ groups. The answers to these questions do not lie in passivity and waiting for donors to change their

minds or by taking the easier routes of operating in less risky environments not controlled by armed opposition groups or groups considered to be “terrorists”. The answer lies with trying to take both programmatic and institutional risks and trying to find creative and highly impactful interventions for millions of people who go hungry every day.

A large scale cash program in Somalia is not only possible; it might prove to be less risky than other types of intervention. The humanitarian imperative, to save lives and protect livelihoods in Somalia is strong and the urgency to find a solution is increasing. Without a large scale intervention, what are the alternatives? Furthermore, if one day Al Shabaab is finally removed, will we consider going back to food aid? Or will the promise of large scale cash programs herald in a new era in humanitarian interventions in Somalia?

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ⁱ "Khat (*Catha edulis* Forsk.), known in Somalia as "qaad" or "jaad", is a plant whose leaves and stem tips are chewed for their stimulating effect."