

# How can we speak the truth if they can't understand us?

Failure to address language barriers compounds challenges accessing assistance for internally displaced people in Somalia, especially for vulnerable groups and marginalized Maay and Benadiri ethnic groups

## Summary: what you absolutely need to know

Humanitarian organizations responding to acute and widespread food insecurity in Somalia lack data to understand and address language-based exclusion. As a result, they risk reproducing and aggravating pre-existing exclusion of marginalized language speakers in society. Data from the 2021 Joint Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (JMCNA) for Somalia, [analyzed jointly by REACH and CLEAR Global](#), highlights the marginalization of minority groups from humanitarian assistance, and the role of language as a compounding factor of exclusion. These findings challenge a widespread perception that Northern Standard Somali (Mahaa) is used and understood by all, and mutually intelligible with Maay and Benadiri Somali. To further understand the language challenges internally displaced people (IDPs) face in Somalia, we talked to humanitarians and academics who speak either Maay, Benadiri, or Mahaa as a first language about the mutual intelligibility of these languages and dialects and the resulting language barriers.

- **Maay and Benadiri speakers have great difficulties understanding the dominant Mahaa dialect.** Benadiri is only partially intelligible and Maay is not intelligible with Mahaa. Although Mahaa and Maay share official language status in Somalia, Mahaa is the dominantly used language in government, education, and the media. Not everyone understands and speaks Mahaa. This causes language barriers for all Maay speakers, but especially for people from rural areas who are less exposed to Mahaa or have a low level of literacy.
- **Speakers of marginalized languages are reported to fear repercussions when speaking their own languages.** Maay speakers feel uncomfortable and intimidated to communicate in Mahaa if they do not speak it fluently. They also fear being demeaned by Mahaa speakers when speaking in their own language. Internally displaced people (IDPs) in particular sometimes choose to remain silent rather than expressing their needs and concerns towards predominantly Mahaa-speaking NGO staff.
- **The risk of language barriers is particularly high for vulnerable groups**, such as women, children, older people or people living with disabilities. Vulnerable people are less likely to have access to education or learn Mahaa. This reduces their access to information, services, and aid. Sign language users are at particular risk of being excluded, as Somali Sign Language is based on written Mahaa.
- **Language is a factor of exclusion and discrimination.** Education, government, business and media are conducted solely or predominantly in Mahaa. People at risk of discrimination due to clan membership are less likely to be able to use Mahaa well or at all. Low awareness of Somalia's

multilingualism, and lack of steps to address this in humanitarian programming, reproduce the risk of exclusion from information and services.

- **Language-based discrimination stops IDPs from making complaints.** Use of complaint and feedback mechanisms is generally extremely low. Unactioned feedback and risk of retaliation severely reduce trust in accountability mechanisms. IDPs who speak a marginalized language face greater constraints. Mechanisms are almost never available in their first language, and experiences of language-based discrimination deter them from using those that do exist, or sharing concerns with predominantly Mahaa-speaking aid workers.

## Recommendations to responding organizations

### Address language based exclusion and take proactive steps to prevent it

- Hire staff at all levels with diverse language skills matching those of the communities served: ensure teams include (or can at least call upon) speakers of all languages and dialects spoken in their operational areas.
- Ensure staff reflect the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the communities served by hiring Bantu, Benadiri, and Reewin (among others).
- Review procurement and hiring practices for language and other identity bias.
- Incorporate interpreting and translation into budgets and work plans.
- Translate messages and information into languages and dialects that are spoken by IDPs and use formats like audio that are accessible to people with lower levels of literacy.
- Treat Maay and Benadiri as the dominant languages in southern Somalia.

### Progressively build understanding within teams about how best to manage language diversity

- Explore language barriers and communication practices, where points of confusion lie, and what communication strategies can reach all groups.
- Build glossaries of terms with widely understood and accepted translations in all relevant languages, through discussion with affected communities, teams and linguists. CLEAR Global's existing glossaries offer a starting point.<sup>1</sup>
- Consult local experts on communication issues for different language communities and incorporate their insights into plans and practices.

### Collect data on language and communication preferences

- Include at least "What is the main language you use at home?" as a standard demographic indicator in all data collection among affected people. Ideally, also include "Which other language or languages do members of your household use?" to give a more complete picture.
- Disaggregate program indicators by main language to track access, participation, outcomes and accountability across language groups and correct imbalances.
- Use additional standard questions on communication preferences to gather baseline data,<sup>2</sup> and update regularly to capture change, especially where displacement is ongoing.
- Treat language data as sensitive data, and consult local experts on managing sensitivities around

<sup>1</sup> CLEAR Global, glossary web apps: <https://glossaries.clearglobal.org/>

<sup>2</sup> CLEAR Global, Language Questions in Humanitarian Data Collection, downloadable question bank: <https://translatorswithoutborders.org/language-questions>

language data collection and sharing as part of data collection risk assessments.

**Strengthen accountability mechanisms to assure humanitarian principles**

- Review complaints and feedback mechanisms for inclusivity and make mechanisms available in languages beyond Mahaa.
- Ensure reporting mechanisms are safe and confidential, and prioritize closing the feedback loop to increase trust in feedback mechanisms.
- Disseminate information to IDPs about their rights and entitlements to assistance in relevant languages and dialects, and in a range of formats.
- Ensure that monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) teams reflect the ethnic diversity of the communities and have the language skills to hear from marginalized language speakers.

## Somalia is a multilingual country

[The 2021 Joint Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment \(JMCNA\)](#) for Somalia records [11 languages in use](#). The JMCNA indicates that Northern Standard Somali (Mahaa) is the most widely spoken as a first language (60% of the population), followed by Maay Somali (20%) and Benadiri Somali (18%). The country's official languages are Northern Standard Somali and Maay. Arabic is considered a second language, but is used chiefly in religious practice.

**Northern Standard Somali**, also referred to as Mahaa, Maxaatiri or Af-Somali, has been the official language of government and education throughout the country since it was codified in 1972. Mahaa is generally regarded as the dominant language of the majority clans and is spoken in the northern and central regions of Somalia and near the border with Kenya.

**Maay**, also referred to as Maay Maay or Maay Somali, is the lingua franca in southern Somalia from the Middle Shabelle Region to Lower Juba Region. Maay is spoken by the Reewin and many of the Bantu minority groups. There are multiple varieties of Maay that are intelligible with each other, but are unintelligible with Mahaa.<sup>3</sup> In the 2000s, Somalia's constitution was amended to include both Mahaa and Maay as official languages.

**Benadiri**, also referred to as Xamar, Af-Hamar, Benaadir or Benadiri Somali, is spoken by Reer Hamar. Some regard Benadiri as a variant of Mahaa specific to residents of Banadir. Benadiri is only partially intelligible with Mahaa. Different communities of Benadiri speakers live in southern Somalia, Mogadishu and other coastal areas.

**Other minority languages** include three Swahili dialects: Bravanese (also known as Chimwiini, Chimini, or Chimbalazi), spoken along the southern coast, Bajuni or Kibajuni (spoken on the far southern coast and islands near Kenya). and Unguja (standard Swahili) spoken in the Lower Juba River valley and along the border with Kenya. Another Bantu language spoken in the Lower Juba River Valley is Kizigua spoken by the Zigua or Mushunguli people who are also found in northeast Tanzania. Other surveys (forthcoming) have recorded use of Eyle and Awer which are both languages of indigenous hunter gatherer groups found in remote areas and some IDP camps. There are also poorly understood languages or dialects spoken by Somalia's occupational minorities, Gabooye, Tumaal and Yibir.<sup>4</sup>

**Somali Sign Language** (SSL) was developed in the late 1990s and is based on written Mahaa. In order to learn SSL, the student needs to simultaneously learn reading and writing Mahaa.

See also [our language maps for Somalia](#) for further information.

**A note on the use of language names in this report:** For ease of reading, we refer to Northern Standard Somali as Mahaa, and use the names Maay and Benadiri throughout the report.

<sup>3</sup> Eno, Mohamed A. (2008) *The Bantu-Jareer: Unearthing Apartheid in the Horn of Africa*. London, Adonis & Abbey Publishers, Ltd. p. 26.

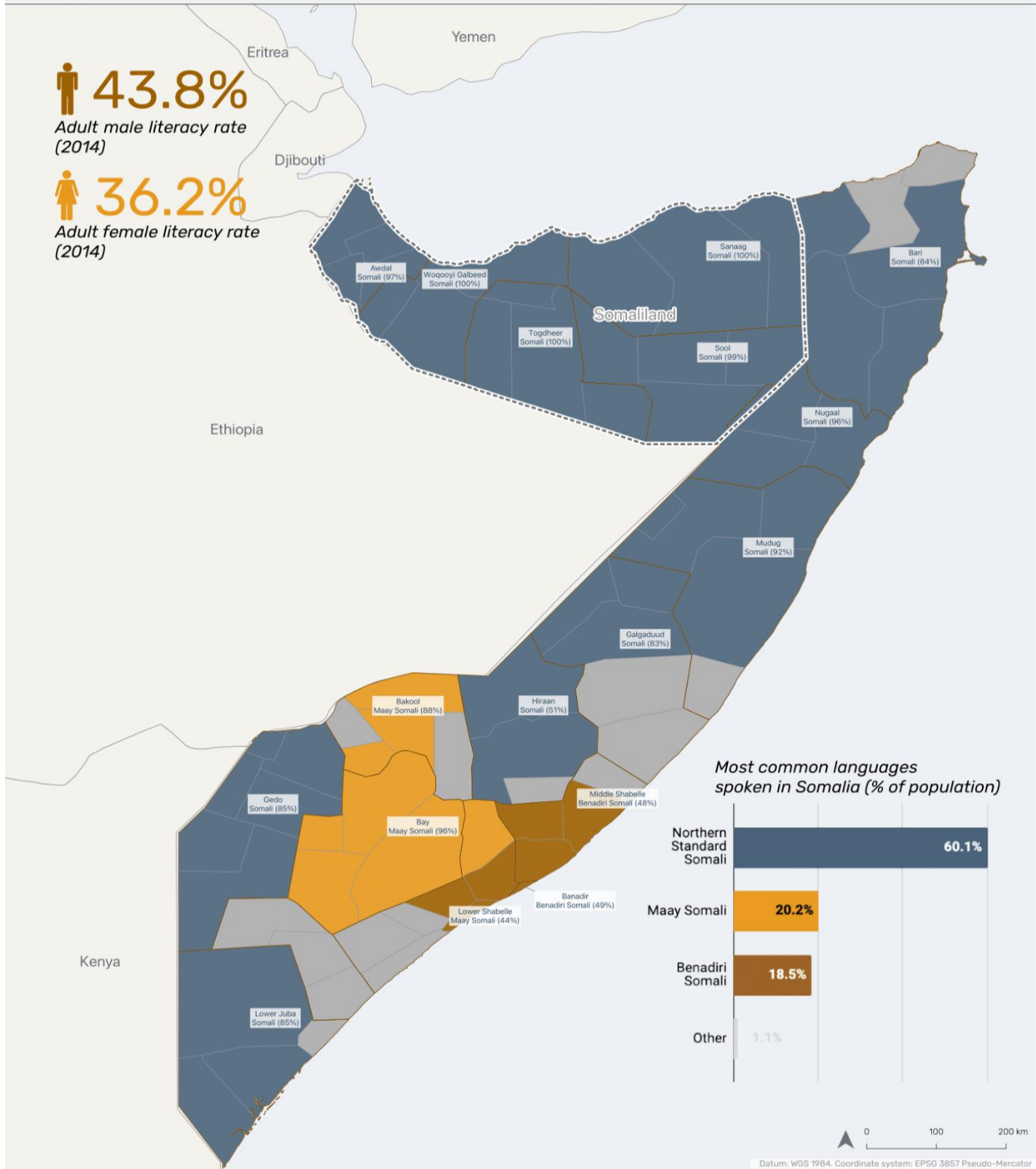
<sup>4</sup> Information supplied by Minority Rights Group

# Language map of Somalia

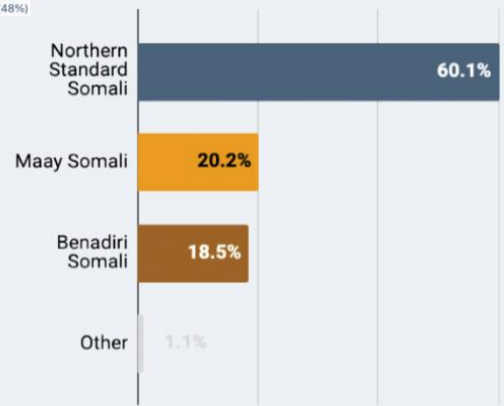


**43.8%**  
Adult male literacy rate  
(2014)

**36.2%**  
Adult female literacy rate  
(2014)

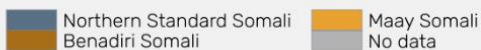


Most common languages spoken in Somalia (% of population)



Datum: WGS 1984. Coordinate system: EPSG 3857 Pseudo-Mercator

## Most common first language by district



Region name (primary language)

The 2021 Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment in Somalia records 11 languages and dialects spoken in the country. Northern Standard Somali and Arabic have the status of official languages.

As sampling was not random, results are therefore indicative rather than representative. However, the targets for the number of surveys (15,000 households) by population group (IDPs and non-IDPs) and district were based on the JMCNA 2020 methodology, which set the target number of surveys at a 90% confidence level and 10% margin of error. The exercise covered 74 districts across 17 regions in Somalia. General notes and disclaimers on mapping and analysis products can be found on [our website](#).



Translators without Borders. August 2022.

Language data from REACH 2021 Somalia Multi-Sector Needs Assessment; Literacy data from UNFPA PESS 2015

## Maay speakers face great difficulties understanding Mahaa

Maay is not mutually intelligible with Mahaa. Maay speaking IDPs face serious language barriers when communicating with Mahaa speaking humanitarians. Most of the key informants we talked to reported that Maay-speaking IDPs cannot communicate with NGO workers or understand the information provided. Key informants reported that many Maay-speaking IDPs come from rural areas and have little or no access to education; language barriers for these groups are even more severe.

*Sometimes NGO managers come from Puntland [Darood region where Mahaa is spoken] and Hargesia [Hawiye region where Mahaa is spoken] who cannot understand Maay and there can be complications. - Mahaa-speaking NGO worker*

Key informants estimated that only about a quarter to half of Maay speakers can speak some Mahaa. They cited language of instruction in schools and official communication in government offices in Mahaa as reasons why some Maay speakers partially understand some Mahaa. Despite the existing language barriers, nearly all key informants said that there is some communication between Maay-speaking IDPs and NGO workers. Some NGOs hire interpreters and some NGO workers learn some Maay. While this may allow for basic communication, IDPs' knowledge of Mahaa, and NGO workers' knowledge of Maay, might not suffice to relay more complex information. As one of the key informants stated, information on COVID-19 was provided mostly in Mahaa and was not understood by Maay speakers.

*During COVID, lots of instructions were given orally in Mahaa so Maay speakers couldn't understand Covid warnings; IDPs didn't understand. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

While nearly all key informants responded that Maay-speaking people are the most impacted by language barriers and limited access to information, language barriers also exist for speakers of other marginalized languages. Key informants stated that Tunni, Jiddu, and the Swahili-speaking Mushunguli (Kisigua), Bravanese (Wamini), and Bajuni peoples are also negatively impacted by language barriers. Similarities between Benadiri and Mahaa mean that Benadiri speakers can understand Mahaa to a greater extent than Maay speakers can. However, key informants also stated that Benadiri speakers who had little exposure to Mahaa or haven't attended school also face difficulties communicating and understanding Mahaa.

*Maay and Benadiri-speaking children don't understand the language of instruction in schools. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

*There are a lot of languages in Somalia. Maay speakers cannot understand Mahaa tiri. [Maay speakers] try to speak Mahaa tiri in government offices but government officials don't understand Maay. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

## Dialect differences create confusion and misunderstanding

There are letters and sounds in Maay and Benadiri that are difficult to understand in Mahaa. In 1972, Mahaa became the official written Somali language and the Latin script was modified to represent sounds specific to Mahaa. Some sounds and letters in Maay and Benadiri do not exist in the Mahaa script.

*Mohamed is my name but the 'h' is silent so the sound is omitted so they just say 'Mut' and if we compare it to 'mot' which means 'dead' so that can be an important moment of confusion. So you might get a new name since your Maay name in Mahaa doesn't exist. - Maay-speaking professor*

*Maay language has a Gh letter/sound that is not in Mahaa. The letter P exists in Maay but not in Mahaa. Mahaa writes Xeer verse Maay Xeedh. - Mahaa-speaking professor*

Intonation and pronunciation are also different between Mahaa, Maay and Benadiri. Some key informants stressed that speaking slowly and using simple terms can increase comprehension of Mahaa for speakers of other languages. Plain language will generally improve understanding, but even simple words sometimes have a completely different meaning in the different dialects, which can create misunderstandings and embarrassment. For example, the word *doro* means “ants” in Mahaa, but “chicken” in Maay. The word *hajaar* in Benadiri means “cucumber”, but “someone who lacks concentration” or “a fool” in Mahaa. The word *shuun* in Mahaa means “something good”, but refers to “pubic hair” in Benadiri. The table below gives further examples of differences between Mahaa, Benadiri and Maay for some key humanitarian terms.

Table 1: Dialect differences make understanding key terminology difficult

English	Mahaa	Benadiri	Maay
<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Xil ka saaran La xiaabtan</b>	<b>Xil ka saarag yahay La xisaabtag</b>	<b>Hil ka saarigyo La hisaabtag</b>
<i>Consent</i>	<b>Ogolaansho</b>	<b>Ogolaagsho</b>	<b>Ogaalaag</b>
<i>Eligibility</i>	<b>Xaq-u-yeelasho</b>	<b>Xaq-u-yeesho</b>	<b>Haq-ig-weeldho</b>
<i>Food security</i>	<b>Badbaado Cuno</b>	<b>Hunguriga</b>	<b>Hunguriga</b>
<i>Governance</i>	<b>Dowladnimo</b>	<b>Dowlonimo</b>	<b>Dowlo ahaagsho</b>
<i>Protection</i>	<b>Ilaalinta</b>	<b>Ilaaliyo</b>	<b>Ilaaliyoow</b>
<i>Resilience</i>	<b>Adkeysii</b>	<b>U adkeysii</b>	<b>Adkaaysii</b>

## Socio-cultural sensitivities further aggravate language barriers

The existing language barriers are further aggravated by the fact that people who have only a partial knowledge of Mahaa feel uncomfortable and shy about communicating in this language. Key informants stressed that Maay and Benadiri speakers feel intimidated to speak Mahaa, while Mahaa speakers often feel reluctant to speak Benadiri or Maay even if they have the skills. This is also linked to traditions in oral society and the high value Somalis place on speaking well. Not speaking a language fluently or being told that one is not speaking correctly is considered humiliating and degrading.<sup>5</sup>

*[Maay speakers are] ashamed to speak [Mahaa] because they don't speak it well. Even students at university feel more comfortable speaking Maay rather than Mahaa. - Mahaa-speaking professor*

*They say 'we can't understand you' so they sometimes force the Maay person to speak Mahaa. [We are told] "what are you speaking?!" and "speak Mahaa." - Benadiri-speaking NGO worker*

Speakers of Maay, Benadiri, and other minority languages and dialects also feel intimidated to speak their own languages in the presence of Mahaa speakers. Key informants stated that because Mahaa is considered the dominant language, everybody in Somalia is expected to speak it; Maay and Benadiri speakers are sometimes insulted or abused when using their language in or outside of an IDP camp, discriminated against and threatened with not receiving aid.

*If [a person] cannot communicate in Mahaa, sometimes Maay and Benadiri [peoples] can be demeaned because they do not speak Mahaa. - Mahaa-speaking professor*

*Most Maay meet with problems with Mahaa. [Maay speakers] are forced to speak Mahaa or lose their rights. Children and adults lose their rights to get aid. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

These sensitivities around the use of language cause IDPs to often remain silent and not express their needs or concerns. Key informants therefore suggested that the delivery of humanitarian aid would be positively impacted if NGO workers spoke the same languages as the IDPs.

*IDPs only listen but don't express their needs. So, Maay-speaking NGO workers would help IDPs express their needs. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

Key informants saw several solutions to reduce language barriers for people receiving humanitarian assistance. Many emphasized the importance of language for inclusion of Bantu, Benadiri and Reewin minorities and requested organizations to raise awareness among their staff of the importance of inclusivity for an effective response. Several mentioned the value of having staff who speak the languages that match the profile of the communities served, especially Maay. One informant shared that their organization does not send

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<sup>5</sup> Mukhtar, Mohamed H. (2013). Multilingual Somalia: Ploy or Pragmatic, Herbst 2013 Nr. 37 (Accessed February 18, 2023), p. 18. <https://ub-ojs.ub.unibas.ch/bulletin/article/view/960/1175>



monolingual staff members to areas where they are unfamiliar with the ethnic or linguistic context of aid recipients. But informants also raised that addressing people's language needs is a challenge; one shared that during the Covid-19 pandemic, they asked interpreters to record information about the virus in Maay, but could not find an organization willing to do so.

## Language marginalization compounds vulnerability

Key informants highlighted that several groups at risk of exclusion are more likely to face language barriers. Internally displaced women and girls, children, and elderly people are less likely to understand Mahaa or be able to access communication channels and communicate with service providers. They are also less likely to leave the camps and be exposed to other languages. Key services such as maternal health care are scarce and under-resourced; inadequate information provision makes it even harder for vulnerable groups to find and use them. Communication barriers can also compound social and cultural power dynamics. Informants raised that certain groups, especially women and children, do not feel able to approach aid workers; this is even stronger for those who do not share a language with the aid worker.

*Most women don't go to NGO offices. Women are shy to speak to men. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

*A child has no authority to ask or challenge or approach a different language speaker who is an NGO worker. - Mahaa-speaking professor*

Disability-inclusive communication is also a significant challenge. Most informants were unaware of organizations using signed languages for communication, though a few recognized that interpreters or relatives sometimes help transmit information. Somali Sign Language (SSL) does exist, but it is based on written Mahaa<sup>6</sup> and is not yet widely used. Those who cannot understand Mahaa struggle to use SSL at all. Informants mentioned that almost no internally displaced deaf people can use SSL. This increases the challenge for organizations trying to hire trained interpreters. People with mobility-related disabilities are likely to have very low access to the places where information is commonly shared.

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<sup>6</sup> Woodford, Doreen (2006) The Beginning and Growth of a New Language - Somali Sign Language. Paper presented to the International Conference on Languages and Education in Africa, Oslo University, 19-24 June 2006 and posted on the Enabling Education Network (EeNET). (Accessed March 1, 2023) [https://web.archive.org/web/20131029191657/https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/somali\\_sign\\_language.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20131029191657/https://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/somali_sign_language.php)

*Old people try to speak up for their rights but don't have confidence. The elderly have to stay in camps and are not getting information, and can't understand NGO workers. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

*They (deaf people) don't get help from NGOs because the organizations don't have that understanding of the sign language of these people. Their disability is very impossible. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

Barriers to access information as well as humanitarian services and aid cause members of vulnerable groups to be even more at risk of starvation, extortion, exploitation, and abuse.

## Language is a factor of exclusion and discrimination

Key informants raised that there has been a long-standing narrative that Somalia is linguistically homogeneous. The language policy introduced in 1972, which promoted Mahaa as the dominant language, reinforces this. Yet this does not reflect the linguistic profile of the country and risks masking dynamics of exclusion and discrimination that disproportionately impact minority language speakers. Many informants stated that this disadvantages non-Mahaa speakers, even in areas where Mahaa is not the most widely spoken language. The link between language and barriers to access humanitarian services and aid has been confirmed by data collected in the 2021 Joint Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment (JMCNA) for Somalia and the [2022 Hard-to-Reach Areas Assessment](#).

*[Mahaa speakers]] discriminate and use abusive words against Maay, Banadiri, and other (language) speakers. - Benadiri speaking NGO worker*

*The single language policy in 1972 tremendously impacted Somalis, especially speakers of Benadiri, Maay and other languages. Means of instruction, schools, curriculum, everything was in the Mahaa language. Kids started to suffer. Truancies and dropouts became common. The other languages stopped being used. Today, every aspect of social life, even social media, is in the Mahaa language. People can't get a job if they are not educated in the Mahaa language. - Maay-speaking professor*

Members of majority clans largely speak Mahaa, while members of minoritized clans (Bantu, Benadiri, and Reewin) largely speak marginalized dialects of Somali, or other languages altogether. The resulting language marginalization impacts people's access to information, services and resources even in areas where a marginalized language is dominant, such as Maay and Benadiri in southern Somalia. Some informants shared that the hiring practices of many organizations reproduce these dynamics, as the majority of aid workers are first-language Mahaa speakers from dominant clans. This increases the risk of exclusion and reduces the ability of the response to understand and account for Somalia's multilingualism.

Key informants voiced concerns that speakers of marginalized languages are denied humanitarian assistance and that humanitarian aid intended for IDPs is being diverted to the benefit of members of Mahaa-speaking dominant clans. They shared perceptions that a long-standing system of dominant clan "gatekeepers" extorts IDPs, who are mostly from minority clans, for access to aid. Informants also echoed concerns from the wider humanitarian

community about corruption and disruption to aid delivery, especially regarding food distribution and protection concerns such as sexual assault and forced child labor.

## IDPs have difficulties raising complaints in any language

Realities and perceptions of skewed assistance<sup>7</sup> have further implications for IDPs, especially in regards to raising complaints or giving feedback. Over two thirds of key informants responded that Maay, Mahaa, and Benadiri speaking IDPs could make complaints, but that real or perceived risk of retaliation makes people distrust complaint mechanisms. These challenges exist for speakers of any language, but key informants added that language-based discrimination further dissuades Maay and Benadiri speakers from making complaints.

*[The IDPs are] too afraid to lose the little support they are getting. - Banadiri-speaking NGO worker*

*Complaining will make problems for the IDPs. Leaders of IDP camps will threaten [to deny] supply of food to IDPs who complain. - Mahaa-speaking NGO worker*

Key informants also lacked confidence that monitoring and evaluation efforts were effective in improving equal distribution of aid. Staff hired to monitor and reduce the risk of disruption to aid are not representative of the language profile of those receiving assistance. Informants shared that some Mahaa-speaking NGO staff prevent Maay and Benadiri speakers from accessing safe and confidential channels in the right language to raise concerns.

*IDPs don't trust M&E. IDPs fear losing their rations if they speak the truth to M&Es. - Mahaa-speaking NGO worker*

*M&E are not effective, Nobody follows up with M&E reports. M&E represents the majority clans' interests, [they] are from the same clans as NGO workers. - Banadiri-speaking NGO worker*

Frustrations about humanitarian aid and ineffective complaint and feedback mechanisms negatively impact the accountability of the response. Low access to and trust in mechanisms means organizations lack actionable insights from service users to improve their programming and ensure it is relevant for those most in need.

*Foreigners don't know, or don't care? Jilec (majority clan) interpreters prevent Jareer (Bantu and most Reewin) from speaking the truth to foreigners. Nobody understands the discrimination. - Maay-speaking NGO worker*

*People buried in the grave, can you hear them? No? IDPs are like that. - Mahaa-speaking NGO worker*

Others have described the tendency of the aid system to reproduce processes of exclusion that exist within Somali society and that create unequal access to assistance between

<sup>7</sup> Nisar Majid, Mohamed Jelle, Guhad Adan, Aydrus Daar, Khalif Abdirahman, Peter Hailey, Nancy Balfour, Andrew Seal, and Daniel Maxwell. Another Humanitarian (and Political) Crisis in Somalia in 2022. Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 2022: [https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Another-Crisis-in-Somalia\\_6-9.pdf](https://fic.tufts.edu/wp-content/uploads/Another-Crisis-in-Somalia_6-9.pdf);

groups.<sup>8</sup> Previous periods of acute food insecurity or famine highlighted the importance of ensuring that provision of humanitarian assistance doesn't increase marginalization. To be effective in tackling these structural problems, as they have committed to doing,<sup>9</sup> humanitarians need to understand how language compounds other factors of exclusion, and act accordingly.

### How CLEAR Global can help

CLEAR Global's mission is to help people get vital information and be heard, whatever language they speak. We help our partner organizations to listen to and communicate effectively with the communities they serve. We translate messages and documents into local languages, support audio translations and pictorial information, train staff and volunteers, and advise on two-way communication. We also work with partners to field test and revise materials to improve comprehension and impact. This work is informed by research, language mapping and assessments of target populations' communication needs. We also develop language technology solutions for community engagement.

Existing resources to support effective two-way communication are available on our [website](#):

- [Interactive language map of Somalia](#)
- [Language and communication questions for surveys](#)
- [Tipsheet](#) on how to use language data in programs
- Guide to writing in [plain language](#)
- Short free online training on [humanitarian translation](#) and [humanitarian interpreting](#)
- [Core PSEA principles](#) in 100 languages

For more information, contact us at [info@clearglobal.org](mailto:info@clearglobal.org).

<sup>8</sup> MCAN (2019). A Survey Report on How the Marginalized Communities in IDP sites in Mogadishu and Kismayo Perceive Their Exclusion. Marginalized Communities Advocates Network and Minority Rights Group. (Accessed April 7, 2023) <https://minorityrights.org/publications/mcan-report/>

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022 Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/2022-somalia-humanitarian-needs-overview>

## Methodology

This study is based on in-depth key informant interviews with eleven humanitarians and academics. All key informants were native speakers of either Maay, Benadiri or Mahaa. All but two of the participants were working and living in southern Somalia. The key informants either work for non-governmental organizations that provide humanitarian assistance in Somalia's nine southernmost regions or are academics who are experts in southern Somalia's languages, ethnic groups, and politics. Three informants are female, four are native Mahaa speakers, three are native Benadiri speakers, three are native Maay speakers, and one is a native Gare speaker. Convenience or snowball sampling was used to identify the KIs who were surveyed over the phone in late March of 2023 by the authors. Institutional Review Board (IRB) and CLEAR Global human subjects' approvals were obtained.

The study was designed as a scoping exercise. The small sample used for this study does not allow for more generalizable conclusions and all findings must be considered as indicative. The sample does not include IDPs and only reflects their experiences as reported by our key informants.

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The H2H Network is driving change across the humanitarian system, getting more to people in need, by coordinating and convening humanitarian-to-humanitarian support and services. The H2H Network and its fund are supported by UK aid - from the British people, and the U.S. Agency for International Development - from the American people, and is hosted by the Danish Refugee Council.

**h—h**  
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Humanitarian  
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