Engaging the Gatekeepers
- on the viability of utilizing informal resources of governance in Mogadishu

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Picture 1: The signboard showing the Gatekeepers’ commitments, displayed in an IDP settlement.
### List of abbreviations

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<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>FGS</td>
<td>Federal Government of Somalia</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAAAP</td>
<td>Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
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<td>MGA</td>
<td>Making Gatekeepers Accountable</td>
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<td>OCHA</td>
<td>Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs</td>
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<td>FGM</td>
<td>Female Genital Mutilation</td>
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<td>HRW</td>
<td>Human Rights Watch</td>
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Summary

As Gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient governance structures at local level in Mogadishu formal stakeholders, including government and the international community, will need to come to terms and engage with them proactively if there is to be an improvement in IDPs’ protection and livelihoods.

One of the most hotly contested issues in contemporary development policy is the discussion of whether bottom-up approaches to strengthening governance are more effective than top-down interventions. This has led some scholars to suggest the “hybrid political order” as an alternative, whereby formal and informal – or Western and traditional – power structures merge and create both a more effective and more legitimate order than either of the other two alternatives can do on their own. But so far the practical experience with this hybrid approach has been very limited.

In Somalia, however, important experience is emerging from a new intervention aimed at improving the accountability of informal IDP settlement managers – the so-called Gatekeepers – in Mogadishu, who have established themselves as unavoidable actors in relation to aid delivery to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Gatekeepers represent an informal power structure stepping in to provide what the formal power structures – in this case the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) – have not been able to provide in terms of protection and services. However, the Gatekeepers fundamentally lack accountability; both upwards to the government and downwards to the IDPs, and have hence been considered impossible to engage with without compromising the authority of the state and the security of the IDPs.

This assessment is now being challenged through the DFID funded project “Making Gatekeepers Accountable”, designed and being implemented by the Danish/Kenyan partnership of Tana Copenhagen and Intermedia Development Consultants – Tana/iDC. The aim has been to improve the accountability of Gatekeepers and thereby increase the protection of IDPs through training of selected Gatekeepers, increased transparency, as well as a formal approval process for Gatekeepers and their settlements. All in all, the project has proved to be a success albeit with some challenges and dilemmas.

By working – and actually creating change – with this entrenched but informal and unrecognised system in Mogadishu, we believe that the prospects of engaging with informal power structures as a way of improving governance are positive. The work shows that creating real change through an engagement with local power structures is possible, but not an easy or fast exercise. Such engagements must be based on a thorough understanding of the specific political economy, on realistic expectations, and on a pragmatic approach; all of which should be reflected in the project design. A key conclusion of the pilot project is that changing and formalising informal power structures cannot be pursued without full acceptance and buy-in from the formal power structures – the goal is a truly hybrid order in which both parts are convinced, hard as it is, that they can coexist and in fact complement each other.

As Gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient governance structures at local level in Mogadishu – with no signs that their presence will diminish in the near future –
formal stakeholders, including government and the international community, will need to come to terms and engage with them proactively if there is to be an improvement in IDPs’ protection and livelihoods. Such an engagement will require engaged actors that are risk-willing and have the courage to challenge their own perceptions, as we find that these perceptions are often the biggest obstacles to change. In this regard, we hope this paper will be of value.

Introduction
Since Somalia collapsed as a state in 1991, there have been vivid discussions around how to assist and protect the huge number of IDPs in the country – a number that is presently estimated to be 1.1 million. Of these, a recent survey indicates that 80,657 households and 464,486 individuals reside in 486 settlements in the 17 districts of Mogadishu. Around 85% of these people are internally displaced and the settlements in which they reside do not have any official status.\(^1\)

Common to all humanitarian efforts in and around Mogadishu has been a need to relate to the managers of these informal settlements, the so-called ‘Gatekeepers’. It is estimated that there are roughly 130-140 Gatekeepers in Mogadishu, with each Gatekeeper potentially managing one or more settlements.\(^2\) They emerged as the humanitarian conditions exacerbated during the 1990s, and especially following the devastating famine in 2011/12 where huge numbers of people from all over the country fled to Mogadishu in pursuit of food and protection, ultimately resulting in a huge rise in the number of new displacements – a situation that remains unsolved, even though the security in Somalia has since improved.\(^3\)

![Picture 2: A settlement visit in June 2016.](image)

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\(^1\) Internal Displacement Study of Mogadishu, 2016. UNHCR, FGS

\(^2\) Project team estimate, Tana/iDC.

\(^3\) There has been a gradual increase in the number of returnees making their way back to their Villages/Regions of Origin, but the numbers are still constrained by the lack of livelihood options after many of them lost their assets (crops, seeds and livestock) to the famine.
Gatekeepers act as middle-men (or women) between IDPs and NGOs. On the one hand, they offer the IDPs a plot of land in a settlement on which to live – and in some cases also very basic services such as latrines and access to water trucks – against payment in either cash or kind. On the other hand, they regulate and restrict NGOs’ ability to provide humanitarian relief and the IDPs’ freedom of movement. They do this through the control that they exercise over access to and from the settlements, often in concert with local militia, and in some cases also through exercising control over the IDPs’ food ration cards.

As will be described below, the Gatekeepers’ ability to regulate aid flows is one of their means to keep their position. The Gatekeepers are therefore quite ambiguous characters: though they provide the IDPs with a level of service and security – or, put simply, governance – that the FGS still has not been able to match, they do so in a non-transparent, and in some cases, also exploitive way. This is probably the reason why Gatekeepers are referred to by some Somalis as mukulel mathow (“black cats”), which, according to Somali mythology, is something to be feared.

Regardless of the negative perception that many people have of the Gatekeepers, however, they have proven to be a remarkably resilient governance structure in Somali society. The Gatekeeper is both feared and respected by the IDPs, who recognise them as legitimate service providers who often have been the IDPs’ only source of assistance during difficult times. But since the Gatekeepers are not part of any official governance structure in Somalia, but are rather seen as “private sector” stepping in to provide what should be public goods, the recognition of Gatekeepers as service providers in general is not shared by anyone but the IDPs. And though the FGS, NGOs, and the international community are fully aware of the Gatekeepers’ existence, very few steps have been taken to interact with them. In the humanitarian community around Mogadishu, therefore, the Gatekeepers have become the elephant in the room that everyone sees – and is forced to interact with to provide aid – but few, if any, admit that they engage with them.

Situating the Gatekeeper

Given how extensively Gatekeepers have managed to regulate the lives of the IDPs and the aid flows around them, the knowledge of and interest in how they actually operate is surprisingly low. Acknowledging this information gap, the Somalia Cash Consortium, consisting of four NGOs (Action Contre la Faim, Adeso, Danish Refugee Council, and Save the Children), funded a research study in 2012 on the role Gatekeepers play as intermediaries between IDPs and aid organisations. The research was conducted by Tana Copenhagen in cooperation with iDC Kenya, resulting in the report Gatekeepers in Mogadishu that was published in 2013

4 Available at: http://www.cashlearning.org/downloads/1376766704.pdf

Simultaneously, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published the report Hostage of the Gatekeepers.

5 Available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/somalia0313_ForUpload.pdf
far, these are the most comprehensively researched sources of knowledge on Gatekeepers.

As the research by Tana and iDC showed, the term ‘Gatekeeper’ is used generically by aid organisations to refer to various levels of power structures and actors around IDPs in Mogadishu. However, for the sake of clarity and consistency, the term will only be used here to refer to the overall IDP settlement leader to whom other camp structures report to within the sites.

Since 2013, a hierarchy has been developed between the Gatekeepers reflecting their status in the network of IDP settlements. These are usually organised in a so-called Umbrella (typically consisting of 5-8 settlements) having appointed an Umbrella leader. A number of Umbrellas (usually 3-10) then again form a Centre. The hierarchy can be seen in the figure below:

**Figure 1: The management structure of the settlements.**

As such, a Gatekeeper can be a leader of a settlement, an Umbrella, or a Centre – and can in some cases be both the leader of a settlement and an Umbrella or a Centre. The research also showed that the Gatekeepers come into being in three main ways:

1. Inhabitants of Mogadishu who, on a speculative basis, search for and identify an empty plot of land and through connections attract IDPs to settle;
2. Existing land owners who (as above) set up sites to attract IDPs and aid; and
3. Individuals who are appointed to run the daily affairs of a site by the local leaders/officials (most often the District Commissioner) of the area where the
site is located. These are often drawn from the local community, but occasionally, in the older sites, they are also IDPs themselves (Tana & iDC 2013: 13).

In the last two scenarios, the Gatekeepers are often local inhabitants who belong to the dominant clan of that area. When asked about how they came to hold the position they do, almost 45 pct. of the Gatekeepers responded that they are self-appointed; a perception that the IDPs apparently share (40 pct.). What lets the Gatekeepers stay in this often self-appointed position is, above all, their ability to provide services to the IDPs.

These services can be divided into three clusters:

- Land
- Security
- Other services

In Mogadishu, land is a scarce resource. As home to the lion’s share of the country’s estimated 1.1 million IDPs, the situation around ownership of land is chaotic and IDPs are often subject to the Government’s arbitrary evictions. This is the primary reason that IDPs turn to Gatekeepers who provide them with a plot of land in a settlement where they can live with their household. Secondly, as IDPs are the most vulnerable group in the population, the grave security situation in Mogadishu makes protection another big concern for the IDPs. The Gatekeepers’ settlements are therefore often fenced in and the Gatekeeper affiliated with local militia, which serves a dual purpose: they provide security for the inhabitants of the settlements, but at the same time, they back the Gatekeeper and make sure that all inhabitants abide by the norms (really unwritten laws) of the settlement. The threat of violence to maintain order is very real, though, interestingly enough, not explicitly articulated.

Above all, however, the Gatekeepers see themselves as service providers. Most obviously, they (Gatekeepers) are providers of land and security, but they also provide a range of other services. These include distribution of aid, conflict mediation between the settlement’s inhabitants, arranging funerals, assisting in emergency situations such as illness or births, and in some cases also facilitating crowd-funding of new facilities such as latrines, fencing etc.

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6 For decades, when there was no functional government in Mogadishu, many IDPs resided in government buildings and on public land. With the setting up of the FGS in 2012, a wave of reconstruction started in the city and many IDPs were forcefully evicted from the buildings without being provided agreeable alternative locations. These have in most cases found space in new IDP settlements established by Gatekeepers.

7 Interestingly, the Gatekeepers themselves dislike the term and instead prefer the title ‘informal settlement managers’ which Tana/iDC has since used throughout the programme. Similarly, the title of the project has been changed to Accountability in Informal Settlements (AIS).
situations such as illness or births, and in some cases also facilitating crowd-funding of new facilities such as latrines, fencing etc.

All these services are paid for by the IDPs in either cash or kind and, as such, the Gatekeepers can be compared to commercial settlement managers were it not for the fact that they fundamentally lack any formalised accountability, transparency about the payments received, and often also respect for human rights.

HRW’s report *Hostage of the Gatekeepers* describes the situation for IDPs in Mogadishu and documents a horrifying range of human rights abuses including “rapes, beatings, ethnic discrimination, restricted access to food and shelter, restrictions of movement, and reprisals when they [the IDPs] dared to protest their mistreatment” (HRW 2013: 3). Contrary to the suggestion implicit in the report’s title, these abuses were not committed by the Gatekeepers themselves but by militias and security forces that, in some cases, were affiliated with the Government, and in other cases, with the Gatekeepers. As such, they cannot be blamed on the Gatekeepers alone, though by being affiliated with militias committing such abuses, the Gatekeepers are not innocent either. In fact, the title *Hostage of the Gatekeepers* is a quote from an interview with a Somali woman, who explains that her Gatekeeper does not allow her household to move – a rule that is not unheard of, but is not enforced by all Gatekeepers either – and she therefore considers herself a “hostage” in her settlement (HRW 2015: 5).

Although the IDP settlements are often the scene of human rights abuses, this may not necessarily be a product of the Gatekeeper system. Rather, they are one of the products of a collapsed state where the rule of law has broken down, and where few perpetrators are ever held to account. By the same token, the Gatekeepers should not solely be perceived as greedy or exploitative; they reflect a state – and aid community – that is not able to provide citizens with the most basic of services.

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The Gatekeepers also reflect an expression of the underlying power structures of Somali society, in which the clan is the most salient source of identity, and where a democratically accountable state has not existed for decades. This complex political economy surrounding the Gatekeepers explains why they have proven to be such a resilient power structure, and that – despite being shunned by NGOs, the international community, and the FGS – they remain unavoidable power brokers in relation to protection and assistance of IDPs in Mogadishu. Exactly why this is the case will be explained below.

**Black cats or service providers?**

As described, the relationship between IDPs and Gatekeepers is based on an exchange of services and goods, though the goods the IDPs provide to the Gatekeepers in exchange for services are less openly discussed. When the Gatekeeper system expanded during the famine, one of the driving factors was that dollars were part of aid delivery. The serious security situation in Mogadishu at the time made traditional aid delivery almost impossible. Instead, aid organisations chose to hand out cash for
which the IDPs could buy food. While cash helped support local market systems, it also created a market for the Gatekeepers. As documented by Tana/iDC’s research, some Gatekeepers did it completely openly with signboards stating the prices, while other Gatekeepers denied it with passion (Tana iDC 2013: 36).

However, as the security in Mogadishu improved following the expulsion of al-Shabaab, aid agencies switched back to provision of regular foods rather than cash, not least to lower the risk of corruption. One result of this is that the Gatekeepers are instead “taxing” the foods being delivered to the IDPs. They do this by agreeing with the IDPs on a percentage of their food rations they hand over to the Gatekeepers (the latest action research from Tana/iDC suggests that in the three pilot settlements this is usually around 10 pct.). The Gatekeepers then consume these foods themselves or simply sell them. Moreover, as HRW reports, some Gatekeepers require that IDPs deposit with them the food ration cards used by aid agencies to manage food delivery, thus perpetuating their control over food distribution. (HRW 2013: 43 – 48). Being backed by local militia, the Gatekeepers are then effectively controlling the flow of aid to and from the settlements.

An important note to make here is that, due to the scarcity of land in Mogadishu, the individual Gatekeeper is rarely the owner of the land on which (s)he provides shelter for IDPs; in most cases, they rent the land from landowners, to whom part of the payments received by the Gatekeepers then goes. In this sense, the Gatekeeper can be considered as similar to a commercial trader.

As can be seen, the Gatekeepers have managed to establish a highly sophisticated system, which is not only maintained through the explicit and implicit threat of violence and suppression, but also through non-violent means such as the control of aid flows and provision of services. Interestingly, a lot of IDPs generally have a positive view of their Gatekeepers and highlight all the services that the Gatekeepers provide for them. Nonetheless, in the situation of insecurity in which the IDPs find themselves and with Gatekeepers being backed by local militia, the threat of violence remains, and – just as with the modern state – the Gatekeepers thereby operate a regime covering both violent and non-violent means to maintain order.

This situation, however, is by no means uniform and there are just as many profiles of Gatekeepers as there are Gatekeepers. Although the term is used generically, it actually covers a wide range of persons who sometimes are IDPs themselves who were elected as leader by other IDPs, and who therefore care deeply about the wellbeing of the inhabitants of their settlement. At the other end of the continuum is the speculative Gatekeeper whose only interest is to make money and whose consideration about IDP wellbeing and human rights is conditioned by this motivation.

This underlines the point that Gatekeepers should themselves be treated individually; the reason that Gatekeepers are often regarded as controversial is not that they provide

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services that the state should provide; in fact some of them govern much more effectively than the FGS can hope to do any time soon. The main problem is rather their lack of accountability; both their lack of accountability to the FGS and to their beneficiaries (the IDPs), where there is a general lack of transparency.

Another reason is that they present a threat to established local authorities, particularly in locations where a significant proportion (up to 50 pct.) of the inhabitants are IDPs. Since the Gatekeepers – and not the local authorities – are the main source of authority for this majority of IDPs and enjoy greater legitimacy because of the services provided, they are considered a threat by these authorities.

In the following sections, we explore how these accountability relationships could be improved.

Making Gatekeepers accountable

The project Making Gatekeepers Accountable (MGA) is implemented under the Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP), which is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) to identify drivers of accountability in Somalia. The project was designed and implemented as a pilot by Tana and iDC in Mogadishu in 2015.

MGA’s point of departure is the need for increased protection of IDPs and that this should not be pursued in parallel to already existing governance structures in the IDP settlements. Rather, the project suggests using the existing management structures of the Gatekeeper system with a view to enhancing the accountability of the Gatekeepers towards the IDPs. It therefore builds on the assumption that enhanced accountability will lead to improved protection of IDPs and enhanced transparency in the delivery of aid to IDPs in Mogadishu. It was not expected that the Gatekeepers involved could be moved from being unaccountable to being fully accountable from one day to the next; rather, the idea was to influence the Gatekeepers gradually through small interventions that over time will improve IDP protection. The project’s interventions have included:

1) Providing selected Gatekeepers with training and mechanisms for effective camp management, protection and service delivery to IDPs;
2) Enhancing the transparency of the Gatekeepers’ IDP taxation (rent), service delivery, and protection levels of the different camps with the aim of promoting the most attractive camps to IDPs and the aid agencies;
3) Testing a more formalised approval process of Gatekeepers with the local authorities and possibly international humanitarian agencies (formalised certification of informal camp managers).

These interventions were based on the conclusions from a feasibility study carried out in Mogadishu, which showed that the Gatekeepers were surprisingly interested in being trained, just as the Government was interested in being engaged in such a project. The MGA project thus rests on the assumption that the Gatekeepers are motivated and willing to participate in the pilot programme – an assumption that has
held true within the confines of the project but, as we will discuss later, might be less realistic on a broader scale.

The theory of change behind the interventions was thus: *If*... Tana and iDC provide i) demand-based training of Gatekeepers for improved protection and service delivery; ii) support these in enhancing the transparency and ‘marketing’ of IDP-friendly settlement practices; and iii) assist with the introduction of a certification system for informal settlement managers together with the local authorities and aid agencies. *Then*... these Gatekeepers will provide services and protection to IDPs in a more transparent and accountable way. *This will*... result in the settlements concerned being more attractive to IDPs and motivate other IDPs to move to the settlements where protection and services are improved, and allow aid agencies to provide assistance to IDPs in a transparent manner without having to cooperate with exploitative Gatekeepers. *As a spin-off*... this preference of IDPs to be located in settlements where they have better protection and access to services will motivate other informal settlement managers to follow suit and improve their own conduct, thereby improving both the management and service delivery and protection elements within the IDP settlements. In this way the intervention addresses different levels of accountabilities (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors who need to enhance their accountability</th>
<th>Change in accountability expected (tested)</th>
<th>Actor to whom accountability is enhanced</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal settlement manager</td>
<td>Enhanced adherence to IDP needs and protection</td>
<td>IDPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal settlement manager</td>
<td>Enhanced adherence to local government regulations and requirements</td>
<td>Local government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>Enhanced demonstration of ability to govern jurisdiction</td>
<td>Somali citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid agencies</td>
<td>Transparency in aid delivery and increased adherence to humanitarian principles in aid delivery</td>
<td>IDPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid agencies</td>
<td>Aid delivered according to humanitarian commitments</td>
<td>Somali citizens, taxpayers, and other concerned citizens (electorate)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from the above-mentioned primary assumption of the programme – that Gatekeepers are interested in participating in the project – its wider effects were based on a number of secondary assumptions:

a. That IDPs have the ability (and willingness) to move between settlements in Mogadishu to seek the best opportunities (the best settlement);

b. Local governments can see the benefits of participating in the exercise by increased oversight of the settlements in their jurisdiction;

c. Aid agencies (in particular NGOs) can see the benefits of participating in the exercise by working with settlement managers who promote protection, improving their ability to deliver in accordance with humanitarian principles.

The implementation of the project was designed around a pilot phase with a group of three Gatekeepers, with the intention that, if considered successful, it would be rolled
out to a larger group of seven Gatekeepers. It should be stressed, however, that the Gatekeepers invited to participate in the project were Gatekeepers who were already considered by aid providers as less exploitative and easy to engage with. One could argue, therefore, that the project approached the Gatekeeper “continuum” from the easy side where the intervention would make less of a difference as compared to engaging with the “rough” Gatekeepers, where accountability and human rights problems are more prolific. This is a fully valid claim and its consequence for the project will be discussed below. However, we considered it important to have full buy-in from the Gatekeepers in the project, whom it was assumed would more easily change their behaviour for the benefit of the IDPs. The Gatekeepers who participated in the training were offered no kind of reimbursement for their participation.

In the first part of the intervention, the Gatekeepers exchanged knowledge and experience, discussed challenges in their particular settlement etc., received an introduction to OCHA’s humanitarian principles, and they were asked to rank their own skills in different areas in order to identify skill gaps. Throughout, the Gatekeepers were asked to reflect on the needs of the IDPs, also keeping in mind how they could best assist them. They were also asked to perform a short, improvised role play, which they set up themselves based on their own ideas about challenges in their camps – a task which they undertook with great enthusiasm. Afterwards, the participants were asked to draw down the most important lessons from the role-play.

To improve the Gatekeepers’ understanding of transparency, they developed five commitments for their own settlements based on their reflections on the training. For the pilot phase these were: no harming of IDPs, no child marriage, no female genital mutilation (FGM), no gender-based violence, and a commitment to engaging with the IDPs in the management of the settlement.

Picture 3: The Gatekeepers developing their five commitments.
The five commitments were then transferred to big signboards erected at the settlements, both as text and drawings – the latter catering to Somalia’s very large share of non-literate people. Visualising the commitments in this way was intended to provide a basis for the inhabitants of the settlements to understand the commitments made by the Gatekeeper (thereby empowering them to hold their Gatekeeper to account) as well as to advertise the commitments to other IDPs and motivate them to join the “better performing and more accountable” settlement, and as such creating a market for accountability by the IDPs ‘voting with their feet’.

The third part of the intervention – the formalised approval process of the Gatekeepers – was aimed at creating a fully transparent and scalable grading of the camps, which could also be advertised like the commitments of the camps. This intervention follows the same market logic as the intervention about the commitments but, unlike the signboards, the creation of an official grading system is a broader operation that needs buy-in from both the government and NGOs, who would need to commit themselves to (officially) engage with the Gatekeepers concerned, providing a de facto recognition of them. As will be seen below, this part of the intervention was the most difficult.

**Key findings from the intervention and action research**

One of the basic assumptions of the project has been that the Gatekeepers are interested in participating in training and in making change. The pilot found that this assumption did indeed hold true. In fact, the Gatekeepers proved to be surprisingly interested in the training:

”No one has ever shown interest in us.” Gatekeeper

They explained that they had never had a chance to participate in such training before. What was especially interesting was the Gatekeepers’ reaction to some of the lessons of the training, where the issues of human rights, gender equality as well as OCHA’s humanitarian principles, were indeed news to the Gatekeepers, who could easily see
their relevance. The awareness of such principles’ existence apparently made it easier for the Gatekeepers to argue against child labour, gender based violence etc. in their settlements. Interestingly, the Gatekeepers themselves added an extra issue to the programme, which was not initially included, namely Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This proved to be an issue of high concern to the Gatekeepers, the fight against which was then added as one of their formal commitments to their camps. Moreover, on their own initiative, the Gatekeepers arranged various awareness raising events in their settlements, where an Imam informed about how the more brutal form of the practice is against the teachings of Islam. According to interviews in one of the settlements, six people out of seven disapproved of FGM, with younger respondents speaking out most against the practice. The positive effect of these self-arranged awareness raising events was testified during a focus group interview with IDPs from each of the three pilot settlements, where they explained how the negative perception of FGM is now more widespread.

The post pilot research also found that the training on accountability has affected the behaviour of the Gatekeepers, who have since made efforts in liaising between themselves, the IDPs, camp committees, and district commissioners (DCs).

"My Gatekeeper listens to our complaints and works with the community of elders and committee members." Female, 43

"My Gatekeeper has changed a lot recently. She organises meetings and discussions on many issues." Male, 65

As such, the formal training provided through the project seems both relevant and successful.

However, the programme’s theory of change was further based on the assumption that a wider change outside of the targeted settlements would happen as other IDPs move towards the better performing and more accountable settlements. The finding here is that the IDPs’ freedom of movement is not as significant as was initially hoped, and that this is due to two factors: firstly, that the IDPs in the “rough” settlements are not free to leave; one informant in the NGO community told that IDPs can only swap between settlements if an agreement is made between the two Gatekeepers, and that it would usually involve a cost for the IDPs to “buy themselves free” as well. Secondly, it turned out that moving between settlements involves surprisingly high transaction costs for the IDPs, and hence they only very rarely consider moving. The IDPs in the targeted settlements – where the IDPs consider themselves free to leave – told that they had heard about people moving camps, but that this was usually due to severe conflicts with other inhabitants. As such, the market dynamic intended at driving the wider change seemed to be stuck.

Another driver of change soon emerged, since it appeared that the Gatekeepers’ urge for formal recognition was much higher than anticipated. The

"You know, we have no government, so we are the government." Gatekeeper
Gatekeepers spoke at length about how all their good efforts for the IDPs were not recognised by anyone. It emerged very clearly that the Gatekeepers consider themselves legitimate service providers and that their efforts are not being acknowledged. Being aimed specifically at the Gatekeepers, the training was therefore considered an acknowledgement of their function.

That a District Commissioner showed up one day at the training and addressed the Gatekeepers added to the perception of recognition, and this was mentioned by one Gatekeeper as the single biggest achievement of the training.

"I have never seen the DC of my district before. Now he knows who we are." Gatekeeper

"This has been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.” Gatekeeper

The discovery of recognition as a powerful driver of change made us shift the project’s theory of change in that direction by making the erection of the signboard a public event at which the DC was present as well as local media. Thereby, the Gatekeepers, at least in the settlements targeted by the project, turned from “black cats” to recognised service providers.

Another central finding about the Gatekeepers was that they see their main raison d’être as deal making. The Gatekeepers know that their position is crucially dependent on their ability to set up deals with NGOs to service their camps and that this is the most critical aspect against which the IDPs will evaluate them. When asked about what they would do differently if they were Gatekeepers themselves, one IDP responded that all IDPs probably thought they could perform better by setting up more deals with NGOs (and added that few of them probably could), just as the Gatekeepers mentioned that the training could be improved by introducing them to NGOs (just as they had been introduced to the DC mentioned above). This would provide a return for the Gatekeepers running their settlements in a transparent and accountable way, but it would of course require the NGOs’ willingness to openly engage with the Gatekeepers, thereby acknowledging them as legitimate service providers.

The biggest challenge for the project, however, has been developing the formal approval process of the settlements. It quickly emerged that no formal approval process of the camps could be initiated without buy-in from the local authorities, and that this buy-in was anything but easy to obtain. Within the FGS, it appears that there are strong supporters of the idea, but also strong forces working against it.

A primary concern of the FGS is the ‘illegal’ settlements on valuable FGS land in Mogadishu and therefore that certification may make these settlements more permanent, as well as give legitimacy to what is considered to be a predatory system. The concern about IDP occupation of FGS land is thus either a long-term concern about accessing land as the administration will grow over the next 10-20 years, and/or
a more immediate concern related to the economic opportunities of the FGS land in Mogadishu.

Furthermore, there are concerns that legitimisation would counter the Government’s efforts towards returning IDPs to their place of origin and that there is ‘no space’ for them in Mogadishu. This illustrates the limited influence of IDPs in the political sphere in Mogadishu; while some IDPs occupy public land, they are all Somali citizens that the FGS should serve (as any other Somali citizens), and IDPs living on private land that is ‘rented’ by Gatekeepers are therefore considered legal residents of Mogadishu.

The difficulties experienced in pursuing certification mean that the project has had to change its course. In practice, it is assessed that certification is too early at this stage, and that other means of enhancing accountabilities should be pursued instead. This has led to an increased focus on settlement monitoring committees in the pilot group of Gatekeepers.

The settlements already have so-called settlement committees, and therefore the concept of a committee is not alien to the IDPs or to the Gatekeepers. Unlike the settlement committees, however, the monitoring committee is not grounded in one single settlement, but is instead overseeing developments in several settlements. The idea here is to increase the engagement of local government so that it has a greater stake in the system. In this way, the monitoring committee would be chaired by a DC and include representation from IDPs and clan leadership, as well as Gatekeepers. As such, the monitoring committee can be seen as a gradual step towards improved accountability, which allows for testing accountability mechanisms between the different stakeholders in the power structure. As part of the monitoring committee’s function, it will visit the targeted settlements bi-annually to assess the progress made on a range of different parameters, the result of which will be gathered in a monitoring sheet to be posted outside of the settlement. By making the DC chair of the committee, his privileged position is acknowledged vis-à-vis the Gatekeepers and at the same time put him in lead of change. As such, the monitoring committees can be an important step towards establishing trust and mutual recognition between the local authorities and the Gatekeepers, and thus in the longer run pave the way for a formal certification of the Gatekeepers.

**Gatekeepers as an under-utilized resource of governance?**

In spite of their poor reputation and lack of formal recognition, Gatekeepers remain one of the most resilient informal governance structures at local level in Mogadishu. They have survived and thrived through government changes, forced IDP movements within Mogadishu and hostile attitudes from national and international agencies. And since there is little evidence that the Gatekeeper phenomenon will go away within the short- or medium-term, it can be argued that it is a reality which the formal government (and the
international community) will have to come to terms with and react to proactively.

Based on our findings so far, it is evident that there are Gatekeepers that do provide vital services to the IDPs, and are willing to enhance their accountability to the formal government structures in return for recognition of their work. The Gatekeepers we have worked with have been the individuals who have a documented interest in improving the conditions in the IDP settlements and a willingness to change. For them, the formalisation process sustains their role and acceptance among the IDPs and provides them with a sustainable income base. It is more questionable whether this approach is also viable with the less constructive Gatekeepers; those that have little interest in the well-being of the IDPs and exploit their situation as documented previously. In principle, however, they could be targeted from two sides: either upfront through a direct engagement, or indirectly by changing the market around them through increased enrollment of “good” Gatekeepers in the project. Which of these approaches is the most effective one for creating the biggest impact is at present an open question.

In a follow-up to the current efforts, the Tana/iDC project team will work to test the assumption that improved recognition of the constructive Gatekeepers and a continued approach aimed at enhancing Gatekeepers’ accountability to the local government structures will motivate the less positively motivated Gatekeepers to change. Such change would not only improve the conditions in the IDP settlements by enhancing service delivery and security, but would also, inter alia, contribute to strengthening the formal local government structures in Mogadishu, and assist with enhancing their legitimacy as well.

However, for this change to happen, we will need to work more extensively with changing the attitude of the FGS and the international community towards the Gatekeepers to allow for strategic interaction and dialogue as opposed to the current rejection of their role in Mogadishu society.

As the challenges with certification process show, there are still many actors who refrain from addressing this difficult issue, which ultimately leaves the IDPs concerned with unaccountable Gatekeepers and less protection.

Improving the protection of IDPs through increased engagement with Gatekeepers is not simply a low-hanging fruit that can easily be picked. However, through a long-term engagement in which one is willing to formally endorse the phenomenon of Gatekeepers, we do believe it is possible to create real change for the IDPs – a change that the FGS will not be capable of producing any time soon – and that a continued ignorance and rejection of the Gatekeepers, on the other hand, will leave the IDPs considerably worse off.
Lessons learned and key recommendations and considerations

Making Gatekeepers Accountable was launched as a way of improving the protection of IDPs through already existing governance structures by enhancing their accountability. And, in a bigger perspective, to test the viability of improving governance through endorsing a hybrid political order by merging formal and informal power structures. With the pilot phase concluded and the roll-out almost completed, we can now conclude that it is indeed possible to find proactive means by which such a predatory system can eventually be used positively to enhance governance and accountability at grass-root level, but that there are some important challenges and considerations:

- The mobility of the IDPs – even in the settlements headed by the constructive Gatekeepers – is generally very low. Real change will therefore only take place through the Gatekeepers rather than around them.
- The Gatekeepers consider themselves dealmakers, realising that their position is crucially dependent on their ability to successfully set up deals with NGOs for the benefit of the IDPs. Formalising such deals is therefore a way of enhancing the accountability and transparency of the system – but a prerequisite here will be the aid community’s willingness to recognise the Gatekeepers, potentially placing themselves in a more exposed position in view of the poor reputation of the Gatekeeper system as a whole and the mixed values of the Gatekeepers concerned.
- Durable improvements of the Gatekeeper phenomenon require full buy-in from the official state structures, and these should therefore be included very early in any intervention. The challenge is to convince them that their position will not be challenged by the Gatekeepers.
- Achieving the results experienced by the project cannot be a hurried process. It is important to gain Gatekeepers’ trust over time through numerous face-to-face meetings and discussions.
- The project design should be flexible and open to the Gatekeepers’ ideas. By letting the Gatekeepers develop their own commitments, we believe that they are more inclined to ensure that they will act on these as a contract between them and the IDPs, with the project, and with their respective local authorities.
- The long term prospects for really improving the arrangements involving informal IDP settlements for the benefit of the IDPs rests with the international community’s, the NGOs’, and the FGS’ willingness to reconsider their perceptions of the Gatekeepers, since the persistent and blanket negative perception by these actors of them remains the single biggest challenge for change.

In the broader perspective, one could ask whether our experience with improving Gatekeeper accountability has contributed to the discussion on hybrid political orders, and if our findings will be of value in other contexts. Somalia is after all a very unique case where the Gatekeepers, as we have argued, are an expression of the specific political economy in Mogadishu that cannot be found elsewhere. However, the very concept of informal actors regulating access to certain goods and/or services is common in fragile states. Moreover, by managing to make change with such an entrenched system as that of Gatekeepers in Mogadishu, we believe that the prospects of engaging with informal power structures as a way of improving governance – also
in different contexts than that of Somalia – are positive. Our key recommendations in this regard are:

- Any intervention must be based on a thorough analysis and comprehensive understanding of the specific political economy and the cultural context – there is especially a need to take account of potential spoilers and manage them.
- Full buy-in from the formal power structures is a prerequisite for durable change, though it might not be easy to obtain – the real challenge here is to convince both the formal and the informal power structures that they can coexist and complement each other. Trust and bridge-building between actors in the political economy are critical and time-consuming steps.
- Project design must be flexible and based on realistic expectations – inflated expectations and an idealistic rather than pragmatic project design will not create durable change.
- All actors involved in the process – government, NGOs etc. – must be risk-willing and ready to challenge their own perceptions. Often, we find, these perceptions are the biggest obstacles to positive change.
- Results need to be documented alongside the assumptions and realities on which they are based.

Picture 5: The Safaari settlement during a visit in November 2015.