

Governance and accountability issues within Hargeisa Local Council

Hargeisa citizens are not satisfied with the provision of services from Hargeisa Local Council (HLC). Poor capacity and a lack of skills, proper planning and social accountability have led to weak service delivery and governance. Council election processes and a lack of public engagement further exacerbate this dissatisfaction. Local council election law has to be reformed if the local governance of Hargeisa is to improve. Informed by these findings, the Social Research and Development Institute (SORADI) mobilised citizens from across Hargeisa society and established a reform champions forum to lobby for electoral changes. Proposed amendments are expected to be forwarded to parliament in December 2017.

This Policy Brief summarises the research findings of an IAAAP-commissioned political economy assessment of Hargeisa local governance in order to suggest ways to improve service delivery and enhance accountability and democratic governance. Social Research and Development Institute (SORADI) conducted four focus group discussions, eight group interviews and nine key informant interviews predominantly with local government staff and some councillors and service consumers. IAAAP is a UK Aid funded programme working to generate evidence for action around greater accountability.

Key Findings

Local councillors lack political will and the capacity to be responsive

Local councillors rarely use the range of channels available to them to gather information on the needs and preferences of the local population, despite it being a legal requirement. Members of the council have very little knowledge of public sector procedures or of basic legal frameworks they must adhere to. Most have limited educational attainment; of the 25 councillors, only seven have post-secondary education and three have no formal education at all. The absence of civic action groups and reliance on CSOs to articulate issues heightens HLC's lack of responsiveness.

Staffing issues are a major concern for local government

All respondents agreed that the local government is overstaffed. The latest figure is estimated to be 1400 employees. Conversations with two ex-Mayors noted an 88% increase in staff over a decade (from 450 in 2000 to 850 in 2010), when reportedly only 640 were needed. All respondents also agreed that this increase has not led to an increase efficiency or quality of work. A large number of staff are "ghost employees" who appear on the payroll but never report for work. Further, the majority of staff don't have job descriptions and are often unaware of the expectations they are expected to meet.

Poor relations between local councillors and technical staff limits responsiveness

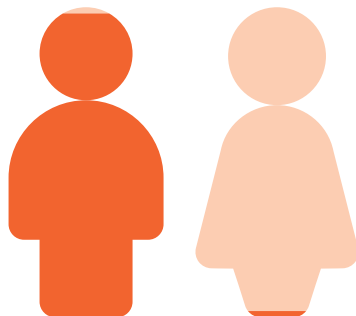
Cooperation between councillors and local government technical staff needs to be improved. Local government staff are aware that elected councillors often do not possess the necessary skills or sufficient clout to hold them accountable. As a result, technical staff sometimes provide inadequate or unclear information, which councillors need to make decisions.

Limited gender representation and social inclusion in council leadership positions

HLC consists of 25 members, none of whom are women or individuals from minorities or with disabilities. Likewise, in the senior management team of over 50 roles there is only one woman – Manager of the Archives Section – and one Sub-District Manager from a minority clan.

98%

of Hargeisa's local councillors and senior management are male



Informal systems and structures overshadow formal ones – and facilitate corruption

Informal networks and rules thrive within the Hargeisa Local Government. There is convincing evidence that most of the council's business transactions take place in the informal arena, involving traditional leadership, business community, real-state dealers and fixers amongst others. This can facilitate corruption, nepotism and intense clan politics that can affect the success of local governance and service delivery.

Ineffective supervision from central government

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) and other central government institutions are responsible for the guidance, inspection, monitoring and coordination of local government to ensure compliance with the provisions of law. However, routine inspections conducted by MOI and others, such as the Auditor General, have reportedly been unable to lead to improved performance or the reduction of corruption and the abuse of authority and of public office. In multiple inspections, inadequate internal coordination within local government has been noted.

Recommendations

Reform local council election processes

Hargeisa citizens should vote to elect the Mayor and Deputy Mayor from a pool of candidates running for these positions, rather than from a narrow clan base. This will stop the councillors from electing and later manipulating these leaders, and force them to fulfil their individual interests.

Define the level of educational attainment for councillor candidates

Prospective local councillors should meet a minimum education requirement to ensure a certain level of knowledge and understanding can be applied to the position.

Democratise the council elections system and simplify the Recall Law

The current city-wide, clan- based system is unrepresentative and therefore is unable to meaningfully affect accountability. Citizens feel that the Recall Law, which requires at least 5000 citizens to sign a petition in front of a judge, requires simplification so that they do not need to wait for elections to express their displeasure with an elected official.

Enforce civil service guidelines around staffing

Local government staff are, by law, part of the Ministry of the Interior. As such, guidelines around civil servant staffing should be followed.

Ensure the provision of timely and accurate information to councillors

To improve responsiveness, technical government staff should provide information to the councillors on time and in easy to internalise formats. Councillors should provide feedback to the technical staff, so they can improve the ways they do this.

Increase transparency around what local government is doing to address citizen's concerns

The Mayor, guided by the MOI, should report to the council on district achievements, challenges and the ways forward for service delivery, as well as on council performance of the oversight and accountability functions. This should be made mandatory and publicised on radio and TV so it could form the basis of regularly meetings and radio talk shows between citizens and local councillors.

For further information, please contact: info@somaliaccountability.org or visit www.somaliaccountability.org Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP) is a four-year UK Aid-funded programme aiming to generate and promote a robust evidence base that will inform, influence and support a broad range of Somali and international actors to hold government more accountable.