PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUE REPORT

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DAMA HOTEL, HARGEISA, SOMALILAND

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Executive Summary:

The public discussion on "Challenges Hindering Political Parties in Somaliland: 'Democracy or Clannism'" underscored the pervasive influence of clannism on the country's political landscape. As Abdiqadir Jirde aptly stated, "*The political system has been diverted from its intended course, leading to clannish politics and societal division.*" **The historical and ongoing impact of clannism significantly shapes Somaliland's political landscape.** As noted by the panelists, clan-based affiliations, while providing a sense of community, can also pose challenges to democratic governance. The prevalence of clan-based political parties can exacerbate polarization, limit political participation, and undermine the development of strong and independent institutions. Sacdiya Muse observed, "*Clan-based party structure undermines merit-based principles and leads to exclusion.*" **The panelists examined the historical significance of clannism in Somaliland society and its enduring influence on political processes.** They explored the implications of clan-based political parties and strategies for mitigating their impact. Additionally, the panelists identified the shortcomings of democratic institutions and their impact on the political process, discussing the need for strengthening these institutions and promoting accountability and transparency.

By examining these interrelated themes, the panel provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges hindering political parties in Somaliland and offered insights into potential solutions. The critical challenges identified by the panelists include clannish politics and societal division, underrepresentation of clans, the risk of civil conflict, lack of political ideology, clan-based party structures, poor internal democracy, weak institutional development, legal framework gaps, and limited academic engagement. **Abdiqadir Jirde's Quote**" advocates *for the RAC to maintain rigorous and impartial guidelines in its registration and approval processes*". He proposes granting the RAC additional authority beyond mere registration and approval, suggesting a more active role in overseeing and managing political parties. While the current RAC is appointed by the president, *Abdiqadir Jirde*" *implies a need for greater independence or a different appointment mechanism*". **For continuous oversight,** panelist suggests the RAC should play a more ongoing role in monitoring and guiding political parties, rather than a one-time registration process.

Overall, panelists highlighted a perceived need for a more robust and independent regulatory body to oversee Somaliland's political parties. It suggests a desire for greater accountability, transparency, and fairness in the political system. And **The panelists also recommended enhancing political inclusivity, strengthening internal democracy, establishing accountability mechanisms, developing clear electoral rules, promoting political education, strengthening political parties' decentralization, and implementing civic education programs.**

1. Introduction

The Somaliland Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) and the GOLE-KEEN Forum jointly organized a public discussion on August 23, 2024, in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The event focused on the challenges hindering political parties in Somaliland's democracy or clannism. Four panelists were invited to share their perspectives on the issue, and the discussion was attended by approximately 150 participants from various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), academics, public officials, and the general public.

During the discussion the panelists addressed the role of clan elders and a multiparty system in Somaliland's democracy, the impact of clannism on political parties, the legal framework governing political parties, and the role of academics in shaping the political landscape. **Dr. Fuad Osman:** "The clan-based nature of many political parties in Somaliland limits the influence of academics." on the challenges hindering political parties in Somaliland's democracy. **Abdiqadir Jirde:** "Democracy is not a perfect system, but it is the best option we have." The panelists highlighted the need for a more inclusive and merit-based approach to politics **Sacdiya Muse:** "The problem lies not in the number of political parties, but in their actions and functioning." while **Mubarik Aar:** "Somaliland's legal framework prohibits tribalism in politics, but it is not being fully implemented." also emphasized the importance of strengthening the legal framework and promoting civic engagement.

To overcome these challenges, the panelist suggested to **prioritize civic education, encourage party-based politics, strengthen democratic institutions, and promote inclusive politics.** This requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and the government in order to foster a more democratic, equitable, and inclusive political environment.

1.1 Historical Context

The establishment of Somaliland's government was laid during the inter-clan conferences of the early 1990s, culminating in the Borama Conference in 1993. A clan-based system of government was established, incorporating elements of Western democratic principles while maintaining the traditional role of clan elders (Guurti).

Somaliland's transition to a multi-party system began in the 2002. laid the groundwork from shift and deciding to move away from clan-based politics and adopt a multi-party system. **Key milestones in Somaliland's political development include referendum on the constitution (2001):** This referendum solidified the country's commitment to a democratic system. Somaliland has held regular elections for political parties, local municipalities, the president, parliament, and the House of Representatives since the early 2000s. These elections have been conducted on a multi-party basis. Somaliland's constitution limits the number of official parties at the national level to three for a 10-year period, determined by municipal election results or direct election. This measure aims to prevent political tribalism. **Despite the multi-party**

system, clan-based politics continue to play a significant role in Somaliland. While some parties may have political manifest, but lack of political ideologies, clan affiliations often overshadow, this lead to fluctuating party programs and alliances based on the interests of specific clans.

However, **the challenges posed by clan-based politics, Somaliland has made progress in establishing a democratic system.** The country has held regular elections and has a functioning institutions. However, ongoing efforts are needed to strengthen democratic institutions, promote inclusivity, and address the lingering effects of clan-based politics.

1.2 Open Dialogue Participants

The Somaliland Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) and the GOLE-KEEN Forum jointly organized a public discussion on August 23, 2024, in Hargeisa, Somaliland. The event focused on the challenges hindering political parties in Somaliland's democracy or clannism. Four panelists were invited to share their perspectives on the issue, and the discussion was attended by approximately 150 participants from various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), academics, public officials, and the general public.

Figure 1 Open dialogue participants listening to the panelists

1.3 Purpose of the Open Dialogue

The overall aim of this open dialogue forum is to strengthen political parties' democratic structures and accountability by providing citizens with the opportunity to voice their concerns and identifying challenges and weakness.

1.3.1 Objectives of the dialogue:

- To create civic space for political parties and citizen to freely discuss issues openly;

- To identify weaknesses and challenges of the current political parties' structures;

- To increase accountability and consultation between the political parties and citizens;

- To encourage political parties' political manifesto and controls clannism interferences;

- To expand the democracy movement network to bolster collective efforts supporting democracy, human rights, and social justice initiatives.

2. Opening Statements

Abdirahman Warsame, CDG director, made official opening "I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all the participants and panelists for joining us today. This discussion on the challenges hindering political parties in Somaliland is crucial for the advancement of our democracy.

As the Somaliland Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG), we recognize that such discussions are often overlooked and undervalued. We believe that it is imperative to create a platform where these vital conversations can take place.

In collaboration with GOLE-KEEN, we are committed to filling this void and facilitating meaningful dialogue on important issues like this. Our goal is to foster goodwill, understanding, and a shared appreciation for the challenges and concerns facing our political parties. This platform will serve as a meeting point for experts and educators to contribute their valuable insights and opinions. By bringing together diverse perspectives, we hope to provide relevant actors with the information and guidance they need to address these pressing issues. CDG is dedicated to creating a space where open and honest discussions can take place, and where constructive solutions can be developed. We believe that by working together, we can build a stronger and more democratic Somaliland for all."

Figure 2 Mr. Abdirahman-CDG Director giving opening remarks

Mr. Khadar's "On behalf of the GOLE-KEEN Forum, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all participants and panelists. We are honored to be part of this important discussion on the challenges facing political parties in Somaliland.

The GOLE-KEEN Forum is a diverse group of individuals from various backgrounds who have come together voluntarily with a shared commitment to contributing to the development of our country. We recognize the importance of identifying and addressing the challenges that hinder our progress.

Through events like this, we aim to analyze these challenges, provide valuable insights, and offer recommendations for improvement. By fostering open dialogue and collaboration, we hope to contribute to a more vibrant and democratic Somaliland.

3. Panelists' Profile

Abdiqadir Jirde is a former parliament member and a seasoned figure in Somaliland's state-building process. His extensive experience in government and politics provides him with a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the country's political landscape.

Figure 3 Mr. Abdiqadir Jirde-A panelist

Mubarik Aar is the chairperson of Beder University and a lawyer by profession. His academic and legal background equips him with a deep understanding of constitutional principles, legal frameworks, and the role of institutions in a democratic society.

Figure 4 Prof Mubarik Aar- A panelist

Sacdiya Muse is a prominent civil society leader and women's rights activist. Her work in advocating for women's empowerment and social justice gives her a valuable perspective on the challenges faced by marginalized groups and the importance of inclusive governance.

Figure 5 Mrs. Sacdiya Muse- A panelist

Dr. Fuad Osman is an educator and senior lecturer at the University of Hargeisa. His experience in academia and teaching allows him to provide insights into the role of education and knowledge in shaping political discourse and fostering democratic values.

Figure 6 Dr. Fuad Osman- A panelist

4. Key Discussion Themes

4.1 Clannism or democracy.

The political landscape in Somaliland is characterized by a complex interplay between **clannism** and **democratic principles**. While the establishment of a multi-party system was intended to foster democratic governance, the persistent influence of clan affiliations poses significant challenges to true democratic practices. In recent years, Somaliland has made progress in mitigating the influence of clannism in politics. The introduction of a multi-party system and the holding of regular elections have helped to diversify the political landscape and reduce the dominance of clan politics. However, clannism remains a significant factor in Somaliland's politics, and its influence continues to shape the country's political processes. As highlighted by the panelists, clannism remains a persistent challenge for Somaliland's democracy. As Abdiqadir Jirde's analysis highlights, clannism, deeply rooted in Somaliland society, poses significant challenges for the development of a truly representative and inclusive democracy.

Clannism has been a central feature of Somaliland society for centuries, with its roots dating back to the colonial era and before. **Sacdiya Muse:** "The primary issue with Somaliland's political parties is their behavior, which is deeply rooted in tribalism."

The prevalence of clan-based political parties can exacerbate polarization, limit political participation, and undermine the development of strong and independent institutions. **Mubarik Aar:** "Despite legal provisions prohibiting tribalism, Somaliland's political parties have exhibited clannish tendencies." Additionally, clannism can hinder the development of effective governance and hinder efforts to address pressing national issues.

While progress has been made in mitigating the influence of clannism, it remains a significant factor in Somaliland's politics have played a significant role in the formation and dynamics of political parties in Somaliland, often leading to a divisive and competitive political environment.

Panelist analysis underscores political parties in Somaliland often reflect clan-based structures, where leadership and candidate selection are heavily influenced by tribal affiliations. This results in a lack of internal democracy within parties, as decisions are made to favor clan interests rather than promoting broader political agendas despite attempts to transition to a more democratic framework, the clan system continues to dominate political interactions, making it difficult to separate clan interests from state governance. This reliance on clan loyalty often leads to a political environment where decisions are made based on tribal affiliations rather than the common good.

Panelists noted that clannism has been identified as a major factor undermining the stability of Somaliland. It fosters nepotism, favoritism, and corruption, diverting political focus from public service to personal enrichment and the need for continued efforts to address the challenges posed by clannism and promote a more inclusive and democratic political system in Somaliland.

4.2 Clan-based political parties

Abdiqadir Jirde emphasized that Somaliland's multi-party system, while rooted in democratic principles, is still evolving and faces significant challenges. He highlighted that even developed countries encounter obstacles in their democratic processes, and fragile states like Somaliland are particularly vulnerable to these difficulties. He further noted that political parties in Somaliland have a long history, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. In that period there were approximately 160 political parties, with 18 operating within Somaliland. However, he expressed concern about the tribalistic tendencies that initially characterized these parties. When Somaliland regained its independence, the same political party was re-established. To address the challenges posed by a large number of parties, the constitution and other relevant laws considered reducing the number of parties. Proposals were put forth to limit the number to three or five. Abdiqadie Jirde again pointed out that the current system of three political parties is primarily dominated by the Isaaq clan. He recommended expanding and diversifying the political landscape to ensure greater inclusivity and representation.

Sacdiya Muse added that, in argued that when Somaliland's political parties were established, there was a hope that tribal affiliations would be overcome or eliminated to foster national unity and strengthen government institutions. However, she contended that the parties have failed to achieve this goal. Added Sacdiya Muse, the primary issue with Somaliland's political parties is not their number, but rather their behavior. She criticized the parties for being deeply rooted in tribalism, often engaging in conflicts based on clan affiliations. Moreover, she highlighted that the parties' organizational structures are largely clan-based, perpetuating a reliance on tribal politics. She further asserted that instead of moving away from tribal politics, the current situation has actually regressed. She pointed to the lack of internal democracy within the parties as a contributing factor to the overall weakness of political institutions in Somaliland.

Followed by Mubarak Aar focused on the structural challenges facing Somaliland's political parties within the context of tribalism. He noted that while the Somaliland Constitution and Political Parties Law set principles for political participation and freedom of expression, In the context of tribalism, the laws of Somaliland and the constitution of Somaliland have set principles according to articles (30 and 99) of Somaliland constitution, and articles (3, 33 and 34) of political parties' law No. 14. All these voices state the political process and participation in society and that they are free to participate in the development of the country. The behavior of the parties often contradicts these ideals. Further the panelists emphasized the role of academies and political parties Dr. Fuad one of the panelist highlighted the clan-based nature of many political parties in Somaliland, where party leaders often represent specific clans and consult with their respective elite-clan's representatives. He noted that there is limited influence of educators on political parties and limited interaction between the two groups. Academics and intellectuals may not be fully engaged in the political process in Somaliland. This could be due to several factors, such as:

- Some academics may not have a strong interest in politics or may prefer to focus on their academic pursuits.
- There may be limited opportunities for academics to participate in political activities or to influence party policies.
- Academics may be concerned about the potential risks associated with political involvement, such as losing their jobs or facing social ostracism.

In conclusion, while clannism remains a significant challenge to the democratic aspirations of Somaliland, proactive measures aimed at promoting inclusivity, accountability, and public engagement can pave the way for a more robust and representative political system.

4.3 Political Parties Challenges

1. **Clannish Politics and Societal Division**: Abdiqadir Jirde emphasized that Somaliland's political system has deviated from its intended democratic course, stating, "The political system has been diverted from its intended course, leading to clannish politics and societal division." This highlights the pervasive influence of tribal affiliations that undermine the principles of democracy.
2. **Underrepresentation of Clans**: Despite efforts to limit the number of political parties to ensure representation, Abdiqadir Jirde pointed out that "the three existing parties were dominated by the Ishaq clan," raising concerns about the marginalization of other clans like Harti and Gadabirsay/Issa. This dominance can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement among minority groups.
3. **Risk of Civil Conflict**: Abdiqadir Jirde warned that the continuation of clannish politics could have dire consequences, stating, "Continuing this trend could lead to civil war and destruction." This underscores the urgent need for a more inclusive political system to prevent potential conflict.
4. **Lack of Political Ideology**: Sacdiya Muse criticized the existing political parties for their lack of coherent political ideologies, arguing that "the problem lies not in the number of political parties, but in their actions and functioning." This lack of ideological focus often results in prioritizing clan interests over national issues.
5. **Clan-Based Party Structures**: Sacdiya Muse noted that the "clan representations within parties can undermine merit-based principles and lead to exclusion." This structure perpetuates tribalism and limits the potential for diverse representation and effective governance.
6. **Poor Internal Democracy**: Sacdiya Muse highlighted the issue of elite control within parties, stating that "elite control within parties can stifle dissenting voices and hinder the development of good ideas." This lack of internal democracy prevents innovative solutions from emerging and reinforces the status quo.
7. **Weak Institutional Development**: Sacdiya Muse pointed out that "political parties have not developed as institutions," lacking the necessary structures and processes for

effective governance. This institutional weakness hampers the ability of parties to function democratically and respond to the needs of the populace.

8. **Legal Framework Gaps**: Mubarik Aar emphasized that while Somaliland's legal framework prohibits tribalism, "despite these legal provisions, Somaliland's political parties have exhibited clannish tendencies." This contradiction indicates a failure in the implementation of laws designed to promote democratic practices.

9. **Recruitment Based on Clan Lists**: Mubrak Aar observed that "the recruitment of parliament and local government candidates based on clan lists" deviates from earlier practices that promoted candidates through party lists. This shift back to clan-based recruitment undermines the progress made towards a more democratic system.

10. **Limited Academic Engagement**: Dr. Fuad noted the limited influence of academics on political parties, stating that "there is limited interaction between the two groups." This disconnect suggests that valuable insights from the academic community are not being utilized in the political process, which could help address the challenges of clannism.

5. Recommendations

1. **Enhancing Political Inclusivity**:
   - The National Electoral Commission (NEC) should expand political representation by increasing the number of political parties that represent a broader spectrum of society beyond the dominant Isaaq clan.
   - Implement mechanisms to reduce clan-based parliament representatives' selection processes within political parties and encourage to make based on districts instead the currently regional.

2. **Strengthening Internal Democracy**:
   - The political parties should develop legal provisions and standards for merit-based candidate selection by establishing criteria for candidate selection that prioritize qualifications and experience over clan affiliation.
   - To provide capacity building programs that improve political parties to adopt democratic practices in their internal decision-making processes to enhance participation and innovation.

3. **Establishing Accountability Mechanisms**:
   - The political parties should strengthen political parties'/associations' registration and approval committee or Create an Independent Committee: The political parties should form an impartial body to oversee political party activities, ensuring transparency and accountability.
   - Implement Judicial Reforms by strengthening judiciary systems to uphold the rule of law and ensure fair treatment of all political actors.

4. **Developing Clear Electoral Rules**:

- o The NEC should improve current legal code of conducts and electoral regulations. Provide platforms for public discussions on political issues to inform parties and candidates of the people's needs and aspirations.
5. **Promoting Political Education**:
   - o The NEC should conduct campaigns to educate the public on the importance of democracy and the role of political parties in governance.
   - o Motivate citizens from diverse backgrounds to engage in political processes and advocate for their rights and interests.
6. **Strengthening political parties Decentralization:**
   - o The political parties should hire electoral process experts to provide training programs on party functions and decentralization.
   - o Establishment effective working mechanisms and functioning of national, regional, districts and another local levels of the parties' structures.
7. **Civic Education program**:
   - o The civic organizations/activists should support NEC by implementing civic education programs to raise public awareness and change societal mindsets regarding party affiliation. This highlights the importance of educating the populace to foster a political culture that values democratic principles over tribal loyalty.
8. **Strengthen the Registration and Approval Committee (RAC):**

   - o Grant the RAC greater independence from the incumbent president.
   - o Expand the RAC's role to include ongoing monitoring and management of political parties, not just registration and approval.
   - o Equip the RAC with clear guidelines and sufficient resources to effectively carry out its jurisdiction power for expanded responsibilities.

9. **Decentralize Governance:**

   - o Implement a system where regions independently elect their local mayors
   - o Reduce the Ministry of interior control over local government
   - o Hold separate elections for regional governors to ensure they are directly accountable to local voters.
   - o Avoid the potential for conflicts of interest between mayoral and local councilors

10. **Develop Anti-Tribalism Legislation:**

   - o Enact
   - o laws specifically designed to address and combat tribalism.
   - o Establish clear legal frameworks and penalties for engaging in tribalist practices.
   - o Identify and address the underlying factors that contribute to tribalism, such as inequality, discrimination, and lack of opportunities.

11. **Formalize the Role of Traditional Leaders:**

- o Establish clear guidelines and responsibilities for traditional leaders in governance and development.
- o Incorporate the role of traditional leaders into the constitutional framework.
- o Study and analyze the experiences of other countries, such as Malaysia, where traditional leaders have played a positive role in governance.
- o Identify best practices and lessons that can be applied to the Somaliland context.