



COVID-19 in Somalia

Rapid Assessment: Priorities & Concerns for Humanitarian Actors

May 2020



Introduction

Somalia reported the first confirmed case of COVID-19 on 16 March 2020. Quickly, responding to COVID-19 became the major priority for the government, humanitarian actors, and stakeholders working in the region. Due to the limitations in existing infrastructure, plus the challenges around resourcing the response, an openness has been created for more collaboration and coordination.

The Response Innovation Lab (RIL) mobilized quickly to support those directly involved in the COVID-19 response with identifying and defining challenges, then working to rapidly provide solutions that can be deployed. To further support stakeholders involved in the response, the RIL conducted a rapid mini-assessment (survey) in April 2020, focused on understanding the needs and priorities of humanitarian actors in the COVID-19 response. These results are being shared openly to foster learning, improve coordination, and prioritize resources to areas of need.

Context

Challenges and complexities from Somalia's long-standing humanitarian crisis in the world, are only exacerbated and compounded by COVID-19. The ongoing civil war and the protracted absence of functional government institutions have caused profound humanitarian and development challenges. Additionally, ongoing conflict and frequent extreme climatic events continue to drive displacement and restrict humanitarian access to significant parts of the country.

Roughly, 928,000 people were displaced within Somalia each year since 2017 due to the impact of floods, drought, and conflict. Of those displaced, 80% arrive in urban areas, causing the expansion of Somalia's cities and placing additional pressure on resources by increasing the density.¹ The Internally Displaced People (IDP) settlements are typically taking place in chronically poor host communities or isolated areas where limited access to water and sanitation facilities, and few livelihood opportunities exist. Additionally, a large number of those displaced rely on daily wage labor to meet their basic needs.

¹ The Brookings Institution (October, 2019) *Somalia's pathway to stability*:
<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2019/10/02/somalias-path-to-stability/>

Only 38% of the population in Somalia have access to an improved water source, and 40% to safe sanitation.² Drought, pollution of groundwater, and contamination of drinking water lead to diarrheal diseases, including Cholera, are some of the challenges faced in providing access to potable water. Lack of water security increases the potential for migration in this region, and a lack of safe water and sanitation contributes to a higher risk of contamination of the COVID-19 virus, as well as existing issues such as malnutrition.

Rationale & Methodology

An online survey was circulated via the RIL's network, and a total of **58 key informants** from **48 different organizations** contributed. Of these, 54% were local, 42% were international, 2% were from the United Nations, and 2% were "other."

The individuals contributing to the survey were 74% male, 21% female, and 3% preferred to keep their gender anonymous.

The assessment was delivered as a questionnaire in English, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions. In most cases, participants were asked open-ended questions, and responses were recorded against a pre-set list.

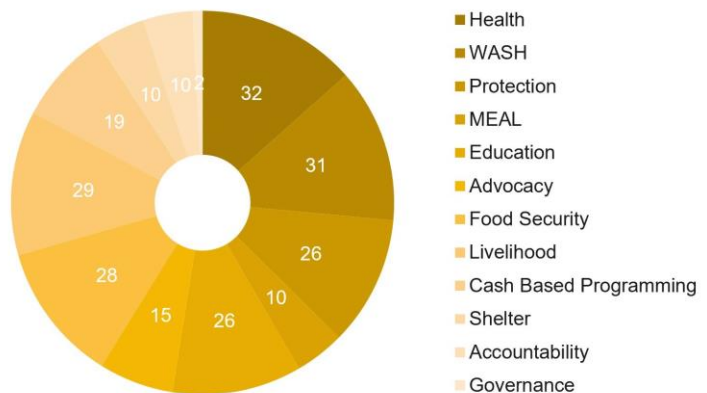


Figure 1 | Which sector do you work in?

As the purpose of the survey was to gain insight into respondents' priorities and interests, no limits or parameters were set around responses.

The respondents were asked which sector they worked in to distinguish the potential difference in priorities and concerns between the areas of work. However, 65% of the respondents work within multiple sectors, and no apparent variations in the concerns and priorities came forward.

Key Findings

The survey results can be divided into four categories; 1) Communication and Awareness; 2) Prevention and Management; 3) Secondary Effects of the Pandemic; 4) Topics with Interest for Innovation.

- Limited methods of engaging communities with information (including illiterate people and in remote rural areas)
- Information availability for vulnerable groups (e.g. children, people living with disabilities, elderly etc)
- Information about referral pathways and available services
- Spread of fake-news and conflicting messages
- Limited cultural adaptation

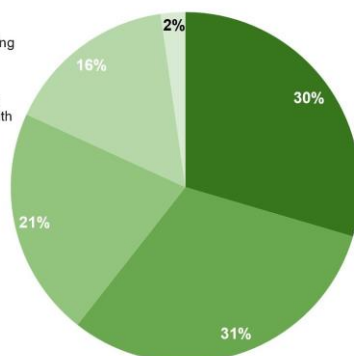


Figure 2 | Communication and Awareness

1) Communication & Awareness: The main concerns related to communication and awareness are the limitations of information available for vulnerable groups, and limited methods of engaging communities with information. An issue raised by several of the respondents was that some communities misinterpret or deny the causes and effects of COVID-19 due to religious or cultural beliefs.

² UNICEF (December, 2019) *WASH Assessment*.

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/REACH_SOM_WASH_Report_01MAR2020.pdf

2) Prevention & Management: The responses related to concerns about the prevention and management of the virus were divided almost evenly. Lack of preventive measures at health facilities was identified as the primary concern, as well as management of crowded communities and the quality of health facilities and systems, which have been dire since the early '90s, and this pandemic is adding unprecedented strain on an already fragile system.

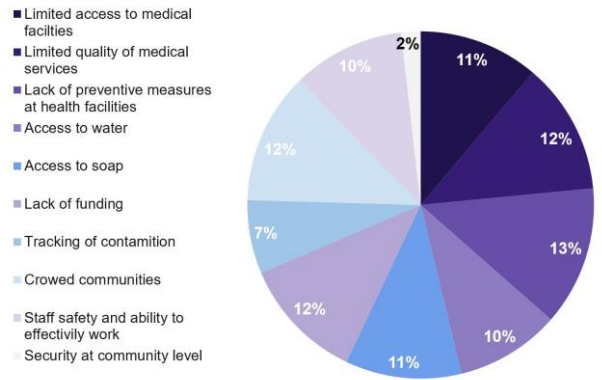


Figure 3 | Prevention and Management

3) Secondary Effects of the Pandemic: 93% of the respondents identified effects on the household economy as a secondary effect of COVID-19. Additionally, the concern **on limitations of access to food, and food security**, was listed by almost 70% of the respondents. Furthermore, there was concern from the **delays and adverse for ongoing projects and education services** due to the working environment and activated measures to limit further infection.



Figure 4 | Innovation Word Cloud

4) Areas with Interest for Innovation: Respondents were asked to identify areas where innovative solutions are needed and which initiatives their organizations have considered or started implementing as a response. In the word-cloud, the **PURPLE** words illustrates challenges that respondents would like innovators to work on, and the **GREEN** shows areas their respective organizations are already addressing.

Conclusion

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread across Somalia, it will become increasingly important for humanitarian actors to coordinate efforts and resources. These unprecedented times also bring innovation to the forefront to respond quickly and enable proactiveness.

Recommendations

- Gaps identified should be further investigated and coordinated by respective clusters (Health; WASH; Education; Food Security; Protection) with more consultation of frontline workers.
- Awareness-raising is the first line of defense and will require public health messages to be available via multiple mediums to effectively reach vulnerable groups.
- Prioritize improving access to hygiene products, such as soap.
- Support contamination prevention protocols and access to necessary equipment for health facilities to help manage the increase in caseloads.
- A coordinated approach to a 'Phase II' of planning and messaging allows for a multi-sectoral response, including 'non-traditional' humanitarian actors.
- Support initiatives for livelihood and education activities to continue in a safe manner.
- Humanitarian actors should seek out partnerships to effectively design and test innovative solutions rapidly.



COVID-19 Public Health Resource Repository (Somalia)

www.responseinnovationlab.com/somalia-covid-19

Founding Partners of the Response Innovation Lab (RIL)