The grid divides Somalia into 404 rectangles, each corresponding to the internationally recognized topographic map file.

Each of these rectangles is given a unique alpha-numeric reference number. Each of these rectangles is then subdivided into 80 square cells, 10 across and 8 down. Each square cell is approximately 5 km by 5 km, representing an area of 25 square km. The square cells are referenced from A to K horizontally and from 1 to 8 vertically.

To report your position:

- Locate the square cell you are in on the map using estimated distance and direction from a known point such as a clinic, school or settlement as a guide.
- Note that the alpha-numeric rectangle code (e.g. NB-38-072)
- Note the numeric reference of the square cell
- Note the alphabetic reference of the square cell
- When reporting your position, quote the full grid reference by combining the two references (e.g. NB-38-072-3D).

The system has been designed for reporting of geographic location in the field, without the use of a GPS.