



AGRIBUSINESS
SOLUTIONS HUB

00 252 63 3221141

m.hussein@agribusinesssolutionshub.com

www.agribusinesssolutionshub.com



AN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT 'HIGH-QUALITY RESEARCH TRAINING IN SOMALIA (2015-2017)'

📍 MANSOOR AREA,
JIGJIGA YAR,
HARGEISA.

This evaluation report has been prepared on behalf of the Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) by Dr. Mohamud Hashi Hussein, Agribusiness Solutions Hub (ASH).

Acknowledgement

I wish to thank Mr Abdullahi Odowa of OCVP, for facilitating access to project documentation and data collection. I would also like to thank all interviewees for their time and collaboration during the fieldwork. Also thanks to Miss Safia Ahmed of OCVP, for her support during the data collection.

Disclaimer

Whilst the findings of this evaluation report are based on inferences drawn from the analysis of the information and data gathered during fieldwork, I recognise that the interpretation of results from the analysis may, to some degree, carry the evaluator's personal judgements. In this regard, the views expressed in this report are my own and do not necessarily represent those of OCVP or their project partners.

Executive Summary

The overall goal of the project, ‘High Quality Research Training in Somalia’ (HQRTS), was to support the capacity of mid-career researchers to conduct high-quality social research across the Somali regions. The project objective was to train a pool of mid-career researchers through structured training activities designed to build theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for the design, implementation and publication of research outputs. The project was funded by the Somalia Stability Fund (SSF) in partnership with the East Africa Research Hub of UK Department for International Development (DFID) and implemented by the Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP), in partnership with Transparency Solutions (TS) and the University of Bristol (UoB), over a two year period, 2015-2017.

The analysis of the data and information collected from project documents and interviews with trainers and trainees led to the conclusion that the project had a significant positive impact on the research skills and competencies of the primary beneficiaries – the trainees. Areas of reported greatest skills and competencies improvement include critical analysis of research problems, identification and review of relevant literature, methodological design, data collection and the writing and publication of research outputs.

With regard to the relevance of the programme, the training was pertinent since there is low research and publication capacity even within higher education institutions in Somalia. Therefore, the programme also had a positive impact on the employers who, according to evidence from analysis of the interviews with the trainees, have significantly benefited from improved research skills and competencies of their employees.

The programme had a significant positive impact on OCVP itself, which has built through the implementation of the administrative capacity necessary to manage substantive programmes and resources. The project also offered OCVP the opportunity to strengthen its strategic partnership with TS and build a new partnership with the UoB, thus raising its profile abroad, as well as further partnerships with a series local Somali partners.

Whilst we have no hard data or direct evidence to make authoritative inferences about the efficiency of OCVP’s delivery of the programme, circumstantial evidence gathered suggests that the effective delivery of the project resulted in good value for money (VfM). For example, the interviews with the trained research highlighted that the training had a significant positive impact on research skills and competencies of the participants as direct beneficiaries of the programme, and henceforth on research capacity of their employers. With regard to efficiency,

other possible alternative implementation options would have certainly involved either the selection of local institutions with less experienced than OCVP, which would have negatively impacted the quality of the training programme or costlier implementation by a non-Somali partner due to the higher logistics costs in running the training abroad

Given the positive impact of the project, the evaluation advises that the project should be followed up with a second training programme building on the quantitative research skills developed and with improved coverage across the Somali regions. Such research is likely to attract candidates working in areas including economics, statistics, finance and public administration, which would have a greater impact on public policymaking.

1. Introduction

The aim of the project, ‘High Quality Research Training in Somalia’ (HQRTS), was to contribute to the international effort aimed at building capacity to conduct high-quality research across all regions of Somalia. The underlying reasoning was that such research capacity can enable Somali researchers working in state and non-state institutions to conduct more critical analyses of social problems and thus attain a deeper understanding of local realities to better support public policymaking. Through this, it can facilitate greater economic and social transformation through evidence-based policymaking.

The objective of the project was to train a pool of mid-career researchers through a number of structured activities designed to impart new knowledge and enhance existing skills relating to the design and implementation of projects and the publication of research outputs. These research skills are acutely needed in Somalia because of the long period of conflict and resulting lack of effective state/public institutions capable of adequately developing curricula and setting educational standards, including in the higher educational sector. At present, there is a large number of mostly privately-run universities inadequately resourced and monitored, which continue to produce poorly trained graduates who lack both basic theoretical grounding and empirical research skills necessary to conduct high-quality research across the disciplines.

The project has been implemented by the Observatory of Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP) in partnership with Transparency Solutions (TS) and the University of Bristol (UoB). The project was funded by the Somalia Stability Fund (SSF) in partnership with the East Africa Research Hub of UK Department for International Development (DFID). The funding was US\$698,000 and ran over two years from August 2015 to August 2017 to train two cohorts of Somali social researchers, that is, researchers working from a policy-based rather than an academic perspective on issues of significance for Somali society.

This report presents the key findings of an independent evaluation of the impact of the project. As part of this, we have collected and analysed relevant data and information, including the original project proposal, project reports, and interviews with trainees and with members of the three organisations which implemented the project.

2. Project Activities

Whilst the project idea came from OCVP, the implementing consortium was underpinned by an existing strategic partnership between OCVP and TS. As TS has been already working with the UoB, it was natural to team up with them to secure the academic expertise required by the project by inviting the UoB to participate. The project fitted perfectly with an existing joint UoB-TS initiative, Somali First, which aims to promote Somali-led development.

The resulting joint proposal and complementary skills facilitated a smooth implementation of the project, which was well planned and executed. There was clear division of labour from the start, with the overall project management responsibilities allocated to OCVP whilst the project activities were distributed across the three partner organisations according to their respective expertise. OCVP coordinated the training and internships phase, the UoB coordinated the lectures, whilst TS coordinated the mentorship phase with the UoB to ensure that the mentees received the necessary academic support in a timely fashion. The essential structure of the HQRTS programme was two twelve-month part-time cohorts in the following phases: (1) Training phase, September to January; in which trainees were provided with six one-week research training modules delivered by UoB staff (including one TS member of staff with a UoB honorary position) and/or PhD candidates. (2) Internship phase, February to April. All trainings were conducted at the OCVP office, Hargeisa, Somaliland. (3) Mentorship phase, May to August. Trainees worked on individual research project mentored by UoB staff or PhD candidates, with advice available from the UoB Research Training Coordinator.

For the purpose of this evaluation, we therefore identified four project implementation activities: recruitment and selection of trainee candidates, a training phase, an internship phase and a mentoring phase. The three phases were specifically designed as a holistic training programme providing trainees not only with a good theoretical grounding in social research, but also with the practical skills necessary to engage in a research project including its design, implementation and publication of findings. In the next four sub-sections, we evaluate each of these project activities in turn, before developing a suitable conceptual framework and methodology for data collection and analysis.

2.1 Recruitment of Trainees

The project targeted mid-level professionals who had completed a Bachelor's or postgraduate's degree, with at least some knowledge in the field of social research and the desire to develop their skills to support policymaking. Special emphasis was placed on researchers working in

government ministries, academic institutions, civil society organisations, human rights organisations and women's advocacy groups. Female researchers were particularly encouraged to apply as the programme aimed at promoting equal gender representation. The UoB was responsible for recruiting trainers and also organised the design and delivery of the training, as well as evaluating and approving the ethics forms and research proposals, and evaluating and approving the research papers and PowerPoint presentations as discussed below.

The selection strategy envisaged that the target institutions would nominate suitable candidates for programme enrolment. However, this strategy proved to be inadequate as it led to the selection of a number of less qualified and committed candidates among trainees enrolled in the first cohort in 2015-2016. As result the recruitment strategy was overhauled for the second cohort in 2016-2017 by publicly advertising the recruitment as an open call. The resulting applications were then assessed and, if shortlisted, invited to take a written examination and attend interviews before admission was offered to the successful applicants.

A total of 56 trainees were selected for enrolment for the two-year period, with 30 trainees enrolled for the first cohort and 26 for the second.¹

2.2 Training Phase

The training phase consisted of lectures on a variety of theoretical concepts, techniques and methods of social research. The syllabus for the training programme included six modules which were developed *ad hoc* by OCVP in close cooperation with a specialist academic staff member from the UoB. These modules included:

- Research Writing and Citation
- Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Methods
- Research Design and Ethics
- Evidence for Policy and Practice: A Critical Analysis
- Gender Politics and Social Research
- Policy and Programme Evaluation Research

Each module was delivered by a lecturer or professor from the UoB as an intensive week-long workshop including lectures, group work and discussions, as well as presentations of group

¹ There were also four trainees (including three females) who were not selected for the programme through the formal recruitment process but were recruited directly at a later stage to boost the number of female participants. Although all four trainees completed the training successfully, we excluded them from the evaluation as they did not go through all the project phases under evaluation.

work, so that the trainees could consolidate the knowledge gained. The workshops for different modules were separated by short breaks. The training phase for each cohort was completed over a four-month period.

2.3 Internship Phase

This phase was intended to give trainees the opportunity to apply their classroom-based learning through practical research involving some fieldwork, although there were differences in the way this was done across the two years. The trainees who completed the first cohort training phase were divided into four groups, with each group spending three months at one of the OCVF offices in Hargeisa, Garowe and Mogadishu, or at the Transparency Solutions office in Hargeisa. The goal was to give trainees the opportunity to interact with experienced researchers to learn about the day-to-day research operations of each hosting organisation, including the design of research activities, collection of field data, performing data analysis, report writing and the undertaking of data dissemination activities. However, the internship strategy for the second cohort was reviewed due to unexpected challenges which arose during the first cohort internships. For more details on these challenges and how they were overcome, see Section 7.

2.4 Mentorship Phase

At the end of the internship phase each participant was asked to return to his/her area of residence and develop a research topic to investigate, about which they would publish a paper on the OCVF website. A member of the teaching staff from the UoB was assigned to mentor each trainee to provide academic support and feedback whilst trainees conducted their research and wrote the papers. To ensure continuity, supervision was provided by the same mentor who provided tutorial instructions during the training phase. Following the successful completion of their research papers, participants were asked to present their findings in a dissemination workshop that marked the end of the project. Most of the UoB mentoring support took place via emails and Skype calls. In relation to this, the project team devised an excellent plan to monitor the progress of the mentoring phase, making good use of information and communication technologies. Whilst TS was coordinating the mentoring phase from Hargeisa to ensure that each trainee was assigned to the right mentor in the UoB in the UK, the latter and OCVF were in direct and regular communication to discuss trainees' progress and promptly intervene as necessary.

Each candidate who attended all six course modules and successfully completed the internship and mentoring phases was awarded a certificate of participation from the UoB.

3. Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the Evaluation

The programme evaluation required the evaluator to use a qualitative approach and review programme documents, including quarterly reports, programme monitoring and evaluation framework, tracer study report for the first cohort and trainees research publications posted on the OCVP website. The evaluation team was also required to conduct interviews with the project team representing the three implementing partners, trainers and trainees.

The scope of the evaluation was to assess the impact of the project against its specified project objectives; in particular, the following areas:

Relevance: Design and focus of the programme

- To what extent did the programme achieve its main goal and objectives?

Specifically,

- How much progress has been made towards achieving the overall outputs and outcomes of the programme?
- To what extent were the results (impacts, outcomes, and outputs) achieved?
- Was the programme relevant to the identified needs?

Effectiveness: Management processes and their appropriateness in supporting delivery

- Was the programme effective in delivering desired/planned results?

Specifically,

- How effective has the programme been in responding to the needs of the beneficiaries, and what results were achieved?
- How effective were the strategies and tools used in the implementation of the programme?

Efficiency: Programme Implementation

- Was the process of achieving results efficient?

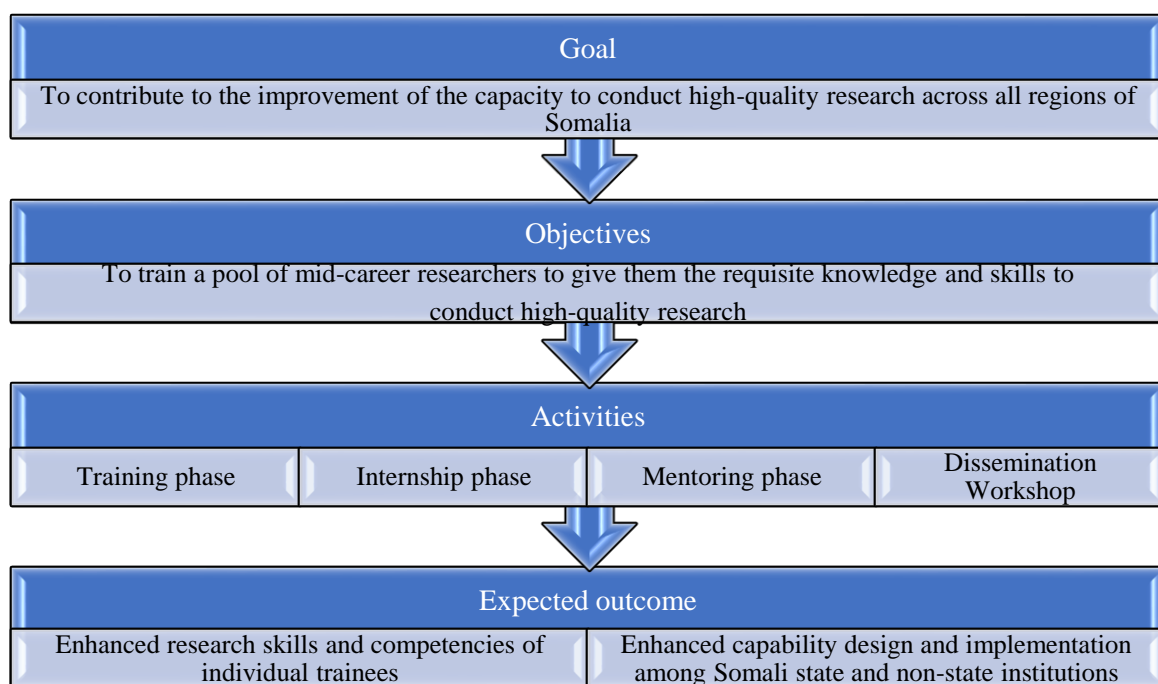
Specifically,

- Did the actual or expected results justify the cost incurred? Were the resources effectively utilized?
- Are there more efficient ways and means of delivering more and better results?
- Could a different approach have produced better results?

4. Evaluation Approach

We reviewed the project documentation to develop an appropriate conceptual framework and methodology for the interviews. The conceptual framework allowed us to establish a causal link between observed project outcomes and activities and its stated objectives (see Figure 1). The diagram in Figure 1 highlights that, in line with the above ToRs, the focus of the evaluation should be on establishing the impact on the primary beneficiary, assessing the extent to which, and how, the project has affected research skills and competencies of target trainees group. Nevertheless, we have also evaluated indirectly the impact of the project on the secondary beneficiaries, Somali state and non-state institutions, through trainee and project team interviews, assessing the extent to which, and how, the improved research skills and competencies of trainees have impacted on their recent and ongoing research activities at work.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



5. Methodology

To elicit the necessary information, we formulated an evaluation strategy guided by the literature on qualitative research methods based on interviews. In this section, we describe the approach taken, with the intention of providing a clear rationale for our methodological approach to data collection, analysis of data and interpretation of results.

To address the questions posed by the TORs, we devised a research strategy following Bryman's view of strategy as 'a general orientation to the conduct of social research'.² An increasingly popular strategy among social scientists is mixed-methods research; adopting a research strategy employing more than one type of research method. According to Axinn and Pearce, mixed method strategies afford researchers special opportunities to use multiple sources (as in the case in hand) and multiple approaches to gain new insights into the social world.³ There are several typologies for classifying and identifying types of mixed methods approaches that are suitable for our evaluation. These approaches can vary widely in the way they are implemented, both in terms of research method design and data collection. Creswell and Plano Clark identify several classification systems drawn from the fields of evaluation, nursing, public health, education policy and research, and social and behavioural research.⁴ Creswell identifies three main types of mixed methods:⁵

- The convergent parallel mixed methods (CPMM) approach in which a researcher collects both quantitative and qualitative data, analyses them separately, and then compares the results to see if the findings confirm or contradict each other (see Figure 1). The key assumption of this approach is that both qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information—often detailed views of participants, qualitatively, and scores on instruments, quantitatively—and together they yield results that should be the same.
- The explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, which involves a two-phase project in which the researcher collects quantitative data in the first phase, analyses the results, and then uses the results to plan (or build on) in the second, qualitative phase. The quantitative results typically inform the types of participants to be purposefully selected for the qualitative phase and the types of questions that they will be asked. The overall intent of this design is to have the qualitative data help to explain the initial quantitative results in more detail. A typical procedure might involve collecting survey data in the first phase, analysing the data, and then following up with qualitative interviews that can help explain and expand on the survey responses.

² Bryman, A (2001) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford. Oxford University Press. (Page 20).

³ Axinn, W. G and Pearce, L.D. (2006) *Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Page 2).

⁴ Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

⁵ Creswell J. W (2014) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- An exploratory sequential mixed methods approach in which the researcher first begins by exploring with qualitative data and analysis and then uses the findings in a second quantitative phase. As with the explanatory sequential approach, the second database expands on the initial database created in the first phase. The intention of the strategy is to develop better measurements with specific samples of populations and to see if data from a few individuals (in the qualitative phase) can be generalized to a large sample of a population (in the quantitative phase).

For this evaluation, we adopted a mixed method approach to collect and analyse the data. This approach allows us to organise our research questions around a set of predetermined open-ended qualitative questions to gain initial insights into the different respondents' perspectives on the impact of the project. We could then follow up with further questions as they emerged from the dialogue with respondents to both clarify their initial answers and/or fill any remaining gaps in our understanding of the issues. In this context, a further set of closed-ended confirmatory questions, in the form of a statement asking respondents to confirm their agreement or disagreement by a choice on a 5-point Likert scale, allowed us to ascertain the respondents' perceived levels of the impact and effectiveness of the project. In line with the CPMM approach, we have in effect assumed that qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information – open-ended in the case of qualitative data and closed-ended in the case of quantitative data. On that basis, we first asked respondents the open-ended questions to explore their understanding in depth, and then followed with the closed-ended questions related to the confirmation of related statements within the same interview session. A questionnaire template designed to implement our data collection methodology is provided in Appendix A.

6. Data Collection

Data collection started 21.11. 2017 and was completed on the 25.11.2017 for trainees. As mentioned above, 56 trainees were enrolled into the programme through the formal selection process. Forty-eight of the total enrolled have successfully completed the programme. The remaining eight have dropped out, mostly due to the less robust selection method for the recruitment of the first cohort. Twenty-eight (59%), 14 (29%) and 6 (12%) of the trainees who completed the programme were from Somaliland, Puntland and South-Central regions respectively, which was notably consistent with the original enrolment composition as reported in Table 1. This distribution suggests that Puntland and South-Central were underrepresented

in the programme, probably due to relatively greater financial and logistical barriers to participants from these areas compared to those from Somaliland. There would have been, for example, significant cost of travel and accommodation expenses at Hargeisa, Somaliland, where the training took place and trainees had to stay for at least five days every other week during the four-month training phase.

Out of the total of 56 recruited, 10 trainees (approximately 20%) were female. Of the females enrolled through the formal recruitment process, 9 successfully completed the programme and one has dropped out of the training. Nevertheless, the female participation at enrolment was 18%, 19% and 14% in Somaliland, Puntland and South-Central, respectively⁶. This is significantly lower than the recently reported female workforce participation in the three regions concerned: A study published in March 2017 found that Puntland has the highest women's participation in paid employment in the non-agricultural sectors at 40%, followed by Somaliland at 36%, and 33% in South Central.⁷

The relatively lower female participation may have been due to a combination of factors, including geographical distance and social factors, such as perceived negative cultural connotations and/or personal safety risks of a young female being away from home for long periods unaccompanied. Another contributory factor may have been family commitments for those who had young children or were caring for relatives at the time, considering the intensive nature of the training. Given the differences in regional and gender participation, a random stratified sampling approach was adopted to obtain a statistically representative sample for interviews.⁸ The stratification was therefore done at two levels: at a region level to account for the varying degrees of overall programme participation across the three regions, and at a gender level to account for the lower female participation across and within the regions.

Of out the total of 48 the trainees who completed the programme 19 were selected for interviews. OCVP has provided a full list of all participants and therefore the sampling frame used. Before drawing the sample randomly, we eliminated from the list both the trainees who

⁶ The direct enrolment of the additional three female trainees was due to this relatively lower participation of females recruited through the formal selection process.

⁷ A Policy Brief: Gender in Higher Education in Puntland: From Accessibility to Creating Supportive Environment for Women in Higher Education and Research, March, 2017, http://www.inasp.info/uploads/filer_public/15/66/1566af35-d359-43a3-89f9-84687cb2029e/policy_brief_gender_in_higher_education_sidra.pdf.

⁸ For detailed discussion on sample stratification, please refer to Survey Methods and Practices, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-587-x/12-587-x2003001-eng.pdf>

did not complete the training and those who completed the training but were not recruited through the formal selection process. We eliminated the latter group to avoid potential biases from the lack of exposure to the selection process but also their possibly different research interest and background, considering that they either did not respond to the recruitment calls or meet fully the selection criteria for the formal process initially. The selected sample is approximately 40% of the total. The distribution of the final selected sample is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of selected sample

Region	No. of enrolled participants	Regional participation (%)	No. of female participants	No. of successful participants	Selected sample (overall)	No. of female out of the total sample
Somaliland	33	59	6	28	11	4
Puntland	16	29	3	14	5	2
South-Central	7	13	1	6	3	1
Total	56	100⁹	10	48	19	7

The two-level stratification strategy resulted in drawing a random sample consisting of 12 males (62%) and 7 females (38%). In line with the rate of women’s participation in paid employment indicated above, we have in effect oversampled the female trainees to avoid potential biases from their lower programme participation, whilst maintaining the original overall proportional representation for all trainees across the regions.

All trainees from Somaliland were interviewed face-to-face in Hargeisa, whilst those from Puntland and South-Central were interviewed by phone, in consideration of the high cost of travel and work commitments. In addition, three key project members from OCVP, TS and the UoB were interviewed. These members were lead persons who, among other things, coordinated the key main project activities including the training, internship and mentorship phases. One of the interviewees also lectured on the training. A full list all interviewees is provided in Appendix B.

⁹ This doesn’t add up to 100% due to rounding off.

7. Key Findings

Findings from the trainees interviews are presented first followed by those for the project team members.

7.1 Trainees

How trainees heard about the training programme

When asked how they heard about the training programme, most trainees indicated that they saw the advertisement on a popular website, Somalijobs.net.

Employment status of the trainees

In terms of employment categories, 9 out of the 19 trainees interviewed (roughly 47%) were employed in the civil service sector when enrolled in the training programme; the remainder were from higher education and research (3), local and international NGOs (3), civic society organisations (2) and the private sector, including consultancy (3).

Motivation for applying for admission

Two important reasons had underpinned their decisions to apply for a place: they felt that the list of the courses was relevant and/or were attracted by the calibre of the three partners implementing the programme.

The prospect of receiving a certificate from the UoB, in particular, influenced their decisions. Although some respondents mentioned that the financial incentive (\$200/trainee) was another factor that affected their decision, they did not appear to have been motivated by this for personal gain but rather they were interested because it was an unusual feature of the programme. They mentioned that past similar training programmes were usually sponsored by an employer or organised by a private institution which charged fees, hence their curiosity was stimulated by the financial incentive. One interviewee stated “you don’t see many training courses giving away money!... they usually ask you pay fee upfront”

The overwhelming majority of trainees stated that they had made commitments and personal sacrifices to make most of the opportunity offered to improve their research skills and competencies. Nevertheless, approximately 14% of enrolled trainees did not finish the programme due to a lack of appropriate skills and commitment among some of the trainees, mostly because of the weaker selection method for the first cohort. However, this is relatively low, considering that the trainees had substantive work and family commitments but also the

one-year duration of the programme . In highlighting the sacrifice made, a female trainee who travelled a long distance to Hargeisa and stayed for at least five days each week during the training stated that “as a mother, wife and senior manager in a demanding job, it was really a very tough time for me but I persevered to not waste the opportunity to complete the programme and get my certificate”.

Inadequate financial support

Indeed, some of the participants from South-Central Somalia pointed out that the money was little as it only covered one Mogadishu-Hargeisa air ticket (approximately \$170) and one or two nights’ accommodation. They highlighted that they also had to cover substantial costs for the travel and accommodation expenses for the additional five sessions of the training phase. On that basis, some respondents from South-Central perceived that they were disadvantaged compared to the participants from Somaliland who received the same amount of money despite incurring no such costs. In highlighting this point, one interviewee stated “I was paying my plane ticket, hotel and food ... people from Hargeisa were just waking up in the morning and driving from home”.

Perceptions on the selection process

All respondents perceived that the selection process for the programme was fair and transparent, especially those from the second cohort as, for these, it involved an open competition. Several trainees, especially those from Puntland and South-Central, indicated that they did not expect to be offered a place at the time because their past experience led them to believe that such opportunities were usually unfairly allocated to relatives and friends of the individuals managing them. In highlighting his initial doubts about the fairness of the selection process one trainee stated, “I considered to put in my application for the second cohort only after I realised that a [non-Somalilander] colleague was accepted for the first cohort”. In appreciating the value of transparent, merit-based selection processes another trainee stated that “We [Somalis] could have resolved most of our social and political problems if we were able to select the right people for every opportunity, be it a training or leadership position”.

Perceived benefits of the training

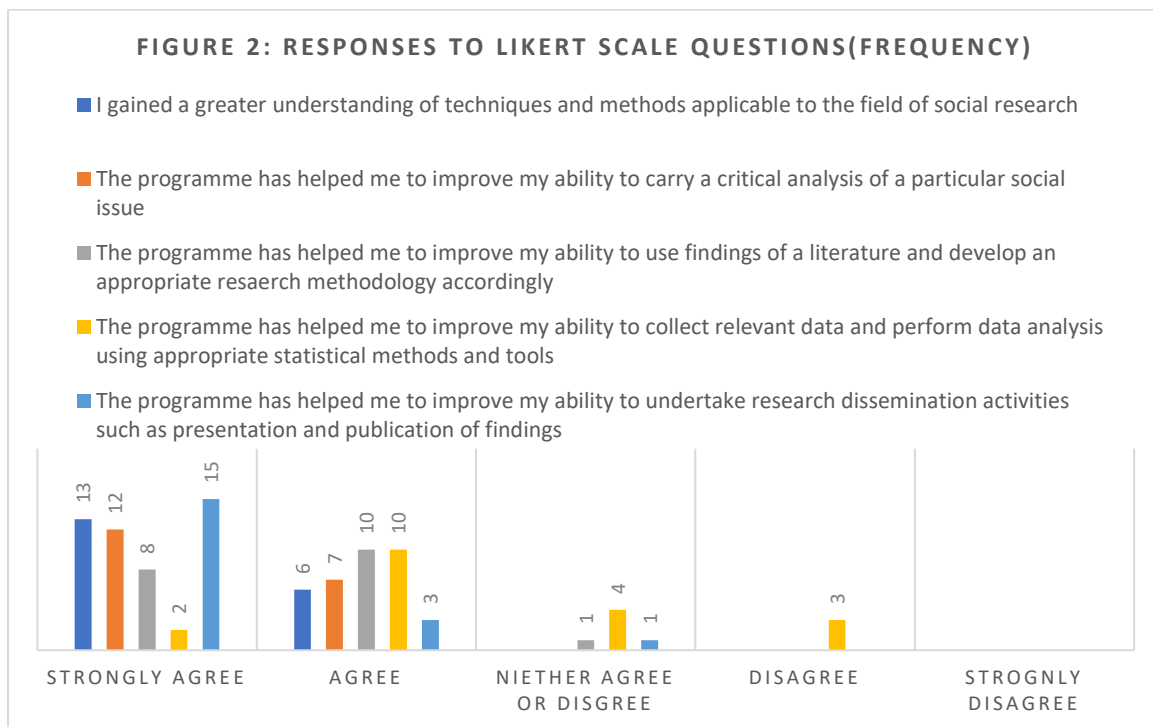
When asked to what extent in general they perceived that the training had helped them to improve their research skills and competencies, the majority of the respondents indicated that they had benefited from the programme significantly. Typical examples given were that the

theoretical knowledge and practical skills gained had either helped them to perform better at work and/or helped them to pursue further education with greater success. One respondent stated: “I am now more confident to lead a monitoring & evaluation project as I can do research from start to finish”. Another stated: “I managed to get good marks in MSc [degree] because of my better writing skills”.

With regard to specific skills, almost all respondents indicated that the programme helped them to improve their ability to think critically when examining a particular social problem at work. Some respondents mentioned that they became more focussed in their analysis and as result can unpack complex social issues, examining these from multiple angles, whilst others indicated they can now research a topic and draw upon existing evidence before making up their minds about the issues and in doing so are relying less on support of more senior colleagues at work. One of the trainees, who is currently leading a project designed to support ongoing revenue and tax policy reforms in a government ministry, stated, “... I was able to look at this more critically both at central (ministerial) and local authorities (district and municipality) levels ... assessing the potential implications of different options for changes in the policy”. She continued that “the skills and confidence I gained allowed me to demonstrate my research expertise and I got a promotion to a more senior position”.

The analysis of responses to the follow up Likert scale-based questions related to specific skills found similarly favourable opinions on the impact of the programme. The Likert scale allows to determine the frequency of responses to five alternative answers for each question. Given that we have nineteen respondents, there is a total of 95 possible responses across the sample and five questions. Overall, the respondents expressed positive views on the impact of the programme: 53% (or 50 responses out of 95) and 38% (or 36 responses) of responses given by respondents were either strongly agree, or agree respectively, with the statements about the impact of the programme in the five key areas of research skills and competencies which were identified as the focus of this evaluation; see Figure 2. The areas with the reported greatest impact were the critical analysis of research problems, literature review, methodological design, data collection and writing up of findings.

Figure 2: Perceived benefits of the training programme



However, some respondents expressed reservation about the impact of the programme in their ability to analyse the data using quantitative methods and tools: 9% of the respondents expressed either neutral opinion or disagreed with one or more of the five statements about the impact of the programme. These neutral or unfavourable opinions were mainly related to a perceived limited exposure to analytical methods and tools for data analysis. Most respondents within this group indicated that they had expected to learn how to use statistical methods and tools for quantitative analyses of survey data during the training. Others expressed a similar expectation that they hoped to learn how to use tools for qualitative contextual analyses. Furthermore, some respondents within this group expressed a view that, in order to cover the quantitative methods and data analysis, the programme should have been longer than it was. The views of some of these respondents appeared to have been underpinned by their unfavourable experience during the internship phase or past research training experience in which they had experienced practical use of analytical methods and tools.

The majority of the respondents indicated that, unlike previous research training they had undertaken, the HQRTS training programme was far more rigorous and demanding. Most indicated they had little or no previous experience in student-led training activities in which knowledge gained through lectures was to be applied immediately through group work, discussions and presentations.

Most respondents also demonstrated a very good understanding of ethical considerations that one must make when collecting data, analysing data, and disseminating research findings – including awareness of how to seek informed consent for primary data collection, of integrity in the analysis of the data and reporting of findings, and of the sensitivity of information and data gathered or generated during research and confidentiality.

Finally, although most trainees interviewed have published work-related reports and their training papers, since completing the programme none has published a peer-review paper, including those currently working in higher education and research. This means they have not gone through the rigour and scrutiny of the peer-review process that is subjected to articles submitted for publication in academic journals. However, a number of the respondents have indicated that they have been working academic papers and plan to publish these in peer-reviewed journals in the future.

7.2 Project Team

Adjustments to the original implementation plans

The interviews with the project team highlighted that the training programme was the first of its kind in Somalia. None of three partners had any previous experience of implementing such programmes. Hence, the implementation required a flexibility to learn and adjust plans along the way as the project implementation progressed. For example, as mentioned above, the initial plans to ask target organisations to nominate some of the trainees were abandoned as these had led to the selection of less qualified and committed candidates during the first cohort, compared to those selected on merit. Consequently, the call for recruitment of all candidates for the second cohort was advertised openly and shortlisted candidates were asked to go through a written test and interviews with a project panel. To highlight the positive impact of the revised recruitment strategy one interview stated “we have basically closed a loophole that allowed employers to nominate a preferential candidate who may not have the skills necessary to complete the course”.

Another adjustment made along the way was that the initial plans to place internees with OCVF and assign them to ongoing projects resulted in lower satisfaction rates among the trainees . As these projects were commissioned externally and the methodology design already agreed upon with clients, they offered only limited learning opportunities, typically data collection. As a result, the internees felt that they had gained limited skills during their internships – a finding that would explain why some trainees mentioned they had unfavourable experience during the

internship phase. To address these shortcomings, the plans were reviewed, and trainees were asked, at end of the training phase, to choose a topic and make a proposal for an individual research paper on which they would work throughout the internship and mentoring phases to produce a paper to be published at OCVP website at the end of the programme. The trainees were matched to the mentoring team from the UoB, based on their chosen research topic and personal preferences, with each mentor assigned 3-5 mentees. Thus, the candidates for the second cohort, not only better met the prerequisite standards for the training, but also benefited more from the programme compared to those in the first cohort because of the greater opportunities to apply skills gained during the training phase through the individually designed and executed piece of original research.

There were also some unexpected opportunities along the way as the enrolled trainees invariably turned out to be lot more committed than anticipated, despite the fact that the programme involved considerable personal sacrifices for trainees and was technically demanding. In highlighting the importance of the trainees' commitments, a project team member stated "we are proud of these extremely high success rates, delivered during drought, floods, social dislocation and a background in some areas of armed violence. This showed how much the trainees valued the project and our rigorous, demanding approach".

The project also offered opportunities to operate in line with and promote locally-led development in positive ways. About 85% of the funding stayed in Somalia and 100% of the funding went through the OCVP's accounts even when it came to the UoB. Furthermore, all UoB staff travel from the UK to Hargeisa was booked through a local travel agent in Hargeisa in order to contribute to the local economy as much as possible. OCVP was the prime contractor and the UoB a sub-contractor to OCVP, which is undoubtedly rare in Somalia and possibly unique in that a major Western university sub-contracted to a Somali institution.

Perceived impact of the project

Overall, the project partners believed that the programme had a positive impact on the project, based on both their observations during the training programme and results of the tracker study of the first cohort which was carried out a year after graduation. According to this study, 67% percent felt they were able to quite easily apply the knowledge and skills gained from the HQRTS programme to their current roles. With regard to observations made during and after the training programme, one interview indicated that the trainees came with little or no knowledge of substantive research and most were familiar with only the traditional lecture-

based approach to training in which the trainees are often “spoon fed”. He highlighted that the HQRTS training was instead student-led and as result it took them out of their comfort zone by using active learning and forcing them to apply the new theoretical concepts learned through group discussions and presentation. In highlighting the positive changes observed afterwards, he stated that “I [now] regularly hear from trainees who often tell me they are putting to use the skills gained at work or building on those skills through further academic training”. He continued that “the programme has helped them to see different horizons and gain significantly improved perspectives on social research”. Another interviewee stated that “only couple of days ago I discovered that one of the graduates has recently sought support from one of the lecturing team to help with preparing his statement for application for a place in a top European university.” These assertions are further supported by other evidence collated during and after the programme. Firstly, during training modules, the beginning and end-testing of the skills and knowledge of trainees on the module content showed a strong pattern of increased scores. Secondly, extensive improvements in trainee ethics forms and research proposals through multiple drafts were observed.

Impact on OCVP

Another positive impact highlighted is that the project, being the first of its kind entirely conceived, designed and implemented by a Somali organisation, had contributed to the research capacity of the country. Indeed, as OCVP is the implementing partner, supported by two well-established subcontractors, it has benefited considerably from the programme implementation, developing the administrative capacity and expertise required to deliver effectively a project of this kind. Some of the interviewees saw this as an opportunity to promote research training among Somali institutions which is understood to face some barriers. According to a project team member with longstanding experience in Somaliland, the perception of donors, and even more so among their implementing regional or global partners, is that Somali organisations are ill-equipped to deliver such projects. He stated that “...as they [donor partners] have the support of the donors, they often come with their own project ideas and send in one or two consultants who run a short training in a hotel, without giving a fair chance to Somali organisations or even bothering much to know about the needs and challenges faced by Somalis”. He continued that “the HRQS project has challenged that conventional wisdom by demonstrating that the donor funds can make a better and more sustainable impact if these projects are designed and implemented by those [Somali organisations] who are best placed to know about the needs of local communities, as well as the socio-cultural realities on the ground”.

8. Conclusions

The overall goal of the project was to contribute to the improvement of the capacity to conduct high-quality research across Somali regions. The project objective was to train a pool of mid-career researchers through the above set of structured activities designed to impart new knowledge and enhance existing skills on the design, implementation and publication of research outputs. The evidence from the analysis of the data and information collected leads us to conclude that the project has met its stated objectives. It has certainly had significant positive impact on the research skills and competencies of the primary beneficiaries – the trainees. With regard to the specific questions posed in the ToR, the findings suggest that most of the trainees have gained substantive theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the design, implementation and dissemination of qualitative social research. Areas of reported greatest skills and competencies improvements include critical analysis of research problems, identification and review of relevant literature, methodological design and data collection, writing and publication of research output.

The programme also had a significant positive impact on OCVP as an implementing organisation. In addition to developing the administrative capacity necessary to manage a substantive programme and resources, OCVP used the opportunity to strengthen its existing strategic partnership with TS and build a new partnership with the UoB, thus raising its profile abroad as a serious local Somali partner. Given the fact that it had done no previous work of this kind also challenged OCVP which has demonstrated an ability to not only manage a major project involving three partners, but also to use effectively the lessons learned during implementation and develop contingency plans to make necessary adjustments quickly.

With regard to the relevance of the programme, the training was pertinent given the fact there is very low research and publication capacity even within the higher education institutions in Somalia. In fact, a recent study found that only 15 of the 44 surveyed institutions reported being engaged in any publishing activities.¹⁰ None reported being involved in any research activities. The absence of research capacity is exacerbated by the lack of meaningful research links and relations with other institutions in the region. Therefore, the programme appears to have had a positive impact on the employers who, according to evidence from analysis of the interviews

¹⁰ The State of Higher Education in Somalia: Privatization, rapid growth, and the need for regulation, http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/HIPS_Higher_Education_ENGLISH.pdf

with the trainees, have significantly benefited from improved research skills and competencies of their employees.

Whilst we have no hard data or direct evidence to make authoritative inferences about the efficiency of OCVP's delivery of the programme, circumstantial evidence gathered suggests that the effective delivery of the project resulted in good value for money (VfM). It is reasonable to assume that other possible alternative options for delivery would have offered less VfM. The most plausible would likely involve one of the following:

- selecting a Somali organisation less established and experienced than OCVP, which has celebrated its 10th anniversary as a research and consultancy organisation. Such an option would have probably resulted in selecting a riskier implementation by an organisation potentially lacking the experience, administrative capacity and strong partnerships necessary to deliver a project of this calibre and commitment;
- selecting a non-Somali organisation with perhaps less relevant experience and partnerships in Somalia. Given the security considerations for non-Somali organisations, this option may have also involved running part or all training programme activities in a neighbouring country, such as Ethiopia or Kenya. Such arrangements would have likely costed more and also posed greater logistic challenges for trainees, potentially resulting in higher drop-out rates.

9. Recommendations

Whilst the evidence gathered shows that the outputs and outcomes of the project meet its stated objective, there are a number of recommendations which can be made as lessons to draw upon for future programmes.

Firstly, evidence collected suggests that the focus of the programme has been on improving skills in social research and especially qualitative skills. We believe that mid-career research needs rounded skills including quantitative skills to effectively support evidence-based public policymaking across the sectors. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that a researcher working in government ministries, such as finance and economics, need to have a good grasp of the quantitative methods used in the collection and analysis of official statistics. Typically, these researchers need to work with statistical methods and related tools, such as Excel-based analytical add-on tools, SPSS, R or STATA. We therefore recommend that any similar programmes in the future should consider enhancing this skill area. Indeed, given the considerable positive impact of the programme, it is advisable to follow it up with a second

training programme focussing on the quantitative skills, perhaps attracting candidates working in quantitative areas such as economics, finance and public administration which most likely have a greater impact on public policymaking. Indeed, the project team themselves expressed keen interest to build on the success of HQRTS with a follow-on project, albeit with some difference in its focus.

Second, it appears that the underrepresentation of trainees from outside Somaliland, in particular from South-Central Somalia, may have been due to the greater financial barriers they faced. We recommend that similar programmes in the future adopt a more effective approach to designing incentives, perhaps based on the cost of participation faced by different regions. Having said that, it is also possible that some of the target candidates outside Somaliland may have assumed that they had less chance to secure a place successfully compared to those from Somaliland [as was mentioned by some of the interview trainees] despite the fact OCVP has offices in all three Somali regions. In this setting, a more targeted communication strategy, perhaps highlighting the transparency of the selection process and expected beneficial outcomes, may be more effective.

Third, the underrepresentation of female participants in any similar future programmes may be reduced by offering female applicants options for accommodations, perhaps including culturally-sensitive option such as all-female accommodation with adequate security arrangements. Offering some degree of flexibility to those with family commitments during the training may also reduce the gender underrepresentation.

Fourth, the research papers produced during the training, especially those deemed to have potential for conversion into academic outputs, could have been used more effectively to prepare policy relevant formats (e.g., policy briefs, fact sheets, etc).

Finally, to support a continuing professional and wider skills development in the research community, we recommend that OCVP creates or supports the creation of an alumni network among the graduates of the programme and beyond. This would facilitate greater sustainability of the programme impact.

Appendix A: Questionnaire Templates



Final interview
template-trainees.pdf



Interview protocol
for project partners.

Appendix B: List of Interviewees

Trainee name	Region	Gender	Cohort
Abdiqadir Dahir Ahmed	Somaliland	m	2
Yasin Jamac Ahmed	Somaliland	m	1
Nuradin Abdirahman H. Nur	Somaliland	m	2
Faisal Jama Geele	Somaliland	m	2
Maria Abdillahi Gahair	Somaliland	f	1
Hassan Hussein Abdi	Somaliland	m	2
Khadar Hussein Hariir	Somaliland	m	1
Hamze Khaire	Somaliland	m	1
Rahma Sead Hirsi	Somaliland	f	1
Sado Hashi Awad	Somaliland	f	2
Ubah Rashid	Somaliland	f	2
Nadiifa Jama Issa	Puntland	f	1
Mohamed Ahmed Ali	Puntland	m	2
Mohamud Ali Mohamud	Puntland	m	2
Najah Mohamed Ahmed	Puntland	f	2
Saed Hamud Mohamed	Puntland	m	2
Ifrah Mukhtar Mohamed	South-Central	f	1
Mohamud Mohamed Nur	South-Central	m	2
Sharmarke Farah Yusuf	South-Central	m	2
Project team			
Abdullahi Odowa	OCVP		
Latif Ismail	TS		
Eric Herring	UoB		