

**Community Consultation
to inform FAO-WFP-UNICEF Resilience Strategy**



***Dollow Town
2nd October 2012***

Dolow Town

The consultation was held under a large mango tree on the banks of River Dawa, the boundary between Somalia and Ethiopia. The tree is a customary meeting place on the property of a local Chairman who welcomed us to meet there on mats and arranged for tea to be brought. About 40 people attended, of which about ten were women. Those attending were both Dolow residents and IDPs, who had been in Dolow for varied lengths of time: some had come in recent weeks and even days (mostly from Bay and Bakool region); others had arrived shortly after the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, mostly because they were originally from Dolow but had settled in Mogadishu and other major towns.

Most Dolow residents were business people, traders and farmers, and many were ex-pastoralists (their lives in herding left behind because of drought, conflict, or overpopulation). Many of the IDPs worked on farms or in the town, while others (especially recent arrivals) survived only on humanitarian aid and social support.

There were about ten visitors including staff from WFP, FAO and UNICEF as well as from several local partners. The facilitator and translators were Somali WFP staff members.

The meeting began with introductions and prayers from Chairman, Sheikh and key elders from the two main IDP camps and from Dolow town. Conversation then followed the twin themes of recent disasters or shocks, and people's ways of coping with them. This was done in order to understand resilience from a community perspective.

What follows is as close as possible a transcript of what was said, based on translation from Somali to English. Before that is a summary of some cross-cutting themes relevant to local perceptions of resilience, which include:

- SAFETY IN MOBILITY
- SOCIAL SUPPORT
- PREPAREDNESS
- DIVERSIFICATION
- CHARACTER

The following themes were raised as important to local definitions of resilience:

SAFETY IN MOBILITY

Those gathered for this consultation revealed the extraordinary levels of movement of people. Whether movement in and out of Dolow from nearby rural areas, long-distance flight from other less secure parts of Somalia, nomadic trekking with animals, or travels across borders to trade, register as a refugee, or seek relatives, mobility defines those living in and around Dolow. There was movement born from flight and loss that seemed frenetic, multi-directional and without apparent end; and there was another kind of movement that seemed voluntary, strategic, or part of a nomadic way of life.

Listening to this from a humanitarian or development perspective, it seemed that while avoidable mobility should be prevented, inevitable mobility should be safeguarded. People need to be prepared before journeys, secure during them (for example by adapting material support and services), and supported after them. It was also clear that non-material support is required for many who have suffered journeys, or may still be on them: the psychosocial effects of conflict and continual mobility were obvious in IDPs who had endured traumatic journeys from traumatic situations (for example one of the displaced women present told how her husband had been beheaded the day before in Hiran).

SOCIAL SUPPORT

This was repeatedly referred to as central to resilience and took many forms: neighbours sharing food with those who have less, communities sharing cash/food/assets with new arrivals or vulnerable members, religious forms including zakat, credit for trading initiatives from known businesspeople, remittances from children or relatives abroad, farming cooperatives, women's groups. Even those without family or clan-based connections can access a form of social support organized by the community's religious/customary elders. The consultation gave the impression of a competent and intact social infrastructure (or community-level governance) for delivering welfare, even if the assets to be distributed (cash, livestock, food etc) are in dwindling supply for many. Safety nets from humanitarian agencies seemed to be seen as a form of social support for the very vulnerable, despite not always being reliable or adequate, and not being linked to systems of mutual reciprocity like other kinds.

PREPAREDNESS

This was described as vital to withstanding shocks including drought, flooding, conflict and risky journeys. In the short term, examples of preparedness included growing, stockpiling and selling animal fodder before a drought, moving crops away from the river before flood, making increased orders of food from major towns before floods or conflict that look set to damage road links, sending surveillance 'scouts' ahead before a family moves location, and preparing long lasting food for journeys like dried camel meat. In the long term, examples of preparedness included vaccinations that will protect children from diseases spread quickly in crowded camps (that families might move in and out of as needed), banking of surplus income for children's futures, or education that will allow them to make their own income and also send remittances home.

DIVERSIFICATION

Very few people at the consultation fitted neatly into one livelihood group: most were employing several livelihoods at once, some seemingly trying anything and everything that could support themselves and their family. Women and especially youth – who were largely absent from this consultation because they were making/seeking an income – seemed to be the engines of this diversification and we heard how small trade, handicrafts, farming, livestock keeping, casual labour and other initiatives all combined in a set of dynamic pursuits. Diversification depends to an extent on having necessary skills – for example many youth move from pastoralism to farming because herds have been lost, or to towns in search of casual labour in construction, carpentry and maintenance works – but support for such vocational skills was not mentioned. An ability to afford and access sufficient food was the central concern, but women also spoke of the pressure to pay for education for their children, something increasingly recognized as crucial, but which comes with many direct, indirect and sometimes prohibitive costs.

CHARACTER

Pressed to explain differential resilience, many people spoke about an individual's character, shaped by their personal make-up as well as influences on their life. To them, the resilience of a woman, child or individual depends as much on will and initiative as on assets and connections, and parents spoke of how this 'x-factor' of resilience can be nurtured in children through good parenting and the presence of strong moral influences. The absence of one or both parents was described as a limit in terms of promoting resilience in children; for example women described how husbands provide material support but also play a central role in promoting strength of character and adaptiveness. Elders, religious leaders and teachers can all promote resilience in children, described as "like apprentices" in a community which views current shocks and disasters as a classroom: "What kills a firstborn, a mother fears for her lastborn", was a proverb offered as explanation for the way communities expect their children to use the shocks of today to build resilience against the shocks of tomorrow.

Shocks and vulnerabilities

Man

Since 1991 we have faced a lot of problems here in Dolow. One was the collapse of the central government of Somalia, the second was the civil war that followed – each of these had its own side-effects. During the civil war we lost people, we lost animals, we lost everything. What God has helped us with is this: we have farmed the land, and God gave us rain. The major thing we *used* to rely on was animals. In towns there was war, and there was nothing going on. Now we've passed all those problems. When it rains the animals get milk and the crops grow. The war changed things and took faces, and different groups emerged throughout it to fight each other. There were many problems. Some of these problems still exist, are still there, even though we have a government today. We people of Dolow and neighbouring districts (Bulahow and Luuq), we are in a good place, the only good place [it is peaceful]. When we are in this peaceful place, the donor agencies have been helping the communities, like CARE, FAO, WFP and UNICEF. Each had its own mandate, like UNICEF was giving immunisations and drugs; CARE was giving food to the towns and their outskirts – CARE left and WFP took their place; WFP is now giving out food here.

There was a famine that affected people and animals. We people of Dolow town have hosted a lot of IDPs. If leaders from other places fled to seek refuge, they all came to Dolow. The problems we've encountered are hard for us to talk about right now, but the worst part was the famine. God relieved us, and we got a lot of help from the world. Today is a good day for us and we are waiting for more rain from God. The agencies we depended on; we know that each has their own separate mandate and work, like Trocaire are doing health, World Vision give us job opportunities, UNICEF, WFP, WHO renovated a health facility and brought doctors who do minor surgeries that mean we people don't have to go to Addis Ababa or Nairobi – that helped the community a lot and we are very thankful for that. We've encountered a lot of problems but now things are getting better.

Deputy Chairman

This bridge was cut off by Al Itihaad, we asked the Ethiopian government to reconstruct it and they did. Then there was a civil war among the people in Gedo region; after ten years it now seems like that has reduced, although Al Shabaab are in many close by areas and many people have fled from that. The biggest problems are failed rains and famine here, that's why agencies came. A bag of grain was going for a very high price until WFP arrived and the price reduced from 500 Birr to 100 Birr. UNICEF gives Plumpy Nut and CSB, and NGOs distributed. Initially Trocaire was helping with the health stuff but now World Vision are doing that and have seven or eight teams, that helps the people a lot. After the start of the famine we got a lot of relief from different agencies, like Horn Relief gave cash and WFP gave food. The last famine was called *Nuhai*, and when a famine happens, some of the animals get a hearing problem.

We have a lot of IDPs here, many went back home but some of those re-returned here to Dolow because they found no relief or even conflict in the homes they had gone to. People come here from many directions and from Ethiopia as well as Somali area, especially Bay and Bakool.

Farmer from Dolow town

Here in Dolow there are farmers, pastoralists, businessmen and IDPs, and each group has its own problems. After the collapse of the central government of Somalia many people became IDPs. There are people who moved long distances to get to Dolow, and there are people who were already here who shared what they had with new arrivals. Before that collapse and all that fleeing there was no farming in Dolow, the residents of this place were only pastoralists. But when all those people arrived there was nothing for them to support themselves with, so farming had to start here. IDPs went to farming, and host people here who lost their animals to drought also went to farming.

After that a warlord called Idit came and we had to flee to Ethiopia; no one was living in the town; it was completely empty. That was in 1992, and then the Al Ittihad war was some years after that, 1996. We had some peace but then Al Ittihad came. Human and animal diseases were there. In this town, any time there is war people flee. Many people died because of diseases, and malaria was the worst – many people died of it. There was no agency helping and no facility, many people died and the majority of them were women and children, they were the worst affected by far. Men were running away from the town but the women didn't have anywhere to go. They used to carry their children around but they had nowhere to go so they would come back to the town. We have two bad seasons a year and most bad things happen during the Dehr season. Floods also happened; the rivers were flooded, like when El Nino [*Ibahar*] came in 1997, a season that even killed our camels and brought diseases we'd never seen before. Cows seemed to be fine but goats and camels were dying of diseases we didn't know. After that people were left with maybe one animal per household, and there was no help like restocking.

Coping and resilience

Man

There was air-dropping of food by WFP; that was the only help there was at that time. During flooding all the farms were washed away but we started farming again, and in fact the land was more fertile because of all the water it had absorbed.

Woman – community leader from Dolow

We were helping each other; anyone with a relative outside here was getting remittances. We helped each other. All people are muslims so we depend on each other. We also got credit from any traders we knew and paid them back when we could, even if it took years.

Man

The only thing that helped was peace, the one that came after Al Ittihad. We had peace, we had peace.

Woman – community leader from Dolow

I came here to Dolow in 1990, like many people who were living in Mogadishu but fled to their home villages when the government collapsed or started to. I have faced a lot of challenges here. There was a terrible famine that swept both animals and people, I can't say exactly when but it was recently, perhaps 2007. There was *nowhere* to graze animals if you had them. I belonged to a group farm, we had harvested a lot of grass in the previous good season and kept it for future use – we had 3,600 bundles of this grass fodder and we sold it to those who had animals when the famine started. We knew the

famine would come, we are used to seasons of no rain, and we know that no rain can lead to famine, so that's what we did to make sure we coped with the famine. The rivers were empty, there was no water in them, and it wasn't possible to farm. We had to keep our fodder bundles safely and then when famine came we sold them to anyone who had money and needed to feed their animals. We also gave fodder on credit to people who didn't have money but needed to feed their animals; after the famine finished and the rain came those animals could reproduce, some were ready for market and we were paid back our credit.

You ask who's most affected during famine? If a child has a balanced diet he or she won't normally get sick, and if a woman is breastfeeding he or she will be well nourished and healthy. But when famine happens and a child misses what he normally gets, that child will become sick. The mother is also affected because she is thinking about the baby, she is thinking about how to get food for the family, so she is very anxious and her health can suffer. It's also very possible here in Somalia that the man of the family will be away, for a period like 5 months, and the mother will be very affected by this. If the father is away for so long, and there is famine and a baby is sick, and the other kids need food, the mother is left very busy and very worried.

Lots of people here in town depend on farms, while people outside depend on animals. Before we used to depend on livestock, but we have become more dependent on farm products now, and on other things including business and trade, and daily wages you get for labour on farms or for other kinds of work, and on remittances from outside, and on humanitarian agencies.

Supporting each other is the most important thing. Anyone who has something will share with other people who have less or have nothing. So if I have a bag of wheat flour and my neighbor has none, I give some to her. Most of the community depends on helping each other. Another thing we do is invite children from poorer families to eat with children from families where there is enough food; that is an important way of helping each other.

We prepare for bad times here. We know the roads to Dollow will be cut off during the rainy season, so before the rain comes we prepare ourselves. We send our demands to Mogadishu in time for them to arrive before the rains, so when the rains come we will have enough. Those goods we use for our own consumption but we will also sell locally to other families.

WHO representative

Cholera outbreaks happen in two seasons: the rainy seasons and the hot seasons. We see diarrhea because people are using dirty water sources like boreholes that got contaminated through flooding in the wet season or scarce water supplies that become stagnant and dirty in the hot season. The Dawa river becomes very low in dry season and easily contaminated, that's a common problem in the dry season.

Man

In 2005 there was a flood and it washed away all the farms. When it ended, farming started again, and some agencies were present to help, like FAO bringing seeds and fuel for pumps. The biggest thing that helped us to cope was this kind of intervention by agencies.

We look after each other too. For example floods washed away many pumps, and those who lost their pumps were helped by those who had lost theirs, they loaned any spare pumps they had. Most farmers are in groups, although there are some individual farmers. We collect money from each member and purchase fuel with that. If someone doesn't have the money they can still use the pump, but they pay back the cost of the fuel when they have harvested and made some profit. Cooperatives might share Sudan grass seedlings, plant and harvest them, sell and then keep the profits. The seeds sometimes come from agencies like FAO, and when those are finished we order them from Ethiopia and buy them from there.

Woman

Preparedness is done differently by the three groups. Businesspeople will stock up in advance. Farmers will close the places that will flood, moving crops from there. Pastoralists will think about where ungrazed grass is, and that depends on the season, and then they will move to there. The rains should come in ten days from now.

Man

The pastoralist will get prepared by looking at the sky and asking where it will rain tomorrow; then they go direct to that place where it will rain the following day. The farmer will prepare his seeds and perhaps prepare the irrigation system to be flood proof.

Man

I purchased three tanks of fuel for my pump through credit. But my harvest was very poor; when I had sold it all my profits couldn't even cover half the price of the three tanks of fuel. So I had to sell my remaining animals to be able to pay the rest; I sold those animals and that's how I settled my debt.

I knew a man who sold four goats but with that he couldn't buy all the goods he needed in the market for his family, the food and oil and other things. For him, the only thing that could help him was agencies; that's how he survived.

We're mostly all farmers here now, in this place, at least 70% of us. The other 30% include business people, pastoralists, and those with nothing. There are also those who stay in the market: they go there in the morning and wait for work doing anything like portering, construction or other jobs in town – those people depend on the market.

Man

You ask about education here, and when shocks like drought happen? Children might have to leave school because parents can pay for things like fees and books that need to be bought for a child to attend. Tuition might be 100 birr for a child per month, but if a family can't pay for that the child will have to stay home. There is also school uniform, if a family can't buy it they will stay home. Fees have to be paid every month, but if a family can't afford the hundred birr for the next month then a child will be sent home at the end of the month and can get discouraged and start crying. If there's no money, there's no school for him or her.

WHO Man

Dolow is a big town with two big IDP camps. In case rains come and bring cholera, there are tents that will be used and we have devised a contingency plan with World Vision and other agencies.

When there's hunger, it means there wasn't a good harvest for the farms. When hunger comes, kids get malnourished and sick and come to the hospital

Woman

Mothers do much more work during drought. If a child gets sick and needs taking care of or needs medicine bought, it is the responsibility of the mother. If the animals need feeding, it is the responsibility of the mother. As a mother I also have to encourage my kids to go to school. And the family has to make a living: some mothers go to the bush and get firewood and sell it, others sell *khat* to make money to feed the family with.

You ask what might make me stronger in the face of a shock compared to another family or woman who seems to be of the same status as me. Well when a shock happens, I *run*. I look for medication for my kids, I look for income – I go to the bush and look for firewood perhaps, and I sell it – and with the money I make, my child gets food. Another woman might not even understand how to do all these things, she might just stay at home – that's the thing, it depends on everybody's talent.

There are groups of women who help each other and this is important for weaker women.

It helps having a husband present in the home. Even if he's not doing anything, even if he's idle, it helps: for example the kids will fear him, they'll go to school and learn things, they'll behave properly and not be idle. Just his presence is a support. Normally in Somalia children don't fear their mothers, only their fathers, so if the father is around it help with the upbringing of the child.

For example, if your child gets sick and your husband is around it really helps; he can take the sick child to hospital while you look after the other ones – that really helps. If it's just you it's really hard, but his presence makes a difference.

The most vulnerable family is the one that can't afford to cook in the morning, the one that woke up and had *nothing* to put on the fire. Maybe they're orphans, often it's the family without a mother.

Man

IDPs tend to be the most vulnerable people in Dolow town. They might get something sometimes from someone, or an agency, but it's not regular and there will be times when they have nothing. Some moved across the border to Ethiopia but then came back here after a war between clans. Mostly they depend on agencies, but at the moment they get little from them.

Somalis naturally help each other. Within IDP communities themselves they help each other: if someone has nothing to cook someone else will give them something.

Casual labour is done by a lot of IDPs, including women who wash clothes and clean homes in Dolow town before returning to the camp in the evening. Some of the men go to the bush to collect firewood and sell it, or they offer their labour to farmers. IDPs come to Dolow town and approach donkey cart owners to work for a day; they collect

things like travelers luggage or other things, then at the end of the day they keep half the profits and give the other half to the cart owner.

In 2011 after the famine and after aid came, it rained. People went to work on farms and got something out of it. The best thing is that Dolow town is a very peaceful place. There are 83 districts in Somalia and this is the only peaceful one; all the time we've been here we've never encountered problems like someone being raped or chased or anything else.

But the rains were less this last rainy season, and humanitarian agencies have reduced their interventions too, and the war in Somalia is still continuing so there are a lot of IDPs coming. If agencies don't make good interventions and the rains don't come it might take people back to the days of the famine, that's our big fear. It might bring famine and outbreaks of disease. And as I mentioned earlier, IDPs are the most vulnerable people here. That's all.

Man

Lots of IDPs from here cross the border and register themselves as refugees on the Ethiopian side, then they move between the two sides depending on what's happening.

Man

I have a family and a wife. WFP might give me 25kg of maize, to last my family a month, but that won't be enough so I have to do casual labour for farmers to supplement our food. I don't just sit idle, I have to go and do something else.

I don't own land here, I'm an IDP here, so I go to farmers who might not cultivate their farms themselves and I negotiate to cultivate his land with his pump. The owner provides the land and the pump and the fuel, I provide my labour. The profits from the harvest get split to include me as a labourer. Some people do it differently; they become a shareholder in the farm.

You ask what can make the difference between one family being stronger and the other family being weaker. A family might depend on another family that has something to share, those relatives will help in terms of cash. The relatives may be outside Somalia and they send remittances. That can make the difference, that can make one family stronger. There's another reason: people don't have the same ability to do work. In some families both the mother and father can go out and look for work and at the end of the day they'll have enough money to help the family out; in another family the father might not go out, he might just stay and idle around, and so that family will be weaker.

Woman

In one family the mother might be active, doing a lot of work. She might also have a good relationship with someone like a businessman in town, and through that she can open a little shop in town. She opens that shop, like a grocery, using his credit, and then she pays the trader back from the profit she makes.

A man might be a member of a farming group, where he provides his labour and then gets a share of the collective harvest. In that case a wife may take some of the profit for her business, and so the family is strong.

Bad health? That could be a result of bad hygiene; if a mother cleans a baby well and cooks in a clean place, then her children will be healthy.

[Social connections are very important. Are there people who have none, and what happens to them?]

Man

There are people here who have no connections. If someone comes here as an IDP and knows no-one, and is really in need of help, then he will go to the mosque. After that members of the community who are making money from cleaning, or farming, or business, will give their contributions to that person.

Man

The problem is when a shock comes, it hits those people really bad. We show them to agencies. There are some who are even disabled. There is a man I met this morning who is 100 years old, I'd never seen him before but I met him this morning. He has no connections and very little to live on, and when I spoke to him this morning he couldn't hear me because he's partially deaf. There are many people like that and they're very vulnerable.

[How can parents and others make the children of today strong future adults, strong against shocks?]

Man

There's a Somali proverb that say, "*What kills a firstborn, a mother fears that for her lastborn*". If I know these bad things will happen I'll work hard and make investments so that my children's futures will be more secure. I plant on farms and I teach my children how to farm. If I make money, I keep what I can for my children. I might sell some of the crops and put some profits in the bank for my children.

Woman

To make our children strong in the future we teach them religion, and we educate them by taking them to school. When they go to school and work, they'll graduate and get jobs in the future to support themselves and their families. The southern part of Somalia is very fertile land so some can farm there.

[Are there regrets that people here have, about how they could have found themselves in a stronger position now?]

Woman

As IDPs we wish we could have stayed in our homes, it was only a lack of peace that made us leave.

Man

I regret that I didn't have sufficient cash to start a business here in Dolow when I arrived.

Man

We know the importance of education to our children's future, we know we have to educate our children.

Man

We teach our children to adapt and be able to deal with shocks. Their life's experience now in how people deal with shocks becomes very important to their future strategies, to what they do when they grow up. As part of the family we make sure they are aware of how we are adapting to shocks, then when they are adults they remember what their parents were doing. What we are teaching is long term. They won't help us now but they will learn from the experiences and the difficulties they face, then one day when they are grown up they will be prepared and know what to do. The children are in a practical exercise, like apprentices, they are learning to understand and adapt to situations in a way that will be helpful to them in the future.

Children will also contribute to the family through their future income sources, perhaps they will be educated and work outside and send remittances. Or perhaps they will find some local way of making an income, and join other breadwinners in the family who might all be doing different things to raise income and help support the family.

The meeting then ended with thanks from both sides, and plans were made for further discussion the following day, in particular with women, IDPs and youth.
