

Review of Country Information and Guidance Report: Somalia, April 2014

Introduction

This is a review of modules 2 and 3 of the Country Information and Guidance Report: Somalia, April 2014 on behalf of the Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI). The emphasis of the review is on the accuracy and relevance on the information contained in Module 2 and Module 3 of the Country Information and Guidance Report, not on any of the policy directives contained within these modules. The veracity, reliability, scope of the information relied upon in the report were considered.

It is important to note the parameters of both the document under review and the review itself. The country information and guidance report is not meant to provide exhaustive or comprehensive knowledge on a country. Rather it provides background information regarding matters likely to arise in asylum claims. Officials relying on these documents use this information in tandem with the individual circumstances of an applicant. As for the review, its remit is to consider the Country Information and Guidance Report: Somalia, April 2014 for errors or omissions, identify potential further sources of information and make recommendations for general improvement.

Overall comments

Relevance and accuracy of sources relied upon.

In general the sources relied upon in Module 2 and Module 3 of the report are from credible and relevant sources. The data is compiled from international NGOs, fact-finding missions; European governmental documents. Somalia is a difficult environment to obtain information from and situation on the ground changes rapidly. It is notable and commendable that there is the inclusion of first-hand evidence gathered from local sources. However, it is important to avoid an over-reliance on anecdotal or unverifiable information from which generalizations cannot be made.

Recommendations for general improvement

Tone

Module 2- Major clans and their sub-clans- suggests that the character of the conflict has shifted from being a clan-based conflict to one between groups with rival Islamic projects. While this is true the extent to which this displaces the centrality of clan dynamics in the conflict in Somalia is limited. Al-Shabab's successes as well as those of their rivals have always come from either an astute reading and manipulation of clan identities/rivalries. It would be an oversimplification to view the conflict through the prism of competing Islamic polities.

Structure

There is good review of relevant evidence and counter-evidence on the clan system in Somalia in Module 2- Major clans and their sub-clans. Useful information is presented. However, the way in which it is presented prevents the reader from gaining a clear overall impression. Further clarity could be introduced through organizing the information presented in a different fashion. Currently we are presented with evidence for a thesis and then counter-evidence and then evidence in support again. The information is often conflicting and sometimes repetitive, making it difficult to form a general overall impression. The guidance does not come across as particularly authoritative or helpful to an official. It might be an idea to use sub-headings and group the evidence and counter evidence separately in order to aid the reader to reach an informed decision on the relevant issues. Module 3 Woman does not suffer from a similar problem and a clear picture on the issues relating to women is presented.

Major clans and their sub clans

p. 43

2.1.4 "While Al Shabab were in power, the clan system became less relevant."

Comment:

Does this wording relate to a particular geographical region? It is not clear whether this is a general or particular claim. Al-Shabab, even at the height of their strength, were not in power in all of the country. 2.2.8 contains a similar claim, although that seems to be particular to Mogadishu. In any case, it is a little optimistic to suggest that the clan system

has become less relevant in any part of Somalia. Politics in Somalia has always been influenced by external political events and the ascendancy of Islamic political actors in the region is no exception to this historical trend. However, it is perhaps naive to say that the clan system was sidelined by Al Shabab tactics. It was neither their strategy nor within their capabilities to undermine the clan system. Al-Shabab themselves were frequently constrained by clan politics e.g. their tactic of deploying human resources from within a clan to attack targets within the same clan.

p.45

2.24 “The clan system has changed over time, and in at least some geographic areas it is no longer fully functioning.”

Comment:

It is true that the clan system has been transformed and adapts to socio-political circumstances, but it would be a mistake to describe it as no longer fully functioning. Also given that the clan system is multi-functional, one wonders which functions in particular are being discussed here. Is it the *mag* or *diya* system which is the subject of the paragraph that is considered no longer fully functional or all aspects of the clan system? Some clarity here would be helpful.

p.46

2.2.7 “ A joint Danish Immigration Service / Landinfo fact finding mission in October 2012 was told by OCHA that clan influence in Somalia has increased again since February 2012.

Comment:

If by clan influence we mean clan political influence, then of course clan-based actors would benefit from the political losses of Al-Shabab but clan influence is broader than just political power and extends to all features of social life.

p.46

2.2.7 “..The same source explained that individuals now seek assistance and support from respectable and well off individuals rather than their clan or sub clan

Comment:

This claim must be treated with some scepticism. It is difficult to conceive of this being an actual widespread phenomenon. It may be the case that people seek assistance and support from respectable and well-off individuals from *within* their clan or sub-clan, but it is unheard of for them to do so outside of their clan family, especially given that the educational and institutional contexts where such relationships might be established are limited.

p.46

2.2.7 “..this means that if you are Hawiye Haber Gedir Sa’ad you can only expect to be protected by Sa’ad sub sub clan, not Hawiye in general.”

Comment:

This is inaccurate or at least misleading. The extent to which wider support would be available would depend on where the threat originated from. If the threat was from another Hawiye clan, then this statement would be correct. However, if the threat was from another tribe, such as Issaq or Darood it could be reasonable to expect to mobilise resources at the Hawiye level.

p.49

2.2.14 “the UNHCR paper...

Comment:

This section is a little repetitive and could be merged with the information contained in section 2.2.9

Women

p. 53

3.1.3 “Most lone females with no protectors or resources are likely to be in need of international protection.

Comment:

While this is true it is also important not to forget the position of women in relationships, who are unlikely in any case to have any control over resources. A study by the

international Rescue committee in 2011 found that “Participants identified IPV [Intimate Partner Violence] as the most common form of gender based violence (GBV)” Most GBV, as is the case outside of Somalia, is committed by womens’ partners.

Source: International Rescue Committee, Gender Based Violence Rapid Assessment, Dadaab, Kenya 2011

<http://mhpss.net/?get=129/1312457004-IRCFINALGBVRapidAssessment-DadaabJuly2011.pdf>

p.53

3.1. 4 “Factors to be taken into account include: access to family networks or clan protection and support, age, health, economic status, family responsibilities, connections with the diaspora (which can be material both in terms of income and ability to find work with reference to the diaspora driven economic upsurge) and other individual circumstances of the person.”

Comment:

Clan protection is not a factor to be taken into consideration in this regard. Leaving aside the tension between the evidence presented in Module 2 on the perceived diminishing importance/influence of the clan system in Somalia, its importance in protecting vulnerable women should not be overstated. There are several reasons why clan protection is not an option for women at risk:

- 1) The clan system is largely reactive and seeks resolution and restoration, not protection
- 2) Traditional notions of justice are preoccupied with finding balance, and so their solution to women being raped from one clan might be to rape women from the perpetrators clan, which is perhaps not the type of protection one would wish for
- 3) Resolutions might involve further threats to wellbeing such as forced marriage to the perpetrator and thus further acts of gender based violence

p. 54

3.1.9 “However, there is evidence that in some areas of Somalia it [FGM] may be declining.”

Comment:

It would be useful to present the evidence to support this claim, especially in light of the counter-evidence presented in 3.2.3 p56 that cites the UN as saying that “no significant changes in FGM/C prevalence [In Somalia] can be observed.”

pg.54

3.19 “an uncircumcised, unmarried Somali woman, up to the age of 39, will be at real risk of suffering FGM.”

Comment:

Although data on its prevalence is lacking, re-infibulation after childbirth and divorce is not an unheard of phenomenon, and therefore it is possible that not only unmarried girls and women are at risk of this procedure.

Source:

Jaldesa et al (2005) Genital Cutting among the Somali of Kenya and Management of its Complications

http://www.popcouncil.org/uploads/pdfs/frontiers/FR_FinalReports/Kenya_Somali.pdf

Conclusion

I am confident that Module 2 and Module 3 of the Country Information and Guidance Report: Somalia dated April 2014 contain accurate and useful information. As such they are fit for purpose. The range and nature of sources relied upon is varied and unbiased. The information is mostly up-to-date. The document could be improved by incorporating the suggestions and the comments I have made in this review.

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