

# Implementing Culturally-sensitive Risk Education in Somalia

The Somali Compact 2014 – 2016 outlines the objectives of the Somalia federal government to guide the process of stabilization and peace building. The Compact also recognizes the vital contributions by representatives of women, youth, civil society organizations, traditional elders, religious leaders, diaspora and the business community from all segments in each region.<sup>1</sup>

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The Somalia Explosive Management Authority (SEMA) and the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Somalia contracted the Gender and Mine Action Programme (GMAP) in 2014 to carry out a comprehensive gender assessment of its mine action program. The aim of the assessment was to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for gender mainstreaming in core activities of the humanitarian explosive management program, including risk education (RE) activities. Through consultations with staff from the national authorities, U.N. agencies, national nongovernmental organizations (NGO), international NGOs and other stakeholders, the assessment focused on, amongst other aspects:

- The methods that are used to keep women, girls, boys and men alert to the risks of mines, explosive remnants of war (ERW) and improvised explosive devices (IED) when contamination remains over extended periods of time
- The strategies that are used to monitor the effectiveness and evaluate the impact of RE.

The findings of this assessment, as well as ongoing consultations with UNMAS Somalia and other national NGOs carrying out RE in South Central Somalia are discussed in this article.

## Humanitarian Explosive Management in Somalia

As a result of conflict with Ethiopia and two decades of civil war, Somalia is contaminated with ERW, stockpiles of weapons and ammunition. Armed groups increasingly use IEDs, contributing to the threats faced by the Somali population, the federal government and aid organizations. UNMAS became the lead U.N. agency for explosive hazards management



UOS gender-balanced RE teams.  
All graphics courtesy of UNMAS.

in Somalia in 2009 and has since provided support to the Somaliland Mine Action Centre (SMAC), the Puntland Mine Action Centre (PMAC) and SEMA, enabling them to coordinate humanitarian activities that contribute to stabilization.<sup>2</sup> The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has also asked the international community for support with weapons and ammunition management, along with helping to enhance RE strategies for small arms and light weapons threats.

## Importance of Culturally-sensitive RE in Somalia

An understanding of the clan system, religion, and other factors such as language, gender, age, geographic location and socioeconomic status is essential to ensure the design and delivery of culturally acceptable community RE in Somalia. This is because the prevalence of religious and clan-based systems, in combination with the impact of protracted conflict and humanitarian crises, have all contributed to creating barriers, preventing access to services for certain demographics of the Somali population.<sup>3</sup> When this is interwoven with other factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, the power dynamics become even more complex. For example, clans in South Central Somalia are typically male dominated and

women have historically been excluded from the arena of clan-based politics.<sup>4</sup> In the clan system, age is also a key determinant of ability to participate in decision-making processes because in many cases it is not acceptable for a younger man to speak up in front of an elder. The interpretation of the Islamic faith in certain parts of the country—for example, those under the control of al-Shabaab and other extremist militia groups—also has direct implications for some community members in terms of their ability to participate in public forums and decision-making processes. However, it is important to keep in mind that South Central Somalia is extremely culturally diverse and that social norms can vary from one geographical location to the next.



Somali women receiving risk education materials.

It should be noted that despite existing barriers, the marginalization of underrepresented groups has resulted in them directing their collective political acumen and agency into the civil society space with some positive results. The protracted conflict and humanitarian crises have also provided opportunities for underrepresented groups to take on non-traditional roles in society. It is a false assumption that only women or men conduct certain livelihoods or household activities, as this varies across clans, geographical locations and individual families.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, national NGOs should complete a gender and diversity analysis as a prerequisite before starting activities to better understand opportunities for and barriers to meaningful participation in RE services. This analysis will enable the design of culturally-sensitive community engagement strategies. Working with district authorities and local communities is also central to gaining acceptance for RE projects in newly accessible areas and districts, and the emphasis should be on working with national NGOs with existing links in the community.

#### **Culturally-sensitive RE in Somalia**

The hiring of RE teams directly from the communities affected by explosive hazards is a useful approach for accessing the local population and building trust while ensuring the delivery of life-saving safety activities to protect civilians from the threat of explosive hazards. Through its grants and contracting system UNMAS has made a significant effort to ensure that the composition of RE teams deployed in Somalia

and Somaliland are gender-balanced and clan-sensitive to ensure women, girls, boys and men can access RE services. This is particularly evident in the current project with Ukroboron-service SC (UOS), which requires the deployment of 20 male and female teams throughout South Central Somalia. Each RE team consists of one male and one female facilitator who deliver sessions at the community level. With the exception of one district, this has now been achieved by working with local authorities and clan leaders to gain acceptance of the RE projects, and also to receive their nominations for community members to be employed on RE teams. National NGOs funded by UNMAS, such as the Somali Humanitarian Demining Organization (SOHDO), and the Somali Youth Development Network (SOYDEN) have also successfully deployed gender-balanced RE teams in parts of South Central Somalia, as have international NGOs with bilateral funding.

Many different techniques were developed in South Central Somalia for the dissemination of RE to ensure that the different age and sex groups remain alert to the threat of mines, ERW and IED contamination. International and national NGOs use a variety of traditional techniques, such as direct RE presentations, radio broadcasts, roleplays, and games. UNMAS and national implementing partners also made an analysis and identified the best forums in which to access the different age and sex groups through direct RE initiatives. For example, men are most readily available in tea shops, clinics, livestock markets and water points.<sup>6</sup> Additional forums and

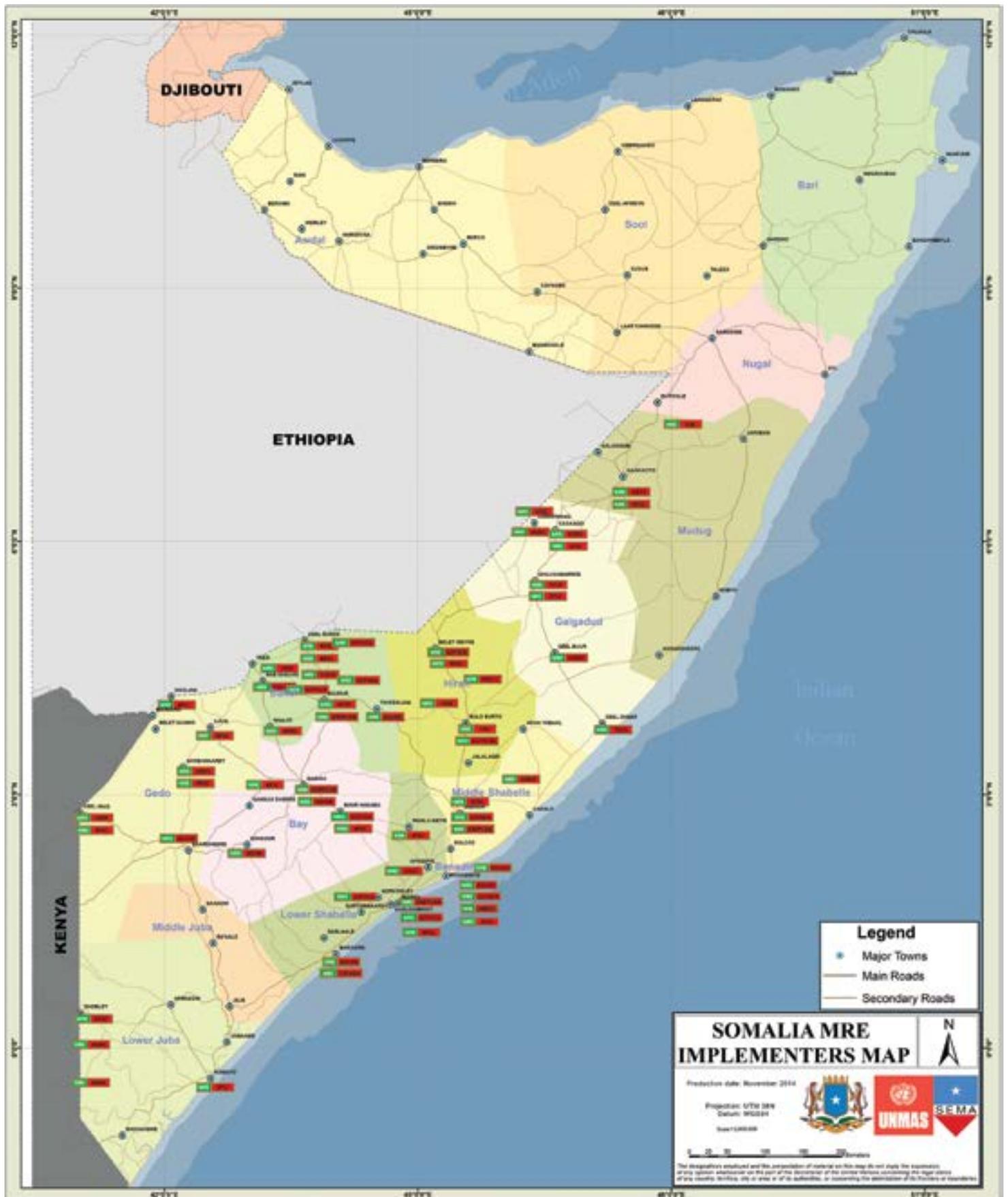


Figure 1. Map showing local NGO distribution in South Central Somalia in 2014–2015.

RE Beneficiaries				Total	Sessions
Girls	Boys	Women	Men		
54,628	69,119	31,266	33,102	188,115	10,545

Table 1. Risk education beneficiaries.

mechanisms identified for targeting high-risk demographics of the population are organized internally displaced persons (IDP)/refugee camps and return points, communities (using the Danish Demining Group (DDG) community safety approach), UNICEF child-friendly spaces, community police dialogue initiatives, and private stockpile workshops (PSW).<sup>7</sup>

To promote the sustainability of RE initiatives, there has been a shift in focus toward training community-based RE facilitators, for example midwives and traditional birth attendants to target women; teachers in schools to access children and adolescents; religious leaders such as the sheikh or moalim (religious teachers) in the madrasas (religious schools) to target non-scholarized children and adolescents; and Imams in the mosque to target men.<sup>8,9</sup> Since Somalia does not have an established government school system the majority of children attend religious schools called madrasas rather than government-established or private schools. The African Network for Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect Somali Chapter (ANPPCAN-SOM) has identified the need to integrate RE into community-based structures by establishing RE committees and training pre-existing community education, health, water and teachers' committees in rural villages. In response to the fact that boys and young men between the ages of five and twenty-nine years are considered to be most at-risk of mine/ERW accidents, the ANPPCAN-SOM project supports RE mainstreaming in the formal and informal educational systems in affected communities in the Bay, Lower/Middle Shabelle, Bakool and Hiran regions of South Central Somalia.

To further promote the sustainability of RE initiatives and to support the development of national capacity, UNMAS trained a small number of police explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams in Mogadishu to deliver emergency RE in areas where they respond to reports of mines, ERW and IEDs. The concept of developing the emergency RE capacity of the police is based on the model successfully used in Somaliland, where the main provider of RE is the Somaliland Police EOD teams, and it is planned that the full responsibility of RE will be handed over to the Somali police by 2017.

This model is currently being expanded throughout South Central Somalia as part of the RE project with UOS. Under the terms of the project, UOS RE officers will train two male and two female police officers from each district in emergency

RE so that they can disseminate messages in affected communities. According to statistics received from UNMAS Somalia in December 2014, 1,029 male and 97 female police officers from 13 districts participated in the training.<sup>10</sup> This initiative is also linked to broader stabilization and peace-building efforts because training police officers as emergency RE facilitators is a tangible and proactive method for strengthening positive perceptions of policing at the community level.<sup>11</sup>

### Measuring the Effectiveness of Culturally-sensitive Risk Education

In the case of South Central Somalia, the objective is that RE is provided to all communities affected by explosive threats, and the expected outcomes include the following:

- At-risk populations adopt safe behaviors
- The number of landmines/ERW/IED accidents is reduced
- Community perceptions of the police are improved

One positive outcome of stabilization work is that communities, interim administrations and the local security sector that were previously not accessible due to their location within al Shabaab-controlled areas were recovered after the AMISOM/SNA advance in 2014. These communities have now received basic ERW and IED awareness training to increase their knowledge on how to protect themselves from the risks. In addition, local NGOs participated in train-the-trainer workshops for future community-based RE projects in areas that are recovered to the FGS through a partnership with UNICEF and international NGOs.

In terms of monitoring the outputs of RE in Somalia, presently data is collected and disaggregated by age and sex to illustrate participation in RE sessions. Outputs of RE teams operational in newly accessible districts, in line with the national stabilization plan and the United Nations Refugee Agency returnee projects, are included in Table 1.

In addition, there have been efforts to evaluate behavior change and accident reduction. This has primarily been done using Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) data to map RE sessions and casualty data in the areas where RE has taken place since 2010. In the case of Mogadishu, there has been a reduction in casualties, although UNMAS states that other factors, such as clearance of hazards and improved security facilitating operations also contributed



UNMAS teams distribute RE leaflets in the community.

to this outcome. However UNMAS also highlights that evidence suggests that currently the majority of accidents happening in South Central Somalia are in areas where the local population has not benefited from RE initiatives.

There is no strategy currently in place for measuring and evaluating improved community perceptions of the police, but a strategy is under development by rule of law and security institutions. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the international community is working with FGS in line with the Somali Compact, which provides an overarching strategic framework for coordinating political, security and development efforts for peacebuilding and state-building activities. Its priorities build upon existing plans and strategies of the government. One of the main goals of UNSOM and

the Rule of Law and Security Institutions group is to give strategic advice and coordination support to the FGS through the Somali Compact and the U.N. Integrated Strategic Framework for Somalia. If the security situation permits, there would be an added value in carrying out a culturally-sensitive Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Beliefs survey or a pre- and post-RE assessment in newly accessible areas. This would allow SEMA and UNMAS to evaluate the extent to which RE delivered by national NGOs and emergency RE conducted by the police have contributed to the achievement of the expected outcomes. It would also enable the collection of more qualitative information on the effectiveness of different RE strategies for targeted groups. ©

*See endnotes page 65*



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