

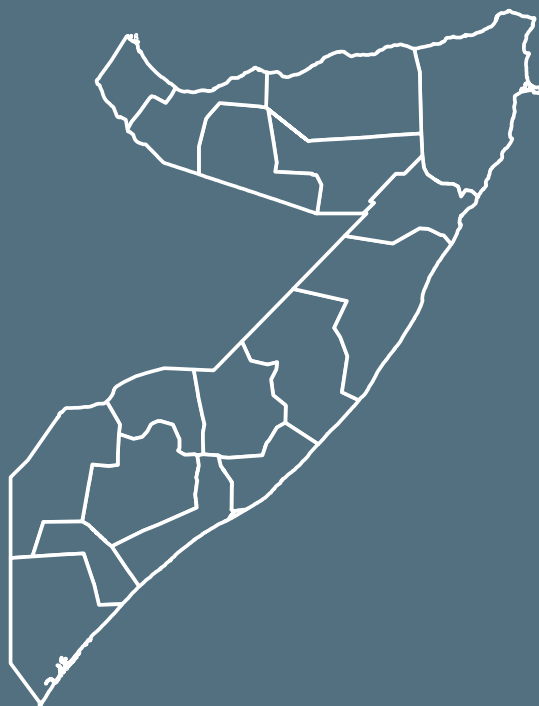
# Overcoming power imbalances:

## Community recommendations for breaking the cycle

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Cash Barometer • Somalia • July 2023

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## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the community members who took the time to participate in the discussions and share your views.

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# Context

In 2022, Somalia has experienced the longest, most severe drought in its recent history, after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. Many Somalis faced catastrophic levels of food insecurity, but collective local and international efforts have prevented an official famine.<sup>1</sup> With another famine narrowly averted, questions arise about longer-term solutions. In May 2022, a new Somali government was formed, which later in the year launched a widescale military offensive against Al-Shabab, aiming to restore peace and stability.<sup>2</sup> Humanitarian, development and peace actors must work together with the government to respond to this persisting crisis.

## Listening to communities in Somalia

Ground Truth Solutions has been tracking people's perceptions in Somalia since 2017.<sup>3</sup> Following a recent quantitative survey<sup>4</sup> with cash and voucher recipients, as part of our Cash Barometer project, we carried out focus group discussions to discuss our findings with community members and gather their recommendations on how things could be done better. Many of the people we spoke to feel trapped in a never-ending cycle of dependence on humanitarian aid and crave longer-term solutions. While humanitarian assistance helps many meet their most important needs in the short term, people call for more focus on interventions that build their resilience.

People's voices are not always heard in decisions about aid. This is in part due to aid organisations struggling to prioritise consultations, but also a natural consequence of engaging only with gatekeepers, who often stand as bottlenecks between aid providers and the community. In 2022, the Somalia Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) strategy was endorsed, outlining a commitment to "shifting power from aid providers towards communities and local groups".<sup>5</sup> This cannot be achieved without careful analysis of gatekeepers' role as prominent power figures and rethinking the way aid providers engage with them to create a more balanced power dynamic. **This report presents specific recommendations made by community members on how to go beyond gatekeepers, in addition to their insight into what would help them become more resilient.**

## Who are the gatekeepers in Somalia?

The term "gatekeeper" is used generically by the aid community to refer to individuals with power that allow or deny access to internally displaced persons (IDPs) at various levels, including district commissioners, landowners, clan leaders, businesspeople, or some local organisations or agencies.<sup>6</sup> However, the term is more commonly used to mean the chief leaders of IDP settlements. The role of gatekeepers emerged after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 and the resulting void in the provision of public services, including assistance and protection to the millions of displaced people in the country.<sup>7</sup> Since gatekeepers are not part of an official governance structure, they are often seen as private-sector providers of services that should otherwise be public goods, primarily land and security to IDPs.<sup>8</sup> Many gatekeepers see themselves as "commercial settlement managers" and require IDPs to pay for the services they provide, in what is sometimes labelled "taxation" or "rent".<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> OCHA. February 2023. "[Humanitarian Response Plan Somalia](#)."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. "[Somalia](#)."

<sup>4</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "[Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis](#)."

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Somalia. May 2022. "[Somalia National Community Engagement and Accountability \(CEA\) Strategy and Action Plan \(May 2022 - 2024\)](#)."

<sup>6</sup> Erik Bryld, Christine Kamau and Dina Sinigallia. January 2013. "[Gatekeepers in Mogadishu](#)."

<sup>7</sup> DFID and Tana Copenhagen. March 2017. "[Engaging the Gatekeepers: Using informal governance resources in Mogadishu](#)."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster Somalia. July 2017. "[CCCM Cluster Somalia Strategy](#)"; Aoife McCullough and Muhyadin Saed. December 2017. "[Gatekeepers, elders and accountability in Somalia](#)."

Gatekeepers play a positive role in the provision of services to IDPs in Somalia, not limited to land and security, but also including distributing aid, mediating conflicts, and arranging funerals.<sup>10</sup> But proper mechanisms to hold gatekeepers accountable are lacking. Gatekeepers' accountability is mostly upwards to those helping them maintain their positions,<sup>11</sup> such as district commissioners, clan leaders, businesspeople, or landowners. Mechanisms of downward accountability to IDPs are very limited. This has allowed many of them to abuse their power, as vividly described in Human Rights Watch's report "Hostage of the Gatekeepers".<sup>12</sup> There have also been reports of aid diversion by gatekeepers but the extent of this remains unknown.<sup>13</sup>

**As discussions about community engagement and accountability dominate various forums in Somalia, aid organisations need to reflect on how they may inadvertently be contributing to gatekeepers' power and establish mechanisms to engage more inclusively with the communities they serve.**

## Methodology

We carried out eight focus group discussions (FGDs) in January 2023, in collaboration with our partner New Access International (NAI) Somalia. The discussions aimed to explore participants' reactions to the findings of our quantitative study from 2022 and whether these findings resonate with their own experiences. We then asked participants to tell us what they thought aid providers should do about each of the issues identified. This report is structured to present people's insight into each topic followed by their recommendations on how to overcome the issues identified. We also formulated each set of recommendations into a checklist with specific easy-to-track actions for the aid community.

FGDs were conducted in eight locations in two regions in Somalia. Each FGD included eight participants. The discussions were held with men and women separately (three groups each) as well as in mixed-gender groups (two groups). As some of our findings can be seen as sensitive, we have kept locations and organisation names anonymous to ensure our participants cannot be re-identified. Further, this report aims to present recommendations for due diligence when aid providers engage with gatekeepers wherever they are in Somalia, rather than providing location-specific recommendations.

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<sup>10</sup> Aoife McCullough and Muhyadin Saed. December 2017. "[Gatekeepers, elders and accountability in Somalia.](#)"

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch. March 2013. "[Hostages of the Gatekeepers: Abuses against Internally Displaced in Mogadishu, Somalia.](#)"

<sup>13</sup> Camp Coordination and Camp Management. July 2017. "[CCCM Cluster Somalia Strategy.](#)"; Aoife McCullough and Muhyadin Saed. December 2017. "[Gatekeepers, elders and accountability in Somalia.](#)"

# Key findings

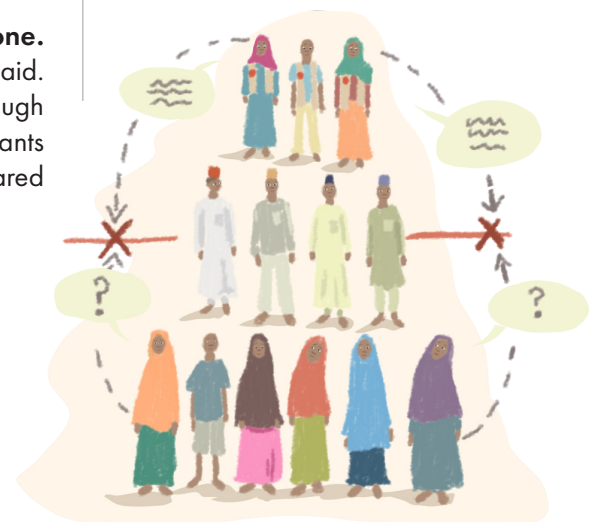
## 1. Aid does not always reach the intended recipients:

- **"Arranged sharing" or "taxation" exists but is not always forced.** Many FGD participants said they shared a portion of the aid they received with a camp leader, camp committee, landowner, community leader, or district authority. In some locations, arranged sharing is forced and is part of an agreement that people enter into, in exchange for being included on assistance lists. Once the deal is made, people cannot get out of it, otherwise, they risk exclusion from aid or eviction from IDP settlements. However, people in some locations said they voluntarily allocate a portion of the aid they receive to camp leaders as a sign of appreciation for their efforts, arguing that this would enable them to do their job better.
- **In some locations, people have witnessed corruption or aid diversion.** Many people are convinced that corruption is inherent to the aid industry and that as funds make their way from donors to affected populations, many "middlemen" benefit along the way. Some participants gave specific accounts of aid diversion, mostly of in-kind aid.
- **People say that in-kind is easier to divert than cash.** When asking people to give recommendations on how aid diversion can be eliminated, none of them mentioned shifting from cash to in-kind assistance. Instead, many participants argued that in-kind is easier to divert than cash as it goes through intermediaries and can be easily sold.

Learn what communities say needs to happen to stop forced sharing and aid diversion in [Section 1](#).

## 2. Communication has improved, but is still exclusive:

- **Information about aid is becoming more available but not to everyone.** More people have been receiving information about humanitarian aid. However, since this information is mostly channelled by aid providers through gatekeepers, some people are systematically left out. Most women participants said they have not experienced any improvement in the information shared with them, unlike men. Persons with disabilities are also often left out.



- **People want aid providers to use appropriate information channels.** The people we spoke to pointed out gaps in the way aid providers share information about aid especially to illiterate persons, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
- **Many people do not know how to directly contact aid organisations.** With few accessible options, the main choice for many people is to give feedback through camp leaders or gatekeepers. Having this as the only mechanism for complaints exacerbates existing power imbalances and limits the ability to hold gatekeepers to account. Many people were concerned about not being able to complain about camp leaders or committees since they could only file complaints through them.

Learn what communities say needs to happen to make communication more inclusive in [Section 2](#).

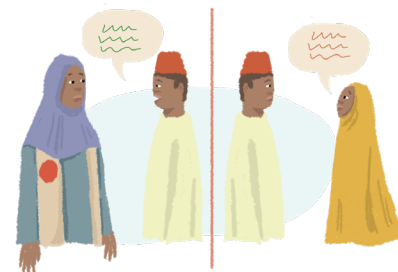
### 3. People don't dare to speak up:

- **Fear (among many barriers) keeps people from giving feedback.** When asked about the things that keep people from submitting feedback or complaints about aid in Somalia, the majority of FGD participants mentioned fear. Many participants fear gatekeepers because of the power they hold to exclude people from assistance, evict them from IDP settlements, and in some locations, administer physical violence through their soldiers. This has created a culture of fear that stifles feedback, where people in the community would try to stop those who want to complain fearing for their own safety and aid-receiving prospects.
- **People feel that no one listens.** People emphasised the need to close the feedback loop to promote people's trust in the feedback mechanisms. When people submit feedback and get no answer, they give up trying.

Learn what communities say needs to happen to promote trust in the feedback mechanisms in [Section 3](#).

### 4. Aid providers make decisions without knowing the realities:

- **People say inadequate consultations lead to irrelevant aid.** People feel that aid providers come to implement plans they have already developed in their offices without involving the community or considering its needs. On many occasions, this has led to the provision of irrelevant aid, such as pots, pans and sleeping materials when food was the biggest need, or jerricans when there was no water.



- **Only certain people can influence decisions about aid**, including camp leaders, camp committees, village heads, clan elders, and district authorities, whereas ordinary people's voice is not heard. Men are more able to influence aid than women who, due to cultural or religious barriers, have fewer opportunities to participate. IDPs, minorities, youth, and persons with disabilities were also mentioned as having the least influence.

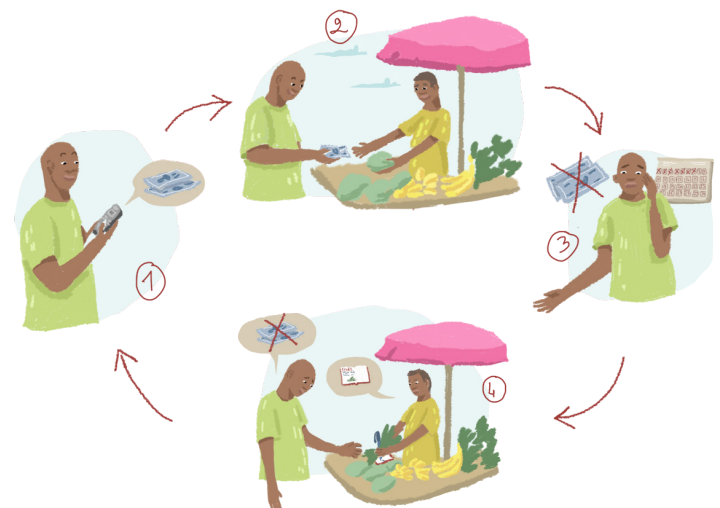
Learn what communities recommend for meaningful participation and wider influence in [Section 4](#).



## 5. Trapped in a never-ending cycle of aid:

- **People don't think the aid they receive allows them to make long-term plans.** They describe assistance channelled into their communities as being irregular, provided for short durations, in small amounts, and only to a limited number of people. While some people say that cash and voucher assistance still helps and that they are grateful to receive it, it only enables them to cover their needs for a short while.

Learn what communities say needs to happen to break the cycle in [Section 5](#).





# 1. Aid does not always reach the intended recipients

## "Arranged sharing" or "taxation" exists but is not always forced

Many cash and voucher recipients in Somalia share some of the aid they receive with others in their community. Sharing of resources is a cultural and religious practice in Somalia, which many people do voluntarily, driven by their urge to help those in need. However, sharing is not always a spontaneous decision; thirty-four percent of respondents to our recent survey<sup>14</sup> said they were asked to do so by a community leader, village head, or another prominent member of the community.

Many FGD participants have experienced "arranged sharing" or "taxation", which according to them is most common in IDP settlements. Many of them mentioned sharing a portion of the aid they received with a camp leader, camp committee, landowner, community leader, or district authority. In some locations, arranged sharing is forced and is part of a "deal" in exchange for being included on assistance lists. People need humanitarian aid and so have no alternative but to comply. Otherwise, they risk exclusion or eviction from the camp. In certain locations, physical force is used – some FGD participants mentioned being threatened with guns, having their possessions taken away, or having to share their assistance with "soldiers". How much people are asked to share varies and depends on the agreement or on what people can afford. Some people gave an estimate of 5-6% of the assistance value; others said it can be as high as 50%. According to some participants, this assistance gets redistributed to other people in the camp, but mostly to those not in need. These experiences were mentioned by both men and women; however, they only came up in discussions in certain locations. Some people said that new IDPs are most at risk since they are new to the location and do not know "the system" yet.

"Some gatekeepers tell you that you have to pay a part of the aid you received. If you don't want to and refuse, they will not register you next time. No matter what, the person has needs and has to agree." – man in location B



“

Well, it happens. The community leaders, some organisations, and district authorities are all involved in the arranged sharing of the aid. We cannot prove it – most of us fear for our lives or being kicked out of the camps. It's a common thing.

– woman in location A

“

I have not experienced it personally, but it happens here and in other camps. Arranged sharing is common; some people do it willingly, but others have no choice but to obey the chairman. It mainly happens in new IDP settlements. When new arrivals come, they don't understand the system and are forced to share some of the aid if they want to be beneficiaries.

– woman in location A

“

Everyone is looking for all the help they can get, no matter how small, so they have to take the deal. It's common – every time organisations distribute aid, we have to give some to the committee.

– man in location B

“

The only way you can refuse is to move out of the camp and disappear. If you stay in the camp after you receive the aid distribution and you refuse, you may be penalised for not respecting the agreement.

– woman in location A

<sup>14</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis."



That said, the discussions revealed that not all arranged sharing or taxation is forced. In other locations, people said that it does exist, but they do not mind it. They said that camp leaders or committees often ask them to share some of their assistance to give it to people in need who were not selected. Since they feel that all vulnerable people in their community should be supported, they accept this arrangement to show solidarity. However, some were not entirely sure that the aid that gets collected goes to people in need. In locations where this practice was common, FGD participants were split over whether people could say no to arranged sharing – some mentioned not being able to deny such a request from a camp manager or committee, while others said people can choose not to accept the arrangement without being harassed, though the risk of future exclusion remains.

"Yes, it's common here – whenever an organisation gives out cash transfers or food assistance, the committee comes to us and asks to share some of it. They do this to help others who were not lucky enough to get aid. As brothers and sisters, we have to support and stand by each other. This is common for most IDPs." – *woman in location A*

In some other locations, FGD participants said that they voluntarily allocate a portion of the aid they receive to camp leaders as a sign of appreciation for their efforts. In their view, camp leaders should be supported since they keep them safe, among other services, and if they are supported, it will enable them to do their job better. According to these participants, this voluntary allocation is more common with cash transfers than other aid modalities. These participants strongly stressed that they do not consider this as aid diversion, that diversion does not exist in their camps, and that whatever they give to camp leaders, they do so willingly.

"The community leader should get some separate assistance. If they are supported, they will help us more. Now some money is always allocated to the camp leaders, and it's common whenever there are cash transfers." – *woman in location E*

"No one diverts our money. We receive what we were told we would receive. But there are some of us who share or give the committee and the community leaders some of our assistance. It is by choice." – *woman in location E*

In the remaining locations, people said that they have never experienced forced or arranged sharing. Some even vigorously defended their camp leaders, asserting that they never ask them to share any of their assistance or get anything special.

"No, the camp leaders do not ask us to share. It is us who decide if we want to share with our friends or neighbours." – *woman in location F*

“

The majority [of community leaders] inform us that they will distribute to others. But we have not seen others getting it, so basically, they may be keeping it to feed themselves or their families.

– *woman in location A*

“

We like to help and appreciate those who brought us here and are keeping us safe. We do this by giving out some of the assistance we receive.

– *woman in location E*

“

No, I have never seen leaders ask us to share the aid we receive. It is true we help each other and if someone next to you does not have anything to eat, and you have received something, you have to help. Muslims support each other.

– *man in location F*

## In some locations, people have witnessed corruption or aid diversion

FGD participants gave some accounts of aid diversion or corruption – ones which they have witnessed personally or heard from others. Some people feel that corruption is inherent to the aid industry and that many stakeholders are involved in facilitating and benefiting from it. According to them, as aid makes its way from donors to people in need, many "middlemen" benefit along the way. Some gave specific accounts of seeing aid, particularly in-kind, being diverted in their community. These included food and non-food items (like soap or jerricans) supposedly meant for camp residents commonly sold at markets, and aid workers using shelter items to build their personal houses.

"Yes, it's not a secret. We have seen food items that were supposed to be distributed to us being sold in the market. Food, soap, jerricans, and other items are mainly diverted and sold in the black market." –  
*woman in location A*



“

It exists. This country has reached a high level of corruption and mismanagement. Lack of investigation and monitoring allowed some middlemen and organisations enrich themselves by diverting the aid that is supposed to reach the vulnerable people who have been affected by the drought and conflict.

– *woman in location A*

“

We are all aware that corruption happens at all levels. I felt it, but it's hard to prove since those involved are businessmen, NGO staff, and community leaders.

– *woman in location A*

## People say that in-kind aid is easier to divert than cash

When asking people to give recommendations on how aid diversion can be eliminated, none of them mentioned shifting from cash to in-kind assistance. Many participants argued that in-kind is easier to divert than cash. While cash, mostly provided as mobile money, is delivered directly to recipients' mobile phones, in-kind goes through intermediaries and can be easily sold. In FGDs where people shared personal experiences of aid diversion or forced sharing, participants said that mobile money is more convenient since people receive their cash transfers directly to their phones without having to travel to a distribution centre or stand in long queues. People can also spend cash on anything they want, and they consider mobile money to be more secure.

"The aid that is being diverted is food and other items. Money cannot be corrupted since everyone receives it on his or her phone. Even if you lose your phone, your money is still safe." – *man in location F*



“

Exactly. Aid is diverted when it's in the form of food or other items, which can be sold in the market to enrich those involved.

– *woman in location F*

“

Our country has high levels of corruption, some of the organisation staff and the gatekeepers have agreements to divert and sell the food. You will see the same food [assistance] we received in the shops.

– *man in location F*



## Community recommendations for stopping forced sharing and aid diversion

- ✓ Ensure strong monitoring of the aid delivery process from beginning to end to make sure aid goes to the people it is intended for.

"I think there should be a strong system to monitor aid. I would also suggest that aid providers with government support should deal with gatekeepers and those involved in any corruption." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Involve the government actively in investigating incidents and dealing with those involved.

"The government's role is missing. The ministries should be keeping an eye on organisations and carry out audits." – *woman in location F*

- ✓ Deliver aid directly to people in need instead of through third parties (for example, mobile money).

"Organisations should deliver directly to the community and not through third-party local NGOs since they do most of the food diversion." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Establish committees to oversee aid delivery, comprising community actors that are selected and trusted by the community like clan elders and religious leaders.

"To create an oversight committee from the government, aid providers, community leaders, and other key stakeholders. The mandate of the committee is to monitor and follow every single dollar of aid." – *man in location D*

"To assign a committee from the elders and clan leaders who are trustworthy to manage the aid delivery." – *man in location F*

"I agree – religious leaders should be given the chance to manage aid since they do not steal and have moral and religious standards that will not allow them to divert aid." – *man in location F*

- ✓ Establish direct communication channels between aid organisations and the community to rely less on gatekeepers or "middlemen", as described by some participants.

"Aid providers should work straight with the community instead of working with the chairmen or camp leaders. This will cut the involvement of middlemen and will lower corruption." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Establish and strengthen measures for aid organisations to ensure the accountability of their own staff.

"I am asking the organisation to bring honest, fair workers when giving out aid." – *woman in location C*

## 2. Communication has improved, but it is still exclusive

### Information about aid is becoming more available, but not to everyone

Time-series data from our quantitative surveys<sup>15</sup> shows that people in Somalia are becoming more aware of available aid. Most FGD participants said that they felt improvements in information sharing including receiving more frequent updates from their camp leaders or camp committees about new or planned aid programmes. A smaller number mentioned receiving these updates directly from organisation staff, who now visit more often, or through text messages. Some also sense more transparency around aid and that even non-recipients know about available programmes – or at least know how to access this information.

"I have seen more meetings in the camp on Fridays, hosted by the camp management to inform us about organisations that are coming soon and things we need to do. Also, when new people arrive, we meet and discuss with the management." – *man in location B*

Despite these improvements, some people continue to be left out. Most participants pointed out that they rely on camp leaders or camp committees for information about aid because they cannot reach aid organisations directly. But when information is shared through camp leaders only, it does not trickle down to everyone as widely as needed. Most women participants said they have not experienced any improvement in information-sharing. While some mentioned being informed about aid by camp leaders, none mentioned receiving information directly from aid organisations through face-to-face interactions. One woman noted being shy to ask aid providers questions when they visit the camp. Persons with disabilities are also often left out of information-sharing.

"We can't reach aid providers directly. The camp leaders are in between us and the organisations." – *man in location D*



“

It is not the same as in the past. People of the camp have a lot of awareness and are able to name the projects that are funded and identify the organisations that they belong to.

– *man in location B*

“

There is more information spread to everyone. Even those not benefiting from the programme are informed. There is more transparency regarding information about aid overall.

– *man in location D*

“

No, I don't know much more about aid than before. I don't know what happens in other areas but in this camp, we don't get much information.

– *woman in location C*

“

Not everyone is aware. Only a few people are registered, and the rest do not know anything about aid. There are also deaf people who are not aware of what is being said.

– *woman in location F*

<sup>15</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis."

## People want aid providers to use appropriate information channels

The people we spoke to pointed out gaps in the way aid providers share specific details about aid, such as duration, sometimes leading to unclear or conflicting information. While some said they were never informed about their assistance duration and did not feel empowered enough to ask, others said that aid providers do not always use the right mechanisms for information-sharing. For example, sometimes aid providers gather many people for a community meeting but do not use microphones, so people standing in the back or those with hearing difficulties cannot hear. In addition, participants felt that aid providers do not put enough thought into conveying information to people in more inclusive ways, such as those who are illiterate, from rural backgrounds, or older people who require information to be provided in a simplified manner. As most people say they cannot reach aid organisations directly to clarify, they can only do so through camp leaders or other people benefiting from the same programme. This often results in rumours or confusion spreading in the community.

"The organisations come here to register and are always in a hurry, they don't use public speakers and there are many people – someone standing behind may not hear anything, and when you ask around, you may get different information." – *man in location B*



“

Some organisations tell us aid will last for four or five months, but the community is confused. There is conflicting information coming from the organisation's staff and the camp leaders. We don't know who to trust or believe. It is true many of us do not have any idea how long the aid is going to be for.

– *man in location B*

“

There is a lot of exaggeration and rumours that are circulating in the camps. Older people, women who have no education, those who migrated from villages and rural areas [have less access to information].

– *man in location B*

## Many people do not know how to directly contact aid organisations

In our latest quantitative data collection,<sup>16</sup> more than half of respondents (55%) were unaware of how to make a suggestion or complaint about the aid or services they received. This resonated with most FGD participants, who confirmed that most people in their community are unaware of ways to give feedback to aid providers. Some argued that most organisations do not inform people about their feedback mechanisms or share their phone numbers. Others said that aid providers don't share this information in an appropriate way. For example, when feedback channels are mentioned during community meetings, illiterate persons, persons with disabilities, or older persons often have a hard time memorising or noting down this information. Further, it is normal for people to forget, especially when information is provided orally. Many people stressed the need to hang posters or distribute leaflets with organisations' phone numbers which they can refer to whenever an issue arises that they need to complain about.

"We don't have a contact at the organisations. I heard some shared information about a phone number to call but I have never seen or called it. They don't share with us the process for submitting complaints or feedback." – *woman in location A*

Lacking other options, the only choice for many people is to give feedback through camp leaders or gatekeepers. This exacerbates existing power imbalances and limits the ability to hold gatekeepers to account. Many FGD participants were concerned about not being able to complain about camp leaders or committees since they could only file complaints through them.

"The issue of going through the camp leaders is very long and they should not know our complaints – sometimes our complaints are about how the committee registers people." – *man in location F*

“

Yes, because we do not know what number to contact for any issues or complaints, so we are stuck.

– *man in location D*

“

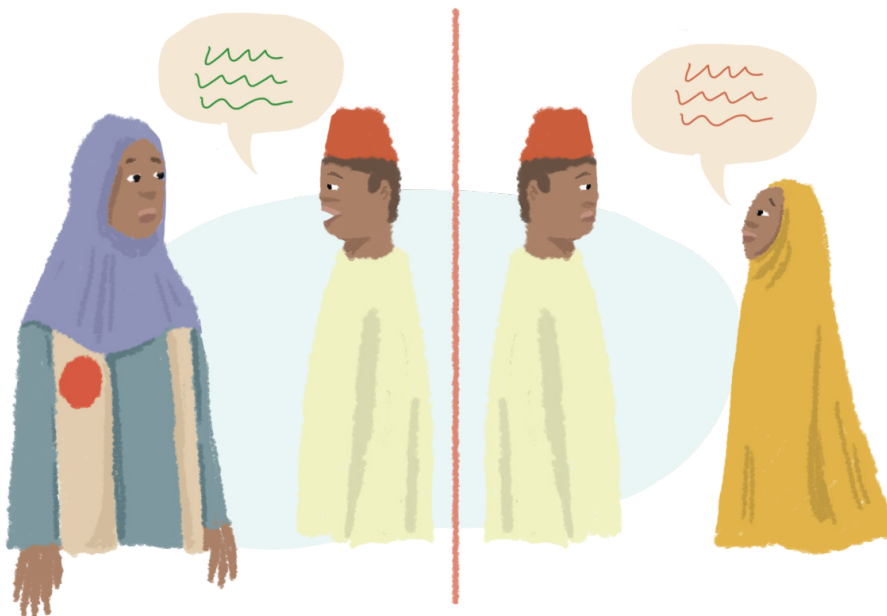
Most of the community is illiterate – they cannot read. Some people are afraid. Some people don't know the complaint number. The organisation must educate us and raise awareness.

– *man in location H*

“

There is a hierarchy between aid recipients and the organisation – the leader is in between. So, you should talk to the leader who will convey your message to the organisation. People are scared of the gatekeepers who control the camps and if they fail to coordinate with them, they can evict people immediately.

– *man in location D*



<sup>16</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis."





## Community recommendations for more inclusive communication

- ✓ Share information about aid directly with people through:
  - regular (weekly or monthly) awareness-raising sessions;

"Organisations can arrange weekly meetings in the camps, like on Fridays when people are off so that they can share with us all the information and people can, in turn, give them feedback and ask questions." – *man in location B*

- setting up information/feedback desks in camps.

"It will be very helpful if they open an office or assign someone in each camp for any complaints or feedback, instead of us bothering the camp leaders." – *woman in location A*

- ✓ Avoid channelling information exclusively through gatekeepers to ensure no one is left out.

"The issue is the middlemen, who sometimes do not inform us. The organisation should work with us directly so that we can get first-hand information." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Ensure the community has access to posters and leaflets with key information about aid, especially how to access feedback mechanisms.

"I would recommend organisations with the help of the camp leaders to print posters with the contact information in the middle of the camp so that anyone who wants to raise a complaint can do so easily." – *woman in location A*

- ✓ Use simplified language and explanations so information is accessible to all, including illiterate persons, older persons, and people with disabilities.

"Most of the community is illiterate. The organisation must educate people and raise awareness." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Ensure organisations' phone numbers are widely known to the community for any complaints or questions about aid through:

- using short numbers that are easy to memorise;

"Setting up a short number for complaints, which is easy and memorable for everyone." – *woman in location A*

- managing people's expectations in terms of the working hours of these phone lines.

"There should be a free number we can call 24/7 for any complaints or feedback." – *man in location G*

- ✓ Share information via radio, at regular times.

"They can broadcast on the radio at specific times on a regular basis so that everyone will be able to listen." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Specify certain locations in each camp where people can find information about aid.

"They should have places in the camps where people can find information." – *man in location G*

- ✓ Train community representatives on the feedback process and allow them to receive and deliver complaints and other feedback from the community to aid organisations.

"[Aid providers should] train people who raise awareness among people in the area, and we can share any complaints with them, and they can pass it on to the organisation." – *man in location G*

## 3. People don't dare to speak up

### Fear keeps people from giving feedback

In our latest quantitative survey,<sup>17</sup> 60% of the people who knew how to complain or give feedback said they had never done so. The reasons they gave included not having a reason to complain (62%), being grateful for aid (25%), or being unable to access feedback mechanisms (15%). Some did not believe they would receive a response (13%) or feared retaliation or exclusion from assistance (8%). When we explored this topic in our qualitative discussions, the picture started to become clearer.

The majority of people mentioned fear as the key barrier. People fear many things in Somalia. Many have been displaced and lost their livelihoods and rely on aid to meet their basic needs. They fear exclusion from it if they complain. This risk intensifies when confidentiality is not guaranteed – many people fear being characterised as "troublemakers" if their identities become known. When it comes to exclusion from aid, people fear camp leaders or committees the most because they are the ones in charge of selecting aid recipients. In addition, participants said that camp leaders and landowners have the power to evict people from IDP settlements. As a result, many people refrain from giving feedback, fearing they might lose their shelter. In certain locations, participants said camp leaders or other gatekeepers administer physical violence through soldiers who can arrest or "beat people up" if they complain about them. Therefore, many do not feel they could bypass camp leaders by complaining to aid organisations directly, even if they knew how to do so. Others had the perception that if aid providers received many complaints from a certain IDP settlement, they would flag it as a problematic place, impacting its likelihood to receive aid in the future.

"I think we don't have the power to raise our voices. We rely on aid, and no one among us wants to lose the little aid we receive. The camp leaders do not want people to complain a lot to the organisations, otherwise, the aid providers will identify that camp as a messy place with no law and order." – *woman in location A*



Some people know how to and still don't report anything because they are afraid of being excluded from the project. It is easy to identify people who raise complaints.

– *man in location B*



As you know this land belongs to people, and they manage it. If they realised you talked to the organisation without them knowing, it may cause a problem, like a warning to be expelled from the camp.

– *woman in location G*



Some camp managers have armed soldiers who may arrest or beat up people. People are scared of these soldiers.

– *woman in location A*

<sup>17</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "[Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis.](#)"

Some participants said that those who complain are discriminated against by other people in the community. One said that other people might try to stop an individual from complaining because they fear for themselves and their own situation. Another said that sometimes people are reluctant to lend their phones to others who do not own one to use it to file a complaint, fearing their numbers would be identified and they would get into trouble.

"If you are seen submitting a complaint, it is said that the person who complains will be stopped by other people in the camp, fearing that by complaining they might lose aid or not get what they should be getting." – *woman in location G*



“

I don't own a phone. If I ask someone to lend me their phone to call the organisation, they say you are getting me into trouble.

– *man in location B*

## People feel that no one listens

Closing the feedback loop is critical to people's trust in feedback mechanisms. This was emphasised as one of the reasons why some people do not use these mechanisms. Some shared their experiences of calling organisations' phone numbers with no answer or waiting for a response after submitting a complaint and not getting one. Using these mechanisms was seen futile unless aid organisations improve their capacity to provide a response.

"There are challenges. First, we don't know the numbers or contacts of the aid providers. Secondly, if we knew, there is little chance that they will respond or pick up our calls. Even when they do, they don't allow us to explain, and they may ask us to call back." – woman in location A

“

The reason is, if people submit their complaints, no one will respond to them, and they will not follow up with you.

– woman in location F





## Community recommendations for promoting trust in feedback mechanisms

- ✓ Hold camp leaders and gatekeepers accountable by:
  - monitoring and stopping them from penalising people who contact organisations directly.

"One important thing is to tell the camp leaders not to harass the people who complain, and the organisation staff should not reveal people's identity." – *man in location F*

- ✓ Establish direct channels for people to give feedback to organisations without having to go through gatekeepers.

"The middlemen should be eradicated, and organisations should open communication channels with the community." – *woman in location A*

- ✓ Set up face-to-face channels like in-camp complaint desks for people who are illiterate or those are not good with using mobile phones to allow them to complain about camp leaders if they want to.

"They need to have staff in the camp who help people who have questions." – *man in location H*

- ✓ Promote confidentiality by:
  - having measures in place for keeping people's details confidential;

"They should come up with a mechanism that allows people to talk to them in a confidential manner without sharing their details with the camp leaders or anyone else." – *woman in location A*

- setting up channels for people to complain discreetly without their identities being known;

"They should set up a system like a secret phone number with short codes that are easy to remember." – *woman in location A*

- engaging with existing independent accountability mechanisms which people can use without revealing their identities.

"We would like someone who is independent of the staff so that when we file a complaint our names and numbers are hidden." – *man in location H*

- ✓ Set clear expectations for response to complaints and other feedback.

"The community, camp leader, and the organisations should agree on a way forward for handling complaints and issues." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Address and respond to complaints in a timely manner.

"The organisations should be able to answer when people call and address their issues immediately. Now the system is long and weak. We complain via the camp leader – getting a response may take a week or more." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Allow voice recorded feedback for people who are illiterate and might not be able to contact helplines.

"A complaint box should be made for voice recordings because we cannot write, but we can record our voice." – *man in location F*



### Gatekeepers' land ownership:

Some participants pointed out gatekeepers' ownership of the land they live on as a root cause for the power imbalance they are experiencing. Although gatekeepers are sometimes appointed by the local district commissioner, in newer and less formalised IDP settlements, they are landowners who set up sites to attract IDPs (and aid), or people who speculatively search for and identify empty plots of land, and through connections, attract IDPs to settle.<sup>18</sup> As a result, gatekeepers can decide who stays in the settlements they manage and who gets evicted, and many of them use this as leverage to force people in their settlements to follow their rules.

"You know every problem has a root cause. If IDPs have their own land, the camp management and gatekeepers will not be in the picture. Therefore, I recommend settling IDPs in a land where they manage themselves. As long as these people [IDPs] are residing in someone's land, they have to pay some of the aid they receive." – *man in location B*

"Government and organisations should allocate land to be owned by the community so that they no longer fear the gatekeepers." – *woman in location A*

"If the base of the issue is not addressed, it will not be eliminated. If we had our own places, camp leaders would not threaten us. Organisations should give us land, then people will have the ability to raise complaints." – *woman in location F*

<sup>18</sup> DFID and Tana Copenhagen. March 2017. "Engaging the Gatekeepers: Using informal governance resources in Mogadishu."



## 4. Aid providers make decisions without knowing the realities

### People say inadequate consultations lead to irrelevant aid

In our quantitative survey,<sup>19</sup> only 39% of respondents said they were consulted by aid providers before receiving cash and voucher assistance. People feel that aid providers come to implement plans which they have already developed in their offices without involving the community or considering its needs. Many people feel disempowered and so accept whatever they are given without feeling like they have a say. On many occasions, lack of consultation has led to the provision of irrelevant aid. One participant said, "When we needed food, they brought pots and pans" and two others said, "They gave us jerricans, when there is no water in the camp", or "They gave us sleeping materials, when we needed food the most". A lack of consultation can result in significant efficiency losses.

"No one has consulted us in this camp. They give aid to whomever they want, and they bring things that we don't need. When you needed food, they would bring pots and pans. They are not aware of the needs in the community. It is important to be consulted and asked." – woman in location C



Other participants said that there is consultation, but only with gatekeepers. Fewer participants said that some organisations consult with communities, but only sporadically. Only a few people said they witnessed consultations with aid providers – and then only once or twice.

“

There are no consultations. They plan their things in their offices and come to us with their plans and we accept what they provide. They should ask us and consult us about our needs like education, healthcare, and other necessities.

– man in location D

“

No, I was never consulted on my needs. The organisations consult the camp leaders and gatekeepers about the aid distribution. We receive whatever they allocate for us.

– man in location F

“

The organisations and the community do not meet, but the camp leaders and community leaders advocate for us. The organisations do not even visit us, how can they consult us? I have not seen any consultations in this camp. They come only when they are distributing the small amounts of aid they provide.

– woman in location A

<sup>19</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis."

## Only certain people can influence decisions about aid

Forty percent of our quantitative survey<sup>20</sup> respondents felt that people in their community could influence how aid is provided. However, only certain people hold this influence like camp leaders, camp committees, village heads, clan elders, and district authorities. Ordinary people's voice is not heard. While some participants mentioned their camp leaders advocate for their needs, others wished more people in the community had a say. To some participants, being able to influence aid is a product of being consulted – how can people in the community influence how and what aid is provided when they are not consulted on their needs and priorities in the first place?

Further, many agree that men have more influence than women who, often due to cultural or religious barriers, have fewer opportunities to participate. IDPs are also considered powerless due to the inherent nature of displacement. In addition, participants mentioned minorities, youth, persons with disabilities, and the poor among the least influential.

"Men dominate decision-making. We don't have any influence." –  
woman in location A



“

No, we don't have any influence because they plan and do things without considering us. Whatever they give us, we take it.

– woman in location E

“

The community leaders have influence. There were times when a project had to be stopped because community leaders felt that it was being done badly. They have the power to change the project, but the community does not have the same power.

– man in location G

“

There are cultural barriers and religious restrictions. Women are not allowed to make decisions. It's generally men who decide.

– woman in location F

“

People with disabilities [have no influence] because they need help. There are also people who are ostracised; they don't have any say in any decisions.

– man in location G

<sup>20</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis."



## Community recommendations for meaningful participation and more influence

- ✓ Ensure more direct contact between organisations and the community:
  - at the design phase before implementation (and not after);

"People want to be asked about their own needs and priorities before planning any implementation. Then, people can respond and raise their voices. Then, aid providers should implement what was agreed, like providing food, providing healthcare or cash assistance. But the reality is that they plan and come to us already with their plan." – *man in location D*

- not just a checkbox; genuinely ask people about their needs and priorities and be willing to adjust plans based on what people say.

"We want the organizations to listen to us and adjust their plans with respect to our needs." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Share enough information about aid with the community to allow people to provide meaningful input when asked to participate.

"First of all, the community should be made aware. People should be informed about everything related to the project, whether it is a good or bad." – *man in location H*

- ✓ Stop consulting only camp leaders or other gatekeepers because they do not always know people's priorities.

"We need regular meetings with the organisations, and not to rely on camp leaders for our needs. They may not know all of it. The whole community should be involved and consulted, regardless of gender or status." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Set up mechanisms to consult with the wider community, taking gender, age, disability, and clan affiliation into account through:

- community meetings where everyone is invited to attend;

"Elders, women, and youth should be consulted. The kind of consultation we need is for aid providers to listen to us, instead of discussing our needs with the camp leaders. Organisations should trust us and should be willing to talk to us." – *man in location B*

- encouraging people to set up committees to represent them and speak on their behalf.

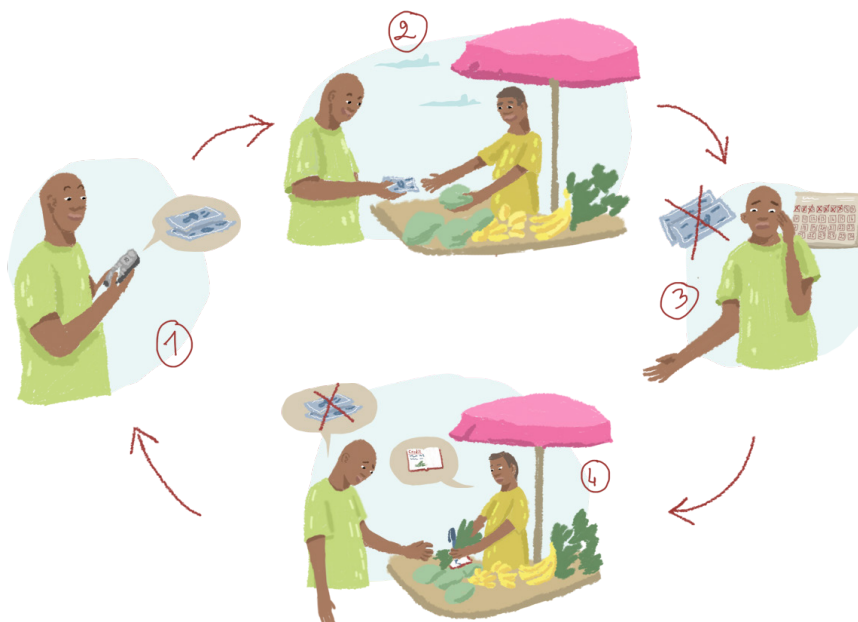
"We don't have any influence, but it's true – we can influence if we are given the opportunity to participate. I would suggest having a joint committee for the community and the organisation to enhance communication and enable the community to have influence over their future." – *woman in location A*

## 5. Trapped in a never-ending cycle of humanitarian aid

Recognising people's struggles is key to understanding why only 42% of our quantitative survey<sup>21</sup> respondents felt able to meet their most important needs with the cash and voucher assistance (CVA) they received. The people we spoke to feel that aid is stagnating, despite the rising needs on the ground. Many describe assistance as being irregular or sporadic, provided for short durations, in small amounts, and only to a limited number of people. While some people say that cash and voucher assistance still helps and that they are grateful to receive it, it only enables them to cover their needs for a short while. Some questioned the way transfer values are calculated and whether they consider people's needs and market prices. Although the Somalia Cash Working Group and Food Security Cluster increased their transfer value in September 2022,<sup>22</sup> there is a clear discrepancy between the values mentioned by participants receiving CVA from different organisations in the same location. This suggests that not all CVA providers have updated their transfer values since the new guidance was released.

People argue that receiving humanitarian CVA for three, four, or five months only allows them to cover some of their needs during that period. Once it ends, many people rely on debt. If they get selected again to receive aid, they use their transfers to pay off their debts before they can buy their necessities for another three to five months – leading to a never-ending cycle of reliance on humanitarian aid. People say that while CVA helps many families "put food on the table" for a few months, it does not help with long-term resilience.

"When there is no assistance, we face a lot of issues. When we are paid, we use the money to pay off our debts and to pay for school. But when we are not, it is difficult." – man in location H



“

The projects are very far apart with gaps in between. Lack of consistency of aid delivery is the problem we are having.

– man in location E

“

Organisations should do something to help us overcome our challenges. They don't assess our needs, but rather they come and distribute a small number of food rations and some cash to a few households.

– woman in location A

“

I think the issue is that organisations underestimate IDPs' needs. They allocate very little aid and think we can survive with as little as 30 USD. They should do proper assessments and increase the cash transfers accordingly.

– man in location B

“

The cash transfers do not cover our needs. After three months, we survive by relying on debt as there are no jobs.

– man in location D

“

You cannot plan with three months of cash. We receive 60 USD per month for three months. Our children might get sick, they might need new clothes, and if someone dies, the funeral cost alone is 180 USD. All these needs with this amount? It is impossible to plan.

– man in location D

<sup>21</sup> Ground Truth Solutions. December 2022. "[Rights, information, and predictability: Keys to navigating a complex crisis.](#)"

<sup>22</sup> Somalia Cash Working Group. September 2022. "[Drought Response CVA Transfer Value Recommendations.](#)"



## Community recommendations for breaking the cycle

- ✓ Provide regular cash transfers for longer. In a trade-off between smaller transfers for longer versus larger transfers for shorter durations, most people prefer the former.

"If the transfer is for two or three years, it will help me plan for my future. I can save and plan my family's priorities. I will be able to join a savings group and start a small business." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Focus on providing livelihood support in addition to cash through:

- cash to help people start businesses;

"I would rather be paid a good amount of money and invest in a machine that grinds grain in the fields, so later when my kids need something I can help them." – *woman in location G*

- farming input and/or livestock;

"The NGOs should provide us with livestock and seeds for farming so that we can produce our own food and restart our livelihoods." – *man in location F*

- skills training.

"Community members should not only receive cash or other forms of aid, but they should also receive assistance to develop the skills to sustain their lives in the future." – *man in location D*

- ✓ Consider increasing coverage, even if it means lowering the transfer value.

"I would suggest they increase the number of families they are reaching. Often, we share some of the aid we receive with our neighbours who did not get any help; we have to share so that we can all survive this hardship." – *woman in location A*

- ✓ Regularly consult with people on their needs.

"Well, they should change the whole aid planning. They should allocate more aid to us IDPs and consult with us about what we need and listen to our priorities. They come and give out small cash assistance, which is not helping us." – *man in location B*

- ✓ Rethink current approaches to resilience through linkages between humanitarian and development actors.

"I suggest providing food rations and building infrastructure like hospitals and schools and providing skills training to people. The cash transfers are not helping in the long run. The government and aid providers should come up with a different approach." – *woman in location A*



## Resolving trade-offs – the breadth versus depth debate:

When asking participants to give recommendations for how this endless cycle of aid can be broken, they suggested several programmatic changes that need to be implemented at the same time. These include increasing the duration, value, and coverage of aid. However, knowing the funding limitations and capacity constraints of the aid system in Somalia, we gauged people's priorities by asking them to choose between different scenarios related to their suggestions: smaller transfers for longer versus larger, transfers for shorter durations and broader coverage with small transfers versus narrower coverage with larger transfers.

The majority valued the predictability of small transfers over longer periods when other sources of income are uncertain. People were aware that extending the duration would make the amount received each month smaller but still felt that receiving CVA regularly for a year or two would enable them to meet their needs gradually, for longer, and cover more of their unmet needs like putting their children in school.

"I would rather take longer-term money. Even if it is not much, at least I know that I will be getting it for at least a year." – *woman in location C*

"I welcome this idea. This will help cover my needs because if the amount is small but is for a long duration, it will help me sustain my basic needs. The cash we receive now is for three months only, which is not enough and does not help much." – *man in location D*

"I see that if the amount is small but for longer, it will help a person plan his needs accordingly, and if this month is not enough, he can plan for the next month, step by step. Now we receive money for three months, which cannot cover our needs." – *man in location D*

The majority also preferred broader coverage of CVA even if it meant receiving smaller transfers. When needs are high, low coverage is perceived as "unfair" and often leads to community tensions. Some also say that they share their CVA with others in the community anyway, which leaves them with small amounts not enough to cover their own needs. If aid is distributed in smaller amounts that reached everybody around them, there will be less need for them to share.

"In my opinion, if the organisation wants to pay us 60 USD per person for 150 people, we prefer it distributes 30 USD per person for 300 people instead so that many people can benefit. It is not good if your neighbour is hungry, and only you have taken something." – *man in location B*

"The money we get is not much, but many people are left out, so we have to share it. If everyone gets aid, then we won't have to share as much." – *woman in location C*



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