

Chapter 1: Public Perception of Local Councils in Somaliland

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1. Introduction

In Somaliland, the local council elections of 2002 were the first democratic elections that heralded the end of the clan-power sharing formula and marked the onset of a democratic order. This followed the adoption of a Constitution in 2001 which provides for a multi-party system and the passing of the Political Party and Associations Act that resulted in a Local Government Law (2001). Besides allowing the voters to participate in an open and competitive electoral process for the first time in thirty years, the local council elections were also significant in decentralizing the system of governance by granting local communities more power to manage their own affairs.

The Somaliland Constitution provides a framework for a decentralized system of government. The districts are given the primary responsibility for service delivery at the local level. In the 2002 elections, the local councilors and mayors were not directly elected, but through party lists. The mayor, selected from among the council members, is the highest official holding municipal office. Women's representation has been extremely low, with only two female councilors (in Berbera and Gabiley districts) in 2009.

Progress in decentralizing fiscal, administrative and sector functions to councils has been slow. Sources of local revenue include land registration and annual property fees, business licensing fees, sales tax, public employee income tax, and livestock taxes collected in local markets. According to the UNDP over half of district budgets are spent on staff salaries and allowances (JPLG, 2011b).

The official term of the local councils is 5 years, and Somaliland has been struggling to hold a second local councils election since 2007. The failure of the incumbent government and National Election Commission (NEC) to arrange the elections on time, and the prioritization of parliamentary and presidential elections, has necessitated the repeated extension of the term of office local councils.

The continual failure to hold to the electoral cycle has led to repeated political crises. This, in turn, encourages the tendency to solve these crises through negotiations and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the political contestants, rather than referring to the constitution.

As a result, the House of Elders extended the term of office of local councils on 12 December 2007 to 1 July 2008, so as to bring it in line with the terms of the political party's accord, which solved a standing political dispute at the time (Hashi, 2007). Another 18 month extension was also passed in 2010. In addition to political manipulation and the lack of robust institutions, the reasons for the repeated delays included challenges in the voter registration process.

Holding timely and periodic elections is a principal avenue for public involvement in political life and for citizen participation in a democratic local government. The numerous postponements of the local elections have not only denied the voters a second chance to exercise their democratic right to elect new local councils, but also undermined the progress of Somaliland's democratization and decentralization process. This has created a widespread public disappointment with the local democratic process and dissatisfaction with the current local councils, whose legitimacy is often brought to question.

Since 1991, numerous new districts and regions have been created by Presidential decree largely for political gain during elections, and encouragement from clan and sub-clan interests. At present, there are 13 regions and over 80 districts (APD, 2010). Only six regions and 42 districts have been approved by the Parliament. According to many political analysts legalizing them would be highly contentious as most of the new regions and districts have poorly defined boundaries. Out of the 42 districts, only 23 are electoral districts of which 17 officially elected their local councillors in 2002. Officially there are no functional differences between the elected and the appointed district councils (Abdi, 2012).

In addition to 300 elected councillors, there are also over 450 appointed district committee members (APD, 2010). The Ministry of Interior nominates councillors, (normally composed of a Mayor, Deputy Mayor and a Secretary) for all the recognized districts that did not have elections or were unable to hold elections for security reasons. The newly established districts have also nominated committees who act as district council. Obviously, these appointed officials are accountable to the central government, which changes them frequently. As political appointees, their qualifications and administrative skills to manage the business of local government is lower than the elected council members (Abdi, 2012). Thus, the legitimacy of the new districts (with unelected councils) and regions is challenged both by their lack of democratic mandate, as well as the capacity of its members.

Furthermore, many of these districts, and even some of the regions, are not self-sustaining due to the lack of adequate and taxable economic base. In the larger and more urbanized districts with elected councils, some capacity exists for both local resources mobilization, public expenditures management, and implementation of a level of public services, including infrastructure maintenance (JPLG, 2011a). But, while the elected councils have the mandate to raise their own funds through local taxation and resources (including international donor sources), most of the appointed councils depend on central government for subsidies (Bradbury, 2011).

The Study

This paper focuses on "local government". This is understood as the set of formal institutions legally established to deliver a range of specified services to relatively small geographic jurisdictions. In Somaliland, these institutions take the form of an elected council representing an urban municipality or rural district, or a government appointed committee that is responsible for the day-to-day management of local affairs.

In order to strengthen democratic governance at the local level in any given location, it is necessary to carefully analyze the realities of local governance, its strengths and weaknesses, its capacity to effectively and efficiently answer people's needs for public services and economic development opportunities.

It is a widely accepted fact that the daily lives of the majority of the people of Somaliland remain relatively untouched by the agents and institutions of the central government. Most people are more likely to experience day-to-day interactions with local government entities or with informal, traditional or religious leaders in the community. This study focuses on the emerging, formal political relationships between citizens and local government.

The purpose of the study is to solicit the opinions of ordinary Somaliland citizens regarding the performance of their local councils over the past nine years (from 2002-2011). It examines local government performance from the perspective of the voters, with special attention given to questions of responsiveness, service delivery, representation, and accountability.

Since little is known about the citizen-government interface at the local level in Somaliland, the paper first addresses a series of descriptive questions about:

- Citizens' knowledge of the local council members
- What governmental and service delivery functions people attribute to local councils
- How well do they think these functions – from maintaining roads to collecting rubbish – are being performed
- To what extent citizens think that elected councilors are qualified to undertake local council functions
- And how accountable council officials are seen to be in informing, consulting and involving citizens in the management of local affairs

The study also asked people about the type of local governance they would like to see and how to improve the performance of these local institutions. The study found that while Somaliland has experienced comparative stability and has succeeded in establishing nascent administrative authorities, their institutional capacity remains limited. Overall, the study found that citizens have a realistic understanding of the limited scope of local government functions, but that they find fault with both the process of local decision-making and the substance of developmental outcomes.

The study is intended to inform practitioners, donors, and policymakers working in the field of decentralization and local governance. Especially those working on issues connected with capacity building for monitoring, evaluation, and democratic control of local governance structures.

Summary Findings

The study found that citizens generally have a negative opinion about the performance of their local council, both in terms of the quality of service delivery, as well as, the quality of governance over the last ten years. Their perceptions will probably inform and influence their voting behavior during the upcoming local council elections.

The main messages that can be taken from the study are:

- To date, citizens have not seen any significant impact from the democratic election on the performance of their local council
- The distance between those who govern and those who are governed is increasing, at least in the districts studied
- Local government is increasingly governing the districts and municipalities on behalf of its citizens and not with its citizens
- This weakens the legitimacy of local government and steers Somaliland away from its collective vision of establishing a democratic system of government

The solution to this crisis is not simply a matter of improving the skills or technical capacities of local councilors or of pumping extra money into the system. It requires changing the attitudes of those serving the people regarding the way they relate to their citizens. Those interviewed for the study came up with valuable suggestions as how local government performance can be improved. Their message to prospective councilors is clear:

- Truly listen to us and be responsive to our needs
- Communicate actively and be transparent about how you use our money
- Be accountable to your electorate
- Deliver the goods

After a short introduction on the methodology used in the study and the selection of districts and municipalities that participated in this research, the report presents its findings and conclusions. The latter are important for central government policy and should be useful for prospective candidates in the forthcoming district council elections.

2.0 Methodology

The study provides a comparative perspective on people's perceptions of the nature of the local government and how it functions in the context of political and economic decentralization, as well as, the type of local councils they would like to see in the future. The study involved a review of secondary literature and the collection of primary data, using a common questionnaire with open ended questions. This included questions about the quality of services as well as the quality of governance in order to deepen our understanding about how they influence each other.

The Study Districts

In 2002, there are 42 administrative districts, of which 23 were electoral districts, 18 of which were officially elected. Since 1991, 21 new districts have been created by presidential decree, without their boundaries being specified, of these only two have been ratified by the Parliament.¹

Data on citizen perceptions of local councils was gathered from a sample at five districts of different sizes and legal status (4 out of the 24 elected local councils and one with unelected local council), namely; Hargeysa, Borame, Salahley, Sheikh and Sabawanaag districts (see Table 1). Each of these districts was taken as a case study. The criteria utilized to select the Council for the assessment were population size, rural-urban divide, and legal status.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Study Districts

Districts	Grade	Established	Total council membership	Estimated population (authors estimate)
Hargeysa	A	Before 1960	25	700,000
Borame	A	Before 1960	21	200,000
Salaxley	C	After 1991	13	40,000
Sheikh	C	1960-1999	13	25,000
Sabawanaag (This council has never been elected)	D	After 2007	9	5,000

The Study Population

In total, 92 questionnaire interviews were carried out. Forty questionnaires were filled by the individuals themselves, and the remaining interviews were conducted face to face. It took almost three weeks to complete the process.

The respondents were randomly chosen from a cross-section of key stakeholder groups that included business people, academics, women, youth, elders, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organizations, high school and university students and professionals (see Table 2). Approximately one third of all respondents were women, which helped ensure a gender balance in perspectives. A large proportion of the respondents (60%) was aged below 35 years, with almost two thirds of them having secondary education and above.

Students and academics, which included teachers from both high schools and universities, constituted more than 30% of the respondents.

¹The country is divided into twelve regions, namely Awdal, Marodi-jeeh, Sahil ,Togdheer, Sanag , Sool ,Gabilay, Salal, Odweine, Saraar, Buhodle, and Badhan. The regions are sub-divided into 57 districts. Source: **Somaliland in figures, 2009**

Table 2: People Interviewed

Groups	Number of respondents interviewed					
	Hargeysa	Borama	Sheikh	Salaxley	Sabawanaag	Total
Civil Servants	2	2	1			5
Business people	3	2	3	2	2	12
Students	3	4	2	5	3	17
Academics/professionals /Lawyers	4	3	2	4	2	15
Local NGO's	3	3	3	2	2	13
Journalist	1	1		1		3
Traditional and religious leaders	3	2	1	1	3	10
Laborers/Bus drivers	2	1				3
Women & women Groups	4	2	2	1	1	10
Minority groups/individuals	2	1		1		4
Number of women	8	7	5	6	4	30
Total	26	21	14	17	13	92

3.0 Findings

PART I: Local Political Processes

The Extent to Which Citizens “Know” Their Councilors, Understand Their Role and Relate With the Local Government

The assessment showed that 62% of all respondents knew the mayor of their district or some members of the local council, while 28% professed that they do not know the mayor or any member of the local council. 51% of respondents remembered correctly the year the council was elected.

Knowledge about the council members depends on the size of the district. In general, the smaller the size of the community, the easier it is for people to know their leaders. The knowledge is significantly greater among people above 30 years of age, among men rather than women, among people with higher education levels, and among those with relatively higher incomes. The least informed are mostly people below 30 years of age, women, and people with lower educational levels and socioeconomic status.

In Sheikh, knowledge about the mayor and council members is significantly lower in comparison with the other small districts. This may be because of the frequency of change or turnover of the mayors - four times in the last ten years in sheikh district.

Popular views about local government -performance were further established by assessing the people's awareness of the role and responsibility of the councils. Most respondents perceived the local Council to be a body charged with governing on behalf of central

government and to be in charge of development at the local level. The list of responsibilities mentioned by the respondents included a range of activities, from “the allocation of land” to “keeping the community clean”. However, a significant percentage (38%) understood the main role of the council as to represent the community, by identifying community problems and using local taxes to rectify those problems. A traditional elder from Borame noted: “the council members were elected to be responsible for the development of the district but I am not sure whether some of the council members remember their role at all.”

Formal Responsibilities of District Councils

- District Councils have self-administration powers. This means that district authorities have administrative powers to levy and collect taxes, provide services, and lead district development undertakings.
- The district council is responsible to implement the policies of the Government and to implement government programs. They must ensure that their development programs are in line with national development programs. District administrations report to the MOI [Ministry of Interior] on the use of Government financial transfers, management of district own revenue, and the progress of government programs and projects. **Source: Somaliland in figures, 2009**

While 60% of the respondents said that water provision falls under the responsibility of the Local Council, only 55% knew that local government is also responsible for refuse removal. On the other hand, and this is more worrisome, 75% of the respondents thought that primary and secondary education fall under the responsibility of the local government. In addition, 69% thought that security is the council’s responsibility although their responsibility for this is very limited. Interestingly the respondents did not mention basic health care services at all, for which local and central government share responsibility. The differences in awareness between the various districts were great, with Hargeysa having the largest number (30%) of respondents who were ignorant of the council’s responsibilities and Borame the lowest percentage (15%). Between small municipalities there were not big differences.

When asked what the Local council does for you, the overwhelming majority responded that the council does not do anything for them. An equal percentage added that they also do not do anything for women. It is possible that people were responding to the question about whether they personally benefited. However, 35% stated that they benefit from the rubbish collection and some road repair.

One trader in Hargeysa asserted that: *‘the local council collects taxes from me, but does nothing that is useful for me’*.”

The assessment showed that only 15% of respondents would regularly visit the local council premises or local government offices during a given year. Twenty percent came in touch with the council only sporadically, and up to 72% did not visit their local council at all.

However, there were large variations depending on the size of the districts; people in smaller towns had more opportunities to visit the local council, although they may not benefit much from these visits. From those citizens who occasionally or frequently deal with their local council, the main reason given was related to pay taxes or a land issue.

A student from Hargeysa University argued that: *“poor awareness by community members and most local council members of their roles and responsibilities in the local governance has contributed to poor performance and in some cases a complete failure of the local councils”*. Another student added: *“most people are not informed about the role of the local governmentall they know is that they are part of the overall government.”*

Not knowing who is responsible for what services will make it difficult for citizens to claim such services from the right service provider and will also lead to the wrong institution being blamed for poor performance. In all places, improved public information about the responsibilities of the local council will be a prerequisite for any improvement in communication between local government and its citizens.

People’s Expectations and Satisfaction with the Local Councils

Over 70% of respondents said they were unsatisfied with the performance of local councilors; and 80% felt that the local councils never fulfilled their expectation after the elections of 2002. 60% of respondents also added that the local councils have developed an undemocratic culture and practice of discrimination against the public. Thus, for the majority of the respondents the Local councils are very disappointing, negative, ineffective, and undemocratic. For most people, the poor performance by the local councils dashed their hopes for an overall improvement of living conditions following the advent multi-party democracy. A religious leader from Hargeysa moralized that:

“The thing that worries me is that all these people who we vote for make these wonderful promises but they always break them ... you can say that they are committing sin or fraud because it feels like they steal our votes because they don’t honor their promises.”

A livestock trader in Salaxley district commented:

“He was all over the place during the 2002 local council election campaign, but no one has seen the councilor I voted for since he won his seat” (Local livestock trader, Salaxley district)

Most of the respondents associated local councils with inadequate service delivery, corruption and mismanagement, inefficiencies in project implementation, lack of equity, and poor political representation. There are many reasons why the councilors are not seen as good representatives of their constituencies. One reason for this is the lack of regular contact between councilors and their constituency. Some 60% of the respondents mentioned that they never see their councilor except during election times. There is, therefore, a disconnect between people and their local councils.

There is a slightly more positive picture in the smaller districts where councilors seem to have been more active in meeting their constituency. For example the respondents in Salaxley were equally split (50:50) in their satisfaction with the quality of work of the local council and fulfilling their expectations.

Another reason why respondents were not happy with the performance of their councilors was the perceived lack of rule of law in the council. Some 60% of the respondents think that local councilors privately benefit from resources intended for service delivery. In Hargeysa, this figure is even higher with 72% of the respondents saying that local councilors benefit dishonestly from resources for service delivery, while Sheikh had the lowest score of 40%. A woman shopkeeper in Borame lamented:

“The local council members care about their needs only. They seem to have been a thirsty lot and now they are quenching their thirst, rather than fulfilling their mandate, since we have not seen any improvement in the area that we live in. Maybe we have to change the people we have chosen to help us like the councilors ...”

It should be stressed that this was a perception survey and did not cross-check whether the allegations were true. It is however important to know that, whether true or not, citizens (and therefore voters) think that there is no respect for rule of law in their council. This could be related to actual cases of mismanagement or to a lack of transparency and information supply by the council as to what it does to ensure that resources are utilized in the correct manner and in accordance with its policies and plans.

Downward accountability is defined as the ability of citizens to hold the local authority to account. It is measured by the presence of institutions necessary to enforce accountability such as elections or forums for citizen participation. Both of these have been lacking in these districts in the last decade. The few respondents who said the local councils were democratic pointed to the fact that council members can vote the mayor out of office. This has happened in some municipalities whereby up-to three mayors were changed by the council; Borame is a case in point.

Remarkably, there were no significant differences in the responses between the various social groups identified for this study. Men, women, and people from different economic and educational backgrounds all responded in the same way.

Role of the Local Civil Society

On the role of civil society in their districts, 50% of the respondent felt that civil society is trying its best but it faces unresponsive and defensive local councils. About 25% of the respondents were of the opinion that civil society is not organized enough to mobilize public opinion against these councils and were not able to hold local officials accountable for their performance. A high school student from Borame, for example, insisted *‘that civil society is divided along clan and sub-clan lines and therefore, unable to stand up to the elected local officers’*.

Most respondents thought that civil society is facing political pressures from the elected councils by obstructing and frustrating their advocacy work. It is interesting to note that people felt that civil society is more active in smaller districts compared to larger towns.

The existence of a vibrant and diverse civil society is an important indicator of good local governance. Civil society organizations (CSOs) can play a role in identifying and drawing attention to local governance deficits, as well as using their expertise to support the councils.

Difference Between the Elected Councils and the Appointed Ones

The majority of the respondents had contrasting opinions about the elected and the appointed local councils. They stated that the appointed councils were more qualified and effective but were accountable to their leaders, while the elected councilors were poorly qualified, ineffective but could be accountable to their constituencies. According to an Amoud University professor; *“One is democratically representative and the other had public confidence”*.

One of the major complaints about the elected councilors is that they are too many and thus produce more corruption and chaos through competition for power and resources. The popular saying is that *“Hargeysa is not able to support 25 mayors”*, meaning that all 25 council members think they were equally elected and therefore, should have equal access to power and final decision-making.

However, there were some who recognized that the fault did not lie entirely with the councilors. An elder from Salaxley, for example, admitted that; *“it is the competition among the sub-clans and clans that led to the creations of so many useless local councils.....this is fueled by sub-clan prestige and possible access to government resources”*.

The general opinion was that the elected councils can be brought to account by voting them out during the elections only, but the appointed ones can be expelled more easily by government.

PART II: Local Finance

Awareness of Local Council Revenue

The findings reveal that 70% of the respondents were aware of local Council's sources of income. The sources identified include taxation of businesses and properties, as well as issuing new land leases and sale of public land. Around 35% also added that the local Councils receive money from the central government and international organizations, such as the UN.

However, 78% of the respondents had no idea how the councils spend their money because the council doesn't provide them with this information. The majority of the respondents stated that the local council is not transparent about the way in which it spends its money. According to 58% of the respondents, the councils have not put any information sharing or

consultation mechanism in place in order to be more transparent and open about its activities to its citizens. In addition, 60% said they believe the funds are misappropriated. This data points to serious information gaps among citizens about the role of taxation in local development. As explained by one respondent from Hargeysa, *“this information is not public knowledge”*.

The smaller districts confessed more knowledge about the local council finance compared to larger population centers, but in terms of transparency and openness of the local council, the respondents were clear that there is a lot to improve.

PART III: Relationship between Central and Local Government

The Relationship between the District Council and the Central Government

The majority of the respondents (55%) said they did not know about the relationship between the local council and the central government, but were aware that there was one. A women respondent from Sheikh asserted that they, *“work together for development”*. Some 30% said that the local council comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, though the central government cannot fire the elected council members.

A small but significant percentage (24%) mentioned that the local council are not independent from the central government interference, adding that the Ministry of Finance does not release the centrally held tax money to the local councils on time or fully. These respondents were mostly from the Hargeysa district.

The response indicates both a lack of clarity in the legal framework that demarcates the roles of central and local government and a lack of public education on the matter.

PART IV: Public Participation in Decision Making

In order to assess the perception of citizens regarding the quality of participation in decision-making processes at the council level, respondents were asked whether people actively participated in activities and programmes organized by the local councils.

Seventy five percent of the respondents said they did not participate in any events at the local council and an even larger percentage (85%) confessed that they never contributed to any local council plans or programmes. Respondents living in large urban areas participate less in local government meetings (66% didn't participate in any functions) than respondents living in smaller rural areas. Most respondents argued that the local councils never invite the public to participate in the local development process; some added that the councils occasionally mobilize people for their own ends.

Non participation in Hargeysa is much higher (75% of respondents) than in the other districts. This could be because respondents in Hargeysa have lost confidence in their council even more than in other districts. Some 60% of youth and 79% of respondents from minority groups said they hardly attended any council functions, which is an indication that these groups are isolated from local governance issues and participation structures.

The majority (65%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the level of community involvement in local councils. They claimed that local councils do not consult with the citizens or include their priorities in the development of the district. They added that the degree of involvement of various community members, civil society organizations, and the traditional authority structures is minimal. There is no mechanism for public participation. Therefore, the level of political activism of men, women, young people, traditional chiefs, and CSOs is relatively low.

A Hargeysa University student complained that:

“We do not have control over decisions that affect our lives, we need to bring local government closer to us – and let us better understand decisions we cannot make ourselves but affect us deeply.”

Almost three out of every four respondents said that they are not well informed by the council about decisions taken, while only 15% were satisfied. In Hargeysa, the information provided by the council was bad (with 70% not satisfied) while Salaxley was slightly better (50% not satisfied). Borame was the worst performing municipality, with 93% of the population saying that the council is not properly informing them about decisions taken.

Women experienced many difficulties in seeking to enter political leadership that range from social-cultural factors, lack of economic empowerment to an unaccommodating political party structures and electoral system. Perceptions of equal opportunities for men and women in local governance reflect the reality in these districts. Over 90% of the respondents thought that women do not have equal access and influence to the decisions taken by local authorities. An analysis of the composition of local councils indicates that there are no women in political posts. Nationwide, the number of elected female councilors stands at two (2) out of a total number of three hundred and seventy five (375) elected councilors. This means only 4.6% of councilors are women.

A key conclusion is that, *despite the reality that the local council is the most accessible form of government administration for most citizens, none of the municipalities assessed consulted with the citizens in order to include their priorities in the development of their districts or municipality or to keep citizens informed of matters of public import.* This is reflected in the overall satisfaction levels of citizens with local government.

The multiparty democratic system does not seem to have ushered in a more democratic culture. In general people do not expect much from the government. They do not expect the government to consult with them, because they have never experienced that type of culture.

Most people contend that those in power have proven incapable of deepening democratization because they are more concerned with winning power than democratizing the country.

Most respondents believe that citizens lack the knowledge and power to make local councils accountable except in elections. Some stressed that people are not gathering their collective voice together to demand their rights, because they are divided along clan, regional, and political lines.

PART V: Local Service Provision

People in the study districts judged the quality of local council primarily in terms of whether they think elected leaders “deliver the goods.” When asked whether their local council is efficient and effective in delivering public services, only 11% of the respondents mentioned that their council was indeed providing good quality services. Some 17% answered that they provide no service at all and 70% said that the council is not providing good quality services. Comparing the five districts, the level of satisfaction was highest in Borame with 25% giving a positive response and the lowest in Hargeysa with only 5% or one in twenty respondents said that the council is both inefficient and ineffective in delivering public services.

When asked about the type of public services the local councils provide 70% of the respondents mentioned only collection of rubbish and some road repair. A small percentage added issuing of land titles, resolving conflicts particularly on land and security.

The performance of institutions depends in good part on the quality of the individuals recruited to occupy key offices. The assessment therefore also asked respondents to comment on the qualifications and competence of elected councilors to hold local government office.

While respondents again lacked information (up to a quarter “didn’t know”), they offered unfavorable evaluations of local council leaders of all assessed districts. Almost three times as many respondents felt that councilors were unqualified, as though they had not attained enough education (70 percent versus 25 percent). Most of the responds believed that the overwhelming majority of the councilors did not possess the experience to manage public service programs and the necessary commitment to care about the community (some were accused of a lack of nationalism). Indeed, the majority think that the councilors were unqualified to honestly handle public funds. A businessman in Hargeysa commented that:

“People wanted to be able to choose leaders who have qualities of intelligence, integrity and sensitivity which makes them worthy leading our future development.....but the electoral system denied them that opportunity in 2002. The party lists produced the opposite of what people wanted.”

While there are diverse opinions as to reasons for the poor service delivery by the local councils, it became clear that the respondents are linking their perception on the quality of service delivery to aspects of governance like corruption, responsiveness, consultation, the capacity of the elected councilors, clan influence, and lack of central government support.

Trends in Perception of the Main Constraints

In order to understand people’s reactions to local council performance, we asked the respondents to identify the various problems which inhabitants of these districts are living with or the main obstacles hindering the achievement of a better quality of life in their locality.

- The most pressing problems in the views of citizens in the past ten years are seen as poor leadership, corruption, lack of services, and poor economic resources leading to unemployment. About 80% of respondents feel that these problems are now rife in their districts and the country as a whole. The majority of respondent consider these problems as poorly resolved.
- The second problem is connected with political issues, i.e. clan dispute on the distribution of local council posts and land dispute and gender inequality. These problems are mentioned by 60% of those assessed.
- The third problem areas are lack of knowledge and skills, poor management, environmental degradation and lack of public participation in the decision-making process.

Finally, it is important to note that there were no significant differences between the five districts in the responses to the service delivery, even though smaller districts were slightly more positive.

PART VI: Future Vision

In order to find out about people's aspirations and future visions, we asked several questions regarding their expectations of local councils and type of government they would like to see. The results show that the respondents expect their councilors to behave in accordance with principles of good governance.

90% of the respondents said that they expect their councilors to be very committed, capable and energetic and accountable, while 50% added that they expect the local councilors to do more to meet the promises made by campaigning politicians. These include the provision of adequate services and fulfilling their assigned role and responsibility.

The majority of the respondents said that they would like to see a local government that service as a mechanism of good governance and effective decentralization of power. In other words, a government that actively encourages peoples' participation in the decision- making process responds to their needs; and fosters democracy and development. As one student from Sheikh Veterinary School put it, "*a democratic government that is close to the community*", a high school teacher in Borame added, "*an honest and consultative government*" and a local trader in Sabawanaag stressed: "*a can do government that can deliver and satisfy the need s of the people*".

When asked about their suggestions for making local government more responsive, efficient and accountable the majority of the respondents suggested establishing an accountability system to improve honesty. In other words reduce corruption and inefficiency. Many respondents also said that the number of councilors needs to be reduced and more qualified candidates need to be elected. **Other suggestions include:**

- Set strict criteria for the selection of local council candidates
- Enforce rules and procedures
- Local council to produce and publish monthly public reports
- Hold Free & fair elections now

- Increase public consultation
- Control corruption
- Establish a monitoring committee

When asked what has to change to make local government more effective, 80% said change current local council members and elect qualified individuals that have, at least, a first university degree. Fifty percent recommended improving knowledge and capacity of the existing council members and increasing working hours.

The respondents' opinion on opening up of political associations was overwhelmingly positive. People cited the need to provide opportunity for fair political competition, since the existing political parties are dominated by the founders and a few individuals. As well as the need to bring in new blood, energy, and ideas in order to improve critical thinking. A small but significant percentage (27%) argued that it will lead to clan divisions, negative competition, and chaos.

When the respondents were asked whether the local council members should be elected through party lists or through individual candidates campaigning on their personal merits, the 70% recommended individual campaigning, while 30% thought party lists were better. The justification for the individual campaigns was that it affords the voters a choice to select the more qualified candidates. The party lists were thought to involve clan manipulations, as well as, political corruption.

In order to assess the perception of women's rights to political participation, we asked the respondents their opinion on women joining the local council. 60% of the respondents welcomed such an initiative and advised women to seek a quota in the elected houses. Many of these respondents thought that women's participation in the local councils is positive and can contribute to both local and national development. A small percentage, which surprisingly included some women, thinks it is a bad idea, which is unadvisable on the basis of religion and culture.

4. 0 Conclusions

A rather gloomy picture emerges regarding the perception of citizens on the performance of the local councils over the last ten years across five districts in Somaliland. The main conclusion is that only one in ten citizens is currently satisfied with the quality of service delivery and governance provided by the district and municipal councils.

The main conclusions of the study are as follows:

- (a)** A main trend in the last ten years has been the disillusionment from the hopes and expectations that were detected at the beginning of the democratization era. For the majority of the population, the local government system has not fulfilled the expectations that had existed at the beginning

- (b)** In terms of their public acceptance and esteem, local councils have been performing below par. Indeed, there is no function or procedure or sector in which a majority of citizens consider their local council authority to be performing well. People are especially unhappy at the failure of councils to integrate citizens into the agenda-setting and decision-making processes of local government
- (c)** People interviewed in the five districts have negative perceptions about the responsiveness of elected local government councilors. Only about one third felt that these leaders listen to what their constituents have to say regularly
- (d)** Citizens regard local government councils as weak institutions with an ineffective and undemocratic culture and attitude. They defined the current councilors as incompetent, unqualified, and corrupt individuals who enriched themselves on misappropriated public funds
- (e)** The people interviewed lacked information on the fiscal foundations of the local council and its administration. Up to one third of respondents said “don’t know” when faced with questions about amount of tax collected or budget managed by the local councils.

The important question that emerges is why citizen satisfaction with the performance of their local councils is so low. According to the assessment there are a number of reasons that could explain this trend.

One reason is that the service delivery gap -the gap between what people expect and what local councils are realistically able to deliver- is increasing.

Another reason is the lack of responsiveness of the councils to address the important priorities identified by its citizens. This is linked to the fact that, as shown by this assessment, consultation and participation structures do not exist, while downward or social accountability mechanisms are not in place.

Yet another reason, which is supported by the findings of this assessment, is that increasingly citizens base their assessment of the quality of governance on the performance of local government. They are aware of poor communication, lack of transparency, increased corruption and nepotism in their local government and the fact that these factors have a negative impact on the ability to deliver high quality services.

These findings confirm the dysfunction of the local council system in Somaliland is deepening. This is a systemic problem that has become more and more embedded in Somaliland’s political culture and actual system of local government. The governance issues raised by this assessment (lack of transparency, lack of communication between council and citizens, and lack of social and political accountability) relate to a disdain of basic democratic governance principles and values that are increasingly sacrificed by politicians for individual benefits and political power.

It is important to note that this survey was a perception survey, reflecting citizens' opinions. These may (as a result of lack of other information, for example) not necessarily reflect the reality in their districts and municipalities. But it will be very interesting to see how these

perceptions inform the voting behavior of citizens during the upcoming local government elections. Will citizens reprove the sitting councilors who didn't deliver enough in their eyes, will there be a shift in political preference or will it result in a lower voter turnout as people might have lost confidence in the local government as an institution that addresses their needs adequately?

5.0 References

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