

*IMPACT STORY*

# **BUILDING TRUST: LOCAL PARTNERS, COUNTRY FUNDS AND DATA RESPONSIBILITY**



OCHA

## Credits

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Cover photo: Asha Abdikadir Omar, Horn of Africa Peace Network, Somalia. Ms. Omar participated in OCHA's data responsibility training for pooled fund partners in Mogadishu, Somalia in December 2024 and Kismayo, Somalia in October 2025. Credit: OCHA

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## Summary

The Humanitarian Reset is about more accountable humanitarian action, deeper engagement with the communities we serve, prioritizing local and national partners for funding from pooled funds, and fostering greater collective action.<sup>1</sup> None of this can be achieved without trust.

Managing data about people and operations safely, ethically and effectively is foundational for building trust between communities and humanitarian organizations. All humanitarian organizations need to balance the need to collect and share data with the responsibility to protect its misuse. However, local partners bear this responsibility even more given they are on the front lines of identifying those in need and delivering assistance, often in insecure and remote locations and with limited technical infrastructure. This combination of factors can

increase the risk of mishandling personal or sensitive data in ways that can cause harm.

When local organizations receive funding from Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs), they often collect and share sensitive data as part of their programme implementation and monitoring. To help reduce the risk of data security incidents, OCHA's Centre for Humanitarian Data has been providing data responsibility training to CBPF partners. Over the past two years, partners in the Central African Republic (CAR), Lebanon, Myanmar, Somalia and Sudan have taken part. Through practical, everyday actions, these partners are demonstrating how responsible data use protects the people they support, increases confidence and strengthens collaboration.

## When data risks become human risks

Asha Abdikadir Omar works for the Horn of Africa Peace Network, a local non-governmental organization (NGO) in Somalia.<sup>2</sup> The organization aims to build peace and security by working with communities, including some people formerly affiliated with armed groups, to improve living conditions through livelihood development, water and sanitation, and education.

Mishandling sensitive data about the people in these communities can put their mission at risk.

Ms. Omar explains: "We collect a lot of personal details, including names, ages, phone numbers and locations. We also have safe spaces where people can receive basic education services. The communities where we operate are often curious and want to know who we are, what services we provide and who is receiving them, but we do not always know the person's intent or how they might use that information."

Across humanitarian contexts, local partners face similar risks. In CAR, limited Internet connectivity

means some local NGO staff travel long distances with lists of aid recipients that could be confiscated at checkpoints. In Myanmar, local organizations are wary of sharing data with international organizations for fear of how it might be used. And in Sudan, volunteers and mutual aid groups, often the only ones able to reach affected communities, are under increasing pressure to share the sensitive and personal information they collect.

When more data is collected than necessary or when personal details are shared unnecessarily, it increases the risk of aid recipients or humanitarian staff being identified, targeted, stigmatized or harmed if the information is inadvertently exposed or stolen. At the same time, withholding data can undermine coordination, slowdown response and increase the risk of duplication.

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1 To learn more about the Humanitarian Reset see: <https://www.unocha.org/news/humanitarian-reset-10-march-2025>

2 For more information on the Horn of Africa Peace Network see: <https://hapen.ngo>



## From risk to responsibility: local partners lead change

Since 2023, OCHA's Centre for Humanitarian Data has worked with local partners to make data management safe, ethical and effective.<sup>3</sup> At the request of the OCHA-managed Country-Based Pooled Funds, the Centre has trained nearly 500 staff from organizations in CAR, Lebanon, Myanmar, Somalia and Sudan. It also provided a training-of-trainers programme in Dakar for OCHA's regional pooled fund staff for West and Central Africa.

The training familiarizes participants with data responsibility guidance and frameworks<sup>4</sup> and connects it to real-world situations: an office break-in, a lost laptop that holds personal data, a detained colleague, or requests for information. Through these scenarios, participants discuss, debate and apply guidance to practical challenges.

During the training, partners learn to distinguish personal from non-personal data, detect sensitive data, and take data-security measures to avoid mishandling of data that causes or risks causing harm. Participants then take this learning back to their organizations, championing responsible data practices across their teams and networks.

For Ms. Omar, the training transformed how she approaches her work. She went on to introduce new measures in her office and train her colleagues.

"To protect people's personal information, we now use codes instead of individual names, our files are locked, and we have clear procedures for who can access what information," she said. "We've also learned how to respond to questions from the

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3 The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) defines data responsibility in humanitarian action as: "the safe, ethical and effective management of personal and non-personal data for operational response, in accordance with established frameworks for personal data protection." [IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#), 2023.

4 This includes Information Sharing Protocols which serve as the primary reference for governing data- and information-sharing in a humanitarian response.



Multi-sectoral needs assessment, Yalinga, Central African Republic, March 2024. Hard-to-reach Yalinga is a priority zone for humanitarian response, including for the CAR Humanitarian Fund. Credit: UNOCHA/Maxime Nama

community without inadvertently sharing information that could put people or our organization at risk.”

Her colleague, Ahmed Ibrahim Mohamed, Programme Officer at Somali Humanitarian Relief Action, had a similar experience.<sup>5</sup>

He explained: “Before the training, I noticed junior colleagues were collecting more personal information than necessary when monitoring their programmes. After the training, I led sessions with staff and community mobilizers to reach a common understanding of what data was essential. We adjusted our data-collection tools, so now we only collect the information that is critical to our programmes.”

A key part of the training is to help partners classify the sensitivity of data and understand when and how to share it. Partners in CAR now confidently determine what information to include when reporting and what to withhold.

Lamine Keita, Risk Management and Compliance Officer for the CAR Humanitarian Fund, explained: “Now that colleagues understand the difference between personal and non-personal data, we receive less unnecessary personal information from our local partners when they report on their programmes. We have also seen a stronger adherence to protocols for sharing reports of sexual exploitation and abuse.”

Beyond equipping local partners with knowledge, the training has also strengthened trust between international and national partners, critical for data sharing.

In Myanmar, the training is helping to build trust in an environment where coordination can be difficult, reassuring local partners that international humanitarian organizations have clear data-management protocols.

Craig Anderson, Head of OCHA Myanmar’s Humanitarian Financing Unit, explained: “Our collective response to people in need continues to be hindered by a distrust among humanitarian organizations on how information might be misused. The training was instrumental in engaging partners in country operations on how we can work on this, providing them with the guidance and tools to more confidently engage with coordination structures. It also inspired and supported our partners to strengthen their data security and data handling procedures.”

In Sudan, hundreds of mutual aid groups<sup>6</sup> have mobilized since the current war began in 2023. The training has helped group members think about data in a simple but practical way. Using a traffic light system, they learned to identify what data is sensitive, when it can be shared and what questions to ask before releasing information.

Mukhtar Elsheikh, Sudan Team, Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network, explained: “The knowledge exchange gave participants the skills to decide what information should be shared, with whom and for what purpose. It also strengthened their confidence to share data knowing there is a clear process to follow.”<sup>7</sup>

Following the training, Sudan’s Information Sharing Protocol, the primary reference document governing data sharing among humanitarian organizations, is being translated into Arabic for local partners and mutual aid groups. This will help everyone involved in delivering humanitarian assistance in Sudan to adhere to the same standards and processes for sharing data safely.

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5 For more information on Somali Humanitarian Relief, see: <https://shrasom.org/about-us>

6 For more information on Sudan’s mutual aid groups see: <https://www.mutualaidsudan.org>

7 For more information on the Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network see: <https://www.cdacnetwork.org>



## The foundations for trusted, principled action

These examples show growing recognition of the benefits of data responsibility in humanitarian operations. The Country-Based Pooled Funds are a great entry point for supporting local organizations with the skills and knowledge needed to handle personal and sensitive data as they implement their programmes.

The data responsibility trainings also illustrate many aspects of the Humanitarian Reset: humanitarian action with protection at its center; a response that is locally led and globally supported; genuine participation and leadership of local actors; and increases in pooled funding.

A locally led, principled humanitarian response is possible only when organizations have the confidence and capacity to manage data responsibly, especially in the most challenging contexts. Data responsibility provides the structure that turns good intentions into trusted, principled action.

Ms. Omar now views all her work through a lens of data responsibility. As she explains:

“From photos and social media posts, to how I password-protect documents, to who is on an email list, to how I use AI for note-taking, and even who in the team I discuss travel routes with, I’m always thinking about what the information is, who needs to know it, and how to keep myself, my colleagues and the people we serve safe.”

To learn more about data responsibility, visit the Centre’s [website](#). Individuals can also take an [online training course](#) at OCHA. Learn to learn data responsibility basics, assess data sensitivity, and responsible approaches to data sharing.



Haj El Hassan Displacement Settlement, Gedaref State, Sudan, 5 November 2024. Haj El Hassan Displacement Settlement has been home to families displaced from across Sudan since the conflict began in April 2023. With support from the Sudan Humanitarian Fund, local community-led organizations have set up a community kitchen and provide food assistance. Credit: OCHA/Yao Chen



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