



Academy for Peace and Development
Akaademiga Nabadda iyo Horumarka

The Status of Civic Education in Somaliland

A Workshop Report



October 2007
Hargeysa

Introduction

The people of Somaliland went to the polls four times¹ in order to move the country towards multi-party democracy. For Somaliland's new democracy to take hold and flourish a critical mass of its citizens must have the skills, values and behaviours to sustain a stable democracy. Though it takes a lifetime to absorb these democratic beliefs, one way that new democracies can obtain the skills, values and behaviours that are deemed necessary for functioning and stable democracy, is through civic education, which essentially seeks to jump-start the process of democratic socialisation (USAID, 2002).



Mr. Boobe, APD Program Coordinator

The Academy of Peace and Development, with the help of a recently formed Youth Working Group², organised a three day workshop to discuss and identify the challenges to civic education in the country. There were also discussions that attempted to define the role of the central and local government (both the executive and legislative bodies), the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the political parties, civic organizations, the media, and the public.

The workshop was held in Hargeysa on 7-9th September 2007. The workshop participants included representatives from the central and the local government, the political parties, the civic organisations, the media, intellectuals and the public. A few days before the workshop, a discussion paper in Somali was distributed to the participants. The discussion paper raised the critical issues pertaining to civic education exercise was designed to stimulate and guide the discussions.



Abdi Odawa: DG of Min. of Education

What is Civic Education?

Before the participants were able to discuss the status of civic education in the country, a debate on defining “civic education” emerged. Some participants believed that “civic education” was a very broad subject and covered many topics that included: religion, culture and heritage, social structures, natural resources and climate. The understanding projected by other participants was that “yes” civic education is a broad subject, but it relates to politics and governance. In words of one participant:

“It is about teaching the public about their rights and obligation towards the county and fellow citizens, to impart that feeling in them. It is to create a “civic culture” that can sustain and understand the prevailing life-style and our emerging democratic institutions.”

¹ They are Constitutional referendum, and Local, Presidential and legislative elections.

² In June 2007, APD have formed a Youth Working Group to engage the youth in its Dialogue for Peace program and particularly in the democratisation process. The Youth have identified lack of civic education as one of the challenges to stable democracy in Somaliland.

The Current Status of Civic Education

Contrasting views emerged from the workshop's debate on the level of civic education in the country. Some participants felt that there was some civic education in the country. According to this view, many received civic education in the past and still there is some kind civic education that has been retained by the community since that time. They also argued that elements of civic education could be found in our education system, some programmes run by the media, and activities conducted by some civic organisations.

Others describe the available civic education as something that was not systematic, active or practical, and did not reflect the need of the masses. Some of the participants who held this view were commented:



Amran Hassan: Journalist student.

“The available civic education is static and does not progress with the growing mind of the student. It is not the kind where a group of people that are gathered in a particular place are being taught their constitutional rights and obligations and voting procedures.” “If the current civic education was effective and practical, the students would have been able to select their class/school leaderships instead of the teachers selecting for them.”

The majority of the participants believed that there was no comprehensive and sustained civic education effort throughout the country. Particularly the type of civic education that impart to citizens their obligations and loyalties to the country and that reflect our socio-political realities. As one participant explained:

“There is a certain type of civic education that gives the person his/her responsibility, and all of us subscribe to it, but it is the kind that has no relationship with the interest of the country. It is not the kind that promotes one’s loyalty and obligation to the whole country, but to one’s loyalty and obligation to his/her clans or sub-clans.”



Mr. A/labi Yassin: M. of Education

The workshop participants identified the following major challenges to comprehensive and regular civic education:

- The lack of the skills, knowledge, means and leadership to set up plans or policies that could guide a civic education campaign.
- The lingering legacies from the prolonged civil wars and dictatorial rule that have lessened the need for and importance attached to civic education.
- Limited resources, scattered and nomadic population with high illiteracy rates, poor infrastructure, and underdeveloped institutions have limited programs in regular, comprehensive and outreaching civic education.
- It is not a priority issue for the government, the political parties, media, or civic organisations.

Some of the opportunities the participants mentioned are:

- The prevailing peace and stability
- The democratic values that we embrace
- The existence of some institutions (governmental and non-governmental) despite their limitations.



Rasbid A/labi: WCC

The Role of the Government

There was consensus among the participants on the role of the government (both the executive and the legislative bodies). They all recognised how it is important for the government to lead and guide any national civic education campaigns. To them, the various organs of the government were to work together in order to develop a national policy that would define and enhance its role in the provision of civic education. And to set up the mechanism to implement civic education programmes. It was the executive to implement these civic education programmes and the parliament was to ensure the implementation of these programmes by the executive.

The participants also realised the missing role of the government (both the executive and the legislative bodies) in terms of civic education and the lack of national policy pertaining to civic education. According to one of the participants:

“There is no defined national civic education policy/programme that deal with the majority of population- (that are eligible to vote or/and run for public office) and who hold in its hands the political future of the country in order to infuse in them the belief in the country and in the national interest.”

Some participants were not surprised at all with the absence of civic education and the inaction of the government. The ones who expressed that sentiment were stated:



“Both the government and the public are not aware of or feel the need for civic education and that is the main reasons that we don’t have a national policy. When you become realised that you are missing something then you try to address it.” “There is no political will and commitment on the part of the government, when it comes to civic education.”

The other major challenge associated with the lack of national civic education policy that was mentioned is the absence of working checks and balances among the three branches of government. The absence of this practical check on each other made it difficult for them to work together or cooperate on resolving and addressing critical national challenges and to ensure that each entity is accountable to the other, least of all the executive to the parliament.

The Role of the National Electoral Commission (NEC)

The participants considered civic and voter education as one of the main responsibilities of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), whether it is part of NEC’s mandate³ or not. They also believed that during the elections NEC run exceptionally very good voter education given the limited resource and time constraints they faced.

However, they were strongly in favour of making NEC’s civic education effort a regular and comprehensive one that was not confined only to the election periods and limited to information about the electoral procedures and

³ Like many Electoral Commissions in Africa, NEC is not mandated to conduct civic education, though it is one the main activities they do.

practices. Unfortunately, NEC's activities come to a stand still when there is no election, which means that NEC is not posed to conduct a comprehensive and regular civic education.

The participants have identified a host of obstacles that are preventing NEC to design and implement a comprehensive civic education during the election and off election periods, which included:

- Lack of regular budget and other resources intended to conduct continuous civic education activities.
- The absence of critical infrastructures, particularly a mass media like a radio with good outreach makes it difficult to have programmes that reach the whole country.
- The lack of developed civic organisations with the institutional capacity to carry out regular civic education has denied NEC another critical channel that it would have utilised.

The Role of the Political Parties

The overall view expressed by most participants on the role of the political parties in terms of civic education can be summarised in this viewpoint articulated by one of the participants:



Yusuf Mohamed Gulaid Local councillors

“The political parties are in the best position to carry out effective and meaningful civic education and public awareness. One the important things, which is the backbone of whatever they do, is act as a “role model”. They can be a role model for the public in various issues/things such as acting responsible, working together, being ethical, trustworthy, genuine, productive and doing their best in everything. Then it can become a good example for the public to follow.”

The participants also pointed out the need for the political parties to establish neighbourhood centres to promote civic education efforts that emphasize teaching about citizens' rights and responsibilities along with their respective party platforms. There was consensus among the participants on the failure of the political parties to play their expected roles as “role model” to foster democratic political culture. And that they tend to promote clan or parochial interests instead of national interests.

According to the participants, the obstacles preventing political parties to perform their rightful role with regard to civic education stems from one single ailment: a lack of “party relevancy”. They attributed the failure of the political parties to assert their relevance as purely political bodies to the following:

- The underdeveloped party structures and mechanism has been vulnerable to the entrenched and robust clan system. As result of that, political parties has become clan instrument that project clan interest.
- Lack of financial resources and institutional capacity, compounded by the public's lack of understanding of the concept of political parties - whereby people are seek from the political parties money rather than contribute to them - have hampered the development of the political parties. This helps the political parties to succumb to clan interests.
- Absence of guiding or general principles and ideology that unite the party apparatus, internal democracy within political parties, and programmes aimed to indoctrinate the party members and supporters and to broaden their political base have all undermined the political parties' relevancy.



Mohamed Yusuf: Chairman of NEC

The Role of the Mass Media

The participants recognised how is it important to have mass media that acts responsibly. And among other things, they should be geared to educate the public about the critical issues of the day, their rights and responsibilities. However, the participants differed on the issue whether the existing media in Somaliland seeks to contribute to the process of democratic socialisation.

Some of the participants believed that the mass media do within their capacity some kind of civic education. In the words of one participant: *“Their role in civic education and public awareness has been good. They convey various programmes, analysis and news items that contain some elements of civic education and useful information (no matter how small) pertaining to political, social and economic issues.”*



A/fatab M. Aydid: Hatuf Media Group

Other participants disagreed and thought that Somaliland media have not done a good job when it came to civic education deliberation. As one young woman journalist admitted: *“The proof to their disinterest to civic education is during the elections they were not ready to carry any voter education messages and instructions until they received money form the National Electoral Commission. We, the media people have not dedicated ourselves to this issue.”*

Some participants asserted that, in reality, our media do not provide meaningful civic education that fosters “civic” or “civil responsibility” among ordinary people. And they have accused the media of imbedding values and norms contrary to the kind of civic education we are talking about. As one intellectual explained:

“In cities and towns we want to create and establish lineage based Hargeysa communities, Burco communities, Berbera communities and so on, in the place of the clan/tribal lineage and that is the essence of any civic education. And down from the community level one can say I am teacher, I am trader, I am civil servant and so on. So, our media instead of promoting such identities they are using terms like “the clan/sub-clan of Eastern Burco or clan/sub-clan Northern Hargeysa, and these new terminologies are media creation and they embedded them in our society.”

They also accused the media to be a follower of the masses or the street people rather than leading and guiding them. And that the media people do not refer to the opinion of relevant experts, professionals, leaderships, and intellectuals, when they are analysing critical issues. Instead they considered those of the street people and opinion makers. *“The Media implicates a whole clan when someone from that clan does something wrong, rather than explaining to the masses that individual errors should not implicate his clan or sub-clan.”*



Amina M. Diriye: Kulmiye Political Party

The participants also acknowledge that the criticisms that have been levelled against the media are not confined to the media sector only. The other segments of the society, too, do manifest some of these behaviours, since they all share the same experience and conditions. It simply reflects the prevailing socio-political environment in the country.



Ali Mohamed: UDUB Political Party

The participants identified four major obstacles that limited the role of Media in educating the public:

- Lack of knowledge: The Somaliland media does not possess the skill on how to educate the public and to prepare such programmes or activities. Most of them are not trained in this area, and because of that they concentrate on news reporting.
- Poor financial resources: because of poor income they have to concentrate on those areas where they make some money and that compromises their rightful role in educating the public.
- Limited equipment and out-reach capacity: Most Somaliland media are concentrated in Hargaysa, even the radio - which is the most important medium in Somaliland society - doesn't go beyond Hargaysa. Furthermore, private radios are not allowed to be used for radio broadcasting.
- Constant pressure: The Media are not truly independent (both the public and private ones). Journalists face various pressures from different fronts: pressure from the editors/owners/directors who censor their materials, and harassment and detentions from the government. Furthermore, they do get some bashing and labelling from clan leaders. As result of that Journalists stay away from certain issues.



Ayaan Muuse: Hawayo

The Role of the Civil Society

Before even getting into the debate about the role civil society organisations in the provision of civic education, a few participants saw the civil society as an instrument used by the donors and other external forces to undermine the government institutions and to confuse the public. *“Two or three organisations are capable of doing what we expected from them. Most of them discharge programmes/activities that have been handed to them by others.”* As one participant complained.

Other participants, sensing the hostility to the civil society organisations expressed by some participants, argued that this sentiment stemmed from the confusion over the role and the purpose of our existing civil society. In the words of a leading member from the civil society: *“Certainly, we do need civic society and it is part and parcel of the democracy we embrace. But what is not clear to us, and still contentious, is their role and what we expect from them.”*

According to another participant:

“If the civil society messes up that does not mean we don’t need them. Our large society, with its various segments, has to participate and contribute in different capacity in the development process and we should not be against the idea of having civil society. However, we can criticise them, holding them accountable, and correct them when they make mistakes.”



Suad Ibrahim APD and NAGAAD

The participants in the workshop were divided over whether the Somaliland’s civil society organisations are actively engaged in civic education and civic awareness activities. Some participants believed that with the exception of the government, civil societies are the ones who conduct all ongoing education and awareness raising activities. They pointed out that many civil society organisations were actively involved in voter education campaigns during the elections. Even when there were no elections, others like the Academy for Peace and Development (APD), held numerous forums and debates for political awareness. They also conducted public awareness campaigns about HIV/AIDS, FGM and other human rights abuses.

Other participants believed that Somaliland’s civil society organisations do not conduct comprehensive and regular civic education campaigns and it is not high in their priority lists. As one leading civil society insider put it: *“Their voter education drives are limited and confined to the election period. There are no regular and long term civic education programmes that have an impact.”* These limited activities with respect to voter education and public awareness are concentrated in the major cities and do not reach the rural areas, where the bulk of population live.



Mohamed Barawani. SONYO

The first obstacle that is weakening the effectiveness of our civil society organisations in general is a lack of sincerity and commitment. They described them as if they are not out there to serve the need and the aspiration of their communities. And that they are not sincere about or committed to their stated noble objectives.

In terms of civic education, the participants asserted that the civil society organisations were not in a position or equipped to get engaged in civic or voter education exercises because they, too, needed to be taught civic education. One of the participants recalled this incident during the polling day:

“We have to mention what the real problems and symptoms are. Instead of being good role models for the society, they are the ones who are misguiding the public. During the polling day a woman, who was involved in our voter education drive in the country before the polling day and was a member of our observers team, pulled out from the car a container with chemicals to erase the ink so that she could vote one more time. Then I told her what can we expect from the ordinary people if the one who was instructing them no to double vote was attempting to double vote.”

Other challenges that have been identified by the participants were the following:

- Giving priorities to where the funding is available
- Many of them are unaware of their role and the need for civic education
- Those who are aware of it do not have the capacity and funds to conduct regular and comprehensive civic education programmes
- There is no funds from the donors side to carry such long term activities

The Role of the Public

There was consensus over the role of the public, which was to take the responsibility of learning their constitutional rights and obligation and to be able to seek these rights and to fulfil these obligations.

The participants felt in general that the public tend to be not interesting in any kind of civic education and not aware of their constitutional rights and obligations. Because, they argued that would have manifested in their behaviours. A Complaint of one of the participants:

“The prevailing behaviour and attitude in the country is that of a destructive one: The motto is since every one is eating or grabbing, so I too, must do the same. And those of us who refrain from such things are considered stupid or naïve, as they were not able to make fortunes like their peers and thereby leaving themselves and their children penniless.”

The participants have attributed to this pervasive practice to lack of new ideological and political movements with visions in the country. One of the participants explained:

“Forget about new ideological vision. The existing political thinking is one that gets its fuel from the bad behaviours we have already mentioned and it offers the same old package. They don’t offer new visions, values, behaviours and ethics that they want to lead the people to. Even if they include some in their speeches, they rarely adhered to them. And since there is no access to such new thinking and visions, we can not have the type of civic education we are talking about.”

The other challenge the participants identified, and which overshadowed the discussions about civic education throughout the three days, was clanism. They argued that clan, which most of our people have absorbed in their belief system and practices over their life time, is antithesis to the kind of civic education we are advocating. As result of that most of our ordinary citizens do not believe, or are unaware, they are missing out on such civic education that would advance their collection interest. Therefore, they are not ready to absorb such civic education efforts.



Sabra Abdirabman: University Student

High illiteracy, lack of faith combined with wide spread poverty have forced many people to resort to any means necessary in order to make it, thereby encouraging parochial tendency. According to some participants, when there is competition or opening for certain position, people would select and favour the most zealous one that they think would secure the clan share. Because to them the good ones would be disastrous for the clan interest.

Others cited that for those people who have interest in obtaining civic education, the opportunity is not there. If they are students, they have no access to school-based programs that run from kindergarten to the university level. And if they are adults, they have no access to adult civic education programs.

They also cited the preoccupation with the daily struggle to make both ends meet made many people to think less about civic educations.

The Central Problem

Civic education programs are designed to address fundamental weaknesses in a nation's democratic system. Identifying the central problem(s) shape the programs objectives, goals, contents and target groups. So, here the participants were asked to identify the main challenges to Somaliland's democratisation process so this could be the basis for those of us interested to develop a civic education campaign.



Qani Abdi Ali: SOCSA

The participants identified numerous challenges to the consolidation of Somaliland's democracy; however, the following are the key ones:

1. **Poor leadership:** According to some participants, the key for effective civic education efforts that promote democratic values and behaviours among ordinary citizens is good leadership that can be a good example for them. Their view was that you can have excellent civic education campaigns that can be taught at home, through the media, through the mosques, but unless the leaders practice these values and be role models all these efforts would be wasted. So first we need to concentrate on reforming and transforming our leadership.
2. **Allegiances to clan:** The participants contended that most of our people tend to have allegiance to their clan or sub-clan. As result, few of us attend to common interests. So they recommended civic education efforts that impart knowledge about democratic practices and institutions and promote civic culture.
3. **Another closely related challenge to the above: a lack of knowledge about rights and responsibilities.** For this there should be programs that emphasise the teaching about the citizens' rights and responsibilities.
4. **Lack of knowledge about the mechanism of voting in the lead up the elections:** they suggested programs that transmit information on electoral procedures and practices to the electorates.



Abmed Ismail: Hargeysa Cable Tv

Methodology

Then the participants discussed the means and the methods to implement these programs. The following ones were identified:

1. For the young they recommended to formulate school-based programs that start from primary school to the university level.
2. For the adult and others they recommended designing adult civic education campaigns.
3. They also recommended the creation of National Commission for Civic Education to work with all key stakeholders to formulate a national strategy that guides all civic education efforts and coordinates ongoing programs.

List of the Participants

| | Name | Organization |
|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Abdi adowaa | DG of M. of Education |
| 2 | Mohamed Yusuf | NEC |
| 3 | Mohamed Ismail Salah | HEDO |
| 4 | Yusuf Mohamed Guleed | Local Cancellor |
| 5 | Ismail Abdi Geli | Local Cancellor |
| 6 | A/ shakur abdi adan | YMD |
| 7 | Mohamed Dahir Ilmi | W.W.B |
| 8 | Hussein Dahir | M. of Education |
| 9 | Ali Mohamed No | Udub- Party |
| 10 | Hamda Hussein Ahmed | Working group |
| 11 | Farah Yasiin A/ Ilahi | Working group |
| 12 | Ahmed Mohamed | Geeska Africa |
| 13 | Ayan Muse | Havoyoco |
| 14 | Hamze Mohamed Hassan | SRC |
| 15 | Yusuf A/ rahman Aw Yusuf | SRC |
| 16 | Amran Hassan A/ Ilahi | UOH |
| 17 | Sahra Kiin a/ rahman | UOH |
| 18 | Faisal A/ Ilahi Abdalle | Maangeeq MG |
| 19 | Ahmed Ismail Hussein | HCTv |
| 20 | Barkhad Mahamuod Kaariye | Ogaal News Paper |
| 21 | Mahamuod Abdi A/ Ilahi | Somali Rights Watch |
| 22 | A/ qadir Ahmed Mohamed | UOH |
| 23 | A/ Ilahi Yasiin Deriye | M. of Education |
| 24 | Adnan Abdi Hassan | Sonyo Youth Umbrella |
| 25 | Ahmed Mohamed Hassan | Activist |
| 26 | Rashiid Sheikh A/ Ilahi | WCC |
| 27 | A/ Fattah Mohamed Aideid | Hatuf Media Group |
| 28 | Hamze A/ rahman H. Yusuf | Admas |
| 29 | A/ rahman Ismail omar | CCBRS |
| 30 | Hodan Yasiin Ibrahim | TOSTAN/ SOCSA |
| 31 | Qani Abdi Ali | SOCSA |
| 32 | A/ hakiim Mahamuod Shirwa | YMD |
| 33 | A/ kariim Yusuf Dahir | IHU |
| 34 | A/ qadir Ahmed Ismail | APD |
| 35 | A/ qani H. Ali Yusuf | SRC |
| 36 | Badra Ismail Kahin | Kulmiye |
| 37 | Aamina Mohamed Deriye | Kulmiye |
| 38 | A/ qani H. Ali Yusuf | SRC |
| 39 | Mohamed Hussein Ahmed | Dadweinaha |
| 40 | Hussein Dahir Roble | M. of Education |
| 41 | Adan Mohamed Mire | UCID- Party |
| 42 | Ahmed-deeq A/ Ilahi | SITCO |
| 43 | Mohamed Mahamuod Dahir | YMD |
| 44 | Barre Nooh H. A/ Ilahi | UDUB |