

## Accountability for all: Gender equality, social inclusion and pathways to accountability in Somalia

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and discrimination prevent certain Somali population groups from exercising their voice, choice and agency. In an already fragile context, state-citizen relations are further strained, as these groups tend to lack the awareness, skills and experience to demand accountability. Experiences from IAAAP highlight the ways in which pathways to accountability in Somalia differ based on gender and other identities. Some IAAAP partners are helping to break new ground and navigating the barriers and entry points to more inclusive accountability, but sustained support from programme leadership is needed if they are to continue their progress towards achieving 'accountability for all'.

This briefing summarises the findings from an IAAAP-commissioned learning paper on gender equality and social inclusion produced by Social Development Direct. The paper draws on IAAAP partners' reports and experiences over the past 18 months, highlighting systemic barriers to groups in the pursuit of accountability, as well as the challenges and opportunities partners face towards more inclusive and equitable pathways to accountability in Somalia. IAAAP is a DFID-funded programme working to generate evidence for action around greater accountability in Somalia.

### Key Findings

#### Deeply entrenched social norms and attitudes create barriers to community participation and political participation for women

Somali society is based on patriarchal systems that affect women's access to and agency in decision-making at all levels from community groups to the national-level election process. IAAAP partners have found it difficult to challenge male dominance and encourage female participation in ongoing projects.

#### Clan affiliation also presents barriers to participation

Those from minority clans are typically absent from decision-making positions and are not effectively represented at local and national levels. Prevailing acceptance of kinship and patronage in Somali society means that leaders' duties and responsibilities are owed to one's group rather than the whole community. As a result, citizens find it hard to hold their councillors to account because they have too little power or resources and are easily intimidated as a result. The level of intimidation for already vulnerable and marginalised groups is likely to be even more pronounced.

Several IAAAP partners have recognised the importance of including clan leaders in discussions around accountability to address these issues.

#### Weak accountability for women and other marginalised groups is characteristic of both the informal and formal justice systems

There is a general perception that the outcome of xeer trials favour the rich and powerful and are more often focused on maintaining a balance between clan relations than on justice. Responsibility for a crime is determined by whether a victim's family is powerful enough to press charges and whether violations are enforced at lower levels. It is problematic that clan elders, who are all male, are the leaders responsible for negotiating criminal cases where the victims are women, such as rape and domestic violence. Rulings in rape cases thus often involve marriage between culprit and victim and thus, women tend to distrust the xeer system. Within formal court institutions, women are under-represented and lack knowledge of their rights as citizens. Women themselves report that they do not have the knowledge, skills or experience to participate in decision-making, which is often linked to the lack of opportunity to participate.

## Environmental and infrastructural barriers also create impediments to accountability

Evidence from IAAAP confirms that people with disabilities (PWDs) find it very difficult to access public places and use public transport, which further impedes them from participating in decision-making processes. An IAAAP project found that internally displaced peoples (IDPs) are dependent on NGOs, humanitarian agencies and informal settlement managers to meet their food, shelter and security needs. In addition, the mobility of the IDPs to move between camps is extremely difficult due to high costs associated with relocating. Poor infrastructure, combined with rough and often hostile terrain, can make it extremely difficult to reach remote communities who are often very poor and marginalised. This presents an additional barrier to their participation in decision making processes.

## Applying participatory methods and tools in Somalia is essential but challenging

IAAAP partners that have staff who are well-versed in these methods, particularly in mediation and facilitation to diffuse group tensions, have been most successful in mobilising diverse stakeholders. Relatedly, some partners are grappling with how to ensure a 'do no harm' approach is taken. Providing support to partners in their engagement with vulnerable and marginalised groups has been critical. Research methods can be exclusionary when spaces where information is exchanged and discussed are frequented only by men. While the use of female researchers correlates with the increase in women who attend meetings, issues of capacity and security negatively affect their recruitment.

## Facilitating discussions on the value of inclusivity can get community and local authority buy-in

Some IAAAP partners found that taking the time to discuss inclusive engagement with local authorities can reduce their resistance to the inclusion of women, youth and clan minorities. One found that facilitating discussions about gender with communities early on can encourage women to express their views and to participate longer term. Another suggests building the capacity of both councillors and local government officials regarding gender, human rights and social inclusion, as well as positive action to bring minority clans into the council. Developing a revised ethics code for public servants could be one potential entry point according to Somali Open Government Initiative.

## Careful mediation in safe spaces can increase the meaningful participation of excluded groups

The use of clan neutral facilitators counter community perceptions of clan bias and can reduce corrupt practices of local project staff, generating more balanced and fair research. Holding meetings in traditional and informal settings, such as outdoor community focal points, gives people the freedom to participate as and when they wish, this is particularly important for women who have to work around their domestic responsibilities. Extra support to those who are often excluded can also help to create this safe space.

## Communication with communities should be diverse and positive

Excluded groups are often characterised by low levels of literacy. Using visuals can ensure that communication is accessible to all types of people. One partner found engaging with informal settlement managers (ISMs) particularly effective. They worked with these managers to display their commitments to IDPs on boards within the camps so that all IDPs can understand the commitments and hold the ISMs to account. Showcasing positive examples can stimulate those who otherwise feel they do not have any influence. One IAAAP partner has numerous examples of young people and women who have become more engaged once they've recognised the role they can play in achieving change – media can be a powerful way to share these.

## Emerging opportunities and entry points for applying a GESI approach to accountability work in Somalia

Key lessons and advice emerging from practice in IAAAP to date include:

- Consult programme guidance on the 'Do No Harm' approach
- Engage partners earlier to broaden project objectives and ensure gender and inclusion is included in political economy analyses right from the start
- Use data from accountability research to raise the voices of those who are not heard in the current electoral system
- Explore social media as a platform to increase young people's engagement with accountability
- Develop a better understanding as to why laws, policies and legislation that support women and other marginalised groups are often not implemented.

**For further information, please contact: [info@somaliaccountability.org](mailto:info@somaliaccountability.org) or visit [www.somaliaccountability.org](http://www.somaliaccountability.org)** Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP) is a four-year UK Aid-funded programme aiming to generate and promote a robust evidence base that will inform, influence and support a broad range of Somali and international actors to hold government more accountable.