IAAAP
Somalia Accountability Programme

UKaid
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Pathways to accountability for women and marginalised groups in the Somali context

Gender sensitive and inclusive programming in fragile contexts has a long way to go. International evidence shows that there are numerous 'blind spots' across the development sector's understanding of how gender and inclusion issues play out in fragile and conflict-affected state (FCAS) settings, and how this impacts accountability processes. As such, there is a need to move towards a deeper, more nuanced and, crucially, politically-informed understanding of gender, inclusion, accountability, conflict and fragility. IAAAP has generated a unique body of data on the underlying political economy of accountability issues and the nexus between accountability, gender inequality and social inclusion in the Somali context.

This Briefing summarises the findings from an IAAAP Learning Brief on gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) produced by Social Development Direct (SDDirect). The Learning Brief draws on IAAAP partners' reports and experiences over the lifetime of the programme, in addition to global and Somali specific literature, highlighting the specific contribution of non-state actors in achieving more inclusive and gender-sensitive accountability. IAAAP is a DFID-funded programme working to generate evidence for action around greater accountability in Somalia

Key Findings

Non-state actors play a critical but complex role in supporting pro-accountability agendas

Insights from international literature show that while it is helpful to identify local champions to play a facilitative role as interlocutors or advocates, supporting champions to bring about positive change is also a highly sensitive and risky approach, which can constrain the ability to experiment and innovate for fear of doing harm. For example, clan elders are notoriously challenging to work with from a gender and inclusion perspective as their very identity and position rests upon a set of widely held beliefs that uphold the superiority of men and majority clans. Nevertheless, their influential status makes them key players within the accountability apparatus.

IAAAP partners' political economy analyses (PEAs), and the subsequent interventions based on these studies, reflect how critical and influential non-state actors can be, both as champions[1] and spoilers[2] (sometimes both at once) in supporting a pro-accountability agenda. The small-scale, experimental and adaptive approach of IAAAP provided a valuable framework within which to explore competing interests and interactions of non-state actors.

Careful risk analysis and GESI-aware PEA is essential to effectively engage with key stakeholders

Each of the different sets of non-state actors brings different exclusionary – or inclusive – possibilities to their approach, driven by a context-specific set of incentives. While some may be open to supporting an agenda where women can play a greater role in leadership or decision making, they may nevertheless prove to be 'spoilers' when it comes to any threat of weakening majority clan dominance. An impetus to engage on gender and inclusion issues may actively disincentivise broader accountability reform where powerful groups feel their status may be threatened. As part of a 'Do No Harm' agenda, careful risk analysis, in conjunction with a more integrated approach to gender and inclusion, within PEAs is required to account for this. Evidence from IAAAP shows that partners were able to navigate spoiler dynamics and identify champions because of their ongoing PEAs.

Gains in more inclusive accountability are feasible but are often met with resistance

Efforts to strengthen inclusive accountability can go one step further by challenging existing discriminatory norms around gender and specific population groups, such as minority clans and internally displaced people (IDPs). Within IAAAP, efforts to promote inclusive accountability have been somewhat fragmented as few partners were willing or able to embrace this challenge in a meaningful way. Nevertheless, some partners successfully engaged in this ambitious agenda, deploying different approaches and even challenging widespread scepticism. This was the case with Tana Copenhagen's work with informal settlement managers for example, and their commitment to fighting gender-based violence within the IDP camps. Undertaking a gendered PEA helped Tana identify opportunities which otherwise may have been overlooked.

Tailoring interventions to the needs of different groups requires a nuanced understanding of diversity and difference

There are important differences in perceptions and experiences of accountability among diverse marginalised groups. For example, IAAAP evidence reveals that women have higher levels of scepticism towards clan leaders compared to their male peers, and social media engagement is much more constrained for minority clans and the urban poor. To effectively reach a diverse range of people, it is important to think about accountability in a much more nuanced way, unpacking how the perceptions and experiences of different groups vary, in order to better understand how this could affect their willingness and ability to engage.

Moving away from a one-size fits all approach to civic engagement, IAAAP partners explored a range of contextualised approaches, including adapting interventions to take account of prevailing social norms. These approaches included providing capacity-building to women prior to their participation in multi-stakeholder accountability events or platforms, helping marginalised groups identify shared interests in support of collective action, and using a range of media to inform and engage citizens, including the more marginalised.

Ongoing and flexible donor investment allows partners to explore pathways to sustain gains in accountability

Localised interventions offer a wealth of opportunities to incentivise champions and overcome spoiler networks, but they cannot do so unless sustained over time. IAAAP partners have highlighted this as a concern for the legacy of the programme, given the short timelines of the action-research initiatives. In the context of a powerful disabling environment, the sustainability of partners' work and innovations is questionable. A single donor-funded programme, by itself, can only carve out limited space and only for the short-term. These constraints are particularly challenging for the gender equality and social inclusion aspects of the accountability agenda.

Without more sustained investment over a long period – building momentum for change across society at multiple levels – it will be extremely hard to sustain even small gains in redressing the profound deficits of voice and accountability for women and other excluded groups in Somalia. As such there is a need to give more time and space to prove the viability of innovative models to strengthen the enabling environment for accountability and to mobilise indigenous sources of support for gains and changes in accountability.

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[1] "Nascent Somali accountability actors (CSO, government, academia, etc.) and associated actors willing and capable to maintain IAAAP momentum beyond the duration of IAAAP" (DFID (2015) Business Case, Somalia Accountability Programme).
[2] Individuals or entities who believe that emerging peace or state building processes threaten their power, world view, and interests and who therefore use violence or comparable means to undermine attempts to alter the status quo to the broader public benefit (See Stedman (1997); Newman & Richmond, (2006); Menkhaus (2007); Boucher & Holt (2009); Zahar (2010); Shaw & Kemp (2012); Nadin & Cammaert (2015).

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