

Lessons learned from Somaliland's last Elections and Future Recommendations for Electoral Process



Figure 1 Panelists for Lessons learned from Somaliland's last Elections and Future Recommendations for Electoral Process

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About the Center:

The Centre for Democracy and Governance (CDG) is an independent, Somaliland based nonprofit center of excellence that promotes the advancement of democracy and good governance. By deepening of democracy and works to contribute to peace and security in Horn of Africa, the African continent and beyond through dialogue, the pursuit of knowledge and rigorous analysis of critical issues and developments. CDG activities target Socio-economic groups (Local Communities) Civil societies Academic institutions Government and non-governmental institutions Political Parties Refugee and IDPs. In exercising this responsibility, CDG focuses on the challenges of institution capacity building, democratic governance and the rule of law, as well as opportunities for peace, security, cooperation and integration.

Location:

Badacas, behind State-house, Hargeisa-SOMALILAND

Phone: +252 63 4425849

www.cdgsom.org | country-director@cdgsomaliland.org |

Introduction

CDG in collaboration with the SDWG in partnership with the HBS organized one-day post-election forum to review lessons learned and provide recommendations for future electoral processes in Hargeisa on 25th December 2024 in Hargeisa City. The objectives of the forum comprised of evaluation of the roles played by key electoral stakeholders (political parties, National Electoral Commission (SLNEC), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), election observers, security officers, religious leaders and media) during the last elections; identification of lessons learned by analyzing the electoral process, including successes and challenges faced during the recent elections; strengthening the collaborations by building networks among stakeholders to promote ongoing dialogue and collaboration in the democratic process and generation of constructive recommendations aimed at enhancing future electoral processes and promoting democratic governance. The forum targeted about 150 participants, including electoral stakeholders, political party representatives, CSOs, members of the SLNEC, academia, and members of the general public (Women and youth activists, traditional elders, clan leaders, religious leaders, and business community representatives), academia and business community representatives to give their perspectives about the past elections in Somaliland.

Key Take always from the forum

Mr. Khadar Maxamed Diiriye noted that Somaliland has a social contract among its clans and to some extent follows the constitution of the country. He added that Somaliland showed the countries in the Horn of Africa region how it is different and regardless of the political tensions during the campaigns, election results were accepted by all contestants and there was a peaceful transfer of power. Additionally, Mr. Khadar acknowledged that gaps in the election laws always resurface every election cycle. He mentioned that NEC should make necessary electoral law amendments, and political parties should move to a more democratic process rather than falling back to traditional elders with their agendas and interests. He added that there is a need to strengthen the legal capacity of NEC and its regular operations. He highlighted that the registration should be regular. He noted that NEC's weaknesses are lack of stability, limited planning for the election process, and influence by political elites.

Mrs. Muna Bile explained that for the last 3 years, there was an unconstitutional political tension that created insecurity in specific regions, on the other hand, the institutions that were supposed to naturally side with the group and lost their credibility called for the intervention of the traditional elders. She added that the people of Somaliland managed to conduct a peaceful election with no tension or insecurity issues. She applauded the former president for unconditionally accepting the outcome of the elections. She claimed that the media played a dirty role by promoting hatred and propaganda amongst the communities that created uncertainty and fright situations in which the reality on the ground was much calmer and very different.

Furthermore, Mrs. Muna added that the bio-metric system did not start now but has been there since 2016 which is always very costly, apparently only 1 million have registered but NEC did not undertake a study to establish why the other 4 million voters were not registered in using the biometric system. In addition, she noted that low turnout in most of the regions could be due to the limited period of 30 days which was not adequate for proper public engagement across the countries. She emphasized that lack of civic education also played a role as communities lacked a clear understanding of their constitutional rights. She emphasized that there were some technical issues including dysfunctional biometrics in some regions which NEC should resolve in future elections.

Mr. Cabdinaasir Maxamed explained that the communities had understood they had the right to vote. It showed how the community had the power to make a change in the highest level of leaders including the election of presidential candidates. He added that about 50 percent of registered voters did not vote since they were concerned about security because they did not know how the candidates would react to the election results. He further added that the elections proved the commitment and struggle for peaceful elections and democratic process in Somaliland. Additionally, Mr. Cabdinaasir agreed that there had been lots of political tension and disagreements due to the weak laws and policies that were supposed to manage conflicts but turned into political institutions. He expounded that the peaceful elections would catalyze economic growth and development which had been stagnating during the political period due to uncertainty about the elections' outcomes. He emphasized that clan nepotism had also increased political institutions that were supposed to overturn the clannism ideologies that used clans as their political and campaigning tools which resulted in the unprecedented rise of clan politics in Somaliland.

Mr. Mubaarik Ibrahim explained that people's confidence in the NEC administration and government institutions declined in the last elections. He added that in certain regions, only 50% of the registered voters casted their votes. ***“He highlighted that elections are costly as a reference from the Ministry of Finance, about \$40M was the cost of the last 2 elections within 3 years”***. He suggested that voter registration is like any other necessary service, and NEC need to allocate resources into conducting it in all regions in Somaliland. He added that there was external interference by some countries in the Horn of Africa that had some sort of involvement where they were favoring one candidate/party/association above others. He emphasized that there should be a way for public accountability from the parties because they usually receive funding from the national budget.

Conclusions

The panelists concluded that the last election brought a positive image of Somaliland. They explained that for the last two and half years, Somaliland had been facing political tension so the election was a remedy to heal conflicts and hatred among the communities in Somaliland. The panelists added that the last elections were free and fair indicating a positive trajectory in

Somaliland's democratic process. Nevertheless, the panelists believe that there are no laws that prevent women from participating in politics. In most cases, socio-cultural beliefs about the roles of women in society undermine their participation in the political process. They further outlined that the NEC should schedule the elections and be respected by all parties regardless of their political powers and affiliations. Moreover, NEC should carry out proper voter registration and education programs in all regions of Somaliland before the elections to empower the communities and electorate about their democratic rights. The panelists also recommended that NEC should increase the number of polling stations to reduce congestion in some polling stations, especially in major cities across the country.