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MAP, Puntland Media position paper on Disaster Risk Management and the need to establish the access to information act

1. Issue 1: Situational Overview on Disasters and DRM

The geology and terrain of Somalia make it vulnerable to natural disasters such as droughts, famine, floods, and tropical storms. These conditions have weakened, overburdened, and destroyed the Somalia's delivery systems.

In Puntland, Qardho witnessed devastating flooding on October 23rd, 2022 as a result of torrential rainfall. The floods disrupted livelihoods, social services, marketplace usability, and infrastructure (road networks and telecommunications) and caused population relocation.

Following the Gardho floods, and in an effort to provide a platform for public engagement, MAP organized a unique public forum through the Danwadaag consortium program in collaboration with Free Press Unlimited. The townhall¹ (see outcomes in the link below) drew 50 members of the Gardho town public, the Governor of Karkaar region, the Mayor of Gardho town, and officials from the district municipality for a one-day open discussion on the impact of repeated floods in Gardho city and the response gaps both before and after disasters.

The stress in lack of adequate actions in preventing future floods, absence of a pre-disaster plan and limitations of assistance post disasters were among the core points that were discussed during the Townhall. Special media field trips that engaged victims of the floods in Gardho, decision makers and the agriculture community also underlined that they were worried about future floods due to the fact that prevention strategies to mitigate the impact of the floods aren't in place.

We believe that the flood danger will increase unless there is a new approach to the work, thereby usage, and investment in disaster-prone areas, together with more effective measures to regulate the human influence on the global climate.

“Disasters do not just happen; they are the outcome of development process failures that raise vulnerability and weaken coping skills, further limiting lives and economies in a negative loop”

- **MAP chair – Mohamed Dahir Warsame**

¹ <https://mediapuntland.org/11418-2/>

The Media Association of Puntland, strongly believes that media's role in early warnings prior to the catastrophe as well as information on the casualties, damage, supplies, and skills required, the best methods for obtaining these resources, the support that is accessible and being rendered, etc. after the disaster one that is crucial and has been evident and acknowledged during the 2022 media coverage on the Gardho floods – this is partly due to the tailored capacity building provided to local journalists on their role in Disaster risk management. However, the concern of lack accurate information at the right time does exist and undermines the efficiency of media performance.

We acknowledge the efforts of the Puntland authorities towards disaster risk management thus far, such as the recent appointments of DRM Head units designated for the towns of Garowe and Gardo, however, the public feedback collected from both the townhall event and the discoveries on the special media field trips all show that the state is yet to develop a well-rounded disaster risk management policy.

Recommendations

It is crucial that the Puntland institutional frameworks for managing the many facets of flood risk allow for an educated and open discussion between national and local government, the organizations that assist them, and those who will be using the service.

- ⇒ ***Right information at the right time:*** The Puntland public and emergency groups are directly connected via the media, which also plays a critical role in informing the public of critical information prior to, during, and after catastrophes. Direct and efficient working partnerships between the media and disaster management organizations should be formed and maintained in order to assist the media in fulfilling these roles.
- ⇒ ***Public Engagement:*** Public support should be sought through an open discourse backed by access to pertinent information, and governance systems must be transparent with clear accountabilities.
- ⇒ The Puntland Disaster Risk Management policy law shall include appropriate authorities and consequences to enable efficient flood risk management, particularly in the pre- and post-disaster period.

2. Issue 2: Urgency on the need to enact the Puntland Access to information act

In Puntland, the right to access information is enshrined in in the article 3, clause 7 of the Puntland Media Law (2016) but remains to be established yet the need to establish the information act is extremely urgent.

The fact is that Journalists cannot carry out their primary task of informing the public unless they have enough information. When journalists' access to information is violated, the entire society's right to receive information is violated.

We underline the need of establishing an information act as it will best assist journalists' work in accurately informing the public, since it shall contain a right to request and receive information, as well as a responsibility for governments to disseminate information openly.

“A democratic society must have a culture of open information exchange because it fosters good governance, public empowerment, proactive disclosure, and accountability. We call on the Puntland authorities to support the MAP initiative that seeks to establish the Access to information act”.

- **MAP chair – Mohamed Dahir Warsame**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference and the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers," recognizes access to information as a fundamental human right.

Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) enshrines the right to receive information on a regional level. Every person "shall have the right to receive information and the right to express and disseminate his/her opinions within the bounds of the law,".

The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) is in the process to organize consultative forums that will engage both state and non-state actors to start discussions on the development of the information act.

We firmly believe that an-all inclusive process is a fundamental to creating a standard information act that is aligned to the Federal Constitution, Puntland constitution, as well as international standards.

We look forward to engaging with the Puntland government and Civil Society groups through the consultative forums and hopefully get to the finish line on establishing the information act.

3. About MAP

The Media Association of Puntland (MAP) is an independent, non-profit organization registered in Puntland and recognized as a legitimate representative of Puntland's journalists and media establishments. The organization was founded in January 2009, as freedom of expression movement, to promote and defend the right to free expression by improving the professional capacity, as well as the social and economic rights of media professionals in Puntland, Somalia.

The core activities of MAP revolve around press freedom, preservation of journalists' rights, skill training on professional journalism, building a united voice of journalists, forming a foundation for cooperation and confidence, and dialogue engagement on legal and policy issues.

We pursue our mission by fulfilling its activities through:

- ✓ advocacies;
- ✓ training needs assessments for the journalists;
- ✓ organizing workshops, seminars and conferences for the journalists and other stakeholders;
- ✓ initiating dialogue engagements with authorities; and
- ✓ systematic monitoring, investigations and reporting of violations of press freedom