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Aid in a city at war: the case of Mogadishu, Somalia

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Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, has been central to life, war, and peace in the country for almost two decades. Its urban characteristics, though, have been put to one side for the most part. In recent years, Mogadishu-related issues have been merged mostly into a global agenda for South and Central Somalia, resulting in the technical and coordination approaches employed in the city largely being reproductions of solutions utilised in refugee camps and rural areas. Unfortunately, urban problems require urban solutions. The aid system is just starting to discover how specific aid in cities at war should be, both from an organisational and a technical standpoint. The enhancement of aid practices in an urban setting implies, among other things, a more strategic approach to the specific spatial characteristics of the city, a more fine-tuned analysis of the technical requirements of the urban service delivery systems, and a better understanding of the role of urban institutions.

Keywords: food aid, gatekeepers, health municipality, internally displaced persons (IDPs), shelter, Somalia, urban IDPs, warfare, warlord

Introduction

Although it was at the centre of humanitarian operations in the twentieth century, Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, is largely absent from recent debates on humanitarian aid in the country. It is included indiscriminately in references to 'South and Central Somalia' (see United Nations, 2005, 2008, 2011a, 2011b), as if the challenges of working in the city did not have specific characteristics. Urban issues are referred to only in relation to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Puntland and Somaliland (UN Habitat, 2002, Taylor, 2008). The fate of Mogadishu's urban population rarely figures in aid documents, apart from two or three specific studies and marginal mentions of flows of IDPs (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2004) or nutritional issues (FSAU, 2004, 2006; FSNAU, 2009, 2011). Yet, Mogadishu plays a critical role in the wider Somalia context. Much of the political turmoil that has affected the country is rooted in the city and waves of famine and conflict-displaced people often end up there (Perouse de Montclot, 2000).

This paper was prepared in November 2011 amidst mounting international interest in humanitarian aid in urban settings, to illustrate the challenges of working in a city at war. It explores the characteristics of humanitarian crises in Mogadishu and looks at how assistance has been delivered in response. In so doing it argues that natural disasters and war generate specific impacts in urban contexts and that humanitarian aid in Mogadishu cannot be the same as aid in rural Somalia. It examines the particularly urban characteristics of the environment where IDP assistance is delivered and it

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assesses how the needs of IDPs have been identified and addressed. Lastly, it evaluates the suitability of the humanitarian system and its traditional approaches to coordination for implementing an appropriate response.

The first section of this paper describes Mogadishu's development and the conflicts that have been waged there and have driven people from rural areas. The second section identifies some of the ways in which this history affects the operating environment of humanitarian organisations trying to provide assistance. The third section looks at the threats confronting the population, especially IDPs, and how humanitarians have responded. The conclusion analyses the challenges to humanitarian response in Mogadishu and outlines several issues warranting further investigation.

Methodology

This paper is based on a study of humanitarian aid in Mogadishu that was carried out in September–October 2011, part of a wider evaluation of humanitarian aid in urban settings commissioned by the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (DG ECHO) of the European Commission (Grünewald et al., 2011). The city was chosen as it illustrates the case of open armed conflict and multi-phase displacement in an urban context.

Research comprised a field visit in mid-September 2011, including a series of meetings in Nairobi, Kenya, with United Nations (UN) agencies—the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Agency for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT), and the World Food Programme (WFP)—the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and a number of non-governmental organisation (NGOs)—Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and Solidarités International. In addition, it involved a trip to Mogadishu to establish an up-to-date, first-hand picture of the situation through meetings with humanitarian actors on the ground—DRC, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Secours Islamique France, and the Turkish Red Crescent Society—covering aid and access strategies, as well as meetings with inhabitants of the city (inside and outside IDP settlements), on displacement and survival strategies, and with the capital's municipal authorities, including the mayor and the urban planning team. This study is also informed by the author's other visits to Mogadishu over the past two decades.

The review of research on the humanitarian situation in Mogadishu and the related aid response draws on several knowledge bases, such as Somali studies. Political scientists such as Roland Marchal (2007) and Markus Hoene (2009) have published detailed works on Somali society and the country's internal politics and current dilemmas. Authors such as Alex de Waal (2010) have described in depth the humanitarian assistance provided to the region in general, and to Somalia in particular. Other sources of inspiration are studies of warfare (Hopkins, 2010) in an urban environment and the humanitarian consequences (Vautravers, 2010), the growing body of research on displacement, especially protracted urban displacement (Lassailly-Jacob, Marchal

and Quesnel, 1999; Borton, Buchanan-Smith and Otto, 2005; Deng, 2006; Crips, Kiragu and Tennant, 2007; Norwegian Refugee Council, 2007; Kälin, 2008; De Geoffroy, 2009), and the still underdeveloped pool of literature on humanitarian aid in urban contexts (UN-HABITAT, 2010).

The history of Mogadishu's urban development

Mogadishu is one of the oldest cities on the Coast of Spices (Ahmed, 1993), created by Arab and Indian merchants involved in coastal trade in the tenth century. It grew out of two pre-existing small coastal communities, Hamarweyne and Shingaani, in the Benadiir coastal area. As the physical characteristics of the coast permitted the establishment of a deep sea port, it became a central element of the Italian colonisation process in the Horn of Africa. The urbanisation process was relatively limited during the Italian colonial period (Ahmed, 1993). The first urban planning exercise took place in 1937 under the authority of Governor Guido Corni. This remains the only comprehensive urban planning ever to have been undertaken in the Somali capital (Lucchini, 1986).

In 1960, the city was still relatively small (around 800 hectares), with a population of approximately 100,000 (Ahmed, 1993, p. 3). It was not until the mid-1970s that it really began to grow, reaching 500,000 (Ahmed, 1993, p. 3).

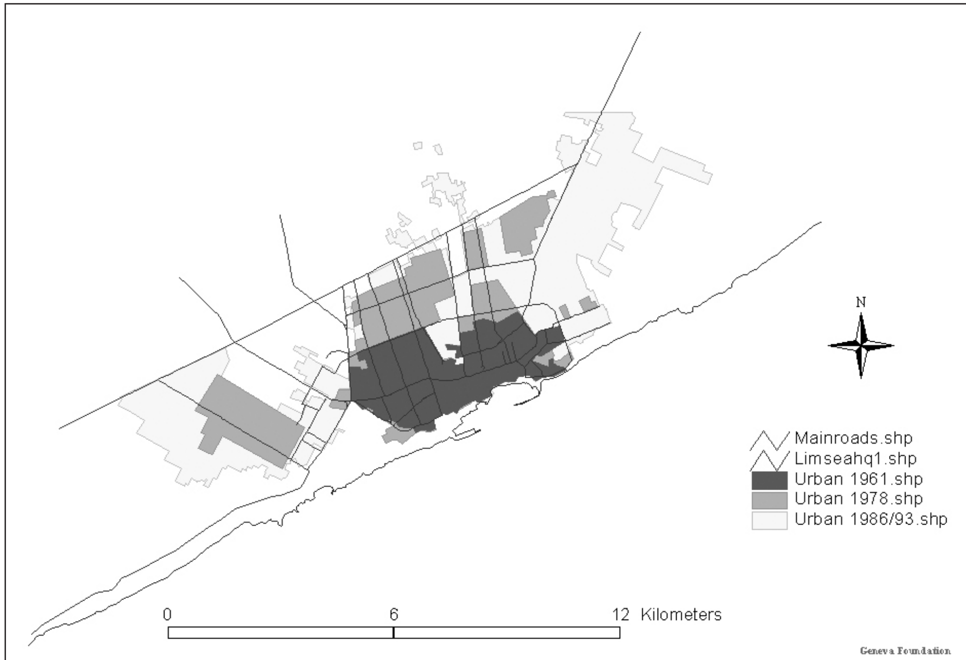
The nation-building strategy of President Siyaad Barre (1969–91) began to break down the clan system by attracting elites to Mogadishu and by using a 'divide-and-rule' approach. During this period, the city developed around its historical centre, with the creation of wide streets. At the same time, the deep sea port became a very active commercial hub, attracting a burgeoning unskilled labour force, mostly composed of destitute nomads and agro-pastoralists affected by drought and economic difficulties in rural areas. Mogadishu became increasingly a melting pot of people from all over Somalia drawn to the 'city lights' (Marchal, 2002).

The economic boom of the 1980s, when Somalia was seen as a vital ally of the West in the Cold War vis-à-vis Red Ethiopia, resulted in the development of a middle class and of a growing 'business class'. Urban growth was prevented to the east of the city by the Ministry of Defence's ownership of a large section of land. The city expanded northwards and southwards, along the road to Mogadishu International Airport and in the area known as 'Kilometre 4'.

The new neighbourhoods had no infrastructure: roads remained sand tracks and electricity and water supplies were largely in the hands of the private sector. There was no sanitation whatsoever. Rich residents had toilets with septic tanks whereas poorer households had only very basic facilities, if any.

The growing politicisation of the clan system (Lewis, 1993, 2008) by the government gradually began to affect social interaction in Mogadishu. With growing insecurity, people began to seek protection in areas of the city where there was a higher presence of their own clans and kin (Marchal, 2002).

Figure 1 Mogadishu: evolution of the urbanised area



Note: boundaries are approximate.

Source: Nembrini, 1998.

The government failed to design and implement any kind of urban planning initiative in Mogadishu. Somalia's first and principal urban planning law, which was introduced in 1973, is the only town planning scheme for the regulation of settlements. A second urban planning programme was due to be implemented in 1984, but this multi-phase programme, expected to improve the urban fabric of the Mogadishu metropolitan region, did not materialise. Mogadishu was increasingly an historical centre built to host a limited elite population in good conditions, surrounded by a series of less planned urban peripheries, with limited service installations, and quasi slums linked to the last poverty-triggered movements. Speculation and degradation reigned, leaving Mogadishu as 'a shadow of its former splendour' (Ahmed, 1993, p. 3). This was the situation when war erupted in 1991.

Since the start of the twentieth century, city life has been modernised. Contrary to the rural sector, it depends to a great extent on electricity. The production capacities of the Societa Electrica Italo-Somalia (SEIS), built in the 1920s, and the national company Ente National Energia Electrica (ENEE), created in the 1970s, were rapidly overwhelmed by demand and hence there were regular power cuts. Generators and private electricity producers—close to 100, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (cited in Marchal, 2002)—became necessary to supply houses, hotels, and shops with lighting and energy and power for water pumping. Indeed, the complex pumping systems (with submersible pumps) in areas

where water can be extracted and the wells dug within individual house compounds are totally dependent on electricity. During the war, these plants would have stopped working without the assistance of aid agencies. The ICRC took particular care to ensure that the hospitals that it supported retained a certain level of autonomy in terms of energy (ICRC, 2004). The Somali private sector also invested in the energy sector and managed to keep electricity running in parts of the city experiencing inter-factional confrontations. Even in an unstable context, keeping the city lights on and the household-level energy supply functioning were considered to be of crucial importance to the survival of city inhabitants. IDPs, however, rarely benefit from these services, as they are relatively costly.

Of course, increased population density has also increased the need for water and sanitation services, a particularly challenging problem in a region where water is scarce. The estimated water demand of Mogadishu was estimated at 50,000 cubic metres per day in 2000 (SWALIM, 2009).

The city's underground water table is composed of several layers (Nembrini and Conti, 1998). There is a permanent competition between human beings, who are extracting water from these underground reserves, and the resupply process largely connected to the riverine system of the Shabelle. As the city is largely built on sand dunes, the wells have been created using a highly filtrating material. The risks of contamination, pollution, and salinisation were already very high in the years prior to the war. The main clean water and sewage systems have been destroyed or have been damaged and rendered unsafe by the war.

During the war years, the population of metropolitan Mogadishu accessed water via several mechanisms (Nembrini, 1998). In the south of the city is the Afgoye water production field, comprising four deep wells drilled before the war and connected via elevated water tanks (the production capacity of the Afgoye field is around 25,000 cubic metres per day). From these tanks, pressurised water was distributed to houses equipped with water counters connected to the city's networks. Other smaller production fields, with 35 drilled wells, distributed lower quality water to three distribution areas of the city. Additional private wells extracted water from the intermediary ground water and sold it to 'water sellers', mainly donkey-cart owners who sold the water in the streets and from house to house. In times of active military confrontation or high insecurity (presence of snipers), the Mogadishu population took advantage of any quiet period, even at dawn, to fetch water and develop stocks. As such, the most critical aspect of aid in the past was the distribution of buckets and jerry cans to enhance this 'fetch-and-stock' strategy.

Studies of Mogadishu's economy in the 1980s paint a very peculiar picture of a place where the formal economy had more or less collapsed but where an extremely dynamic informal system provided niches for businesses with all kinds of international connections (Little, 2003). The International Labour Organization (ILO) noted that, based on available macroeconomic indicators, starvation should have been widespread in Mogadishu. The reality, though, was a vibrant city with active markets and bustling streets.

The rise of the Islamic money-lending system, *Hawalaad,* in Mogadishu's economy in the 1980s became a critical aspect of monetary flows into the city and, from there, to many parts of the country. The role of remittances from the Somali diaspora was already critical. Thirty years ago, the redistribution of these remittances made an important contribution to the overall economy of the country (Marchal, 2002.) Today, *Hawalaad* remains one of the most important lifelines of the city and has grown due to the sharp increase in the number of overseas Somalis. It probably represents much more than the value of aid provided to the country. The economic situation in the main urban sectors was badly affected by the dismantling by the United States of the Al Baraka Bank in November 2001, as part of its attempts to prevent the financing of terrorist movements (Perouse de Montclot, 2003). Somalis immediately set up alternative channels and other mechanisms have emerged subsequently, keeping the vital flow of resources alive.

Another characteristic of city life is the desire to access information rapidly. Telecommunications, radios, the local press, and television networks have been critical in Mogadishu. Cellular telephone networks have developed swiftly in the past 20 years and are fully integrated into the daily life of inhabitants, such as for undertaking specific economic exchanges linked to the *Hawalaad* system and for maintaining links with the diaspora. The internet is increasingly available in many parts of the city, and there are numerous private internet cafes in the vicinity of the Bakaara market. This is a key asset for the aid system since it allows local actors to report and communicate, and to set up crowd-sourcing mechanisms to triangulate information. This relatively sophisticated telecommunications set-up has great but still untapped potential in terms of alerting the population of threats, communicating with disaster-affected populations during response endeavours, and disseminating hygiene messages. This is two-way communication: information flows 'in' to beneficiaries about aid programmes and 'out' to assistance organisations about the difficulties and needs of beneficiaries.

Wars in Mogadishu

Prior to the 1980s, conflict primarily occurred in rural contexts in Somalia (Lecuyer-Samantar, 1979). This changed in the 1980s as the incidence of small-scale urban conflicts rose due to worsening conditions in rural areas and growing social tensions in the cities. In 1991, tensions intensified and resulted in a large-scale confrontation in and around Mogadishu, forcing Siyaad Barre to flee the country in 1992 (Torrenzano, 1995). Two factions of prominent clans and sub-clans from the area—led by Abgal Ali Mahdi Muhammad and Haber Gedr Mohamed Farrah Aydiid—managed to negotiate a shaky ceasefire, with Mogadishu divided into two zones by a 'green line' in March 1992.

UN Security Council Resolutions 751 and 794 authorised the activation of Operation Restore Hope, with the US leading the intervention. US Marines landed near Mogadishu on 9 December 1992 to spearhead the UN peacekeeping force. Eventually this turned into a fiasco, culminating in the shooting down of two Black Hawk helicopters and the deaths of 18 US soldiers and nearly two dozen Pakistani peacekeepers

(Pfister, 1996). This urban warfare disaster marked the end of the first large-scale, post-Cold War, aid-oriented military operation and contributed to the view that a new generation of asymmetric urban warfare was in the offing (Perouse de Montclot, 2000). US Ambassador to Kenya Smith Hempstone's famous remark, made in October 1993, that 'if you liked Beirut, you will love Mogadishu' proved prescient: a military debacle with a significant death toll.

Following the failure of Operation Restore Hope, the whole country, including Mogadishu, came under the authority of competing warlords. The ports of the capital and, to a lesser extent, Kismaayo, where trade in consumption goods is concentrated, were particularly attractive places for the militias and the political movements on which they depended. This situation lasted until 2006, when the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of local Islamic leaders and business executives, promoting the primacy of Sharia law over clan laws, took control of most of the south and central regions, and reopened Mogadishu port. Baidoba (in Bay region) remained the last area of inland Somalia under the control of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), created in 2004. Heavily-armed Ethiopian troops started to operate in the south and central regions in 2006. These were soon followed (in spring 2007) by troops sent by the African Union (AU) to confront the *Muqawama* (Resistance), composed of the ICU, nationalists, militias, and other movements opposed to the TFG.

After a strategic withdrawal from a few areas of the country, including part of Mogadishu, the ICU went back with full force into the areas from which it had withdrawn. It regained quickly most of the country, apart from a few square kilometres around Mogadishu International Airport in Kilometre 4, where African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops (established by UN Security Council Resolution 1744 in 2007) had set up their headquarters. The Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin (HSM), better known as Al Shabaab, became the ruling force after defeating another movement, Hisbul Islaam, in December 2010, while some proponents of the ICU joined the TFG.

Urban warfare resumed (again) in Mogadishu between internationally supported AU troops and an extremely fluid guerrilla force. A very difficult time ensued for the inhabitants of Mogadishu—the destruction caused by these battles is visible in many areas, as urban warfare is based on a combination of heavy artillery shelling and street-by-street fighting between enemies. Up to mid-August 2010, most of the city was under the control of the Islamic opposition forces. AMISOM operations in late 2010 and early 2011 extended its control over the capital and brought a period of calm, during which access to the affected population improved.

This development demonstrates the dynamism of urban systems, which reacted rapidly to an improvement in the security situation. As soon as the HSM withdrew, life in Mogadishu changed: swift clearing of garbage, battle area clearance (BAC), and unexploded ordnance (UXO) decontamination permitted the resumption of basic private services and economic activities.[1] Yet, this sense of 'heading back to normalcy', mentioned several times by interviewees, did not last. A tragic roadside bomb triggered a bloodbath and street bombing again started to rise (Mohamed and Gettleman, 2011).

Implications of urban conflict and underdevelopment for the humanitarian response

Urban warfare, mobility, and security

It is important to take into account the characteristics of these different methods of urban warfare when identifying humanitarian needs and developing responses. They limit access by the population to basic security and to its means of survival (water, food, and livelihoods) and they affect deeply the margin for manoeuvre by humanitarian organisations. Interviews with Mogadishu inhabitants underlined the challenge of surviving during active military operations. When it becomes dangerous to leave one's house or protective shelter, access to basic resources, such as food, water, and wood, is limited immediately.

The different stages of conflict in Mogadishu have had different consequences for the mobility of aid agencies, IDPs, and inhabitants. During the war in the 1990s, the city was composed of enclaves, each of them controlled by different factions either fighting all others or establishing rolling alliances to control as much territory and associated resources as possible. Military operations were a mixture of frontline defensive activities and street fighting to claim territory. The ramifications for the population were dramatic. Notably, house-to-house search-and-kill operations created a climate of fear with only two ways to survive: hide or move.

During the war from January 2007 to August 2011, however, the city was divided into zones separated by relatively clear frontlines, which shifted following military operations by AMISOM and Ethiopian troops. Confrontations were limited to a particular strip and aid actors knew who to deal with to negotiate access and deliveries.

The withdrawal of the HSM from most of Mogadishu in August 2011 disrupted these arrangements and led to the end of clear frontlines and defined territorial control, ushering in a new period of uncertainty. Mogadishu remains a divided city and the zone recently taken from the HSM is far more unsafe than the airport area up to Mukka Makarama Avenue, which has been held by AMISOM for much longer.

Demographic estimates and status definition issues

There is no official figure for the population of Mogadishu—estimates differ from one source to another. Due to permanent and seasonal rural-to-urban migration or transitory passage to seek opportunities overseas, the city grew steadily from some 38,000 inhabitants in 1935 to approximately 70,000 in 1950, 225,000 in 1970, 600,000 in 1978, and 1.2 million in 1986 (Ahmed, 2003, p. 3).

Events since 1991 have modified many of the parameters of urbanisation in and around Mogadishu and other Somali cities (Olewe Nyunya, 1998). A key factor has been complex patterns of displacement *to, from,* and *within* Mogadishu. Periods of conflict have been difficult for civilians and many inhabitants of the capital left when they were able to, or moved from one area to another within the city's limits. A significant portion of Mogadishu's population has not moved, including a mixture of relatively well-off Somalis, with good connections to the diaspora, and much poorer

Box 1 Typology of IDPs in Mogadishu

The old IDP caseload. The estimated number of Somali IDPs (UNICEF, 2003, p. 11; OCHA, 2006) country-wide reached two million people at the height of fighting in 1992. After 1995, many people left these areas either to return home or to settle in very precarious conditions in the main cities (Kismaayo and Mogadishu). Most urban IDPs are grouped in planned and unplanned settlements according to clan affiliations, principally in overcrowded slum areas, or in immediate rural neighbourhoods, such as the Afgoye Corridor. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made significant efforts to map and count IDP huts using satellite imagery. However, it is very difficult to differentiate between IDPs and poor urban residents. Another category are localised short-term IDPs who have had to leave their area for some time due to an outbreak of violence but who are eager to go back, conditions permitting.

Displacement linked to the radicalisation of the ICU. Although strict implementation of Sharia law was seen, in some instances, as a strong deterrent to criminal behaviour, the radicalisation of the ICU was not always well received by the mainly Sufi Somali population. Some inhabitants of Mogadishu left the city at this time.

The case load inherited from the AMISOM intervention. The evolution of the confrontation between opposition forces and the AMISOM–TFG alliance and the transformation of Mogadishu into an active combat zone with areas of direct confrontation between troops with heavy weaponry led to yet another round of displacement to the edge of the city. The Afgoye Corridor had to shelter another wave of people, in addition to Bakara market, which was transferred there for some time before moving back to the city. Access to Al Shabaab-controlled areas was difficult.

The new case load: the impact of the 2011 drought. Since early spring 2011, war-related displacement has been compounded by mass displacement of drought-affected communities from the upper and middle Shabelle, Bay and Bakol regions. Often members arrive in a serious state of destitution. Most are not part of urban networks, especially those who have settled in the new camps at the edge of the city where the level of assistance already is very high and is managed by aid agencies that are new to the Somali aid scene (Turkish Red Crescent Society and Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates).

people, who used to work for the former, such as daily workers, housekeepers, and small retailers.

While 'IDP' is a buzzword for aid work in Somalia, mobility represents both a way of life in Somalia (Beauman, Janzen and Schwartz, 1993; ETC, 2004) and a coping mechanism in the face of climatic vagaries (Grünewald, 2006). With the accelerated erosion of resilience and the growing inclusion of relief aid as a 'coping mechanism', many more people have been on the move. The most relevant typology of IDPs in Mogadishu is the one established by the duration of their presence in the city (see Box 1).

As in many comparable contexts (Action Contre la Faim, 2010), it is difficult to distinguish between IDPs and the urban poor. There are many similarities between these two groups: poor living conditions, the need to work in low-paid jobs because of limited choices, and the difficulty of gaining access to most of the services that function on a fee-paying basis (such as education). However, there is a perceived difference between the two categories: many IDPs come to the city from a rural background with limited networks, whereas the urban poor have skills and opportunities linked to their urban history. The longer the period of displacement, the more integrated the IDPs become and the harder it is to separate the two categories. There is, nevertheless, a clear distinction in terms of housing and shelter, as most IDPs live in the camps where they settled on arrival rather than isolated within the population, for 'security reasons'.

Distinguishing IDPs from the urban poor is critical in a context where the majority of IDPs have settled in major towns. In 2006, Mogadishu hosted around 250,000 IDPs, out of a total of 375,000 in the whole of Somalia. This number was no doubt altered by the 2009 war, when people left the war-torn capital, and the recent drought, when a new influx of IDPs was drawn to the city by the expectation of assistance.

Limited access to the field for aid agencies

During the initial decade of the crisis (1991–2000), access was possible, although at a cost (Groupe URD, 1999). Aid agencies agreed to work under the protection of the armed militias of clans and wealthy political actors. Functioning with an armed escort became both the modus operandi of humanitarian action in Somalia and a very remunerative business for the security providers (Gundel, 2006). In Mogadishu, access to IDP camps and the delivery of aid to these facilities had to be negotiated with 'gatekeepers', either landlords or groups controlling public or private plots.

The launch of the 'War on Terror' after the events of 11 September 2001 changed the situation drastically (Groupe URD, 2006). Western aid organisations were seen as part of this enterprise and therefore as potential enemies: Somalia became one of the most dangerous humanitarian hubs (Stoddard, Harmer and DiDomenico, 2009). The multiplication of incidents in the central and southern parts of the country led to a reduction in the physical presence of international staff (Cunningham, 2009). Aid could be distributed only by a limited number of actors that had the credibility to do so. ACF, ICRC, MSF, and SOS Children Villages were among the very small number of agencies that managed to maintain a presence in Mogadishu, together with a handful of Italian priests and nuns, one of whom was killed in September 2006, causing an outcry within the Mogadishu population. With the radicalisation of the context, remote management (Grünewald, 2009) became the main operational method. Islamic charities were the only actors that managed to preserve relatively unhindered access.

Most visits to Mogadishu by aid actors were limited to the airport and to the AMISOM base, which is only accessible with an armed escort. For the few agencies that continued to provide aid in Mogadishu, the only information they had came from local personnel, who were contacted via the internet or mobile telephone or were invited to travel to Nairobi. Consequently, needs assessments, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and targeting currently occur through the use of indirect control mechanisms (photographs, triangulation with different sources, video) or are delegated entirely to local actors.

The new military situation in Mogadishu was just beginning to open some doors at the time of writing (November 2011–January 2012). Agencies such as the DRC, IRC, and MSF had expatriates deployed in the city, although under very strict restrictions. In contrast, agencies from Islamic countries (such as Islamic Relief and the Turkish Red Crescent Society and the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates) enjoyed an impressive presence and were securing access in often highly sensitive areas.

Identification, quantification, and targeting

Working in a context like Mogadishu necessitates constant caution due to the number of variables that are either completely unknown or are only known superficially and with a significant margin of error.[2] For example, it is probable that a significant margin of error exists in terms of the estimated size of the population. As noted above, there is no precise figure for the number of people who have moved in and out, as well as within the city. Extrapolating from limited observations and working hypotheses frequently is the only option for estimating the size of the population.

Since mid-2000, malnutrition rates in Mogadishu have been, at best, rough extrapolations of limited knowledge and patchy information (FNSAU, 2009, 2010). An additional difficulty is ensuring that data are properly disaggregated by population strata. The last study on malnutrition rates within the Mogadishu IDP population does not discern between old and new IDPs. Various tools have been used to try to map and quantify the population. The 'granulometry' (size of the smallest unit for spatial analysis) of tools such as integrated food security and humanitarian phase classification,[3] which produces global situational maps, is not appropriate for analysing urban contexts with the necessary finesse.

Targeting is another extremely difficult exercise in Somalia (Jaspars and Maxwell, 2008) in general, and in Mogadishu in particular. The Somali clan and sub-clan system is such that aid organisations run the risk of being seen as the enemy by one side if they provide aid to another, making needs-based targeting and the allocation of aid a risky endeavour. The most frequent approach to targeting in the context of the current crisis is 'area and site targeting'.

Relations between humanitarian actors and municipal authorities

One of the main conceptual difficulties for aid actors has been to approach Mogadishu as a city and not as a classic humanitarian situation. This requires strategic sector-based coordination linked to administrative units rather than cluster-type sector-based coordination, and, above all, an attempt to engage with urban authorities. While some of the NGOs working in Mogadishu have tried to establish Memoranda of Understanding with the Ministry of Health, they have bypassed the municipal level and gone down to the district commissioner level, which is responsible only for law-and-order control functions rather than urban planning.

The reasons why there has not been any engagement with municipal authorities include the following:

- fear of politicisation
- the risk of corruption; and, more broadly,
- ignorance about their roles, if not reluctance to work with these urban actors.

Some of the lessons learned from urban planning in the cities of Puntland and Somaliland (UN-HABITAT, 2008) will be very useful in the capital.

Threats and methods of humanitarian response

Medical assistance and public health: surviving wounds and diseases

Open conflicts in Mogadishu have had several impacts on the health of the population (ICRC, 2003, 2004). Managing bullet and shell wounds requires the presence of highly skilled medical workers (anaesthetists, nurses, surgeons) and an appropriate environment, with supplies of blood and energy, for instance. ICRC and MSF managed to do this in a limited number of hospitals that remained accessible during confrontations. Blood, however, often was lacking. The capacity to save wounded people is linked directly to the time needed for them to access a structure with suitable treatment capacity. Crucially, these stabilisation skills and evacuation capacities were missing during each of the periods when Mogadishu was an active battlefield. The outcome was either a high rate of mortality or people arriving at the surgical ward with aggravated levels of infection. Amputation sometimes was the only option. In addition, conflict had others consequences that compounded the poor state of health services, such as the destruction of health infrastructure, the lack of medical and energy supplies, and the de facto dismantling of the health pyramid and its related referral system. These developments have reduced further the capacity for a proper medical response to conflict trauma.

Sanitary conditions in the city, with a multitude of IDP camps and high density areas, represent a major public health threat (IASC Cluster Evaluation (Health), 2009). Overcrowded conditions in most sites and camps mean that a high occurrence of communicable diseases is likely. Cholera epidemics are a regular occurrence, and malaria (Schick, 1997; WHO, 2005) is a recurring problem (Nembrini and Conti, 1998)—ACF and the ICRC conducted relatively precise follow-up of geographic and seasonal variations until 2004. Measles is one of the greatest threats to the lives of children in the city. Rumours of biological warfare together with vaccination campaigns induce strong reluctance to measles vaccination.[4] The very high rate of immediate post-natal deaths of children and mothers is a direct ramification of the absence of infrastructure to deal with complicated deliveries.

In the past, IDPs in camps often were the main targets of aid agencies' public health programmes. This continues to be the case for programmes being run by the Turkish Red Crescent Society and the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates in the new IDP camps in different parts of Mogadishu. However, when health assistance is being provided to IDPs, frequently it is necessary to extend it to the surrounding population. Increasing health facilities in camps when the nearby urban population does not have access to any is unfair and can be a source of security problems. Health surveillance and highly responsive epidemic control mechanisms are very difficult to implement in Mogadishu today.

The cost of health services varies as the level and type of conflict and humanitarian assistance in the city changes. For many years, the health system in Mogadishu has been served by private and public providers. With the gradual decay of the public health system, which started long before the war, access to health in Mogadishu has become increasingly privatised. Most people spend a significant amount of money on health, unless they are able to get treatment in hospitals assisted by international

agencies. The growing involvement of Islamic charities and the diaspora since around 2005 has resulted in the multiplication of clinics of all kinds, some of them well-equipped but expensive. With the return of war in Mogadishu in 2009–10, they became less active as the supply of medicine and the mobility of potential clients were significantly reduced.

Addressing thirst in Mogadishu and doing it safely

Two different strategies were implemented in the 1990s and early 2000s to tackle water scarcity in the city. The ICRC WatHab (Water and Habitat) team focused on the rehabilitation of hand pumps, the equipping of deep wells with motorised submersible pumps, and a major drilling programme in existing water production fields to increase overall availability of water for the Mogadishu population. A key factor in choosing where wells were drilled and where hand pumps were rehabilitated was an attempt to limit the risk of salinisation (to a distance of at least three kilometres from the coast), as well as whether or not certain practices were accepted by the landowner. The ICRC accorded priority to ensuring that health institutions could access a secure water system, which sometimes had to be built from scratch on hospital grounds. ACF prioritised the rehabilitation and cleaning of hand-dug wells supplying water to IDP camps.

A variety of means are used to supply IDPs with water. For example, IDPs in Afgoye have been supplied for years using a very costly water trucking system. Since 2005, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have invested in a relatively complex gravity system to distribute water in the Afgoye IDP camps. For the new camps on the outskirts of the city, inter alia, aid agencies are resorting to the classic system of water trucking to fill rubber reservoirs.

The sewage system created during the colonial period was not upgraded sufficiently in the 1970s and 1980s to match Mogadishu's growing population. When the first war started, the urban sanitation system was based largely on individual septic tanks in house compounds. These tanks have deteriorated severely and underground water has probably been seriously polluted as a result. These latrines have to be emptied regularly. The absence of clear rules for the management of black water represents another source of health hazard. In a number of camps, however, there are no latrines at all. Sanitation remains the number one problem for IDPs either in former government buildings or in private compounds or along the road. In certain parts of Mogadishu, it is very difficult to dig latrines because of the sand and the fact that the water table is very high and would rapidly be in contact with the content of the latrines.

Survival strategies in an urban context and how to support livelihoods

The livelihoods of the members of Mogadishu's population are very heterogeneous (Marchal, 2002). At one end of the spectrum there is a still relatively wealthy section, which is closely connected to the diaspora and to the Somali business community

Table 1 Existing opportunities

Individuals	Men	Women	Children
Job	Casual labour, porterage (water, charcoal, etc.), garbage collection, construction, begging	Domestic employment, selling vegetables, camel milk, peanuts and qaat, begging	Small-scale jobs rather than going to school, selling peanuts, begging

Source: Groupe URD (2004).

(Gundel, 2002). As these individuals enjoy access to remittances, they can pay for water, 'airtime' (units for telecommunications), and fuel for generators. Moreover, they contribute to the redistribution of wealth as they employ people for domestic services. At the other end of the spectrum is the urban poor, representing a sizeable section of the population of Mogadishu, although there is no data on them. Begging, hard daily labour, and the concept of *sadaqa* (giving to poor people) are critical to their survival. Their number has risen due to the arrival of IDPs. Their situation remains precarious, yet things have improved significantly since the major famine of the early 1990s. Between these two extremes is an extremely resilient labour force, which tries to make the most of every opportunity. Activities include dealing in water, charcoal and wood, and daily labour in the port and in the charcoal and wood trades (see Table 1).

Food assistance

Food shortages or speculation on local markets can cause food prices to rise quickly. Aid can be injected either to reduce prices or to increase the purchasing power of the population. There have been frequent responses in Mogadishu in the past decade with one or the other of these objectives and which have taken various forms.

The most traditional food aid distribution method—dry rations—has proven to be extremely difficult in terms of targeting the right people and ensuring that there is an efficient logistical system from the point of loading (foreign countries, Mombasa in Kenya) to distribution sites. The 'losses' to pay at checkpoints on the roads from Mogadishu harbour to the delivery sites—the high price to pay to the 'gatekeepers' who control the logistical hubs (especially the port)–makes the whole process costly.

The distribution of cooked meals (wet rations) was central to the operations of ICRC Kitchens in the early 1990s. Cooked food is much more difficult to divert than are dry rations. The transfer of the cost of fuel/wood from the family to the aid agencies also is a clear advantage of these programmes. WFP contributes to the wet feeding programme in Mogadishu, through which some 80,000 hot meals are provided each day, via the DRC and a Somali NGO. The beneficiaries have to wait long hours in queues: this is rather humiliating and it creates security risks in a context where certain parties regularly employ indiscriminate bombing as a war tactic.

In 2010 and 2011, food vouchers and cash transfers became one of the most favoured operation modalities to support families. The cash approach enhances local purchasing power and encourages local trade. Families are targeted and listed, and they

receive either cash or vouchers that they can exchange for items on a list with specific traders. This process shifts risk from the agencies to the traders, who are better equipped to deal with it. Furthermore, it limits logistical complexities. However, it transfers key difficulties much more upstream (needs assessment and targeting) and further downstream (monitoring and impact evaluation) in the intervention programming cycle.

In addition to the food and cash delivery approaches, there have been specific interventions to address chronic and acute nutrition. Chronic malnutrition (often linked to health, hygiene, and cultural issues) remains a widespread problem for the population of Mogadishu (Nutrition Cluster, 2007, 2008, 2009). Flows of drought IDP can increase dramatically the malnutrition rate in the city (FSAU, 2004; FNSAU, 2010). Current trends are the provision of ready-to-use therapeutic products, such as plumpy'nut, which can have a rapid impact on malnutrition. Given the limitations in the operating environment, though, such interventions are problematic as they require serious training for mothers.

A roof and a safe place to live and sleep

The civil war has caused major damage to city houses and urban facilities. IDPs have had to seek shelter in high-density settlements by negotiating with landlords who established themselves as 'gatekeepers' between the IDPs and the aid agencies. From the common Somali round hut with a light wooden structure, carried by nomads on the back of camels, the urban displaced made a version covered with cardboard, pieces of cloth, plastic sheeting, and tarpaulin. Long-term IDPs have managed to improve it with mud bricks and iron sheeting. In overcrowded areas of Mogadishu, limited access to space hinders expansion beyond the huts, for a kitchen or a social area, for instance. Various methods have been used to gain access to places where IDPs can erect their small houses. Notably, IDPs move into former government buildings, settle on compounds through negotiated access with 'gatekeepers', and rent plots that are quite expensive (200–300,000 Somali shillings per month). Given the weakness, if not lack, of official and administrative bodies, securing access to land and property is a critical issue.

Attacks, rape, and robbery: life and security in an urban environment

Protection issues are of high importance in Mogadishu (Groupe URD, 2004). The breaching of international humanitarian law in the context of the confrontations with international troops and the armed Somali opposition or between Somali factions can generate protection issues (ICRC, 2011). These will become increasingly serious if the current Ethiopia–Kenya military operation reaches Mogadishu.

Action to prevent deliberately people from gaining access to services or to assistance also can create protection issues (IDMC and NRC, 2010). This is particularly serious for 'non-Somali' minorities or for the smaller clans that have become dependent on the will of 'gatekeepers' in the Mogadishu setting. For the children of IDPs

and poor families, as well as for orphans, the main threat in the capital is child labour, although, in most cases, this is necessary to ensure the survival of the family.

Domestic crime, in particular gender-based violence, should be dealt with either by the law or by traditional mechanisms such as the *Diyya* (blood debt). In the HSM-controlled area, the strict application of Sharia law is said to be having a strong deterrent effect. However, it appears to be a serious problem in the TFG-controlled areas where the Somali police is mostly ineffective. The deterioration of moral values constitutes a major threat. In the absence of national authorities in charge of law and order, the only protection currently available comes from Sharia law and the threat of being declared '*ferguil*' (excluded by clan and society).

Education and child labour: a future for the children?

While education is not considered to be a life-saving area, it represents a key pull factor that draws people to urban settings, and is viewed as vital to the establishment or re-establishment of a certain sense of normality. The civil war caused the collapse of the education system in 1991. Private schools gradually took over. Koranic schools have continued to operate, even increasing their number of pupils (Groupe URD, 2004). Schools are supported by Western agencies and the local community, or are run by Islamic NGOs. The latter are particularly committed to the education sector, and they seem to have found sustainable solutions. For IDPs, children represent a critical workforce and often are fully engaged in the family food economy. The main issue is convincing parents that the long-term gains of sending their children to school are worth the short-term losses incurred by the children from not doing a full day's work.

Conclusion: humanitarian assistance through an urban lens

The study that was the forerunner to this paper sought to evaluate whether humanitarian aid in Mogadishu is similar to aid in rural Somalia, how the treatment of IDPs and the city's inhabitants should differ, and how best to analyse and respond to their needs. This paper underlines that it is not just a case of adapting aid to urban situations but looking at situations, needs, and capacities in a new way. Urban settings are extremely complex entities in economic, institutional, political, social, and spatial terms and require more than 'business as usual'.

This overview of Mogadishu's history demonstrates that the city was dysfunctional and overburdened even before war erupted, but conflict has generated flows of vulnerable people to, from, and within the city, and has led to massive destruction of houses and infrastructure. The way in which the city has developed therefore has determined the operating environment for humanitarians. A lack of infrastructure and scant public services have increased the need for substitution, and place real constraints on the ability of any actor to invest in long-term infrastructure. The insecurity and the division of the physical territory also have given rise to a 'gatekeeper' phenomenon that plays a role in almost every sector of assistance.

Over the years, complex relations established themselves between the aid agencies, the population, and the 'gatekeepers' (local NGOs, Somali staff of international NGOs, local landlords, clan elders, and militias). These relationships have allowed some agencies to continue to provide certain, limited, types of assistance. But their full impact on accountability and the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system has yet to be unpacked. Are they implementing agents, making aid more effective, supporting actors making aid more meaningful, or 'gatekeepers', diverting aid and making it less efficient? By relying so frequently only on them, the aid system may be introducing significant bias and betraying its principles. Alternatively, it could be facilitating the establishment of new partnerships with civil society and local institutions that are so often called for in urban areas.

Threats facing the population of Mogadishu now, other than from the conflict itself, mostly relate to the lack of crucial public infrastructure to provide drinking water, sewerage, and shelter to the population, and transport options to get the seriously ill and the injured to hospital. This affects the IDP population in particular, as it cannot afford privatised services. As the need to engage in urban contexts receives increasing recognition, humanitarian actors should work to improve their programmes in Mogadishu. To do so, their analysis will need to improve, and the aid architecture and existing standards will need to be reconsidered.

Survival in war-torn cities and bringing aid into such environments require that humanitarian actors enhance their ability to assess multi-layered, complex, open urban systems. Spatial and historical analysis is critical to identify and understand the political economy of the cities, as is analysis of the urban institutions, in order to explore ways to engage with them and the inherent opportunities and dangers.

Urban settings in the midst of war are dangerous both for populations and aid agencies. Analysis of urban warfare and how the population tries to adjust to it is essential to determine where and how to intervene.

Strategic planning of humanitarian aid in urban contexts also implies proactive analysis of relationships between the host community and IDPs. In cities, they live adjacent to one another.

Bringing aid into such complex environments requires a relevant 'assistance toolbox' that takes into account that most of the classical aid references, such as those in the Sphere Standards (The Sphere Project, 2010), are meaningless in urban situations. Water and sanitation responses have to take into account that the working unit in an urban setting is the water network, not the well or the spring, necessitating a different set of skills. The monetised and complex economies found in urban areas are based on flows of goods, money, ideas, and people which humanitarians need to be able to harness for the benefit of their response.

Furthermore, there is a need to evaluate coordination both between humanitarian organisations and with state actors. The current 'stovepipe system' of the cluster system faces limitations in Mogadishu, where the response in a densely populated geographic area requires more concerted inter-sector coordination rather than single sector coordination. A rapid move to area-based coordination in line with urban

administrative units and authorities, in order to have 'city and neighbourhood coherence' rather than 'sector coherence', is one suggestion to address this issue.

It is unclear what the future holds for Mogadishu, or if the current escalation of military operations will bring peace or more suffering to the inhabitants of this city. The key lesson, though, is that, without proper analysis of the specific urban features of a city at war, it is very difficult to respond appropriately to the needs of its inhabitants. In view of the realities in the cities of Libya and Syria in early 2012, the aid community needs to locate its 'urban lens' without delay.

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Endnotes

[1] Field observation by the author, Mogadishu, September 2011.

[2] The recent debate about the number of inhabitants in the slums of Nairobi, where access to the field to gather data is much easier than it is in Mogadishu, underlines the complexity and sensitivity of these issues.

[3] See http://www.ipcinfo.org/country_somalia.php.

[4] Interviews with health NGOs, Nairobi and Mogadishu, September–October 2011.

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