

Principles in action in Somalia



A joint publication by:



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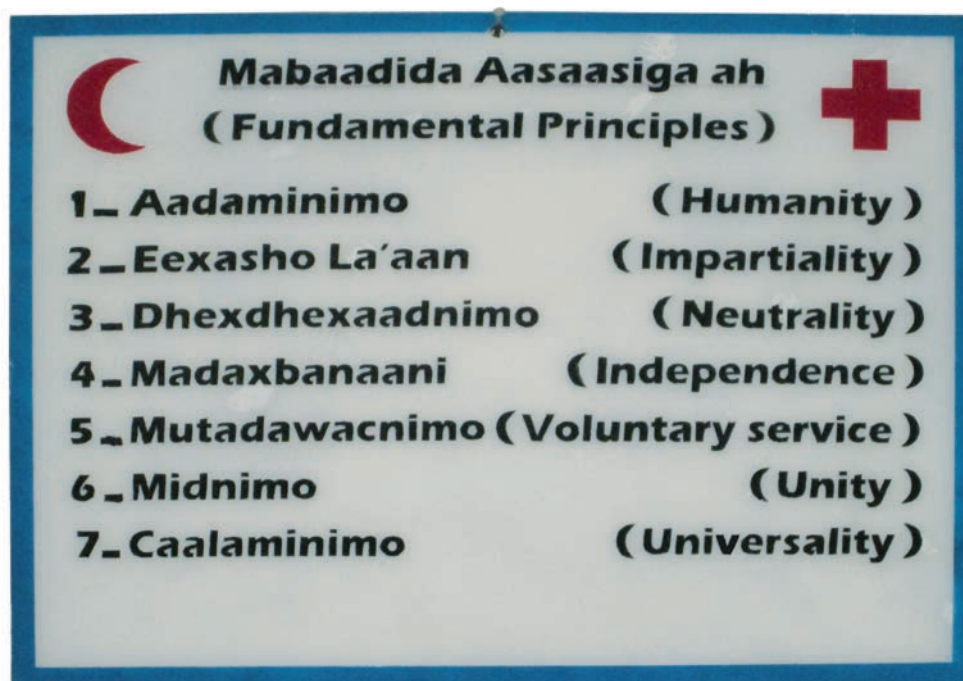
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“For the Red Cross, war is the decisive test. It is in wartime, when everything seems lost, when man has chosen the path of suffering and annihilation that the Red Cross stands as the defender of the supreme interests of humanity.”¹

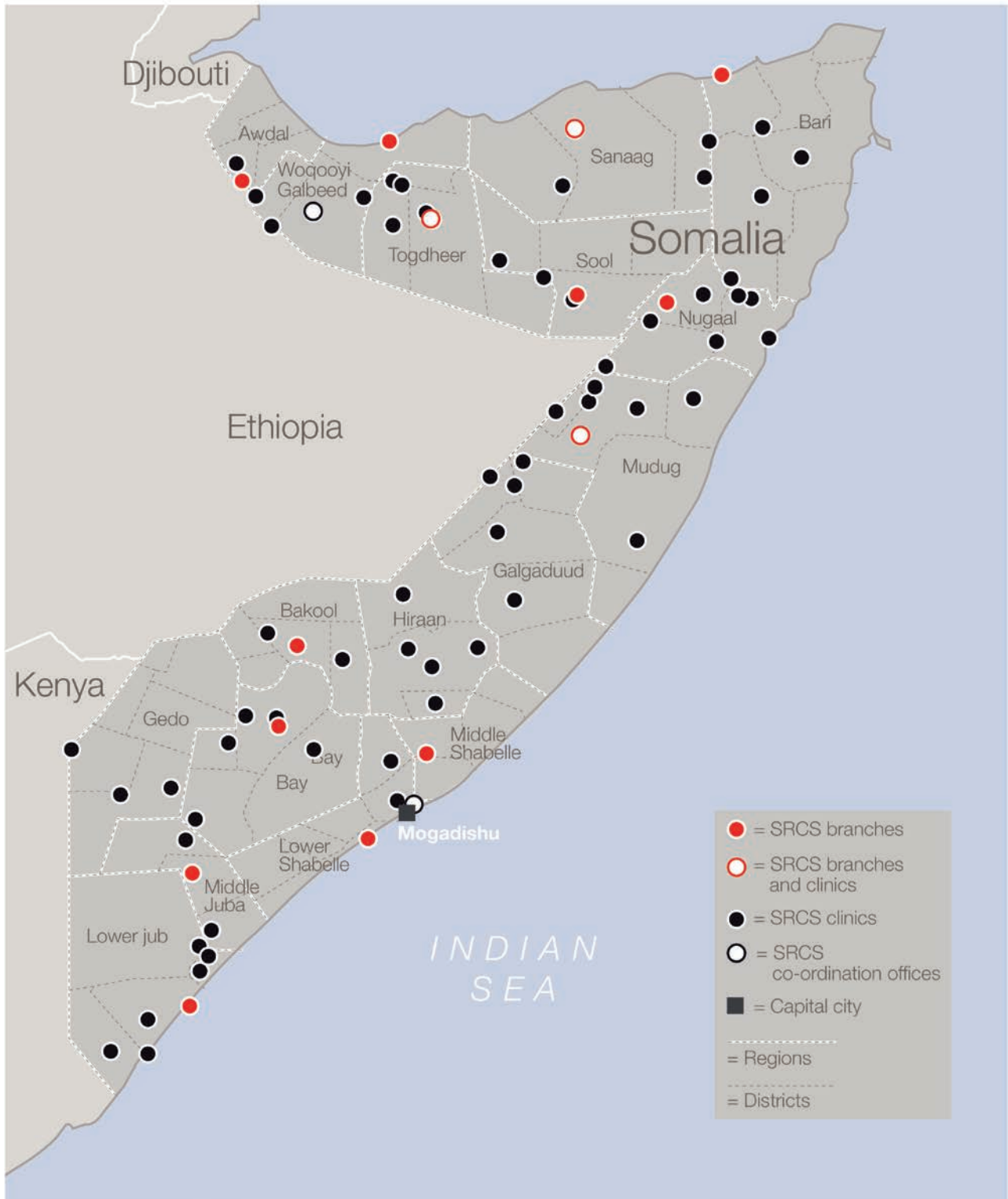


 The Fundamental Principles in Somali in the SRCS Berbera branch in Somaliland. © BRC

Acronyms and abbreviations

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ICU	Islamic Courts Union	SRCS	Somali Red Crescent Society
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross	TFG	Transitional Federal Government
IDP	Internally displaced person	TFC	Transitional Federal Charter
IHL	International humanitarian law	UN	United Nations

Map of Somali Red Crescent Branches and Clinics





➤ Displaced people receive food from the ICRC in a joint operation with the Somali Red Crescent, South Central Somalia, 1992.
© Omar B. Warsame/ICRC

1. The Principles in Action project

This case study is a joint initiative of the British Red Cross and the Somali Red Crescent. Both organisations are members of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a global humanitarian network that responds in times of armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies.

It forms part of the British Red Cross' project, Principles in Action, which promotes the role of the Fundamental Principles of the Movement in helping National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to access and support people in need. By documenting how the Fundamental Principles have been used by National Societies in a range of humanitarian contexts, including armed conflicts,² natural disasters and other emergencies, the project will:

- share learning within the Movement about the application of the Fundamental Principles and clarify their operational relevance
- examine the importance of the Fundamental Principles in today's humanitarian situations
- analyse the distinctive role of the Movement in different contexts.³

The Somali Red Crescent is respected within and outside the Movement for its efforts to uphold and apply the Fundamental Principles since 1965, when they were first agreed. As this case study documents, the Fundamental Principles have enabled the Somali Red Crescent to gain access to people in need and be accepted by different groups. This provides an excellent learning opportunity for humanitarian organisations within and outside the Movement.

The aims of this case study are to:

- capture specific examples of the application of the Fundamental Principles and how they have been relevant to the work of the Somali Red Crescent, in particular in securing and maintaining access to people in need
- document specific challenges associated with the Fundamental Principles and strategies employed by Somali Red Crescent staff and volunteers to overcome them
- analyse external perceptions, including beneficiary perceptions, of the Somali Red Crescent to understand the relevance of the Fundamental Principles.

The case study draws on a review of documents and a British Red Cross mission to Somalia in October 2013. The mission involved semi-structured interviews in Garowe and surrounding areas, Hargeisa, Berbera, Sheikh, Nairobi and London. Due to a security incident, the mission had to abort a trip to Mogadishu. However Mogadishu-based staff were interviewed, as well as diaspora from Mogadishu.

Interviews were undertaken with local and displaced people in communities that receive humanitarian aid from the Somali Red Crescent, representatives from the Somali business and media communities, Somali Red Crescent leaders, staff and volunteers, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and several partner National Societies. Discussions were also held with Somali community-based organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations, European Union and government agencies, international NGOs in Nairobi, universities, think tanks, and focus groups with diaspora between December and February 2013.

2. The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

In 1965, the Movement agreed to seven Fundamental Principles as a framework for its action and organisation. They are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. Despite the distinct operational relevance of the Fundamental Principles,⁴ within and outside the Movement they are often perceived primarily as an expression of values and ideals. As such, their value as an operational decision-

making tool is often underestimated. The Fundamental Principles are distinct from the basic principles of international humanitarian law (IHL), in that they serve at all times to inspire the action of the Movement, whereas the principles of IHL regulate the conduct of parties to a conflict.

The Fundamental Principles are particularly useful in helping to gain access to those affected by armed

conflict, and internal disturbances and tensions. Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are vitally important Principles from an operational perspective.⁵ Humanity, impartiality and independence are referred to in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations in Disaster Relief, which has been adopted by 512 aid organisations at the time of writing.⁶

Box 1: The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality: The Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality: In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence: The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the Principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity: There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality: The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The concept of using the Fundamental Principles to facilitate the acceptance of humanitarian agencies and their activities has long been adopted by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action (also known as the NIIHA approach) takes account of the fact that during armed conflict, and internal disturbances and

tensions, access to local populations may become more restricted and the insecurity of those in need and of humanitarian personnel may increase. To be able to provide support in such contexts, aid organisations must be accepted by State and non-State armed groups, and by local people. In recent years, it has become increasingly evident that all seven Fundamental

Principles, and not only the four articulated in the NIIHA approach, are required for National Societies of the Movement.⁷ However, Pictet raises the question of whether any National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society has managed to implement the doctrine of the Principles “at all times and in its totality”.⁸

3. Context, conflict and principles in Somalia

Somalia was created in 1960 on territory comprised of a former British protectorate and an Italian Trusteeship Administration (Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia-AFIS). Following a coup in 1969, President Siad Barre maintained power until his ousting by opposing clans during the civil war in 1991. This triggered state collapse with devastating humanitarian consequences: violence and famine claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 people, two million people were displaced within Somalia, and a further 1.5 million people left the country.⁹

Somaliland declared independence in 1991, for which it continues to seek international recognition. In 1998, neighbouring Puntland declared itself a non-secessionist federal state. The autonomous states of Puntland and Somaliland have managed to achieve relative stability and some economic recovery. By contrast, South Central Somalia has been in a near-constant state of armed conflict, which has resulted in the absence of effective central governance and rule of law, and an inability to provide basic services.

During the early 1990s, international intervention had limited effect on inter-clan conflicts. United Nations (UN) troops withdrew in 1995 having failed to establish a government. During the 2000s, internationally recognised central governments had intermittent control as the

influence of Islamic organisations over South Central Somalia grew. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was established in 2004, but had limited territorial control as the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) grew in power. By June 2006, the ICU controlled Mogadishu and was extending its reach across most of South Central Somalia. In December of that year, Ethiopian troops invaded in support of the TFG pushing the ICU out of Mogadishu. The ensuing conflict prompted the deployment of an African Union peacekeeping force: the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). It also triggered a 'humanitarian catastrophe', with over two million Somalis requiring humanitarian assistance in 2006.¹⁰

Al Shabaab – a group with links to the former ICU, and later, allegiances to al-Qa'ida – spearheaded a broad-based rebellion against the TFG in early 2009. By 2010, it had taken control of much territory in South Central Somalia, including parts of Mogadishu. Meanwhile, a combination of drought, conflict and a hike in global food prices rendered more than three million Somalis in need of food assistance in 2009. By 2011, the situation had deteriorated further with restrictions imposed on food aid agencies by Al Shabaab, counter-terrorism laws and the lowest rainfall recorded in 50 years in some parts of the country, resulting in famine being declared by the UN in Somalia for the second time in two decades.

In August 2011, with AMISOM support, the TFG's troops re-captured Mogadishu from Al-Shabaab. With further support from Ethiopia and Kenya, Al Shabaab's territorial control was diminished throughout 2012 and a new Parliament, Constitution and President emerged. At the same time, there was increased international engagement. In 2012, the new government was formally recognised by the US and the International Monetary Fund, and the UN Security Council partially lifted an arms embargo. In April 2013, the UK government opened its first embassy in Mogadishu since 1991 and, in May, the international community committed over USD 300 million in support of the Federal Government's plans.

Conflict in Somalia continues, however, despite the political developments and international support. Many urban centres are now held by the Somali government and its allies, but Al Shabaab continues to control vast swathes of rural territory. The acute needs of those affected by Somalia's protracted conflict, recurrent droughts and flooding continue, with the UN estimating in July 2013 that one million people urgently need humanitarian assistance and a further 1.7 million require ongoing support.¹¹



 Residents gathering firewood to sell to ICRC communal kitchens during famine in Baidoa, South Central Somalia, 1992.
© Paul Hahn/ICRC

Humanitarian assistance in Somalia

Somalia was in the top ten countries in receipt of humanitarian aid between 2000 and 2010.¹² An active Somali diaspora also relay an estimated USD two billion annually to the country, as well as providing support to local and international organisations.¹³

Humanitarian assistance in Somalia is controversial and complicated by political considerations. Analysts highlight how aid has been manipulated consistently to further political and economic interests since the 1970s at least. With limited alternative economic resources, the diversion of relief, payments by aid organisations of protection fees, and payments to access key areas have become a major and contested source of capital. This has significant implications for the impartiality of assistance. Allegations of different authorities blocking aid to certain areas or using aid to control the movement of people, clan influence over how aid is distributed and powerful individuals charging for access to certain communities, or diverting assistance for their own benefit, all undermine the allocation of assistance on the basis of greatest need.¹⁴

International support for Somalia often has mixed political and humanitarian objectives. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was conditioned on Somalia's strategic role in the Cold War and, since then, levels of international assistance allegedly waxed and waned in accordance with political interests. UN missions in the 1990s changed from humanitarian to political objectives, and assistance to certain areas was used for 'peace dividends' rather than to address widespread need.

The proscription of Al Shabaab as a terrorist organisation, first by the US in 2008 and later by other countries, resulted in either the termination of donor support to Al Shabaab-controlled areas or agencies operating under threat of criminalisation due to legislation prohibiting contact with, or benefit to, terrorist organisations. These restrictions were lifted in 2011 when famine was declared.

From 2008 onwards, Al Shabaab increasingly placed conditions on aid organisations, and declared all American and UN organisations as enemies, forcing some to close operations. In 2010, regulations were increasingly imposed on all aid organisations including the ending of activities supporting women's rights and the payment of taxes and fees.¹⁵ The Somali Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have also faced challenges including fluctuating levels of access. Despite this, negotiations by the two organisations have been ongoing and they continue to help wounded, sick and vulnerable people in Al Shabaab-controlled areas. As the security situation has improved recently, so too have conditions for aid organisations.

Humanitarian access in Somalia is also made difficult by insecurity. In 2008, Somalia was the site of one-third of the total humanitarian worker casualties in the world, with 35 people killed.¹⁶ International agencies began hiring armed guards in the 1990s and ongoing insecurity meant that these agencies largely relocated their headquarters to Nairobi. Despite an increase in international staff in Somalia since 2010, there are still few permanent ones on the ground.

Commentators highlight how the interplay of different issues including aid manipulation, political agendas, remote management and a perceived lack of understanding of Somali context, together result in 'aid fatigue' and scepticism of international aid initiatives.¹⁷ The challenges associated with the delivery of assistance have led some to question the relevance of the principles of humanitarian action in Somalia. Despite repeated efforts by humanitarian agencies to apply the principles of humanitarian action in Somalia,¹⁸ there is general agreement that all 'red lines' have been breached at different times.

Decades of conflict and humanitarian need along with significant levels of international and diaspora funding have resulted in a growth in Somali non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Local NGOs often have much better access than their international counterparts and many of those interviewed for this study claimed a much better understanding of local context and needs. Although there have been questions about the clan-related and geographical biases as well the political allegiances of some,¹⁹ the increased reliance on Somali NGOs has led to a professionalisation of the sector with some trying to ensure increasing independence.²⁰

Despite all the challenges, UN consolidated reports over the last five years have demonstrated humanitarian agencies' success in meeting targets, and their persistence in reaching vulnerable people and in responding to chronic malnutrition;²¹ efforts which were recognised in interviews by Somali communities at home and in the UK.



 Newcomers arrive at a camp for displaced people during the food crisis in 2011. © Olav Saltbones/IFRC



One-year-old child at risk of severe malnutrition receiving support from the Somali Red Crescent in 2011. © Olav Saltbones/Norwegian Red Cross

4. Humanity

“Neither the plaintive cry of a kinsman nor the distressed squeal of a dikdik fail to be answered.” Somali saying.²²

The Fundamental Principle of humanity, as an intention to help all those in need of aid and an expression of compassion and respect for all fellow humans, is the principle “from which all the others flow”.²³ Humanity requires an organisation to ensure its humanitarian efforts reach across a nation and to the most vulnerable, and address key needs effectively.

“Humanity is the reason why we come here.” Yusuf, volunteer, Sheikh.

The Somali Red Crescent or Ururka Bisha Cas is the oldest and largest national humanitarian organisation in Somalia and one of the only

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health, and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

institutions to operate across the whole country. The delivery of effective humanitarian assistance is its core objective, with its leadership highlighting that “provision of service is where we put all our efforts”. The Somali Red Crescent's reputation today continues to be drawn from the legacy of its response to the famine of the early 1990s. By 1991, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with support from the Somali Red Crescent, was providing food aid to one million people, as well as cooked food provided through ‘soup kitchens’ to approximately

600,000 more. Extraordinary efforts were made to address the mass starvation, with the response continuing when many agencies had evacuated, and food being brought into the country through different ports, across the border from Kenya and by airlift. The response continues to be the ICRC's largest single-country operation ever, comprising half of its entire emergency budget in 1991.

The outstanding role of the Somali Red Crescent during the civil war and famine was recognised by the International Red Cross and Red

Crescent Movement in 1993 when the Prize for Peace and Humanity was awarded to the Somali Red Crescent President, Dr Ahmed M. Hassan. Somali interviewees within and outside Somalia consistently highlighted the work of the Movement during these “hard times” and the longevity of its assistance. The ICRC approach of serving all those in need across Somalia – and not just certain clans or geographical areas – laid a footprint for the Somali Red Crescent’s national coverage today. The financial support of the ICRC and other partners in the Movement at that time also helped create and sustain many of the Somali Red Crescent’s branches, helping to ensure an institutional legacy.

“The Red Cross and Red Crescent were ‘saviours’ in 1991. There are songs about them.”
Somali woman living in London.

The [Siad Barre] army threw my little sister off my mother’s back. She was killed. The Somali Red Crescent helped me to trace my family. As a volunteer, I can now help children like my sister receive first aid.” Somali Red Crescent volunteer, Hargeisa.

The work of the Somali Red Crescent today is predominantly health-related. In 2011, its 19 branches ran 71 maternal and child health and outpatient facilities and 27 mobile clinics treating 1.2 million people throughout the country. The Somali Red Crescent is UNICEF’s largest health partner and, in Puntland, it runs 40 per cent of the health services. Its health, education and outreach services reached 46,000 community members, and 65,000 children were nutritionally assessed. Nearly 75,000 were vaccinated. The National Society also runs three rehabilitation centres in Mogadishu,

Hargeisa and Galkayo, which manufacture prostheses and provide orthopaedic and physiotherapy services to disabled and war-wounded people. Since 1992, it has run the 90-bed Keysaney hospital in Mogadishu, which admits over 200 surgical patients per month, over half of whom are former fighters.

The Somali Red Crescent distributes relief during emergencies, and also conducts longer-term disaster risk reduction, water and sanitation, and livelihoods programmes, particularly in Puntland and Somaliland. The promotion of international humanitarian law and tracing of families separated by conflict are also core activities. More than 250 families were reunited in 2011 and over 24,000 messages were sent between displaced Somalis inside and outside Somalia.

The Somali Red Crescent has conducted youth mediation sessions to encourage young people to adopt a culture of peace, provided training on the Fundamental Principles for other Somali organisations and broadcast radio programmes about international humanitarian law based on Somali songs and poems developed during wartime.

In the face of multiple challenges in Somalia that can slow down, halt or prevent aid delivery, the Somali Red Crescent is recognised for providing life-saving support in a timely way. It has been careful to build on its strengths, focusing on its medical mission and carefully managed delivery of relief. Some interviewees reported that the Somali Red Crescent’s main benefit was the consistency and sustainability of its services. There were many comparisons with other NGOs whose operations are often on a larger scale but are less predictable due to a lack of consistent funding.

Movement funding has supported a rapid response to crises, such as the floods in north Somalia in 2012, and its financial independence and diversity of income is an asset in a climate of erratic donor funds. At the same time, due to a lack of public knowledge about the scale of its work, there is an under-estimation of how far the Somali Red Crescent can reach. One Puntland non-governmental organisation (NGO) remarked: “18 health clinics [in Puntland] is a tough job in a war-torn society.” However, building the technical capacity of its volunteers and local staff will be critical to sustaining these services in the future.

“When other institutions come, they gather us even all day long, under the tree, yet we wait for a long time to receive the aid. We didn’t wait a long time for the Somali Red Crescent.” Displaced person, Garowe.

Implicit within the Principle of humanity is the need for an organisation to quickly adjust to changing humanitarian needs. In 2011, the Somali Red Crescent and the ICRC were the largest organisations with access to Al Shabaab-controlled areas in South Central Somalia. In response to the famine that year, SRCS established an additional 23 clinics and doubled the number of those treated in 2010. Other agencies and government officials pointed to how the Somali Red Crescent responded so quickly to outbreaks of drought and flooding.

Judicious attention to building local relationships, provision of relief at great personal risk during crises, and a growing network of volunteers promoting the Fundamental Principles, has strengthened the Somali Red Crescent’s reputation and acceptance by communities,

thereby increasing its reach. Being embedded in the community is thought to have been a factor in the Somali Red Crescent remaining functional in some Al Shabaab-controlled areas, which meant the continuation of food aid and clinics. Despite opposition at times, it has also successfully negotiated new fixed and mobile health clinics in areas of greatest need and has been given permission to provide immunisation services in its fixed clinics.

“We trust the Somali Red Crescent. It is the only organisation we trust.”

Internally displaced person, Berbera.

The Somali Red Crescent has built its reputation on its historical alleviation of suffering in wartime. However, there were persistent reflections among interviewees that it could continue to build on its strong legacy and reputation and reach further by opening more clinics in remote areas, developing more and different programmes that take account of the changing Somali context and needs, especially cyclical droughts, and communicating more proactively to the broader humanitarian community. National Societies must also deliver in peacetime: helping communities prepare for and withstand possible future shocks, building volunteers’ skills and diversity, supporting dialogue between diverse groups, and continuing health services.

Rehabilitation may bring its own challenges in some communities where aid dependency may mean they are more used to receiving relief. Diaspora associations recommended that the organisation provides “money to go directly to building schools and hospitals”, or “they could build more clinics and orphanages, and support education and more internally displaced people in Mogadishu.” Many highlighted the need to move away from relief in order to build local capacities. One said: “we have suffered enormously by negligence of international organisations. Our country doesn’t need food, but education and health. People need skills and the Somali Red Crescent needs to do more like this.”

✔ **Somali Red Crescent volunteer supporting a large-scale ICRC relief operation in South Central Somalia, 2008.** © Pedram Yazdi/ICRC



5. Impartiality

The Movement makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

“The Somali Red Crescent provides consistent engagement and support to local populations. This must have helped access and security. You can’t break the rules (Principles) and operate safely in Somalia.” NGO representative, Nairobi.

The Principle of impartiality states that aid should be given without discrimination, with priorities determined on the basis of, and in proportion to, need (“proportionality”). One expert on Somalia stated that: “responding to everyone’s need makes you a target for those who expect you to be partial. Impartiality has died a slow death [in Somalia]... it becomes about aid for those to whom we have access, although the Red Cross did more than [others] to gain access.” Prioritising need in a context where needs are endless, delivering relief when access is hampered by insecurity, and then ensuring that those in need of assistance actually receive the aid and it is not diverted, has proven beyond the capability of most aid operators in Somalia.

One of the main ways that the Somali Red Crescent has sought to tackle this is through its presence in all regions of Somalia. This highlights a lack of discrimination towards different clans, political groups and geographical areas.

“The Somali Red Crescent is different. People see it as owned by Puntlanders. People would see other organisations

as owned by certain people. It belongs to the community. When it comes to the Red Crescent, people say: it is ours.” Somali aid worker working for Puntland NGO, Garowe.

Within the Somali Red Crescent, impartiality is reinforced by proactively ensuring a balanced clan make-up within its governance, leadership and staff to help it gain acceptance in different areas, and the organisation carefully selects and deploys specific staff or volunteers to manage negotiations for access to specific communities. Its broad representation is recognised by external organisations. The extent to which the Somali Red Crescent is embedded in the community is also critical. For example, health clinics operate with three relatively low-paid midwives and dispensary staff, and all other costs including rents, security and cleaning are provided by the community. This has helped ensure the Somali Red Crescent can access areas that are off limits to others.

The Somali Red Crescent provides mobile health support and relief to conflict-affected populations in the Sol and Sanaag regions in the north, that have been cut off from assistance from many other groups. Many international organisations were banned by Al Shabaab from operating in these areas due to their unwillingness to pay taxes. Despite also not paying tax centrally, the Somali Red Crescent managed to

avoid a blanket exclusion, although it has faced closure of some clinics.

“They are working where no one is. We use a vulnerability scale, and they have been present in the areas we identified as most vulnerable.” UN representative.

By having wide access, the Somali Red Crescent is well-positioned to respond to needs across Somalia. However, there are challenges in ensuring prioritisation of those in greatest need. The Somali Red Crescent puts emphasis on distributing resources equally between different regions, although there is some prioritisation on the basis of need (South Central receives more relief than Somaliland, for example). Maintaining fair division of resources may ensure consistency of service across different geographical areas, but also means that there is less focus on prioritising those in greatest need. This is compounded by a perception that, like many other aid organisations, the Somali Red Crescent could do more to reach less accessible communities where there are high levels of need. Although its mobile clinics do ensure that services are extended into some rural areas, more could be done.

Among volunteers, there were many inspiring examples of efforts to ensure that assistance was provided on the basis of need. However, the emphasis again was more on a lack of discrimination than on targeting those in greatest need. More could be done to help branches learn from each other about how to identify and target those most in need.

Interviewees voiced different opinions as to whether the pressures faced by local organisations were comparable

to those faced by international aid agencies. Overall they were felt to be similar although some stated that local agencies had fewer challenges and greater access as they have a better understanding of local dynamics. Many volunteers highlighted the ability to bide their time in negotiations – a luxury not always available to more project-based work. On the other hand, being embedded in the system also means being bound by it. Many highlighted the importance of national groups being able to use donor accountability as a way to counter efforts to control the assistance provided. According to one donor:

“Regular visits from expats are important as they create a ‘fence’. You can deal with the elders, show your face and take the decisions. If you remove that fence and a Somali aid worker has to face these people, it is mission impossible. He’ll crack sooner or later.”

One of the Somali Red Crescent’s strategies is to limit its involvement in distribution of relief due to concerns about its ability to prevent it being diverted. This is particularly the case in South Central Somalia but also in conflict-affected areas of Sol and Sanaag (in the north), which the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) leads. Although this

approach is currently under review within the Somali Red Cross, it is lauded by partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement due to recognition of the potential for damage to the National Society’s reputation. While it frequently operates as an implementing partner and post-distribution monitor of the ICRC in food distribution, it plays a limited role in targeting and transporting relief where there is a high risk of manipulation. For the same reason, in some areas, it also limits its involvement in the establishment of new water pumps, focusing only on rehabilitation of pre-existing water points.

Box 2: Impartiality in action

One Somali Red Crescent staff member offered tips on negotiating access and acceptance:

- > Get their attention. Make sure that you are vocal
- > Try to win over some of them
- > If they fight, mediate. Don’t let them fight; this mediation role gives you authority

> There are always some people who want to obstruct you. Don’t let them make a call to their seniors. Keep them close, give them a drink, tea, whatever, keep them engaged

> Be strong, don’t let them walk over you

> If you succeed or if you lose, make friends with those who give you a hard time and then keep in

touch. You are always better off with those you know

> The presumed good guys are not always good guys

> You need to be a social worker, scientist, diplomat, mechanic or from the military... and have a bit of religious knowledge to work as a humanitarian.

In Somaliland and Puntland, where the Somali Red Crescent is directly involved in distributing relief, the challenges of preventing the diversion of supplies are clear. Experienced staff and volunteers noted different tactics to avoid aid

being controlled (including early morning beneficiary counting, public lists, refusing assistance until their approach was accepted etc), but indicated this was a lengthy and difficult process. Beneficiaries in different locations voiced concerns

with lists, demonstrating that even if the Somali Red Crescent is working in areas of greatest need, there are difficulties in getting assistance to those most in need.

6. Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

The Principle of neutrality states that in order to gain (and maintain) access, and to provide assistance to all those in need – irrespective of who they are and any political or other affiliations – the work, staff and volunteers of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement must be accepted by communities, armed groups, authorities and other stakeholders. Gaining and maintaining acceptance by these different groups may be influenced by actual or perceived political, religious, racial or ideological positions of the Movement and so the Movement abstains from involvement in these matters, as well as any actions which may be perceived to derive a benefit to different parties to a conflict.

“From time to time, the stakes mean that you must take a position, local actors expect it, but the answer is that we are on the side of those who suffer. Neutrality can be seen as negative, but you can say that we are with all those who suffer.”
Somali expert.

Years of consistent delivery across Somalia have allowed the Somali Red Crescent to build up a perception of neutrality. The changing political reality of Somalia over the past two decades has provided an opportunity for the organisation to prove its neutrality to different groups through its actions on the ground, rather than relying solely on dissemination of the Fundamental Principles. According to a Red Cross representative, the

“point of brilliance” of the leadership was to “re-brand as a national organisation which is politically neutral” and, as such, distinguish itself from all other humanitarian organisations in Somalia.

Despite efforts by both the Somali Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to forge separate, but connected, identities, there continues to be a strong intertwining of identities between the two. This provides the National Society with a useful international dimension, allowing it to reinforce its neutrality when required, but at others times it can distance itself from its international sister organisation and assert its local dimension.

“One of the strengths of the Somali Red Crescent is that they are the only national structure left. They know how to manage the stakes... They never took sides...knew how to just be present, be there, neutral. Whereas [others] are seen as taking sides.” Independent analyst on Somalia.

There is an understanding among many that the Somali Red Crescent serves all clans. It is governed by a nine-member executive committee as well as two ex-officio members and six honorary members with a diverse clan composition. The strong, local leadership of branches is important to the organisation’s contacts and ability to exert influence

and has meant that potential clan divisions have been overcome to allow acceptance for each clan-based branch to be part of a national institution.

The Somali Red Crescent’s operational reputation is strong, perhaps more as a result of its legacy, consistency and sustainability over the years rather than its technical capacity. However, there is a consistent under-estimation or lack of knowledge among external organisations of the work it does. As one Somali living in London explained: “The Somali Red Crescent needs to do more outreach so that we know what they do.”

In what is a largely decentralised structure, the Somali Red Crescent branch leaders are responsible for engagement at a local level. This is backed-up by a national leadership that is well-known and respected, and comprised of the main clans. The commitment of the Somali Red Crescent President to the Fundamental Principles is well-recognised, driving an appreciation of the Principles throughout the organisation. This combination of a well-respected leadership and locally connected branch leaders has enabled the Somali Red Crescent to reach and gain acceptance from many different groups.

The Somali Red Crescent maintains a deliberately low profile. This has allowed the organisation to reduce potential interference and demonstrate that it is not ‘engaging in controversies’. However, this also means that there is little recognition of its work within the humanitarian sector and that opportunities such as funding from diaspora are missed.



 Doctor carrying out an examination in Mogadishu, 1994. © Heine Pedersen/ICRC

One significant area of external communications is the development of 'Biri-ma-Geydo' with the ICRC. Biri-ma-Geydo – which means “Spared from the Spear” in English – is a document used by the ICRC to promote international humanitarian law (IHL) in a manner relevant to Somalis. Radio programmes have

been developed to disseminate how civilians should be protected during armed conflict. These programmes – including dramas and live round-table debates – are designed for a young audience and targeted at those directly engaged in armed clashes and who have little or no knowledge of Biri-ma-Geydo or IHL.

In each branch, a communications and tracing officer is responsible for undertaking outreach work with different groups, describing the role, objectives and Fundamental Principles of the Somali Red Crescent and helping to gain acceptance.

Box 3: Spared from the Spear (Biri-ma-Geydo)

Somali customary codes of war were drawn up centuries ago to regulate the behaviour of individuals, groups and clans, using moral responsibility and social pressure for their enforcement. Much of this code was developed and expressed through different sayings, poems and proverbs, and was in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Some examples of these Somali customs include the concept of restraint during warfare as the following Somali saying shows: “The noble do not cut down a tree; and if they do, they do not cut it down at its base”. The immunity from attack of women, children, men of God, honoured guests and community leaders is also recognised by sayings such as “the three categories with head dresses (i.e. clan heads, mullahs and women) should be spared”.

Although war-wounded and prisoners of war were often only spared when conflict had not reached extreme or *dhiig-mayr* (“blood-bath”) levels, Somali traditional custom did provide protection to the neutral and unarmed. It also recognised a role for treatment of the wounded during *dhiig-mayr* conflicts by a third neutral party. This party could evacuate the wounded from the battle areas and provide them with medical treatment and general care. Members of the clan providing such assistance were not harmed by those involved in the fighting.

These examples, drawn and adapted from *Spared from the Spear*, show how traditional Somali society already had customs similar to many of the principles of today's Geneva Conventions.

The Somali Red Crescent's neutrality has been tested and demonstrated repeatedly in Keysaney hospital in Mogadishu over the past 21 years. In 1991, when the civil war was at its height, the city was divided in two and war-wounded civilians and combatants in north Mogadishu were cut off from hospital services, which were clustered in the south. Many were left untreated, others endured

home operations undertaken by doctors in very basic conditions. The Somali Red Crescent and the ICRC decided to rehabilitate an old prison, 7km north of Mogadishu, and turn it into a hospital which opened its doors in 1992, and was soon treating more than 100 new patients a day. Patients often arrived in armoured vehicles and fighters demanded priority treatment. It was vital to gain

the trust of different factions for the hospital to serve all sides and ensure staff safety.

The Somali Red Crescent took over management of the hospital two years after it opened. Maintaining the neutrality of its services has tested the committed staff to their limits. In 2006, during the worst fighting for almost a decade, the hospital

roof was used as a military post by an armed group. Two-thirds of in-patients were evacuated but the remainder were unable to leave. All Somali Red Crescent staff stayed to help the patients throughout the 20 days that the roof was occupied. Later that year, the Somali Red Crescent ensured that security searches for rival factions did not take place within the hospital. It was only when this was advertised by radio that many of the wounded felt confident to seek treatment. More generally, the hospital staff have adopted a low profile stating that the people in power understand the organisation's approach and that there are risks associated with being more public. As control of this area of Mogadishu changed repeatedly during the mid-to-late 2000s, the neutrality of Keysaney hospital was proven by its ability to remain operational, irrespective of which group was in control.

The hospital has treated over 200,000 people, including more than 30,000 with weapon-related wounds. The hospital's director since 2004, says: "If you ask any staff members how we do it, they will say that it is thanks to the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement...it's only because we are strictly neutral, and recognised as such, that we can carry out our work in such a difficult environment."

"The Somali Red Crescent is Somali and the Somali approach and culture has something similar to the humanitarian principles... this really

helps them to be accepted."
Representative of international NGO, Nairobi.

It is a point of major pride for the leadership that the Somali Red Crescent has been able to deliver its services throughout different periods of conflict by gaining the acceptance of different groups. However, the organisation's acceptance has contracted with the shift from Somalia's resource-based conflicts in the 1990s to conflicts with more ideological dimensions. With more extreme ideological groups, discussions about the relevance of the Fundamental Principles have not always been possible as a neutral approach is perceived as being in opposition to them. The Somali Red Crescent has therefore developed an organisational profile in Somali and Arabic which explains the organisation, its Principles and its work, although its effect has been limited.

Like other national and international organisations, the Somali Red Crescent has received requests from Al Shabaab for payment of taxes. When this was refused, a significant number of its clinics were closed, although unlike other humanitarian organisations, the organisation was not banned, and many clinics are now re-opening. A number of other challenges have also arisen, including difficulties in relation to the use of the red cross emblem. The red crescent emblem has been interpreted by some as a religious symbol.²⁴ Despite this, tracing messages which are traditionally transmitted in hard copy

to family members, have had to be re-typed into documents where only the red crescent, and not the red cross, emblem is represented. However, the organisation's medical support to Al Shabaab fighters, as well as connections made through different training programmes, have created a certain level of understanding and trust of the organisation.

The challenges faced by the Somali Red Crescent operating in South Central Somalia over the past five years have shaken the organisation and its trust in the Fundamental Principles as a tool for gaining confidence, acceptance and access. In the words of one staff member:

"These groups, they always want to take your neutrality away from you. You must withdraw or accept. As the world changes, will neutrality and independence remain as important? Even global powers are directing aid, saying needs are here and not there. All the Fundamental Principles are at risk."

7. Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the Principles of the Movement.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments, have a duty to support government emergency services in times of crisis. They have a specific legal status, recognised in international humanitarian law (IHL) and rules established by the International Movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and enshrined in national legislation. As such, they have a different role and status to other national humanitarian organisations. The nature of their responsibilities will depend on the context but include relief, preparing for disaster, healthcare, tracing family members and supporting the State to meet its obligations under IHL.

The auxiliary role of National Societies means that the degree of independence that they enjoy

may be less absolute than that of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), but they are only obliged to carry out services if they align to the Fundamental Principles. States have an obligation to ensure that National Societies can act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and States must not interfere in the functioning of the National Society, including the focus of its activities and the appointment of its leaders. Like neutrality, independence enables the Movement to provide impartial humanitarian assistance.

The auxiliary role of the Somali Red Crescent is recognised in the 1965 Somali Presidential Decree and in the constitution of the National Society, but there is limited practical application of this role due to limitations on the government's part. Thanks to a diverse National

Society leadership, the necessary functional relationships are maintained with various government structures across Somalia. Somali non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives indicated that during Siad Barre's time, there was less independence but current perceptions are that the National Society is "free from government". UN and NGO staff interviewed did not raise concerns over the Somali Red Crescent's independence.

The Somali Red Crescent has strong relationships with different ministries and in particular the Ministries of Health. While there are efforts on the part of different ministries to influence its operations, there was little to suggest that the auxiliary role had a bearing on this. There are also many examples of how the Somali Red Crescent has managed its independence successfully.

▶ Somali Red Crescent worker explains the laws of armed conflict and the Fundamental Principles to soldiers and police forces, April 2006.

© Michael Keating/ICRC



8. Voluntary Service

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

“The Fundamental Principles are the umbrella that the volunteers sit under.” Somali Red Crescent volunteer in internally displaced people’s camp, Berbera.

The Somali Red Crescent aims to “promote volunteerism as a significant and positive contribution to mobilising the power of humanity in improving the lives of the most vulnerable in the community and strengthening communities and civil society”. Its voluntary approach runs across the whole organisation and is key to it being accepted as a local, community-embedded organisation. The behaviour of central leadership is a key determinant in volunteers applying the Fundamental Principles. All the organisation’s humanitarian activities are undertaken by 4,600 volunteers, supported by a small team of paid staff in each branch. In every district, there are three volunteers who manage and oversee the activities of all other volunteers, who are broken down into thematic ‘action teams’ comprised of 15 volunteers each. For instance, in each health clinic, there are three paid health staff members, but the volunteers provide security and cleaning for the clinic, and undertake awareness-raising and vaccination campaigns in their communities. Community health committees are composed of volunteer leaders drawn from diverse groups, and volunteer branch executive committees, who are elected by members.

In selecting and recruiting volunteers, the Somali Red Crescent aims to ensure opportunities are open to all and that volunteers are representative of the communities they serve. This is particularly important to ensure acceptance within the community, a strong understanding of different

communities’ needs, and diverse volunteers to engage with different communities. Volunteers tend to come from all age groups, with a balance in gender. However, the majority are aged between 15 and 26, especially in urban areas. Women often leave after marrying, and there are few disabled volunteers. The Somali Red Crescent also tries to get equal numbers of volunteers across all districts.

However, there are challenges in ensuring that volunteers are truly representative of their communities. Although volunteers provide services to nomadic communities and internally displaced people, there is less representation from these communities, partly because they are not located close to branches and can’t access transport. Strengthening its volunteers’ representativeness is critical to the Somali Red Crescent’s impartiality given the influence volunteers have.

Most volunteers are motivated by the desire to serve their communities. This is especially true in rural areas where the health clinics have a strong sense of community ownership.

“I have a child for every year of my marriage. Sometimes there are difficulties with my husband when I get called out by the Somali Red Crescent... He says ‘where are you going? It’s late.’ I persuade. I explain that these are children just like ours and we have to help. He gets angry... but when I explain, he often lets me go.” Volunteer, Garowe.

“I watched Red Cross volunteers on TV helping their people during disasters and wanted to volunteer. Now I am a mother with five children and I will still volunteer... I will volunteer until

I die! Every morning I conduct house-to-house visits. I am the connection between the maternal and child health clinic and the community.”
Aisha, Sheikh.

However, many young volunteers are attracted by the training the Somali Red Crescent provides, as there is a general lack of employment opportunities in Somalia. This is particularly true in urban areas where volunteer groups can resemble youth training schemes. When volunteers join the Somali Red Crescent, they receive one month of training on the Fundamental Principles, first aid, basic international humanitarian law, sanitation and referral mechanisms. Many go on to receive specialist training for maternal and child health clinics, food distribution, or to support staff in one of the organisation’s rehabilitation centres.

Volunteering with the Somali Red Crescent also provides opportunities for part-time work experience as, in urban areas, volunteers are paid small stipends for their services. In a small number of cases, volunteering may lead to some paid employment. Strengthening the quality of training is a concern for the organisation. Other concerns relate to managing long-term volunteers who may substitute for paid staff, both to ensure quality and sustainability.

Although volunteers’ motivations can vary, many displayed a strong understanding and application of the Fundamental Principles. This remains true despite opposition at times from within their communities or other groups. Volunteer midwives spoke of overcoming family dissent to leave home at night to assist nomadic women in difficult labour and others spoke of clan-related issues:

➤ Tracing volunteer distributing a Red Cross message to a woman in Hargeisa, Somaliland allowing her to maintain contact with her family, many of whom live in Galkayo, 800km away.
© Pedram Yazdi/ICRC



“Yesterday two communities in Sheikh were confronted with one another, there were knives and sticks. It was a dispute over water-sharing. I collected the casualties from all the communities... I don’t stop walking even if my community is calling out asking why I am carrying “the enemy”... Sometimes there are disputes between households and clans don’t want to speak to volunteers from other clans – in which case it’s important to send volunteers from the same clan.”

Volunteer, Sheikh.

Many Somali Red Crescent branches were initially created by volunteers during and after the conflict in the '90s, and many volunteers have gone on to create other community-based organisations. Many volunteers still serve as branch executive committee members, clinic managers or leaders

for new volunteers. Volunteers not only take the Fundamental Principles into the heart of communities, supporting impartiality and the acceptance of the Somali Red Crescent as a neutral local organisation, they also help to recruit more volunteers. As the ‘glue’ of the organisation, volunteers are central to its perception of being locally embedded, something consistently noted by external interviewees.

“When I was on the road from Berbera to Sheikh we had an accident and I was tending to people who were badly hurt, but my aunt was crying out asking why I wasn’t helping her and I explained I had to help those who were more badly hurt first.”

Ahlam, volunteer, Sheikh.

“We are volunteers from 7am to midnight if necessary, or more!”

Volunteer, Berbera.

9. Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

The unity of the Somali Red Crescent is an important issue in Somalia given the declaration of independence by Somaliland in 1991. The question of whether a separate Somaliland Red Crescent should be established was discussed at the time. However, given the lack of international recognition and thus inability of Somaliland to ratify the Geneva Conventions, it would not have been possible for a new National Society to be established and accepted into the International Movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The high levels of need in Somaliland, strong community acceptance of the Somali Red Crescent, as well as the financial and other forms of support received from the Movement, meant that there were strong humanitarian reasons for it to continue to function in Somaliland. This pragmatic solution to the lack of international

recognition of Somaliland (and, thus, the absence of a *Somaliland* Red Crescent Society) helps ensure there is a humanitarian response there by a National Society.

Informed interviewees suggest that it is because of the strong leadership, negotiation skills and trust in the Somali Red Crescent that there was acquiescence to the “one National Society, two countries” set-up as it is termed by the government of Somaliland. However, this means that the National Society is focusing now on managing continuity in the event of any change in its leadership.

“Unity is built up by not talking about politics. It is an opportunity to tap into resources. Politicians understand that we are not talking about politics.”
Somali Red Crescent leadership.

Unity is a working compromise but not without its challenges. The Somali Red Crescent has a leadership office in Nairobi which provides both policy and management direction to the two co-ordination offices in Mogadishu and Hargeisa which operate with equal status. The identity of the National Society needs to be managed carefully with volunteers, communities and the government. Although having only one National Society has been an effective solution, it has had implications for how the Somali Red Crescent is managed, as well as for opportunities for internal learning as there are few opportunities for cross-Somalia meetings or staff rotation.



◀ Children queuing for their daily meal in south Mogadishu during the famine in 1992. © Fiona McDougall/ICRC

10. Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

The universal nature of the Movement is evident in Somalia where a large number of Movement partners are active. The Somali Red Crescent's identity is heavily intertwined with that of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), particularly in South Central Somalia. Many within the Movement believe the development of the National Society, and its national reach and commitment to the Fundamental Principles, has been shaped due to its close engagement with the ICRC, particularly during the famine of the early '90s. Today, strategic decisions are often made together, and there is both mutual reliance and respectful differences at times. This intermingling of identities

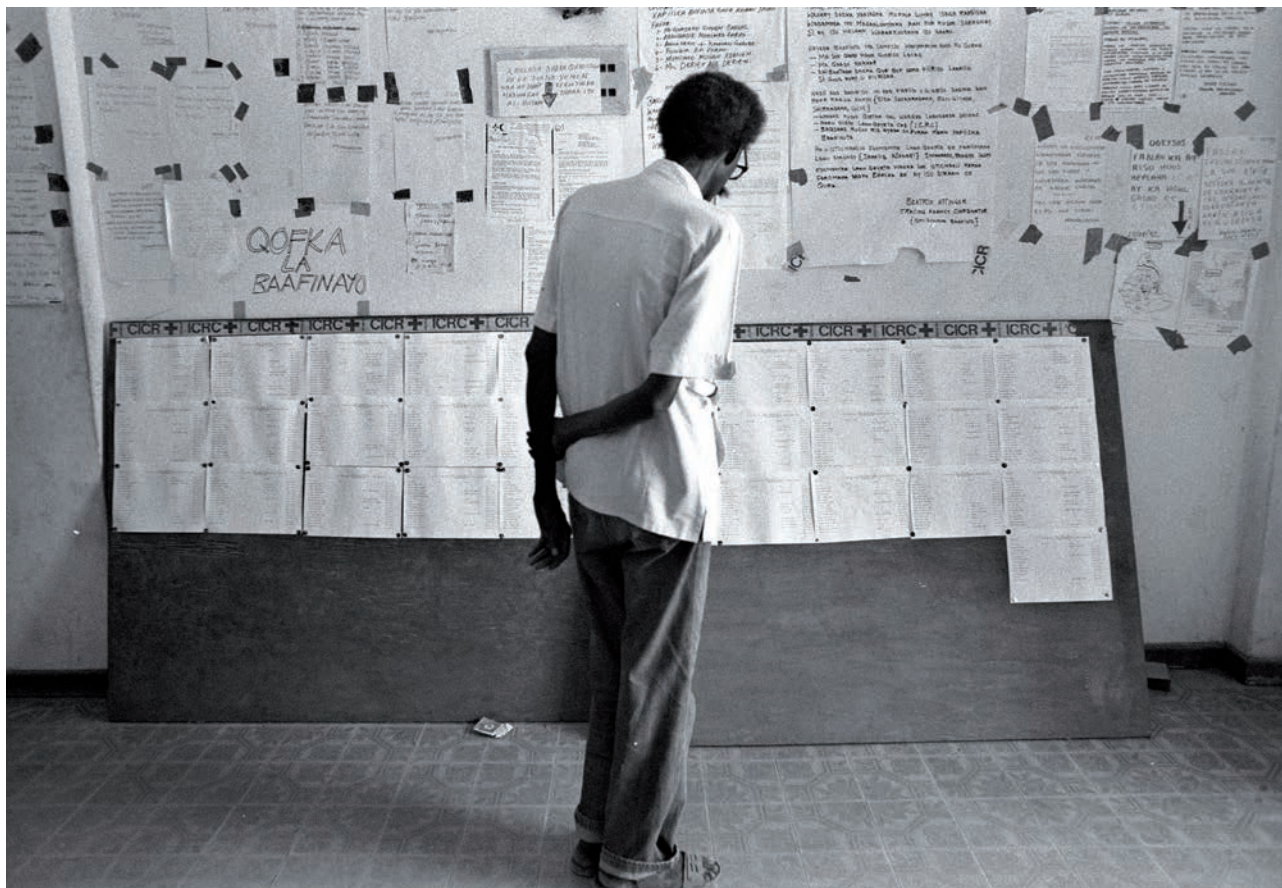
is useful and detrimental to the Somali Red Crescent, depending on the circumstances. In Puntland and Somaliland, there is strong co-ordination and support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, although this has a less direct influence on the Somali Red Crescent's identity as the Federation has less of a presence.

There are some issues associated with universality. The Somali Red Crescent's membership of the Movement means that it is perceived as a rich organisation by Somalis, which has negative implications for fundraising within Somalia. The rejection of the red cross emblem

in certain areas also suggests the universality of the Movement is not accepted by all.

There are other challenges caused by the growing number of operations run by National Societies from other countries. These operations can pose challenges in terms of co-ordination, and in ensuring that the Somali Red Crescent's distinctive identity and its application of the Fundamental Principles are maintained. Responding to this, Somali Red Crescent leaders set up a co-ordination mechanism to help clarify joint practice and mandates.

✓ Lists of missing people at the central tracing agency in Somali Red Crescent Office, South Mogadishu, 1992. © Fiona McDougall/ICRC



11. Conclusion: Building on a strong legacy for the future

The application of the Fundamental Principles by the Somali Red Crescent over the past 20 years has been instrumental to the organisation's ability to survive as one of Somalia's only national institutions, and to ensure it gets aid to some of the most vulnerable people. Analysts question the relevance of humanitarian principles in Somalia, especially if they are not communicated effectively, but the experience of the Somali Red Crescent shows the centrality of the Fundamental Principles to their ability to gain access across all regions of Somalia. The integrity of the organisation – due to its effective, neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action with a strong volunteer network at local level – has allowed it to provide humanitarian services throughout the country, including to Somaliland. At the same time, it means that the organisation is operational in many areas under Al Shabaab control, albeit on a reduced and curtailed basis. It has also meant that it has access to conflict-affected areas in Sol and Sanaag in the North where few other organisations are operational.

The experience of the Somali Red Crescent highlights how key stakeholders distinguish between different organisations and judge an organisation's past and current actions and the degree to which it is principled. It therefore offers opportunities for learning for other humanitarian organisations. It highlights how the mere declaration of being principled is insufficient, and that there must be a deliberate and consistent effort – over the long term – to apply the Principles. It also demonstrates the importance of principles to national, as well as international, organisations despite a surprising lack of debate around this issue, and this, coupled with judicious application of them, can offer greater access to those most in need.

Learning from the Somali Red Crescent approach:

- 1** The Fundamental Principles are extremely relevant to local as well as international organisations, despite the limited attention to this issue in humanitarian literature. They are also relevant in different contexts and to diverse organisations.
- 2** For a National Society, the interplay of all seven Fundamental Principles is important, not solely humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Different ones will be more relevant depending on the context, as was shown by the importance of unity and voluntary service here.
- 3** Strong leadership and commitment to the Fundamental Principles are critical to the adoption of the Fundamental Principles by a National Society. Even within the Movement, the declaration of being principled is insufficient.
- 4** Relevant and sustained humanitarian service to all is critical. In the case of the Somali Red Crescent, although not the largest humanitarian organisation, it is recognised for its consistent and reliable service, over decades, to all. This is an advantage of national organisations, not often available to international ones.
- 5** Choosing services that are needed, sustainable and deliver on expectations, while also playing on the organisation's strengths, is important.
- 6** The perception of an organisation is key to its acceptance and access, and this is built up over time through effective delivery to all. The legacy of the Somali Red Crescent's action in response to the famine in the 1990s attests to this.
- 7** In communities in conflict, there must be representation from all sides among leaders, staff and volunteers, to facilitate impartial action and acceptance in divided communities.
- 8** Developing and sustaining volunteer networks strengthens access, impartiality, perceived neutrality and unity.
- 9** Organisations should work with other local groups to explain what the Fundamental Principles mean in the local context, and how they are put into practice. Efforts should be made to communicate them in locally relevant ways.
- 10** Neutrality may be challenged in contexts where there is extreme politicisation of aid and attempts to manipulate support for political ends. Here, effective humanitarian action to all – including ex-combatants – will help with acceptance. Contacts should be developed and maintained with all groups through active dialogue.



A unique – but often unrecognised and under-utilised – strength of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is their ability to deploy the international, national and local character of their organisations at different times. In effect, this is the interaction between voluntary service, unity and universality. This is something understood well by the leadership of the Somali Red Crescent and is employed shrewdly and to maximum effect. The Somali Red Crescent's local embedding helps ensure strong support, acceptance and, at times, protection from communities, but it can also use its international and

Movement links as a means for managing manipulation. Its national reach allows for engagement with different groups and provides a platform for humanitarian action where it is needed most. The Somali Red Crescent's interconnection with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has strengthened perceived neutrality. With Somali audiences, the Somali Red Crescent has emphasised its Somali heritage and communicated its approach and Fundamental Principles through Islam and Somali custom.

This case study raises questions, however, about the difficulties of using a principled approach to gain

and maintain access in a context where neutrality is questioned by different stakeholders or is considered to be a negation of their position. Somalia experts have noted how suspicion of humanitarian aid has been common among Ethiopians, the TFG and hard-line Islamists, and how each have sought to control it. On the other hand, through counter-terrorism laws, international organisations have placed controls over aid organisations' abilities to provide assistance in Al Shabaab-controlled areas.

Where the Somali Red Crescent has had more success than others

 **A nomadic woman and her child, in Dunay, Galgaduud Region, 2008.**
© Pedram Yazdi/ICRC

in gaining and maintaining access, it has largely been due to its history of effective humanitarian service, its Somali character and its ability to demonstrate that it works with everyone across Somalia. The legacy of the ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent's extraordinary response to the 1990s famine continue to underpin their acceptance today. Two decades, and repeated humanitarian crises later, this legacy needs to be built on. The Somali Red Crescent must continue to expand the depth and reach of its humanitarian action so it continues to be an effective, community-based provider of humanitarian services today and in the future. The positive perceptions of the Somali Red Crescent among some Al-Shabaab leaders due to impartial, neutral and independent medical services provided by Keysaney hospital show how advantageous this can be.

The Somali Red Crescent has managed its perceptions among different groups well. Its approach has been to adopt a generally low public profile, to engage directly and consistently with different groups, and to explain its Fundamental Principles in a manner relevant to different audiences. In an increasingly communications-capable Somalia, the Somali Red Crescent will need to innovate continually so as to

communicate its work effectively and through different means to diverse audiences.

The Fundamental Principles facilitate the presence, access and operations of the Somali Red Crescent – a significant achievement in such a challenging environment – but they have limitations. They help the organisation work within a system rather than challenging the prevailing status quo in Somalia where patronage and diversion fundamentally undermine true impartiality, such that those who are most in need do not consistently receive the assistance required. The Somali Red Crescent has worked hard to ensure it is serving communities across Somalia, and this has been central to its acceptance, but it demands continued focus. Decision-making and resource distribution is managed equally between different areas, but this is not the same as prioritising need. As with many organisations, its services are curtailed by restrictions and insecurity in the most conflict-affected areas of South Central Somalia. The Somali Red Crescent reduces opportunities for diverting aid by limiting its involvement in resource-rich sectors and through dialogue with contacts on the ground, but these efforts have only limited success.

The Somali Red Crescent has had more success in ensuring that its health services remain open and available to all – as the example of Keysaney hospital demonstrates – but they could go further. Limited attention has been paid to who does and does not access clinics at a local level and why, and how to increase remote access, to ensure that minority clans or remote groups do not face barriers to access.

The Fundamental Principles have not only helped the Somali Red Crescent to provide humanitarian services continually in one of today's most complex environments, but also to strengthen and expand its services over time. This is a tremendous achievement from which there is much to learn. As the context in Somalia changes rapidly, so too must the National Society. The challenge will be to retain the strong legacy, commitment to the Fundamental Principles and broad-based acceptance so that its humanitarian services continue to be as relevant, effective and available to those in need in the future as they have been so far. The Somali Red Crescent recognises that it has a unique role to play, and experience to date suggests it is more than up to this challenge.

Endnotes

1. Jean Pictet's *Commentary on the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* (1979).
2. The term "armed conflict" indicates a situation in which recourse is made to armed force between two or more States or to protracted armed violence between government authorities and organised armed groups or between such groups within a State. Whether or not a situation is classified as an armed conflict is important because, if it is, the application of international humanitarian law (IHL) is triggered, which outlines the rights and obligations of the government authority and the armed groups. The term "internal disturbances and tensions" refers to serious situations that fall short of armed conflict and to which IHL does not, therefore, apply. These situations may be of political, religious, racial, social, economic or other origin and include serious acts of violence affecting a large number of people. Such situations may be characterised by one or more of the following: the spontaneous generation of acts of revolt or struggles between groups or between them and the authority in power, extensive police or armed forces involvement to restore internal order, large-scale arrests, a large number of political prisoners, the probable occurrence of ill-treatment or of inhumane conditions of detention, the suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees, and allegations of disappearances.
3. The first case study focusing on Lebanon: O'Callaghan, S. and Leach, L. (2012) *Principles in Action in Lebanon*, British Red Cross, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Lebanese Red Cross. Can be found on www.redcross.org.uk.
4. A lengthy process of research on what had gone well in operations pre-dated the proclamation of the Fundamental Principles in 1965. Although the Movement often treats them as revealed wisdom, they are, in reality, the distillation of practical operational experience over a long period of time. See Webster, M. and Walker, P. (2009) *One for All and All for One: Intra-Organizational Dynamics in Humanitarian Action*. Boston: Tufts University.
5. Pictet, J. (1979) *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: commentary*. It is the first and most detailed analysis of the Fundamental Principles, setting out a hierarchy of principles in which humanity and impartiality "stand above all contingencies." Neutrality and independence are "derivative" principles, or principles of utility, and are viewed as essential to ensure that action is in accordance with humanity and impartiality. Unity, voluntary service and universality are "organic" principles, considered to underpin the ideals of the Movement: <http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/misc/fundamental-principles-commentary-010179.htm>.
6. The Code of Conduct applies to a wider set of groups than those in the Movement and the principles referred to therein do not necessarily correspond to the exact meaning under the Fundamental Principles. See <http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/signatories-of-the-code-of-conduct/>
7. Supra endnote 3, O'Callaghan, S. and Leach, L. (2012).
8. Supra endnote 5, Pictet, J. (1979), introduction.
9. Bradbury, M. (2010) *State-building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia*, Feinstein International Center: Tufts University.
10. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) (2006), 2.1 million Somalis in urgent need of assistance following worst drought in ten years, Available from <http://reliefweb.int/node/203037> [accessed 9 July 2012].
11. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) (2013) *OCHA Operations Director salutes aid workers in Somalia, calls for investment to break the cycle of crisis* Available from: <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Somalia/12%20July%20Somalia%20J.%20Ging%20pr.pdf> [Accessed 12 July 2013].
12. Global Humanitarian Assistance (2012) *GHA Report 2012*, Development Initiatives.
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24. It is not. The emblems are symbols of neutrality and protection under IHL. Also, the SRCS as a neutral organisation would not use an emblem to denote alignment to a specific religion.



🔴 Woman receiving treatment in a Somali Red Crescent health clinic in Badweyn, Galkayo in 2011. © Olav Saltbones/IFRC

The Somali Red Crescent is an independent, non-political humanitarian organisation that was established in April 1963 through Presidential Decree No. 187. Its mission is to prevent and alleviate suffering by working with communities, local authorities and other partners to provide basic and quality services to vulnerable people in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The British Red Cross is a volunteer-led humanitarian organisation that helps people in crisis, wherever and whenever they are. We enable vulnerable people at home and overseas to prepare for and respond to emergencies in their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help people recover and move on with their lives.

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