



ADVANCING INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY IN SOMALILAND - A YEAR OF DIALOGUE, EMPOWERMENT, AND ACTION

2025 Annual Report

Prepared by
CDG Programme Team

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Acknowledgement

As the Centre for Democracy and Governance (CDG) presents its 2025 Annual Report, we do so with profound gratitude for the collective effort that transformed this year's vision into tangible achievement. The work documented within these pages - the Male Champions Initiative, the inclusive community dialogues across Hargeisa, Burao, and Berbera, the women candidates coordination meetings, the political party engagements, the knowledge production, and the advancement of voluntary quotas - represents far more than the accomplishments of a single organization. It stands as a testament to what becomes possible when diverse actors unite around a shared commitment to inclusive democracy in Somaliland. To every individual and institution who walked this journey with us, we offer our deepest appreciation.

We extend our foremost gratitude to our donors and international partners, whose financial support and strategic guidance provided the foundation upon which everything else was built. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) entrusted us with resources that enabled bold vision and decisive action. The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) stood as a true consortium leader, offering not only funding but also technical expertise, patient mentorship, and unwavering belief in dialogue's power to transform political institutions. Our consortium partners (CIAG [Center for Inclusion, Accountability, & Governance] and ADAM Academy) worked shoulder to shoulder through every engagement, sharing insights, bearing challenges together, and celebrating successes as one team. The partnership among our organizations demonstrates that when civil society unites around a common vision, the whole indeed becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

To Somaliland's political parties (Kulmiye, Waddani, and KAAH) we express sincere appreciation for opening your doors, engaging in honest dialogue, and translating good intentions into public commitments. Chairman Mohamed Kahin, Chairman Hirsi, Deputy Chairman Abdikarim, and the many party leaders, women's wing representatives, and officials who participated in our meetings demonstrated that political will for inclusive democracy exists and can be mobilized. We are particularly grateful to the party leaders who designated Male Champions from within their structures and agreed to periodic progress reviews, transforming abstract support into accountable partnership. Your willingness to explore voluntary quotas, review internal nomination procedures, and commit to cross-party consultation signals a maturing political culture capable of placing national democratic progress above narrow partisan advantage. The traditional leaders who gathered for our Burao dialogue deserve special recognition for their remarkable courage.

Twenty-one clan elders (Aqils) examined their own role in political exclusion with honesty and humility, then committed to becoming enablers of women's participation. Aqil Bashir Abdullah, who challenged his fellow elders to distinguish culture from religion; Aqil Abdullahi Ali Ismail, who shared personal fears about supporting his own daughters; Chief Aqil Adan Ismail Hussain, who articulated the marriage penalty disadvantaging women - these leaders and their peers demonstrated that true authority means confronting uncomfortable truths and choosing change. Their public endorsements have conferred cultural legitimacy on the inclusion agenda and provided authoritative counter-narratives to those who would use tradition to justify exclusion.

Finally, we acknowledge with deep respect the persons with disabilities, minority community representatives, and our own CDG team who together ensured that our programming reflected the full diversity of Somaliland's citizenry. Zakarie Ahmed of SNDF and Yusuf Suldan insisted that inclusion must mean everyone, not only those already close to power. The Male Champions (twenty-seven influential men who chose to use their influence for change) demonstrated that men can be allies without losing authority and that true leadership means lifting others while climbing. We thank all the staff of CDG both the office staff and the field staff for their dedication and commitment to upholding CDG values and ethics throughout the year and during project/programme implementation. To Bilan Mohamed Hirsi, our Democratization and Human Rights Lead, and the entire CDG programme and support teams whose tireless dedication, long hours, and unwavering commitment made every dialogue, report, and engagement possible: your work has been an inspiration. The people of Somaliland, whose democratic aspirations and peaceful resilience continue to inspire us, remain the ultimate reason for all we do. We are honored to serve you and privileged to walk this journey alongside so many committed partners.

CDG Programme Team

Message from the Executive Director

The year 2025 marked a pivotal moment in Somaliland's democratic journey. As we approached the critical 2026 elections; combining House of Representatives and Local Council polls, the political landscape was charged with both opportunity and uncertainty. Discussions around election timelines, constitutional provisions, and the integrity of electoral institutions dominated public discourse. Yet beneath these high-level debates lay a more fundamental question: Whose voices would truly shape Somaliland's future?

For decades, women (despite being the majority of voters and the backbone of community resilience) have remained on the margins of political power. Persons with disabilities and minority communities have faced even deeper exclusion. Meanwhile, youth, who constitute a significant proportion of our electorate, have grown increasingly disillusioned with a political system that often seems to serve elite interests rather than public good.

At the Centre for Democracy and Governance (CDG), we approached 2025 not as another year of advocacy, but as an opportunity for transformation. We asked ourselves a difficult question: Why have decades of support for women's inclusion yielded only one female Member of Parliament? Our answer was equally difficult but necessary: because we have been training women to navigate systems we never sought to change.

This realization shaped everything we did in 2025. We moved beyond capacity-building for individual women to system engagement with the gatekeepers of power-clan elders who control nominations, political parties that determine candidacies, and cultural narratives that shape public acceptance. We launched the Male Champions Initiative, mobilizing influential men as advocates for inclusion.

We forged an unprecedented alliance between women candidates and women in media. We engaged all three national political parties (Kulmiye, Waddani, and KAAH) securing public commitments to voluntary quotas. We brought clan elders into honest dialogue about their role in exclusion; and their potential as enablers of change.

The results speak for themselves. Political parties that once offered only verbal support now discuss specific quota targets. Elders who once defended exclusion now publicly endorse women's leadership. Youth who once voted by rote now speak of merit, integrity, and agenda. Persons with disabilities and minority communities now sit at tables where their voices were previously absent.

None of this was achieved by CDG alone. Our consortium partners; CIAG, ADAM Academy, and NIMD, stood with us every step of the way. Political parties opened their doors for honest engagement. Traditional leaders risked social capital to support change. Women candidates and journalists built bridges across a long-standing divide. To all who partnered with us in 2025: thank you. This progress is yours as much as ours.

As we look to 2026, the work is far from complete. Commitments must become quotas. Endorsements must become nominations. Attitude shifts must become votes. But we move forward with something we did not have at the beginning of 2025; a multi-stakeholder ecosystem committed to inclusive democracy, concrete accountability mechanisms to track progress, and evidence-based understanding of what works.

Democracy in Somaliland will not be perfected in a single year. But 2025 will be remembered as the year we stopped asking women to change and started changing the systems that exclude them.



Abdirahman Warsame
Executive Director

2025 at a Glance

27	Male Champions	Influential men from religion, academia, and civil society mobilized as advocates for women's and PWDs' political participation
35	Women United	15 aspiring candidates + 15 women journalists forged strategic media-candidate alliance for 2026 elections
3	Political Parties Engaged	Kulmiye, Waddani, and KAAH participated in bilateral meetings and joint commitments toward voluntary quotas
21	Clan Elders (Aqils)	Traditional leaders publicly acknowledged structural barriers and endorsed women's political participation in Burao dialogue
37	Youth Mobilized	19 young men and 18 young women participated in Berbera youth dialogue on merit-based voting
130+	Aspiring Candidates	Platform established for monitoring election integrity and advocating against postponement
4	Major Research Reports	Evidence-based knowledge produced on structural barriers, youth voting behavior, voluntary quotas, and election integrity
100%	Political Party Coverage	All three national parties engaged and committed to inclusion mechanisms



About CDG

Who We Are

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 democratic practice and contributing to peace and security in the Horn of Africa, CDG works through dialogue, the pursuit of knowledge, and rigorous analysis of critical issues and developments

Our Vision

We believe in a democratic society where everyone has access to adequate human rights, social services, and a life free from fear and insecurity.

Our Mission

The Center for Democracy and Governance provides democratic support and assistance to the Somaliland community and its target groups, strengthening institutions and amplifying citizen voices.

Our Core Values

- Inclusion
- Accountability
- Freedom of Expression
- Transparency
- Social Responsibility
- Commitment to Democracy



CDG Voluntary Quotas for Women and Disabilities **CDG**

What We Do



**Democratization
& Human Rights**

**Governance
& Rule of
Law**

**Civil Society
Strengthening**

**Research &
Knowledge
Production**

**Advocacy for
Inclusive
Participation**

Our Partners

The Male Champions, CDG works in consortium with CIAG, ADAM Academy, and NIMD under the Inclusive Horizons project, funded by FCDO. We engage all three national political parties, the National Electoral Commission (NEC), traditional institutions, civil society organizations, media houses, Ministry of Interior, and community-based groups across Somaliland.



Key Achievements

Male Champions Initiative

The Male Champions Initiative emerged from a fundamental recognition that has too often been overlooked in efforts to advance women's political participation in Somaliland: the individuals who hold power within clan structures, political parties, and religious institutions must become part of the solution if change is to be sustainable. For decades, civil society organizations focused their energy on training women candidates, building their capacity, and preparing them to navigate political systems that were never designed to include them. Yet the results of this approach spoke for themselves. Despite women's high levels of civic engagement, voter turnout, and community leadership, their representation in elected office remained negligible. The gatekeepers who control nominations, endorsements, and resource mobilization remained untouched by these interventions, continuing to operate within systems that systematically privilege men.

Against this backdrop, CDG launched the Male Champions Initiative on 20 October 2025 at the ASSOD Hotel in Hargeisa, bringing together twenty-seven influential men from across Somaliland's political, traditional, religious, academic, and media sectors. The meeting marked the official launch of a platform designed to engage these respected figures not as passive supporters but as active advocates, mentors, and allies for women's and persons with disabilities' political participation. The participants represented a cross-section of Somaliland's leadership ecosystem: political party officials who shape candidate selection, clan elders who control nominations, religious leaders who influence community attitudes, academics who shape public discourse, and media professionals who control visibility. Their presence reflected a collective recognition that the status quo could no longer be defended. The opening session set the tone for what the initiative sought to achieve. Mr. Abdirahman Warsame, Director of CDG, framed the initiative not as a favor to women but as a democratic necessity, reminding participants that democracy cannot thrive when half the population remains underrepresented. Ms. Su'ad Ibrahim reinforced this message, emphasizing that empowering women complements societal strength and aims for a more balanced and representative society. The CDG team then presented the initiative's framework, outlining the categories of champions, their expected roles, and the scope of their engagement from October 2025 through May 2026. Champions would use their influence within clans, mosques, and community forums to advocate for inclusion, accompany women candidates to political meetings to strengthen their credibility, mobilize support through public engagement, and report progress to CDG.

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the initiative's launch was the candid diagnosis that emerged from plenary discussions. Participants acknowledged that previous support for women's inclusion had failed to produce meaningful results because it did not address the gatekeeping systems that control access to political power. They identified the absence of legal quotas, the entrenchment of clan-based nomination systems, and the lack of coordination among advocacy actors as critical gaps. Most importantly, they recognized that traditional leaders, who hold social legitimacy within communities, had been treated as obstacles rather than potential partners. This honest assessment laid the groundwork for a different approach, one that would engage elders, party leaders, and religious figures as allies in transformation rather than targets of advocacy.

By the meeting's conclusion, the Male Champions had moved beyond diagnosis to action. They developed concrete strategies for the 2026 elections, including initiating clan-level dialogues to advocate for women's inclusion in nomination lists, promoting internal party reforms such as voluntary quotas, leveraging mosques and media platforms to counter gender stereotypes, and establishing mentorship circles for women candidates. Champions committed to leading by example, embodying the principles of equality in their public and private conduct to inspire other men. The initiative transformed the discourse from one of women's issues to one of democratic legitimacy and national development, positioning the champions as catalysts capable of shifting Somaliland's political culture from exclusion to equity.



Key Achievements

Inclusive Community Dialogues

Throughout December 2025, CDG implemented a consolidated series of three interlinked community dialogues designed to address the multifaceted barriers to inclusive political participation in Somaliland. The Hargeisa dialogue on 4 December examined voluntary quotas for women within political parties, bringing together representatives from Kulmiye, Waddani, and KAAH alongside the National Electoral Commission, traditional elders, persons with disabilities, civil society, and Male Champions. The dialogue created a platform where political parties could articulate commitments publicly, moving beyond private expressions of support to measurable targets. Kulmiye and KAAH referenced proposed allocations of up to thirty percent, while Waddani acknowledged its initial commitment with openness to growth. Participants identified practical implementation pathways, including embedding quotas in party constitutions, clarifying nomination procedures, reducing nomination fees for women, and providing targeted campaign support, demonstrating that voluntary quotas represent the most politically feasible entry point for advancing women's representation within Somaliland's current constitutional framework.

The Burao dialogue on 11 December took a complementary focus, examining structural barriers through the lens of those who control access to power. Twenty-one clan elders gathered with women candidates, persons with disabilities, and civil society actors for a candid examination of how clan-based systems, marriage norms, financial exclusion, and informal gatekeeping intersect to produce women's political exclusion. Aqil Abdilahi identified clanism as the core barrier, explaining that even when women and men come from the same clan, the system still favors men. Chief Aqil Adan Ismail Hussain argued that marriage across clan lines creates a unique penalty for women, who fall between their natal clan and their husband's clan, losing political legitimacy in both. Aqil Abdullahi Ali Ismail shared a deeply personal example, explaining that he would feel unable to nominate his own highly educated daughter if she married outside their clan, fearing social consequences including potential removal from his position as Aqil.

The dialogue's most significant achievement was the public acknowledgment by elders that women's exclusion is structural, not the result of lack of competence or integrity. Aqil Bashir Abdullah challenged his fellow elders directly, stating that there is nothing in religion that prohibits women's leadership and that culture is too often misused to justify exclusion. He highlighted a critical contradiction: women are the majority of voters, yet no women are winning elections, and women voters support male candidates enthusiastically while giving little backing to women candidates. By the dialogue's conclusion, the assembled elders had collectively endorsed women's political participation, with several committing to raise women's candidacies in clan meetings, advocate for fair nomination processes, and support women candidates within their clans, transforming from defensive gatekeepers into reflective partners in reform.

The Berbera youth dialogue on 13 December completed the series, focusing on promoting merit-based voting among young people who constitute a significant proportion of Somaliland's electorate. Thirty-seven participants, nineteen men and eighteen women, examined how clan loyalty, elder pressure, and social expectations shape voting decisions through scenario-based discussions and direct engagement with women candidates. They spoke openly about elders who instruct them how to vote, the social costs of choosing differently, and their frustration with leaders who disappear after elections, yet revealed openness to supporting candidates based on integrity and agenda, particularly when comparing candidates from the same clan. Direct interaction with women candidates shifted perceptions, with participants acknowledging they had underestimated women's leadership capacity. Collectively, the three dialogues created continuity between discussions on quotas, structural barriers, and voting behavior, reinforcing that inclusive political participation requires coordinated action across multiple levels and transforming inclusion from an individual women's issue into a shared collective responsibility.



Key Achievements

Aspiring Candidates Platform

The Aspiring Candidates Platform emerged from a recognition that Somaliland's election postponement history poses a fundamental threat to democratic consolidation. Over three decades, election delays have accumulated to approximately forty-six years across presidential, parliamentary, and local council polls, creating a pattern of systemic failure that has normalized unconstitutional behavior. Younger generations have grown up with term extensions and law violations, risking the erosion of democratic culture. Against this backdrop, CDG designed a platform that would bring together aspiring candidates as a pressure group capable of closely monitoring the political landscape and advocating for timely elections. The platform's first major activity was an academic dialogue convened in Borama, Awdal Region, bringing together over 130 aspiring candidates, academicians, government officials, and political stakeholders for rigorous analysis of election postponement dynamics.

The dialogue generated critical insights into the structural enablers of election delays. Panelists examined how constitutional provisions, particularly Articles 42(3) and 83(5), grant the House of Elders power to postpone elections, creating a legal pathway for delay that has been repeatedly exploited. They analyzed the composition of the electoral commission, where two commissioners are appointed by opposition parties, two by the House of Elders, and three by the president and ruling party, creating structural conflicts of interest that undermine institutional independence. They documented how opposition parties consistently oppose postponement when out of power but facilitate it once in government, revealing that the problem transcends individual actors and reflects institutionalized incentives. Dr. Mohamed Muse, President of Amoud University, offered a stark assessment: no president will hold elections on time as long as they command majority support in the lower house, and the 2021 and 2005 experiences demonstrate that presidents who do hold parliamentary elections face significant political challenges.

The dialogue also examined the relationship between clan-based candidate selection and election integrity. Panelists observed that political parties have effectively ceded nomination authority to clan elders, who determine which candidates can compete under party banners.

No political party is willing to directly engage candidates without clan endorsement, as parties compete for clan support. This dynamic means that candidates are selected based on clan identity rather than competence, producing parliaments that include unqualified members while excluding many capable individuals. Women are particularly disadvantaged by this system, as clan elders rarely consider women legitimate political representatives. Hibo Mohamed emphasized that communities must realize they have power to influence decision-making by practicing their constitutionally protected rights, including peaceful protest against extractive politics and calculated election postponements.

Former Borama Mayor Mohamed Ahmed Baradho brought a local government perspective to the discussion, emphasizing that local councils have a responsibility to pressure the president for timely elections. He affirmed that he and his colleagues were willing to step down the moment their five-year terms ended, contrasting this commitment with the behavior of those seeking term extensions. He highlighted that the electoral law clearly defines candidacy requirements, yet the 2021 parliament included unqualified members because basic requirements at the national level contrast sharply with more stringent local council requirements. This discrepancy, he suggested, requires legislative attention to ensure that those who govern meet minimum standards of qualification.

The dialogue concluded with a shared understanding that amending the constitution carries risks that may outweigh benefits, as reopening constitutional negotiations could trigger broader political disputes that threaten the social contract binding Somaliland's communities. Yet participants agreed that the status quo is unsustainable. The platform committed to continued monitoring of election preparedness, advocacy against postponement, and mobilization of aspiring candidates as a collective voice for democratic integrity. By bringing together over 130 candidates who have a direct stake in timely elections, CDG created a constituency for reform that extends beyond civil society into the political class itself, strengthening pressure for elections that respect constitutional timelines and democratic principles.

Key Achievements

Women Candidates Coordination Meetings

On 16 June 2025, CDG partnered with the Female in Media Organization (FIMO) to convene a consultation that would prove transformative for both groups represented. Fifteen aspiring women candidates and fifteen female journalists gathered at the CDG Training Center in Hargeisa for a one-day meeting designed to bridge a collaboration gap that participants estimated at less than two percent. The consultation acknowledged a uncomfortable truth: despite personal friendships and shared gender, women in politics and women in media rarely communicated professionally, and when they did, the interaction was often superficial. Candidates lacked visibility; journalists lacked access. Neither group had developed the strategic relationship necessary to ensure that women's political aspirations received the media attention they deserved.

The opening session established the meeting's tone and purpose. Mr. Abdirahman Warsame challenged participants to utilize existing local resources rather than waiting for donor support, emphasizing that women in media and politics must collaborate, build alliances, and pursue their goals together. He stressed the critical need for women with political ambitions to form strategic relationships with media stakeholders, assuring participants that CDG would continue supporting such engagements through additional discussions and technical support. Facilitator Zainab Mohamed then guided participants through a structured dialogue designed to surface honest reflections and build trust across the divide separating the two groups.

The discussion revealed both the depth of the collaboration gap and the opportunities for bridging it. Sagal Guure of SAAB TV highlighted that women in politics are active in daily life but lack strong communication skills and commitment to building public visibility. Ms. Haawa, a candidate from Sanaag region, acknowledged the absence of communication despite existing personal relationships, admitting that she and her journalist friends simply never discussed politics professionally. Feysa, a media professional, criticized the absence of women-focused political programs within media institutions, noting that even when women candidates sought coverage, there were no dedicated platforms. Yurub Abiib, a former deputy minister, pointed to structural barriers including traditional and cultural issues, weak infrastructure, and lack of political inclusion, with male-dominated business networks controlling campaign resources.

Yet amidst these challenges, participants articulated a shared commitment to change. Ms. Muna Bile from Sool region expressed optimism that if action began immediately, meaningful relationships could be built before the elections. Nashaad Farhan of HCTV called for structured and consistent platforms to foster communication and trust, suggesting that one meeting was insufficient and that ongoing engagement was essential. Salma Sheikh of Review Magazine emphasized the need for capacity building, proposing that women in media receive training in conducting interviews, preparing political stories, and engaging the public effectively. Zahra Eidle Nuur, a veteran journalist, offered an inspiring vision, challenging participants to break barriers by doing what they had never done before.

By the consultation's conclusion, participants had moved from diagnosis to action. They agreed to establish a shared WhatsApp platform for day-to-day communication and coordination. They committed to increasing gender-focused programming, with women journalists proactively seeking interviews and stories featuring women candidates. They called on CDG and FIMO to organize advocacy sessions with media owners to support gender-inclusive political content. They endorsed the idea of televised debates led and moderated by women media professionals, providing high-profile platforms for women candidates to present their platforms. The consultation transformed a relationship marked by absence into a strategic partnership, ensuring that as the 2026 elections approach, women's voices will be visible, audible, and central to public conversation.



Key Achievements

Political Party Engagements

Throughout late 2025, CDG conducted structured bilateral engagements with all three of Somaliland's national political parties, recognizing that sustainable inclusion requires institutional commitment from the organizations that control candidate selection and campaign resources. The engagement with Kulmiye Party at its Hargeisa headquarters brought consortium representatives together with Chairman Mohamed Kahin, Deputy Chairman AbdiAsiis Samaale, and senior leadership. Chairman Kahin acknowledged that women are not asking for favors but for fairness, confirming the party's openness to reviewing internal procedures for strengthening women's and minority representation. The party leadership agreed to explore a voluntary quota model with proposed allocations of up to thirty percent and two seats per region for women candidates. They committed to designating two Male Champions from within the party to collaborate with CDG on awareness and mentorship initiatives, developing clear candidate selection criteria prioritizing merit over clan preference. Most significantly, they accepted the principle of periodic progress reviews, establishing a structured channel for ongoing engagement that transforms accountability from abstract concept into practical mechanism.



The KAAH Party engagement on 28 October 2025 brought consortium representatives together with Deputy Chairman Abdikarim, General Secretary Khadra Haji Gaydh, and Women's Wing Chairperson Leila Osman. Ms. Leila affirmed the party's commitment to inclusion while acknowledging implementation challenges, noting that KAAH challenges restrictive clan dynamics and evaluates candidates based on merit rather than gender. Abdilaahi Ubah announced that internal discussions were considering allocating four seats for women and minority candidates, signaling positive internal dialogue. General Secretary Khadra Haji Gaydh reflected on her own political journey, observing that Somaliland appeared to be moving backwards on inclusion since earlier days when she topped candidate lists in Gabiley.



Deputy Chairman Abdikarim announced plans to create an internal pressure group focused on quotas, campaign support, and financing, with discussions already underway with the President to structure assistance for women and minority candidates while affirming the party's commitment to timely elections.

The Waddani engagement with Chairman Hirsi and senior leadership completed the series. Consortium members emphasized that as the ruling party, Waddani holds the greatest responsibility in ensuring women's inclusion, moving beyond mentions in the party's six pillars to tangible commitments including formal quota acceptance. Chairman Hirsi reflected on structural issues affecting Somaliland's democratic development, noting the system's immaturity and the absence of primary elections as limiting factors. He expressed readiness for cross-party agreements while outlining major challenges women face: restrictive cultural norms, weak institutional growth within parties, limited public understanding of democracy, and internal dynamics where women sometimes fail to support one another. Across all three engagements, parties agreed to participate in a follow-up joint consultation to align on common principles for inclusive participation, demonstrating that while electoral competition continues, collaboration on inclusion is possible and necessary.



Key Achievements

Advancing Voluntary Quotas

The advancement of voluntary quotas for women in political parties emerged as a central focus of CDG's 2025 programming, reflecting a strategic recognition that in the absence of legally mandated quotas, voluntary mechanisms represent the most politically feasible pathway to increasing women's representation. The Hargeisa dialogue on 4 December 2025 brought together all three national political parties to explore how voluntary quotas could be structured, implemented, and monitored within existing legal frameworks and political realities. The dialogue acknowledged that previous attempts to legislate quotas had failed due to parliamentary resistance and constitutional constraints, making voluntary approaches not a second-best option but the only viable pathway within the current context. Participants examined experiences from other contexts, considered Somaliland's unique hybrid governance system, and explored how quotas could be embedded within party structures in ways that respect clan dynamics while advancing women's inclusion.

The dialogue revealed varying levels of party readiness but a shared recognition that reform is necessary. Kulmiye, as the party that originally initiated quota discussions in Somaliland, expressed continued commitment and referenced proposed allocations of up to thirty percent. The party leadership confirmed its openness to reviewing internal mechanisms and exploring how quotas could be embedded in party constitutions and bylaws. KAAH representatives announced that internal discussions were considering allocating four seats for women and minority candidates, with Deputy Chairman Abdikarim announcing plans to create an internal pressure group focused on quotas, campaign support, and financing. Waddani acknowledged a lower initial allocation while expressing openness to cross-party agreements and emphasizing that quotas must be embedded within party structures rather than left to informal arrangements that can be disregarded when politically convenient.

Beyond numerical targets, the dialogue explored the practical mechanisms required to make quotas meaningful rather than symbolic. Participants emphasized that quotas must be accompanied by transparent nomination procedures that prevent gatekeepers from simply placing women at the bottom of candidate lists where they have no chance of election. They discussed the importance of reducing nomination fees for women candidates, who lack access to the clan-based fundraising networks available to men. They explored the need for targeted campaign support including financial resources, logistics, and visibility, recognizing that nomination without support is an empty gesture.

They considered how Male Champions within parties could advocate for quota implementation and mentor women candidates throughout the electoral process. Civil society and disability rights representatives brought critical perspectives to the discussion. Zakarie Ahmed of SNDF called for persons with disabilities to be exempt from candidacy fees and emphasized that many highly qualified people with disabilities can perform leadership roles when given proper opportunities. Yusuf Suldan of Adam Academy called for zero discrimination based on clan or background, emphasizing that minority citizens must be supported to become MPs like anyone else. Nimco of SNDF challenged parties directly, asking what specific policies they have regarding persons with disabilities and receiving varying responses that revealed differing levels of preparedness across parties.

Group discussions generated additional insights into the barriers and opportunities surrounding voluntary quotas. One group examined the role of elders and religious leaders, concluding that elders should engage with parties to promote inclusion, religious leaders must clarify that Islam does not prohibit women's leadership, and awareness should target both traditional authorities and law-drafting bodies. Another group examined legal and cultural barriers, noting that women face difficulty approaching elders during nominations, that women often do not support women during elections, and that some fathers fear their daughters' political success may overshadow them. A third group focused on practical implementation, noting reduced inter-party competition recently and calling for more transparent quota commitments that can be tracked and verified.

By the dialogue's conclusion, participants had agreed on several concrete next steps. Political parties committed to participating in a follow-up joint consultation to align on common principles for inclusive participation. The development of a cross-party voluntary quota framework was proposed as a collective accountability mechanism. An inclusion scorecard was suggested to track progress against commitments. Male Champions from each party were designated to collaborate with CDG on awareness and mentorship initiatives. The dialogue transformed voluntary quotas from an abstract concept into a concrete set of commitments and implementation pathways, laying the groundwork for measurable progress toward women's representation in the 2026 elections.

Key Achievements

Generating Evidence for Democratic Reform

Throughout 2025, CDG produced a suite of knowledge products designed to deepen understanding of structural barriers to inclusive democracy and provide evidence-based advocacy tools for stakeholders across Somaliland's political landscape. The Burao dialogue report, "Overcoming Structural Barriers to Inclusive Political Participation in Somaliland," captured clan elders' own framings of women's exclusion in unprecedented detail. The report documented how clan-based nomination systems privilege men, how marriage across clan lines creates a unique political penalty for women, and how financial exclusion from clan fundraising networks leaves women candidates disadvantaged despite their recognized competence and integrity. Most significantly, the report captured elders' public acknowledgments that women's exclusion is structural rather than capacity-based, providing authoritative counter-narratives that can be used in advocacy with other traditional leaders. The report also documented the fear of social consequences that prevents some elders from supporting women candidates despite personal conviction, revealing that resistance is often rooted in fear rather than principled opposition and suggesting strategies for protecting and empowering willing allies.

The Berbera youth report, "Promoting Inclusive and Merit-Based Voting Behaviour Among Youth," provided the first systematically documented evidence of youth attitudes toward voting in Somaliland. The report revealed that youth experience intense pressure to conform to clan voting instructions, with significant social costs for those who choose independently. It documented that first-time voters are particularly open to alternative frameworks, suggesting a strategic entry point for civic education interventions. The report showed that direct interaction with women candidates produces measurable shifts in youth perceptions, challenging stereotypes about women's accessibility and leadership capacity. It also documented the dual marginalization facing young women, who are excluded from youth spaces due to gender bias and from women's spaces due to age-based perceptions of inexperience. The report's findings have been incorporated into CDG's youth engagement strategy and shared with political parties to inform their youth outreach efforts.

The Hargeisa quota dialogue produced "Advancing Voluntary Quotas for Women in Political Parties," documenting the public commitments made by all three political parties and the implementation pathways they identified. The report captured Kulmiye's proposed thirty percent allocation and two seats per region proposal, KAAH's commitment to exploring four seats for women and minorities, and Waddani's openness to cross-party agreements.

It documented agreement on practical mechanisms including embedding quotas in party constitutions, clarifying nomination procedures, reducing nomination fees for women, and providing targeted campaign support. The report also captured civil society and disability rights perspectives, including calls for candidacy fee exemptions for persons with disabilities and zero discrimination based on clan or background.

The reading article "Reviving Democracy and Restoring Citizens' Trust in Somaliland" emerged from the Aspiring Candidates Platform academic dialogue and provided the first comprehensive analysis of election postponement as systemic governance failure. The article documented approximately forty-six years of accumulated election delays across three decades, analyzed constitutional provisions enabling postponement, revealed how electoral commission composition undermines independence, and documented how political parties have ceded nomination authority to clan elders. The article warned that younger generations have grown up with term extensions and law violations, risking normalization of unconstitutional behavior and erosion of democratic culture. It proposed specific advocacy targets including removal or amendment of Articles 42(3) and 83(5), though acknowledging the risks of reopening constitutional negotiations. The article has been disseminated to political parties, international partners, and the public, stimulating debate and providing evidence-based analysis for advocacy.

A press release issued on 27 February 2020 was re-circulated during 2025, reminding stakeholders of CDG's longstanding commitment to democratic integrity. Collectively, these knowledge products positioned CDG as an authoritative source on inclusive democracy in Somaliland, provided stakeholders with evidence for advocacy, and created institutional memory enabling future interventions to build on documented learning rather than repeat past approaches. By generating locally grounded, empirically rigorous knowledge and ensuring its dissemination to key stakeholders, CDG strengthened the evidence base for democratic reform and amplified voices too often excluded from policy discourse.



Key Achievements

Cross-Cutting Inclusion

Throughout 2025, CDG ensured that persons with disabilities, minority communities, and young women were not afterthoughts but integral participants in every dialogue and engagement. Persons with disabilities participated actively in the Hargeisa quota dialogue, with representatives calling for exemption from candidacy fees and emphasizing that leadership is about competence, not physical ability. Their presence documented the triple-layered barriers facing women with disabilities, youth with disabilities, and minority women with disabilities; groups that generic programming often misses entirely.

Minority voices were elevated across engagements, with particular attention to the Gabooye community's experience. CDG documented how geographic dispersion across regions limits minority electoral influence, requiring innovative strategies for building political voice. Barkhad's electoral victory was cited as evidence that community mobilization can enable minority success when civil society and communities unite behind candidates.

Young women's dual marginalization received deliberate attention, with balanced youth dialogue participation ensuring their voices were heard. CDG documented how young women are excluded from youth spaces due to gender bias and from women's spaces due to age perceptions, requiring tailored programming that generic "youth" or "women" initiatives miss.

Most critically, CDG established accountability mechanisms to transform symbolic commitments into measurable progress. All three political parties agreed to designate Male Champions for ongoing collaboration. Cross-party joint consultation was scheduled to align common principles. An inclusion scorecard was proposed to track progress publicly. KAAH announced an internal pressure group focused on quotas and campaign support. These structures ensure that the commitments secured in 2025 translate into tangible outcomes in 2026.



Success Stories: The Human Element

The Elder Who Chose Courage

Aqil Abdullahi Ali Ismail came to the Burao dialogue with hesitation. A respected elder with ten daughters, he privately supported women's leadership but feared the consequences of speaking openly. During the dialogue, he shared his truth: "I have ten daughters. My eldest studied in Hargeisa and Uganda. But if she married into another clan, I would feel shy to nominate her. People may say, 'your daughter married into another clan,' and they may reject me. They might even threaten to remove me as an Aqil. This is very challenging, and I do not want to risk that."

By the dialogue's end, something had shifted. Hearing other elders share similar fears (and witnessing women candidates' courage) Aqil Abdullahi stood and committed to raising his daughters' candidacies in clan meetings. He joined other elders in a collective endorsement of women's participation. One elder's courage became a bridge for many. His story now features in CDG's advocacy, showing other traditional leaders that they are not alone.

The Candidate and the Journalist

Ms. Haawa, a first-time candidate from Sanaag region, and Sagal Guure, a journalist with SAAB TV, sat on opposite sides of the room during the Women Candidates-Media Consultation. They had never met, though they lived in the same city. During introductions, Ms. Haawa admitted: "We're friends with women in the media; but we don't communicate at all." Sagal responded: "Women in politics are very active in daily life, but they lack strong communication skills and commitment to building public visibility."

The moment was honest; almost uncomfortable. But facilitator Zainab Mohamed guided them through it. By afternoon, Ms. Haawa and Sagal were sketching a plan together: regular interviews, media training for candidates, and a shared WhatsApp group for quick coordination. "If we act now," Ms. Haawa said, "we can build a meaningful relationship before the elections." Their partnership became a model for the alliance. Today, they communicate weekly.

The Youth Who Found His Voice

Mohamed, a 22-year-old first-time voter from Berbera, arrived at the youth dialogue skeptical. "Our elders tell us who to vote for," he said. "If we choose differently, we are seen as betraying the clan. But how can democracy work if we cannot think for ourselves?" Through scenario-based discussions, Mohamed encountered women candidates who shared their platforms directly. He heard them speak about unemployment (his primary concern) with clarity and commitment. "I always assumed women candidates were just symbolic; put on the list to meet a requirement," he admitted. "But after hearing them speak today, I see they have real plans for our community." By dialogue's end, Mohamed had not only shifted his own perspective but was encouraging fellow youth to evaluate candidates based on agenda, not clan. He left with renewed motivation to vote; and to convince his peers to do the same.

The Party Leader Who Listened

When CDG first approached Kulmiye Party Chairman Mohamed Kahin about women's quotas, his response was polite but measured. By the third engagement (after data from the Burao elders' dialogue and Berbera youth dialogue were shared) his tone changed. "Women are not asking for favors," he stated publicly. "They are asking for fairness." He committed to reviewing internal party mechanisms, exploring a thirty percent allocation, and designating two Male Champions to work with CDG. More significantly, he agreed to periodic progress reviews; a direct accountability mechanism. When asked why he shifted, he pointed to the evidence: "When I see elders endorsing women, youth demanding merit, and other parties moving; I know this is not a civil society agenda anymore. This is a national movement."

Success Stories: The Human Element

The Engineer Who Became a Champion

Eng. Mohamed Adan arrived at the Male Champions Initiative launch carrying an unsettled question. His daughter had asked him to support her candidacy for local council, and he had responded with hesitation; worried about clan reactions, her marriage prospects, and his own standing in the community. The opening session challenged him directly. When speakers described democracy's need for women's full participation and men's role as allies, Mohamed recognized his own fears reflected in the room.

The turning point came during plenary discussions, as political party representatives admitted their institutions' role in exclusion and elders spoke of fearing social consequences for supporting women. Mohamed realized his hesitation was not unique but shared by men across Somaliland who privately supported women's leadership but feared being first to speak publicly. He stood and committed not only to backing his daughter's candidacy but to becoming a Male Champion advocating within his clan and professional networks.

Since that day, Mohamed has spoken at three clan meetings about supporting women candidates, accompanied his daughter to party officials for her first meeting, and recruited two fellow engineers to the Male Champions network. "I was waiting for permission to do what I already knew was right," he explains. "The initiative didn't give me new beliefs; it gave me courage to act on the beliefs I already had."



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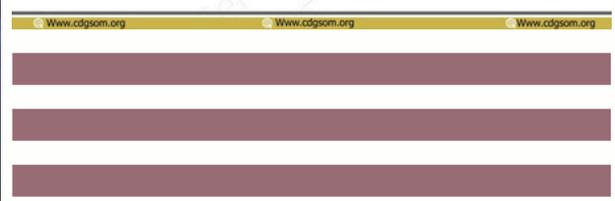
CRUCIAL DEADLINE FOR POLITICAL AGREEMENT ON VOTER REGISTRATION AND 2026 ELECTIONS FOR TOMMOROW MEETING

The Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) highlights the importance of the meeting scheduled for 03 December 2025, where the three national political parties WADDANI, KULMIYE, and KAAH are expected to reach their final agreement on voter registration and the electoral plan for the 2026 elections. This long-awaited meeting, taking place tomorrow, represents a critical moment for safeguarding Somaliland's democratic timeline.

More than 1,200 aspiring candidates across the country are waiting with anticipation for a positive and decisive outcome that will allow them to prepare responsibly for the coming elections. Citizens, civil society organizations, and democratic institutions are also closely watching, hopeful that the parties will act with unity and national responsibility.

CDG underscores the need for the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to host and facilitate this meeting to ensure neutrality, transparency, and effective coordination. A final and timely agreement from the political parties is essential to avoid any delays that could weaken public trust or disrupt the election calendar. Somaliland has consistently demonstrated its ability to resolve political matters through dialogue and consensus. Tomorrow's decision will be a defining moment for reinforcing that tradition and ensuring the 2026 elections proceed on time. CDG calls on all three political parties to prioritize the national interest and finalize their agreement tomorrow for the benefit of the nation and its democratic future.

— End —



Looking Ahead to 2026

Aligning Political Will Through a Cross-Party Quota Framework

The voluntary quota commitments secured from Kulmiye, Waddani, and KAAH in 2025 represent a significant breakthrough, but commitments alone do not guarantee representation. In the coming year, CDG will facilitate a joint consultation bringing together all three political parties to align their individual pledges into a shared accountability framework. This cross-party process will establish common principles for quota implementation, including transparent nomination procedures, clear timelines, and mechanisms for tracking progress. By creating a framework that all parties endorse collectively, we reduce the risk that any single party loses electoral advantage by acting alone on inclusion. The consultation will also provide space for parties to learn from each other's approaches, share challenges, and develop solutions that respect each party's unique structure while advancing the shared goal of women's representation. When parties compete on policy and performance rather than on who can exclude more effectively, Somaliland's democracy grows stronger.

Activating Male Champions Across All Regions

The twenty-seven Male Champions who committed to advancing women's inclusion in 2025 will move from pledge to action in the months ahead. CDG will support these champions in implementing their advocacy, mentorship, and clan engagement plans across Somaliland's regions, recognizing that change must reach beyond Hargeisa to touch every community. Champions will convene clan meetings to advocate for women's inclusion in nomination lists, drawing on their own standing and relationships to open spaces that have long been closed. They will mentor women candidates, sharing campaign strategies, accompanying them to political meetings, and lending their credibility to reinforce legitimacy. They will speak in mosques, universities, and community gatherings, challenging discriminatory norms and modeling what male allyship looks like in practice. The champions' visibility and sustained engagement will demonstrate that support for women's leadership is not a marginal position but a growing movement with influential backing.

Amplifying Women Candidates Through Media Alliance

The partnership forged between women candidates and women journalists in 2025 will deepen and expand as elections approach. CDG will support the Women in Media Alliance in producing a series of televised debates that showcase women candidates' platforms to the electorate, ensuring that voters can evaluate them based on agenda and integrity rather than gender stereotypes. These debates, moderated by women journalists, will provide unprecedented visibility for women aspirants while demonstrating women's competence in political leadership. Beyond debates, the alliance will maintain its shared communication platform for real-time coordination, enabling journalists to access candidates quickly and candidates to respond to media opportunities. Joint training sessions will strengthen both groups' capacities: journalists will develop skills in political reporting and interview techniques, while candidates will refine their messaging and public engagement. The alliance transforms media from a passive observer into an active partner in advancing women's visibility and electability.



Looking Ahead to 2026

Scaling Youth Engagement for Merit-Based Voting

The energy and openness demonstrated by young people in Berbera will be scaled to reach five hundred youth voters across additional regions in 2026. CDG will expand its youth dialogue methodology to communities beyond Berbera, adapting scenario-based discussions to local contexts while maintaining focus on merit-based voting, resistance to clan pressure, and support for women candidates. These dialogues will create safe spaces where young people can examine their voting assumptions, hear directly from candidates, and develop confidence to make independent decisions. Particular attention will be given to first-time voters, who demonstrated in Berbera that they are especially receptive to alternative frameworks when engaged early and appropriately. Young women will be deliberately included, ensuring that their dual marginalization (excluded from youth spaces due to gender bias and from women's spaces due to age perceptions) is addressed through targeted programming. By election time, a network of informed, motivated youth voters will be equipped to vote their convictions and encourage peers to do the same.

Monitoring Election Integrity Through the Aspiring Candidates Platform

The Aspiring Candidates Platform, representing over 130 individuals with direct stake in timely elections, will continue monitoring political developments and advocating against postponement throughout 2026. Platform members will track election preparedness, document statements from political leaders, and maintain collective pressure on institutions to respect constitutional timelines. When rumors of delay emerge, the platform will respond with coordinated advocacy, reminding stakeholders of the 46 years of accumulated delays documented in CDG's research and the democratic erosion that results from normalized postponement. The platform will also monitor candidate selection processes, documenting whether parties honor their voluntary quota commitments and whether women and minority aspirants receive fair consideration. By maintaining a collective voice, aspiring candidates transform from isolated individuals competing against each other into a constituency for democratic integrity that transcends partisan division.

Documenting Learning for Future Programming

Throughout 2026, CDG will systematically document lessons learned from election-related programming, building an evidence base that will inform future interventions and policy advocacy. Researchers will track which strategies prove most effective in shifting elder attitudes, which messaging resonates with youth voters, how media coverage influences candidate visibility, and whether voluntary quotas translate into actual nominations. This documentation will capture not only successes but also challenges, setbacks, and adaptations, ensuring that the development community learns from the full range of experience rather than a sanitized version. The resulting knowledge products will be shared with political parties, civil society organizations, international partners, and government institutions, contributing to a cumulative understanding of what works in advancing inclusive democracy in Somaliland's unique context. By investing in learning now, CDG ensures that the foundation laid in 2025 and 2026 will benefit Somaliland's democracy for years to come.





CDG Voluntary Quotas for Women and Disabilities

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