



Somaliland Non State Actors Forum

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Briefing Paper

Togdheer Voter Registration Performance

Domestic Observation Findings

Summary:

Somaliland Non - State Actors Forum (SONSAF) in collaboration with Somaliland Civil Society Election Forum (SCISEF) mobilized, trained and deployed domestic observers on voter registration throughout voter registration centers in Togdheer region which NEC started in the region on 16th January, 2016. Domestic observers reached approximately 55% of the total voter registration centers operating in Togdheer region. In addition, under auspices SONSAF leadership, the Civil Society Election Forum held several policy discussion meetings in the region and successfully addressed the issues of voter registration process. The civil society actors shared their views on voter registration matters to NEC and provided timely feedback with all concerned election stakeholders. Domestic observers identified severe drought which caused migration of many nomadic people for search of pasture. In the meantime, domestic observers reported that political parties' representatives had no regular presence most of the voter registration centers. Finally, Civil Society is reiterating that international community support for voter registration process and elections is both substantial and vital and remaining segments of the voter cards printing and distribution is an essential in order to conclude this process of the voter registration stages.

Introduction

It is the second time that Somaliland is pursuing very sophisticated voter registration process based on biometric specially IRIS system which makes Somaliland first African country to undertake this initiative of IRIS system in the voter registration. Compared to 2008-2009 voter registration performance, which was fingerprint and unable to detect multiple registration, but domestic observers confirmed that the technology used the current voter registration proved competence to detect any fraud in this year of 2016 voter registration exercise.

Moreover, despite some small technical errors of mainly networking system for the first day of the voter registration followed by other minor adjustments of the some individual kits, the overall domestic observations in Togdheer indicated that the process of the voter registration concluded peacefully. According to NEC, no multiple registration, except duplicates of less than 500 persons reported in the overall voter registration centers in Togdheer region in which 60% were errors made by operators. Hence, NEC confirmed that 99% of the voter registration exercises were successfully completed in Togdheer.

Therefore, the key challenges that domestic observers mentioned were mostly technical adjustments and knowledge gap of the citizens on voter registration. On the other hand, mostly in the rural areas the observers confirmed that women turnouts were less than the men and this can be a cultural phenomenon in the pastoral society in Somaliland where women are generally dedicated both home management and caring livestock. Likewise, domestic observers also pointed out the urgent need for Ministry of Interior to strengthen their representatives in the voter registration, adding that Ministry of Interior identification and screening process of the citizens following providing registration of the national ID forms may perpetuate the time and efficiency of the voter registration if it is continued another regions.

However, this civil society engagement both domestic observation and voter education contributed to increase public participation and coordination between all voter registration and election stakeholders and the CSOs are committed to conduct serious oversight interventions in order to hold state institutions accountable for the benefit of free and fair elections in 2017. Furthermore, domestic observers indicated that political parties' representatives in the voter registration centers were not regular throughout the centers and days but observers encountered some mobile teams from political parties. Regarding security issues, no reports received from domestic observers stated insecurity activities but this cannot be taken for grant in other regions.

In fact, the experience gained from the Togdheer's voter registration is an asset and needs to be applied another regions and during Democratization Coordination Committee on February 2, 2016 at National Electoral Commission, representatives of civil society, NEC and international partners agreed to strengthen the areas of weaknesses such as technical errors and mistakes related to mishandling of camera by NEC staff, because representatives of NEC shared and clarified during the DCC meeting that some duplicates were not intentional but technical mistakes relating camera operating system which occurred as matter of repeating IRIS picture when voter's picture not captured properly, the king picture in the system automatically records repeated pictures as duplicates. This is what has been reported as duplicates occurring operating system.

On the other hand, the observers reported that the situation of the voter registration was very calm and peaceful. Domestic observers also reported that few people who attempted to register twice were caught and arrested by the police, particularly in the urban areas, but in the rural areas, police were not able to arrest as they caught for double registration attempts due to lack of facilities and detention centers in rural areas.

The Scope of the Civil Society Interventions on Voter Registration Observation

It is obvious that Somaliland CSOs are dedicated to pursue coherent and consistent policy dialogue and policy advocacy interventions both domestic and international levels. The CSOs have been very much active in the last 15 years in the areas of good governance, democratizations, elections, civic/voter education, human rights and promoting free press and freedom of speech granted by the national constitution.

From this perspective, Somaliland Non- State Actors Forum (SONSAF) with the support of European Union and Saferworld established and trained long time observers which are about 230 included 100 Civil Society Election Forum members where 45 voter registration observers have been trained in Togdheer region that have covered 55.8% of the voter registration centers in Togdheer region, while there were simultaneous policy interventions that Somaliland Civil Society Election Forum (SCISEF) conducted during the voter registration period in Togdheer region.

Indeed, this course of long time observers in the pre- election stages has substantial impact to contribute the effectiveness of the electoral process and help election stakeholders to accelerate and coordinate elections preparation processes. In regard to NEC, the observers stated that National Electoral Commission (NEC) has made tremendous efforts to improve the capacity of the staff undertaking the voter registration, technical solutions and voter education. However, domestic observers reported that technical implications were included the constrains experienced and it was unavoidable element during the registration but at least seven mobile teams of technical experts were engaged to coordinate and resolve these technical matters.

Stakeholders Cooperation

Domestic observers noticed the existence of greater cooperation between political parties, NEC, and government was good indication that all political actors adhered and respected “voter registration code of conduct” that three political parties and NEC signed. Indeed, it was symbolic and deserve to be commended how political actors constantly shared information concerned the registration process because observers indicated that representatives from political parties were regularly contacting NEC whenever some technical matters occur and it is worth to mention that voter registration environment was more depoliticized and showed some sort of harmony and national feelings.

Policy recommendations

National Electoral Commission (NEC) should:

- Strengthen technical solution and immediate technical respond which is coherent the rest of the regions starting from Awdal region.
- Lessons learned from Togdheer region need to capitalize, cultivate and prepare rapid treatment responses and proper technical and leadership coordination.
- Strengthen voter/civic education both usage of the media and other participatory theater cultural methods that attract emotions and history of the society, promoting sub- regional cultures are highly encourageable.
- Explore the ways and means to deal with the nomadic people that move from one place to another or cross the border with Ethiopia due to the droughts.
- Ensure that data management and the tabulation to be properly recorded, verified and make whole environment intact and secure.
- Ensure that finalization of the voters list must be produced on regional basis timely.
- Increase measures and control of any attempts of the underage registration and double registration.
- Set up a mechanism that NEC weekly discloses the names of the persons attempted double registration.

Ministry of interior should:

- Strengthen their representatives in order to keep the entitlement of the voter registration both the age and nationality
- Ensure that representatives from Ministry of interior who are dedicated to provide forms of the national ID to the citizens may not be an obstacle to the voter registration process.
- Ensure that security of the regions may not be constant always but Ministry of Interior needs to explore regions which are required strong security presence and further security oversight during the voter registration process.
- Prepare the capacity of the rule of law institutions to regulate persons attempted multiple registration according to Law No. 37/2007.

Political parties should:

- Increase their representatives in the voter registration centers for remaining regions.
- Continue the adherence of the signed voter registration code of conduct.
- Educate and sensitize their supporters against multiple registration and whatever that can create insecurity and violence.
- Continue cooperation and information sharing commenced from Togdheer region between political parties, NEC, regional administration and CSOs.
- Resolve all complains by referring back to the code of conduct and avoid whatever may distort the attention of the general public and the process of the voter registration.