Humanitarian Action at the Frontlines: Field Analysis Series

Humanitarian Access Obstruction in Somalia: Externally Imposed and Self-inflicted Dimensions

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The Humanitarian Action at the Frontlines: Field Analysis Series is an initiative of the Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA) at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative. It aims to respond to the demand across the humanitarian sector for critical context analysis, dedicated case studies, and sharing of practice in humanitarian negotiation and overcoming access challenges. This series is oriented toward generating an evidence base of professional approaches and reflections on current dilemmas in this area. Our field analysts and researchers engage in field interviews across sectors at the country-level and inter-agency dialogue at the regional level, providing comprehensive and analytical content to support the capacity of humanitarian professionals on critical challenges of humanitarian negotiation and access in relevant frontline contexts.

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Introduction

Humanitarian access negotiation remains a significant operational and policy concern throughout the humanitarian sector. Indeed, in recent years, humanitarian agencies have devoted greater attention to enhancing individual aid workers’ capacities to negotiate access in increasingly complex environments while promoting efforts to develop or refine organizational access strategies.1 These initiatives demonstrate progress in the domain of international emergency response, especially considering that access obstructions have bedeviled organizations since the emergence of the humanitarian sector.2

New challenges confronting humanitarian operations have further complicated the vast array of perpetual access challenges the aid sector faces. For example, when humanitarian aid extends beyond emergency assistance and aligns more closely to protection and human rights priorities, which host governments might perceive as unwelcome or even threatening,3 or when humanitarian operations become linked with larger political or military aims—such as stabilization, or peacekeeping efforts in the context of integrated missions—humanitarian access may be hindered, and indeed, humanitarian agencies may be violently targeted by armed actors. 4 Furthermore, the rise of protracted conflicts—and consequently, the long-term presence of international humanitarian actors in these contexts—has led to the emergence of a new “paradigm” that challenges traditional approaches of humanitarian action.5 As Dorothea Hilhorst has explained, the original paradigm was “classical humanitarianism,” rooted in international actors taking the lead in providing assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence) under the implicit assumption that a crisis constitutes a “state of exception” in which the government temporarily cannot or will not attend to the population’s humanitarian needs. In contrast, a paradigm of

3 For one example where this tension plays a prominent role, see generally Michel-Olivier Lacharité, “Yemen: A Low Profile,” in Claire Magone, Michael Neuman, and Fabrice Weissman (eds), Humanitarian Negotiations Revealed: The MSF Experience, Hurst & Company, London, 2011.
“resilience humanitarianism” has emerged, in particular, over the course of the past decade. Under this paradigm—which appears to guide humanitarian action in some settings, in particular, in response to natural disasters—local actors and institutions assume a more central role and international efforts focus on complementing and building upon local resilience and capacity. In this model, a state of crisis constitutes not a state of exception, but rather, a new normal. As Hilhorst notes, although these two paradigms “are often loosely used and intermingled in practice,” they constitute two parallel, competing logics of the role of international humanitarian response.6

Without continuous engagement of local actors and institutions, there is a risk that the discourse and practice of humanitarian access negotiation will become stuck within the “classical humanitarianism” paradigm. Indeed, the dominant discourse on humanitarian access obstruction has focused on externally imposed obstructions, with scarce attention paid to how the strategic logic of humanitarian action fits within the larger emergency response ecosystem. For example, a 2010 document published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) enumerates emblematic access obstacles thusly:

- Bureaucratic restrictions on personnel and humanitarian supplies.
- Impediments related to climate, terrain or lack of infrastructure.
- The diversion of aid, and interference in the delivery of relief and implementation of activities.
- Active fighting and military operations.
- Attacks on humanitarian personnel, goods and facilities.7

As the above list indicates, the focus is on barriers to implementing humanitarian programming that are largely external to the organization. To some extent, this perspective does recognize internal and inter-organizational dynamics. For example, there has been focus directed toward intra-organizational coordination, processes of setting organizational “red lines,” and relations between headquarters and field staff in terms of fulfilling commitments made during negotiation processes.8 Regarding inter-organizational relations, there has also been increased attention on cultivating a willingness and commitment to jointly address complex access challenges, adopt common operating guidelines in particular contexts, forge better linkages between funding and coordinated programming, and garner the support of donors in these

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6 Ibid, at 1.
processes. Indeed, lack of adequate inter-organizational coordination has had a significant impact on perceptions of humanitarian actors in the field, the security of staff, access to beneficiaries, and the effectiveness of programs, with repercussions that can reverberate to other contexts. However, this focus on internal and inter-organizational dynamics has been largely limited to how these elements relate to grappling with external actors and obstacles.

When considering what drives, and how to surmount, humanitarian access obstructions, it is important to interrogate the fundamental aims of humanitarian action, as well as how humanitarian organizations work toward realizing their objectives. Without a critical examination of these dynamics, continued efforts in access negotiation capacity building and organizational self-examination will be incomplete, feeding into a narrative that humanitarian organizations are simply victims of externally imposed access obstruction. But one cannot decouple access obstruction from the policy dimensions of humanitarian programming. Indeed, the access challenges that humanitarian actors face can actually be driven or exacerbated by operational decisions made at the strategic or policy level. In this sense, access obstacles are not merely external, but rather, can be self-inflicted, arising from the very manner by which humanitarian organizations determine and pursue their programmatic objectives.

To analyze these dynamics, this paper focuses on Somalia, an emblematic environment in which there is a convergence of a deep and complex protracted conflict, urgent and long-term humanitarian needs, and an insecure and politicized environment where attacks directed at humanitarian actors are prevalent. In this context, there is also a definitive and consequential operational chasm between international humanitarian actors and the populations they aim to serve.

This study is based on over 40 interviews conducted in Somalia, as well as remotely, with senior staff, both local and international, of local and international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies active in different areas of Somalia, including Mogadishu, Afgoye, Baidoa, Kismayo, and Galkayo. In-country interviews were conducted in April, June, and September 2018. Remote interviews were conducted between May 2016 to September 2017. Interviewees discussed their experiences working in various areas in the humanitarian field, such as health, support for internally displaced persons (IDPs), and education.

This paper is divided into five parts. Part I provides an overview of the ongoing conflict in Somalia. Part II discusses externally imposed access obstacles in this context. Part III complements this analysis with an examination of the self-inflicted dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction in Somalia. Part IV, to illustrate the importance of acknowledging and grappling with self-inflicted obstacles, examines the case of Somalia through the lens of the typology of grand strategies of
humanitarianism introduced by Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder. Part V offers concluding remarks.

I. Background on the Ongoing Armed Conflict in Somalia

A state of protracted internal armed conflict has endured in Somalia since the downfall of the regime of Siad Barre in 1991. This multi-faceted conflict entails an ongoing conflict with Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahideen (also known as Al-Shabaab), inter-clan tensions, and tensions between federal authorities and those at the state and local levels. International actors have been present and engaged in supporting the political “modernization” of the Somali state. The most recent significant developments in this regard were the elections of 2016-2017, widely hailed as a flawed but significant step forward for the country. To quote one expert’s reflections on the overall status of Somalia state- and nation-building in the post-election environment: “The operation was a mess, but the patient survived.” Nevertheless, the armed conflict endures, chronic poverty in the country persists, and climate-related environmental degradation continues to exacerbate tensions. The rest of this section will elaborate on these issues, offering context for the humanitarian access issues that the rest of this paper will examine.

A. Political “Modernization”

The project of promoting the political “modernization” of Somalia has entailed international donors pursuing both top-down and bottom-up modes of cultivating political buy-in among a wide range of actors, including elites and civil society, for the process. However, it appears that a lack of strategic coordination among donor actors, as well as donor timelines, has led to a reduced international focus on grassroots efforts directed toward addressing the underlying causes of conflict.

13 See generally Sarah Hearn and Thomas Zimmerman, “A Window of Opportunity for Somalia: Will External Actors’ Peacebuilding Frameworks Help or Hinder the Effort?” Project Brief, Center for
One can describe the mode of governance pursued for Somalia as “federal indirect consociational democracy.” 14 Consociational democracy—a notion popularized by political scientist, Arend Lijphart, in the 1970s as a form of democracy appropriate for countries where politically salient identity characteristics are prevalent—entails “government by a grand coalition of the political leaders of all significant segments of the plural society.” 15 The notion of consociational democracy is that, by institutionalizing political cooperation across politically salient identity lines, as Lijphart explains, “the centrifugal tendencies inherent in a plural society are counteracted by the cooperative attitudes and behavior of the leaders of the different segments of the population.” 16 However, a key critique of consociational democracy is that this form of governance will only be successful if the underlying causes of societal conflict are first understood and addressed. 17 Indeed, as one report notes, institutionalizing politics along identity-based divides can intensify political cleavages, leaving the state weak and under-developed, based on “little more than the relationships forged between powerful elites” who “can mobilise violence easily through patron-client relationships,” and where there exist “short timeframes before bargains are re-negotiated, often through violence.” 18

Furthermore, as the same report states, the “tribal structures, identities, and fault-lines” in Somalia “continue to influence the social relations, norms, customs and legitimacy that govern elites.” 19 Where the prospect of state-building among the political elite signifies a threat to their interests, political elites can and have circumnavigated formal state structures, aiming to intentionally keep state institutions weak. 20 According to another report, some analysts perceive that Somalia’s “narrow model of electioneering only benefits an elite political class” and risks “widen[ing] the already existing rift between clans and sub-clans,” thus potentially “stym[ying] the creation of an all-inclusive system that would unite Somalis based on nationhood.” 21 Furthermore, analysts have described the context as

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Ibid, at 1.

For example, see Donald L. Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1985, pp. 563-652.


Ibid, at 21.

Ibid, at 22.

one in which “externally-driven donor aid allocations and disbursement timelines risk undercutting Somali decision-making and consensus-building on peacebuilding.”

The 2016-2017 elections were plagued by corruption, but nevertheless, the process led to, in the words of one expert, “at least temporary public enthusiasm about and support for the new government, earning it a degree of legitimacy that the outgoing administration had lacked.” Still, this optimism and enthusiasm remains tentative. Interviews with local Somali actors revealed a prevalent perception in the country that the state being constructed is fragile, constituting a bubble with the potential to rapidly explode. As the findings of these interviews indicate, the primary fear among Somalis is the risk of the country backsliding toward a situation resembling 1991, when inter-clan divisions fueled violent conflict and the dissolution of any sort of centralized political order. Moreover, various studies have noted that many Somalis view a strong central state with suspicion and perceive even federalism to be an undesirable externally imposed solution. Nevertheless, interviewees also noted the emergence of a political culture, in terms of debates, and in particular, interest among Somalis in political discourse on social media. Despite this development, dialogue tends to illustrate an underlying level of mistrust between interlocutors. The notion that “every single Somali thinks he is a victim in this context” is prevalent throughout the country.

The Somali diaspora also plays a crucial role in the country in various respects. In 2016, the diaspora injected approximately $1.4 billion via remittances into the Somali

26 For previous research that captures this same sentiment, see Rahma Abdulkadir and Caroline Ackley, “The Role of Shari’a-Based Restorative Justice in the Transition from Armed Conflict to Peacebuilding: Do Somalis Hold the View That the Restorative Justice Aspects within Qisas Offer a Solution?” Northeast African Studies 14(2), Fall 2014, p. 112.
economy. Additionally, more than one third of current members of parliament, as well as the majority of presidential candidates in the recent presidential election (including the winner and current president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, nicknamed “Farmajo”), and the current prime minister, Hassan Ali Khayre, all hold foreign passports. In light of these realities, there is concern among Somalis about the commitment of these dual passport holders toward Somalia in the long term.

B. The Multi-Faceted Conflict Endures

Despite the steps forward in terms of state- and nation-building in Somalia, the armed conflict endures. The clan-based political configuration of Somalia has contributed to political conflicts along clan, sub-clan, and even family lines across the country. Moreover, a major thread in this conflict consists of the clash between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Al-Shabaab, a non-state armed group committed to establishing an Islamist state in Somalia. Al-Shabaab, which once held large swaths of territory in the country, has transitioned into, as one analyst describes, a “semi-territorial organization” able to exert control over, and commit violence against, populations residing in territory the group does not control directly. In October 2017, Al-Shabaab was responsible for one of Somalia’s worst terrorist attacks: a truck bomb in Mogadishu that killed over 300 people and wounded hundreds more. In 2018, Al-

Shabaab’s string of attacks against civilian and military targets has continued, and the group has also achieved gains in terms of territorial control.

Other dimensions of the conflict include tensions between Somalia’s federal states. Notably, in 2018, a long-running territorial dispute escalated between Somaliland (which unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in 1991) and Puntland (which proclaimed autonomy in 1998). Overall, though, the greatest threat to civilians in the country stems from Al-Shabaab, which was, as noted in a United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia report, responsible for the vast majority of civilian casualties for the period of time that the report examined (January-October 2017).

A great deal of international attention—namely, from Western countries, including the United States, which has a growing military presence in the country—has focused on the potential international terrorist threats emanating from Somalia. However, policies that focus on countering Al-Shabaab as an Al-Qaeda affiliate risk overlooking the domestic sources of the Somali group’s resilience and strength, its ability to provide security and dispute resolution, and its capacity to exploit the grievances of disenfranchised clans. As one analyst asserts, “Al-Shabaab should be seen as a consequence, not a cause of the violent conflict and organized crime which predated


long before the emergence of the movement in the early 2000s.”\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, there is a widespread sense among some in Somalia that “[i]nsecurity under Al-Shabaab is far better than security under the federal government,” and indeed, that Al-Shabaab has been more successful, for territory that the group controls, than the central government in “applying the Weberian notion of the monopoly of legitimate force.”\textsuperscript{39}

There are also other important regional and international dimensions to the conflict. A key actor in the context is the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), first mandated by the African Union in 2006. Many perceive that AMISOM has played a critical role in enabling the FGS, in terms of local reconciliation and dialogue. The ratio of AMISOM to Somali troops illustrates the extent of Somalia’s security dependency on AMISOM. There are an estimated 22,000 AMISOM troops in the country,\textsuperscript{40} whereas the official total of the Somali National Army is approximately 26,000, although this figure includes many individuals not actually able to engage in combat, including, as one news report notes, “ghost soldiers, pensioners and the dead, whose families may be receiving their payments.”\textsuperscript{41}

AMISOM’s ability to create stability and to enable intra-Somali dialogue has been undermined by suspicion and mistrust of foreign forces. AMISOM’s decentralized command structure, with forces from each participating country carving out zones of operation and forging alliances with disparate Somali partners, may have deepened the fragmentation of the Somali policy and society.\textsuperscript{42} Furthermore, AMISOM has suffered from inadequate personnel, equipment, and intelligence gathering and processing capacities.\textsuperscript{43}

Geopolitical dynamics can also threaten Somalia’s fragile internal political climate. For example, during the 2017 Gulf Crisis that stemmed from tensions between United Arab Emirates and Qatar, President “Farmajo” declared that Somalia would remain


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, at 2-3. For more on Max Weber’s notion of the state as an entity “successful in seeking to monopolize the legitimate use of physical force as a means of domination within a territory,” see generally Max Weber, \textit{Politics as a Vocation} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965).


neutral in the dispute, but intra-Somali tensions simmered over how to navigate the crisis. As a country dependent on a wide portfolio of donor states, some of which are geopolitical rivals with one another (namely, Saudi Arabia and Turkey), Somalia is likely to remain vulnerable in instances when international tensions between donor states rise.

The international community, nourished by the establishment of a new central authority, have engaged in extensive analysis on the dynamics of the conflict and the role of Al-Shabaab, in particular. A persistent component of these efforts has been the international community’s insistence that, ultimately, a resolution of conflict depends on the willingness of Somalis, especially those in power, to choose dialogue over violence and to develop their own strategies to address the drivers of violence. However, lack of inclusion of the broader population in negotiations, power-sharing, and access to human rights and resources in Somalia has been an unresolved driver of the conflict since the civil war erupted.

In the current environment, the absence of the rule of law, state enforcement mechanisms, and the abundance of weapons in civilian hands has meant that minor quarrels can (and do) escalate into violent confrontations among these groups, which can then draw in their respective communities. As interviewees noted, the process of forming federal member states, rather than promoting grassroots reconciliation between the various sets of clans engaged in localized conflicts throughout south-central Somalia, has intensified and, in some cases, revived conflict over regional boundaries, land use, and political representation. In this sense, the project of Somalia’s political “modernization” (as the previous sub-section discussed) and the country’s enduring conflict (as this sub-section has addressed) are inherently linked, but not in the way that many in the international community would hope. Indeed, it appears that the mode of political “modernization” pursued in Somalia has played a role in fueling the very tensions these efforts have sought to quell.

C. Ongoing Humanitarian Activities

International humanitarian engagement in Somalia dates back to before the downfall of the Barre regime in 1991. Even before 1991, as one scholar noted in the 1970s, Somalia was “one of the largest recipients of foreign aid,” but aid efforts were stymied by a wide array of issues, including “unproductive and wasteful utilisation of aid proceeds” and “motives of self-interest on the part of donor countries.”

45 For example, the ICRC has been present in Somalia since 1982.
Over the past couple decades, large-scale aid efforts have continued as a part of international efforts to address the recurrent crises that Somalia has faced, including famines in 1992 and 2011, as well as the threat of famine in 2017, a risk that persists to the present.\footnote{See generally "Instruments of Pain (III): Conflict and Famine in Somalia," Africa Briefing No. 125, International Crisis Group, May 9, 2017, https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b125-instruments-of-pain-iii.pdf.} As a result of the ongoing armed conflict, as well as erratic climatic patterns—including prolonged drought followed by heavy rainfall, which has resulted in widespread flash floods—Somalia is plagued by immense, persistent needs, including not only the need for emergency aid but also needs related to protection and development. Across the country, 5.4 million people (out of a total population of 12.3 million) are in need of humanitarian assistance, including 2.6 million IDPs.\footnote{"Humanitarian Response Plan—Revised: July-December 2018,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, July 2018, p. 5, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Somalia%20Revised%20HRP%20July%202018-FINAL.pdf.} The United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2018 identifies a funding requirement of $1.5 billion to address the crisis.\footnote{"Humanitarian Response Plan,” p. 5.} Points of focus for these international efforts are emergency food assistance; health; water, sanitation, and hygiene; education; shelter; protection; and resilience.\footnote{See generally ibid.} It is also important to emphasize the role that climate change plays in this context. Indeed, desertification, as well as the aforementioned climatic shocks (e.g., drought, heavy rainfall, and flash floods), have fueled high levels of displacement, playing a central role in rising tensions and competition over increasingly scarce food and water resources.\footnote{Giovanna Kuele and Cristina Miola, "Climate Change is Feeding Armed Conflict in Somalia," Institute for Security Studies, April 6, 2018, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/climate-change-is-feeding-armed-conflict-in-somalia.}

However, various obstacles perpetually hinder efforts to address these needs. Some of these challenges are external in nature, emanating from field-based obstacles to implementing humanitarian programming. Other issues are internal, pointing toward dysfunction in terms of what international humanitarian organizations (IHOs) are actually seeking to implement, and how organizations are pursuing their programmatic ends. The rest of this paper examines these two sets of issues.
II. Externally Imposed Dimensions of Humanitarian Access Obstruction

When examining externally driven access obstacles emerging from the field of operation in Somalia, one can discern at least four significant access constraints. They are:

- Constraints imposed by the government and/or local authorities or that result from a lack of governmental capacity;
- Al-Shabaab’s rejectionist posture toward IHOs;
- Difficulties of dealing with “gatekeepers,” a term that, in Somalia, refers to private actors able to control humanitarian access for their own private ends; and
- The insecure nature of the environment.

This section will examine these four issues, each of which constitutes an important aspect of the humanitarian access landscape in Somalia.

A. Government Constraints

Humanitarian actors in Somalia face access constraints stemming from all governmental levels, including the FGS and federal state authorities, as well as local and traditional authorities. Interviewees reported access obstacles—in terms of reaching beneficiaries, as well as beneficiaries’ ability to access humanitarian services—arising from “different layers of authorities.” These layers include government interference in humanitarian programming; clan and sub-clan conflicts and disputes over resources; bureaucratic systems of regional administrations, which sometimes has delayed or blocked service delivery; and threats of arrest from local authorities. In this context, humanitarians face a combination of constraints that appear to derive from official government policy at various levels and those that stem from, as an International Crisis Group report states, “rogue security elements,” for example: those that have “erect[ed] checkpoints on major routes to serve as ‘toll stations’ as a means of extracting money.”

Another important issue relevant to engagements between humanitarian actors and the government is the destruction, in December 2017, of 23 IDP camps by Somali


security forces. 54 Peter de Clercq, the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, expressed public concern about this incident in a statement describing the detrimental humanitarian effects of these activities. He stated:

I am deeply saddened to learn of evictions, without prior notice, of internally displaced persons, in Banadir region. Some of these displaced people have walked long distances from different parts of the country fleeing drought and conflict. On 29 and 30 December, over 23 IDP settlements, housing over 4,000 IDP households, were destroyed. Personal property and livelihoods have also been lost as people were not given time to collect their belongings before the destruction started. Families, including children, women and the elderly are now living in the open.55

Humanitarian actors have engaged in advocacy in order to pry open access constraints imposed by authorities. These efforts, directed, in 2017, toward FGS and certain federal authorities (in particular, in Galmudug, South West State, and Hirshabelle) led to, according to OCHA, “milestone commitments... to ensure access routes are opened.”56 IHOs have also sought to improve inter-organizational engagement on grappling with access obstacles. An “Access Taskforce” that IHOs established in 2015 has facilitated IHOs’ efforts to negotiate access while grappling with different layers of governmental authorities.57 Although, there is also the issue that aid, after it is distributed, might not remain in the hands of the intended beneficiaries. Aid workers have found, after distributing food and medical aid to IDPs just outside of Mogadishu, that the supplies made their way to merchants who have been selling the supplies in local markets.58

It is also important to highlight that access constraints stem not only from deliberate obstructive activities but also from a lack of infrastructure—for example in terms of roads or airstrips—in the country.59 Infrastructural limitations played a particularly

salient role in hindering humanitarian efforts to respond to humanitarian needs after heavy rainfall in April and May 2018, when flooding rendered certain areas inaccessible. Interviewees reported access challenges stemming not only from poor infrastructure and transportation but also from an overall environment of weak enforcement of law and order in the country.

B. Al-Shabaab’s Rejectionist Posture

Humanitarian actors also face access obstacles and challenges arising from actors associated with Al-Shabaab. Interviewees reported that access challenges in Somalia have included Al-Shabaab regulations and preconditions, as well as kidnappings of aid workers. An International Crisis Group report published in 2017 highlighted Al-Shabaab’s role in hindering access to Somalis affected by the drought “by blocking international organizations, the Somalia Federal Government and local NGOs from delivering aid, even though territories under Al-Shabaab’s control in south-central Somalia are among the most severely affected.” The report described one incident in which “Al-Shabaab detained a group of people transporting relief food on donkey carts, burned the food and issued an edict warning against accepting handouts from ‘crusaders and apostates’ (a reference to foreigners and the Somali government).” The control of humanitarian aid is evidently part of Al-Shabaab’s strategy of consolidating and expanding its territorial control, and indeed, as one analysis notes, a “soft-power approach” geared toward “establishing Al-Shabaab as a provider of basic services and building public confidence in the group’s viability as a source of governance.”

The main challenge for humanitarian organizations in terms of engaging Al-Shabaab in dialogue seems to be the absence of a clear organizational structure. Indeed, as interviewees described, Al-Shabaab’s strategy appears to be to remain “invisible,” maintaining a “ghost presence” while retaining control over populations and the environment. In light of this dynamic, humanitarian actors have struggled with determining how to identify the best Al-Shabaab interlocutor and have found, in their negotiations, that they might not have been engaging with an actor that wields actual decision-making power.

There is also the difficulty of navigating perceptions of humanitarian actors’ neutrality in this context. On the one hand, as an interviewee reported, negotiating with Al-Shabaab, even on issues purely related to implementing humanitarian relief

60 Ibid.
61 “Instruments of Pain,” p. 4.
62 Ibid.
programs, could trigger an inquiry into the extent of the organization’s affiliation with the group.\(^{64}\) On the other hand, reports indicate that, in 2017, with Somalia facing severe drought and the risk of famine, Al-Shabaab forbade populations under their territory to have any contact with humanitarian organizations, evidently, at least in part, due to concerns that aid agencies are affiliated with the FGS.\(^{65}\)

C. Grappling with “Gatekeepers”

In addition to access constraints that arise from the government and Al-Shabaab, difficulties also stem from “gatekeepers,” who are private individuals who control and grant access to IDPs in exchange for payment.\(^{66}\) One can consider gatekeepers to be, as one article states, “self-appointed middlemen who serve as negotiators between IDPs and the humanitarian sector,” or more specifically:

[L]andowners, district officials or businessmen who control access to land used by IDPs, creating makeshift camps that they manage, in exchange for some kind of payment, whether it be cash or a portion of the aid received by IDPs. They dilute aid flows, determining who receives it, and can restrict access of entry and departure to the camps. Sometimes, they provide services such as security, latrines and water trucks.\(^{67}\)

Interviewees reported experiences with gatekeepers who required monetary payment or who otherwise indirectly manipulated IDPs. Some gatekeepers have also engaged in transferring populations with the intention of skewing needs assessments in ways that will personally benefit the gatekeepers. For example, as one article notes, some gatekeepers have “sen[t] trucks into drought-stricken areas to collect desperate people and transport them to their property in urban areas, where they then appeal to the humanitarian sector for aid.”\(^{68}\) Humanitarian actors—in particular, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration—have engaged in efforts to “train” these gatekeepers on humanitarian principles and establish a feedback and complaint mechanism so that humanitarian actors can establish a direct line of communication with IDPs, as

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\(^{64}\) The next section, which addresses the self-inflicted dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction, examines this issue in greater detail.


\(^{67}\) Jerving.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
opposed to having communications filtered through gatekeepers as middlemen. Nevertheless, gatekeepers, as well as the resulting access hindrances, endure as a persistent feature of humanitarian organizations’ engagements with IDPs in Somalia.  

D. The Insecure Nature of the Environment

Another defining feature of the humanitarian context in Somalia is the volatility and insecurity as a result of the ongoing conflict. This element was widely reported by interviewees as a challenge in reaching beneficiaries, as well as for beneficiaries accessing humanitarian services. The 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview on Somalia offers an indication of the severity of this issue:

The first ten months of 2017 witnessed rising violence against humanitarians, particularly those with operations in southern and central Somalia. During this period over 130 violent incidences impacted humanitarian organizations and accounted for the death of 15, injury of 31, physical assault of three, arrest and temporary detention of 17 and abduction of 30, and attempted abduction of nine. In accordance with the trends recorded in previous years, frontline responders continue to be the most affected.

Security incidents that occurred in 2017 included an improvised explosive device attack that led to the death and injury of humanitarian workers; a landmine attack that appeared to target, among others, humanitarian actors; the aforementioned car bomb attack in Mogadishu that analysts have described as the worst terrorist attack

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70 See, for example, “Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict: Practitioners’ Manual,” Version 2, Conflict Dynamics International, December 2014, p. 11, https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/aussenpolitik/voelkerrecht/Human-access-in-situation-of-armed-conflict-manual_EN.pdf, which notes that there is a widely accepted dual notion of humanitarian access that refers to “access by humanitarian actors to people in need of assistance and protection AND access by those in need to the goods and services essential for their survival and health, in a manner consistent with core humanitarian principles” (emphasis in original).


the country has seen in decades;\textsuperscript{74} and an attack on a Mogadishu hotel.\textsuperscript{75} The insecure nature of the environment has persisted in 2018, and indeed, one interviewee described insecurity as “a determinant factor that might halt [the ability of] beneficiaries to access our services.”

III. Self-Inflicted Dimensions of Humanitarian Access Obstruction

Whereas the previous section examined externally driven humanitarian access challenges that arise when implementing humanitarian programs, this section examines access challenges from a different angle. Complementing the elements just discussed, which constitute just one portion of the overall humanitarian access obstruction puzzle, this section shifts toward the self-inflicted dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction. According to this angle, access challenges not only emerge from recalcitrant external actors (e.g., governmental actors, Al-Shabaab, and “gatekeepers”) or environmental difficulties (e.g., active conflict and lack of adequate transportation infrastructure) but also can be propagated and/or exacerbated by the policies that humanitarian organizations adopt.

This section examines four particular issues in this regard. The first is a “bunkerization” spiral, meaning that the measures that humanitarian organizations have adopted to bolster their own security have created a divide between international humanitarian workers and local actors, leading to negative local perceptions toward international humanitarian action. The second is the incongruency between needs and programming. The third is the discounting of local actors’ agency, meaning that, in the view of many local humanitarian actors, IHOs have insufficiently capitalized on existing ideas and capacities of local actors. The fourth is programmatic partiality, in particular, arising from the interests of donors, as well as the limitations imposed on IHOs by counterterrorism laws.

A. The “Bunkerization” Spiral

Local actors interviewed for this paper described humanitarian aid in Somalia as being in the hands of a security apparatus that requires a huge investment. The perception is that international humanitarian actors have been excessively risk averse and that the purpose of the United Nations compound in Mogadishu, for example, is to keep aid agencies safer than civilians, constituting a waste of money that could be


better managed by locals directly. Aid actors have become less connected directly to the local population, and as an interviewee noted, indirectly fund warlords, at least in part, who run private security companies. In general, the distinction between humanitarians and military/political actors also remains blurred.\textsuperscript{76}

In response to security threats, humanitarian actors have adopted various risk management strategies, pursuing “bunkerization,” meaning hard protection to fortify themselves against potential security threats that might manifest. However, a strategy of acceptance, since it has not been pursued, means that IHOs have not achieved acceptance from local actors, leaving negative public perceptions of humanitarian action to fester. Additionally, humanitarian programming itself falls victim to a “bunkerization” spiral, as insufficient local engagement leads to a lack of responsiveness to local needs. The next sub-section examines this fissure between programming and needs in greater detail.

**B. Incongruency between Needs and Programming**

The interviews revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with international humanitarian programming in Somalia. Interviewees described international aid as late, inadequate, and generally run according to very low programmatic standards. There is also a sense that international aid efforts have insufficiently addressed the country’s broader development needs, and that in the absence of doing so, Somalia will be left perpetually vulnerable to poverty and dependent on external assistance. Indeed, IHOs have acknowledged the fact that investing in resilience—in terms of households and infrastructure, for example—is key to mitigating the impact of climatic shocks, and hence, reducing Somalia’s need to depend on external emergency assistance.\textsuperscript{77} There is a vision to devote international resources and efforts to resilience and


recovery efforts in order to render Somalia “famine-proof,” but IHOs have thus far shielded away from the investments necessary to turn this vision into a reality.78

The programmatic components that interviewees most prominently criticized relate to protection,79 even in spite of international efforts to engage on these issues.80 In particular, interviewees discussed issues related to the protection of women and children. The rest of this sub-section will offer a brief discussion of the key elements that interviewees raised in relation to these topics.

Turning first to women’s health and human rights, interviewees highlighted a particularly salient programmatic gap. For example, 98% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 are subjected to female genital cutting, the majority of which undergo infibulation, the most severe form of the practice.81 Additionally, child marriage and sexual violence remain prevalent in the country.82 Two surveys of women’s rights

78 Ibid.
experts conducted by Thomas Reuters Foundation in 2011 and 2018 found Somalia to be among the top five worst countries to be a woman.\(^3\) For the past five years, authorities have been reluctant to put in place a draft sexual offence bill, although there was forward motion in May 2018 when the Cabinet of the FGS unanimously expressed support for the bill.\(^4\) Nevertheless, the bill faces a tortuous route toward passage and effective implementation. Moreover, interviewees expressed concern that women have been systematically excluded from efforts to construct a path to peace, except for inclusion that appears merely tokenistic, ensuring that the continuum of violence will never be fully broken.\(^5\)

Turning to child protection, immunization of children under five years old in the country remains a major concern, and according to Somali medical doctors interviewed for this research, the World Health Organization has been insufficiently proactive in addressing this critical issue. The range of child protection issues in Somalia is extensive, including, as the United Nations Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Children and Armed Conflict has documented, incidents of killing and maiming, recruitment and use of child soldiers, attacks on schools and hospitals, rape and other forms of sexual violence, abduction, and the denial of humanitarian assistance.\(^6\)

Despite the fact, as noted earlier in this paper, that protection is one of the international humanitarian sector’s primary strategic objectives in Somalia, there is a

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83 “Factbox: Which are the World’s 10 Most Dangerous Countries for Women?" Reuters, June 25, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-factbox/factbox-which-are-the-worlds-10-most-dangerous-countries-for-women-idUSKBN1JM01Z.


great deal of concern that humanitarian actors have not pushed far enough in these policy areas. This disparity between needs and effective programming fuels the disconnect between local and international humanitarian actors that flows from the “bunkerization” spiral.

C. Discounting Local Actors’ Agency

There is also a perception in Somalia, as interviewees attested, that the ideology of humanitarian organizations is too paternalistic toward Somalis. Interviewees articulated the sense that international humanitarian actors lack trust in Somali organizations to manage humanitarian action and to develop and effectively implement impartial programs. The overall sentiment of Somali interviewees is that the legacy of humanitarian aid over the last 27 years has transformed the country into a more dependent, more corrupt, and more violent country. Highlighting the general sense of local cynicism toward international humanitarian actors, one Somali farmer told a journalist, “They call it humanitarian aid but we call it dead aid; meaning it’s intended to kill... They brag about helping us and take credit for things that are not even beneficial.” Interviewees discussed the concern that the creation of camps and settlements push people toward aid dependence, whereas Somalis desire more training and education, wanting to “gain skills more than to be fed for the rest of their lives.” There is also a sense that IHOs have privileged reactive programming in response to acute needs, insufficiently planning for projected needs, for example, on the basis of predicting weather patterns based on past droughts. The perception is that the absence of such programmatic foresight fuels a narrative of perpetually acute crisis, feeding into local dependency on international actors.

Experiencing the deployment of international aid for medical and humanitarian emergencies and long-term development programs for almost three decades, Somalis have a realistic perspective of the limitations of international support. As already mentioned, there have been international efforts directed toward cultivating local resilience. These activities include the launch in January 2018 of Resilience and Recovery Framework, as well as resilience efforts stretching back for years.

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Nevertheless, as the Head of OCHA in Somalia has written, there is still the need for a “paradigm shift” that is “supported with adequate funding and approached with long-term goals in mind.”

There remain recurrent barriers to Somali humanitarian organizations accessing international donor funds, as well as a sense that Somalis have been cut out of programmatic decision-making at the strategic level. As one Somali doctor mentioned in an interview conducted for this research paper, “If we are not on the table during strategy planning, we will be on the menu.”

To counteract some of these negative impacts of international humanitarian action, local populations, particularly those working in public services and rural activities, have developed mechanisms to locally predict and manage the acute impacts of crisis. These approaches are aimed at ensuring that Somalis can be on the frontline for their own decision-making. The sense among interviewees is that, in the current environment, scaling up Somali initiatives actually requires the reduction of international presence and projects in order to break the dependence on external actors, allowing for Somalis’ own critical thinking and decision-making for their future. Otherwise, the concern is that, due to the lack of long-term strategic thinking and planning, aid will continue to foster dependency, strangling local innovation and the development of local skills. As revealed by the research interviews, one IDP representative in Afgoye expressed: “Aid is the biggest challenge Somalis have.”

D. Programmatic Partiality

Compounding the issues this section addressed are the ways in which dependence on donors and accountability within counter-terrorism regulatory frameworks can bias IHOs’ programmatic priorities. This issue fits within the broader notion, as one
scholar examined, that the structure of the humanitarian system is one in which IHOs are incentivized not necessarily to serve populations affected by crises, but rather, to “sell” projects to their donors. At a global scale, there is a sense that Somalia has to “compete” with other humanitarian crises for funding. In Somalia, specifically, many humanitarian actors perceive, as one study found, that donors’ “mixed security and political agendas” have been “compromising a needs based approach.”

These issues become exacerbated when engaging with groups, such as Al-Shabaab, designated as terrorists by national and/or international entities. As noted in the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan for Somalia, “Counterterrorism measures also continue to impact some organizations’ perception of risks in areas under the control/influence of listed entities and has continued to deprive some people in need of assistance.”

Humanitarian actors have spoken of the “chilling effect” of counterterrorism laws and policies on humanitarian activities in Al-Shabaab-controlled territories. In the words of one humanitarian actor working in Somalia:

US and UK terrorism financing laws are a significant discouragement to operating in Al-Shabaab areas. At the very least, you could end up wasting a huge amount of time explaining yourself; at worst, if substantial amounts of aid were appropriated by Al-Shabaab— as has happened to people in the past— you could end up in court with your organization shut down...

Connected to this issue is the fact that Al-Shabaab has demanded that humanitarian actors pay a “tax” for operating in Al-Shabaab-controlled areas, raising the risk that, by complying with this demand, humanitarian actors could make themselves legally vulnerable to the charge of offering material support to a terrorist group. This element raises an overarching issue that some humanitarian actors, even if aspiring to act in accordance with humanitarian principles, have instead been shying away from

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99 Ibid.

100 See generally “Countering Terror in Humanitarian Crises.”
seeking to operate in Al-Shabaab held territories, despite great needs, instead prioritizing activities in territories controlled by other actors. Hence, the “chilling effect” of counterterrorism legislation that dissuades engagement with Al-Shabaab can fuel perceptions about humanitarian organizations’ preferential political alignments.

IV. Why the Self-Inflicted Dimensions of Humanitarian Access Obstruction Matter

To illustrate the importance of the self-inflicted dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction, this section examines the case of Somalia through the typology of grand strategies of humanitarianism that Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder outline in their chapter in the 2008 book, *Humanitarianism in Question*. Barnett and Snyder articulate four “kinds” of humanitarianism that vary along two axes. The first axis is the extent to which humanitarian action aims to be political (i.e., “to alter the governance arrangements that are hypothesized to be the cause of suffering”) or apolitical (i.e., shying away from such aims). The second axis is the extent to which the aims of humanitarianism are “modest” (i.e., “work[ing] largely within the parameters of the existing circumstances) versus “ambitious” (“try[ing] to change the incentives for and constraints on local actors in significant ways”). These considerations lead Barnett and Snyder toward a fourfold typology of humanitarian grand strategy. The different grand strategies they detail are:

- “Do no harm,”
- “Bed for the night,”
- “Back a decent winner,” and
- “Comprehensive peacebuilding.”

IHOs operating in Somalia face a clear divide between how they see themselves, how local humanitarian actors see them, and what local actors would like to see. The rest of this section will use Barnett and Snyder’s typology to illuminate these divides, as well as why considerations of externally imposed access obstacles, when considered in isolation, are insufficient to grapple with the complexities of this environment.

A. How IHOs See Themselves: “Do No Harm”

A “do no harm” strategy, according to Barnett and Snyder, is apolitical but ambitious, meaning that there is a focus on impartial, neutral, independent humanitarian action

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101 Barnett and Snyder, p. 146.
102 Ibid.
while trying to “minimiz[e] the negative side effects.”\textsuperscript{103} Such a strategy entails “try[ing] to reduce incentives for the exploitation of aid by the parties to violent conflict” and “anticipat[ing] and try[ing] to prevent the unintended consequences of aid.”\textsuperscript{104} Key considerations inherent in this strategy are:

[H]ow to bargain more cleverly with warlords, which local intermediaries to deal with, how to keep camps from falling into the hands of fighters that perpetrate atrocities, when to rely on military protection from one of the sides or from hired security forces, when and how to flood the market with aid, and how to create local environments where aid can work even if the overall problem is not resolved.\textsuperscript{105}

In short, a “do no harm” strategy constitutes the predominate vision of how to surmount externally imposed humanitarian access obstacles. The notion is that, by acting in a principled manner, cultivating negotiation capacity among aid workers in the field, communicating effectively with external actors, and acting in accordance with an acceptance-based approach, IHOs can alter local actors’ perceptions, and in doing so, pry open otherwise inaccessible humanitarian space for implementing their programs. Based on the interviews conducted, this vision appears to be how many IHOs see themselves operating in this context. But as the rest of this section will make clear, putting energy into surmounting implementation obstacles, albeit an important component of humanitarian action, will not address obstacles that have emerged from the dynamics of the strategic or policy level.

B. How Somali Humanitarian Actors See IHOs: “Bed for the Night”

A “bed for the night” strategy, like one of “do no harm,” is rooted in humanitarian principles.\textsuperscript{106} However, unlike “do no harm,” a “bed for the night” approach is less ambitious, meaning that there is less self-reflection about the potential negative consequences of aid and less of an emphasis on seeking to alter local actors’ incentives by persuading them of the value of humanitarian action. The drawback of this approach is that, as Barnett and Snyder write, this strategy “delivers aid first and asks questions later (if ever),” and hence, “might be so focused on the highly visible short term that it can cause more harm than good to the populations that it seeks to serve.”\textsuperscript{107} Humanitarian actors adopting this approach would not sufficiently take into account the fact that “[a]jid, moreover, can increase distortions of the local economy, displace

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid, at 149.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Barnett and Snyder borrow the term “bed for the night” from David Rieff, A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis, Simon & Schuster, 2002, which popularized the term.
\textsuperscript{107} Barnett and Snyder, p. 147.
or discourage local economic activity, create a short-term hothouse aid economy, produce new kinds of dependencies, and reinforce existing political and economic inequalities.”  

As the research interviews indicate, this is how many local humanitarian actors in Somalia view IHOs. There is a widespread sense that international humanitarian action has had an adverse effect on the country, in particular, by fostering a dependency that has led local innovation and skills development to stagnate. Even worse, interviewees indicated that humanitarian programming is, in many ways, not calibrated with local needs. The “bunkerization” of international humanitarian actors has fueled the perception that international humanitarian action is more self-serving for IHOs than geared toward addressing the local population’s needs. These issues are unlikely to be adequately addressed only by refining the ways that humanitarian programs are implemented. Indeed, it is not a matter of negotiating more effectively, developing more acute organizational access strategies, or devising “joint operating procedures” or “negotiation ground rules,” as IHOs have collectively sought to do in Somalia to facilitate inter-organizational coordination in terms of grappling with access challenges. Rather, these issues appear to stem from decisions made at the strategic level regarding what humanitarian action in Somalia can and should be.

C. How Somalis Excluded from the Political Process See IHOs: “Back a Decent Winner”

A “back a decent winner” strategy aims “to promote those [actors] who are willing to favor an enlightened stability but does not attempt to radically transform political, economic, and cultural structures.” This approach is political in the sense that it entails choosing a side in an ongoing political and/or violent conflict but modest in the sense that it does not entail seeking to alter the conflict dynamics. In this approach, “international actors are willing to negotiate with and make deals with those who once held or who currently hold power,” including “patrons of traditional patronage networks” or “defensive-minded regional leaders and authoritarian state leaders who want to defeat ruthless resource-dealing rebels” in order “to maintain a stable social order.” However, a key controversy inherent in this approach is: “How indecent can the winner be and still be considered a ‘decent’ outcome?” As Barnett and Snyder note, the risk is that the “threshold for a decent winner” will be set too low, making this approach yield undesirable outcomes.

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110 Barnett and Snyder, p. 154.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid, at 155.
The interviews indicate that this is how many actors excluded from the Somali political process see IHOs: as entities aligned with a problematic political “modernization” project. The “decent” winner in this case is the FGS, deemed insufficiently inclusive and created through a process that has actually fueled and resuscitated tensions within Somali society.

This also appears to be how Al-Shabaab sees IHOs: as linked with the FGS. Indeed, Al-Shabaab has claimed that purported linkages between IHOs and the FGS justify obstructing IHO access to Al-Shabaab-controlled territories. Various elements that the previous section discussed—for example, the (partly donor-induced) blurring of humanitarian and stabilization objectives and the reticence of some IHOs to engage with Al-Shabaab due to donor compliance or legal issues stemming from counter-terrorism legal frameworks—feed into this perception. This is not to say that these issues bear the sole responsibility for the forceful posture Al-Shabaab has adopted against IHOs. The main point of emphasis is that elements at the strategic level, which point toward the self-inflicted dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction, can compound and exacerbate difficulties that arise from external actors in the field.

D. What Somali Humanitarian Actors Would Like to See: “Comprehensive Peacebuilding”

A “comprehensive peacebuilding” strategy is rooted in the notion, as Barnett and Snyder write, that “relief and other forms of assistance to those in life-threatening circumstances must be treated as part of a broader strategy for removing the root causes of conflict.”113 This notion lives at the heart of the “resilience humanitarianism” paradigm that, as mentioned in the introduction of this paper, stands poised to compete for primacy with the “classical humanitarianism” paradigm, which is rooted in humanitarian principles and is more aligned with “do no harm” or “bed for the night” approaches. Indeed, at the heart of the “resilience paradigm” is the idea “that people, communities and societies (can) have the capacity to adapt to or spring back from tragic life events and disasters. Disaster, rather than being a total and immobilizing disruption, can become an event in which people seek continuity by using their resources to adapt.”114

As the interviews indicate, this is how many local humanitarian actors see themselves and how they would like to see international humanitarian actors engaging in Somalia. As the previous section discussed, local humanitarian actors feel neither included nor empowered by international humanitarian action. Quite the opposite, many local actors perceive that international aid, in the manner it has been designed and delivered, has inflicted some degree of harm on the country. But it does not

113 Ibid, at 151.
114 Hilhorst, p. 5.
appear possible that engagement oriented toward grappling with external obstacles—for example, through a “do no harm” approach, as discussed above—will convince local humanitarian actors that a full embrace of “comprehensive peacebuilding” or the “resilience paradigm” has occurred. Instead, it would require a genuine transformation at the policy level to reorient the international aid community toward an entirely different grand strategy.

**Figure 1: Somalia and Grand Strategies of Humanitarianism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accept constraints</th>
<th>Political</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How Somali humanitarian actors see IHOs</td>
<td>How Somalis excluded from the political process see IHOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bed for the Night</em>: unqualified short-term emergency relief to those in life-threatening circumstances.</td>
<td><em>Back a Decent Winner</em>: deploy resources to achieve a stable political bargain that will halt gross violations of human rights.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change constraints</th>
<th>How IHOs see themselves</th>
<th>What Somali humanitarian actors would like to see</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Do No Harm</em>: provide relief while minimizing the negative side effects.</td>
<td><em>Comprehensive Peacebuilding</em>: eliminate the root causes of conflict and help promote a more peaceful, stable, and legitimate political and economic system.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V. Concluding Remarks

The two dimensions of humanitarian access obstruction that this paper has examined—externally imposed and self-inflicted—both highlight important sets of dynamics that are crucial for effective humanitarian programming. As this paper notes, many humanitarian organizations have embraced the necessity of building their own capacity to surmount externally imposed obstacles, for example, by cultivating negotiation skills among personnel or by evaluating organizational access strategies. However, as humanitarian organizations continue to devote resources toward these much-needed activities, it will be important to complement these efforts with intensive examination of strategic and programmatic dynamics as well.

The case of Somalia illustrates this necessity in stark terms. Indeed, in this context, one can discern a definitive contrast between the two dimensions that this paper has discussed. On the one hand, an externally oriented perspective directs attention toward access obstacles emanating from governmental actors, Al-Shabaab, access “gatekeepers,” and the insecure nature of the environment without examining the potentially problematic aspects of IHOs’ programming. On the other hand, the dismissive and cynical attitude that many local humanitarian actors have of IHOs’ aims and activities indicates the severity of the inadequacies at the strategic and programmatic level. Indeed, there is a sense that IHOs’ activities have been programmatically limited, insufficiently addressing the broader array of protection and development needs that the country’s population faces. Furthermore, inadequacies or dysfunction at the strategic level can filter down to the implementation level, fueling access obstacles that arise in the field. The door is now open to organizational self-reflection about how access obstacles can best be surmounted. As a part of these self-reflective processes, it will also be important to examine the value and methods of humanitarian programming itself.