Gardo

Gardo is the capital of the Karkaar region of the Puntland State of Somalia. It is one of nine regional capitals within Puntland and as such is classified as a Grade A district, with a local government body comprised of 27 district councillors. Gardo is considered one of the most important districts in Puntland due to its geographic location, climate and pastoral landscape. It is located on the main tarmac road, which connects the towns of Bosaso and Galkayo, and is 230 km east of Garowe, the capital of Puntland. Gardo is a cultural centre and is the base of the top spiritual leader of the traditional leadership in Puntland. The current king, the 34th King Boqor Burhan, was inaugurated there in May 2014. In 1994, Gardo was host to a significant conference for the traditional leaders and politicians of the north-eastern regions of Somalia. This conference resulted in the idea of the establishment of the autonomous Puntland State, which governs the people in those regions and seeks the reunification of Somalia.

Overall, the results from the assessment indicate that the formal systems of security, justice, and local governance in Gardo were operational and duly recognised by the local population. However, the traditional system continued to play a key role and was noted to be very respected within the community. Although subject to the approval of the government, traditional leaders were responsible for the nomination of local council members. They were also heavily relied on for matters pertaining to justice.

The police, however, played a lead role in security provision. Whereas the traditional system was more highly regarded with respect to issues of justice, the police was more trusted in matters of security. At the time of the assessment, the district was regarded as being peaceful. There were few accounts of conflict and violence in the area, and no major incidents were reported. The majority of respondents indicated that they felt safe in their communities. Most also felt that there had been an improvement in the level of safety in the community when compared with the previous year.
**Security**

The police, supported by the local authority, and aided by traditional leaders – elders and sheikhs – maintained responsibility for security provision in Gardo. Most respondents in the household survey (95%) acknowledged the presence of the police within the district. However, the general opinion was that the sole police station was not adequate to meet the needs of the town, based on its geographical area and the size of the local population. Approximately one-quarter of respondents estimated that it would take twenty minutes to walk to the station from their homes, while a similar proportion estimated that it would take them up to forty minutes. With reference to police response times, IDP discussants stated that there were often delays in terms of police being deployed to crime scenes. This, they said, was further impacted by communication challenges, including lack of hot lines or permanent phone numbers.

Despite these challenges, a little less than one half (47%) of respondents identified the police as their most trusted security provider for responding to crime and violence. However, more than one half respondents stated other entities or did not give a definite response in this regard, including more than one quarter (27%) of respondents who mentioned that they trusted traditional elders most. When asked to state reasons for their choice, ease of access and fast response were cited as the main factors influencing preference of the police, whereas ease of access and respect were the main factors associated with trust in the elders.

Elders in their focus group discussion stated that they were overwhelmed by an abundance of cases for resolution on a daily basis. To illustrate the significance of their role in the provision of security, an example was given wherein the police travelled to remote off-road villages in a bid to curb the practice of illegal charcoal mining. The charcoal groups, however, had guns to protect themselves and their businesses, resulting in the police opting to leave without implementing their mission. It was not until the elders intervened that the issue was resolved. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents (81%) indicated that they held fairly or very high levels of trust in the police on the whole.

Respondents also indicated a preference for reporting civil matters (52%), petty crimes (53%), and serious crimes (55%) to the police. There was also a positive perception of the performance of the police, with 44% of respondents stating that there had been an improvement in the performance of the Gardo police when compared with the previous year.

**Justice**

In keeping with its status as a regional capital, the formal court system in Gardo has three main levels – a district court, regional court, and court of appeal. The court was regarded as the legitimate justice provider and most respondents in the household survey (89%) were aware of its presence in their community. Even so, the community continued to utilise the services of the informal justice system, which was largely considered to be reliable although lacking the uniform standards of practice associated with the formal system.

Collectively, a greater proportion of respondents had used the traditional system for matters of justice. Similar proportions of respondents stated that they had used the courts (7%), traditional elders (8%), and religious leaders (7%) during the past year. Generally, there was no distinction between the types of cases referred by respondents to each entity, with the exception of business disputes, which had only been referred to the courts.
The stated issues that were referred to both formal and informal justice providers included household violence, youth violence, robberies and land disputes.

When asked to specify their preferred justice provider, traditional elders were mentioned most frequently (33%). The court and religious leaders were second and third, having been mentioned by 23% and 22% of respondents respectively. Fast decisions was identified as the leading factor influencing respondents’ selection of elders, while both the court and religious leaders were most trusted on account of the perception that they issued fair judgments.

Focus group discussants admitted that there was generally greater regard for the informal system. However, women and youth in particular stated that, while they preferred to see elders or religious leaders for dispute resolutions, there appeared to be increasing confidence in the courts. Indeed, most survey respondents (79%) expressed fairly or very high levels of confidence in the courts. Furthermore, the District Court Commissioner pointed out that use of the courts was on the increase, especially for resolution of civil and criminal cases. Almost two in every five respondents (39%) were also of the opinion that the general performance of the court had improved over the past year.

### Governance

The local council in Gardo comprises twenty-seven councilors, four of whom are female. Members of the council are selected from the different clans by their respective clan leaders and are appointed based on approval by a committee from the government. However, when asked about the presence of the local council, less than three in every five respondents (56%) confirmed that they were aware of the council. Approximately 11% of respondents indicated that there was no council, and the remaining 34% did not give a definite response. Awareness of the council was especially low among the IDPs, with less than one-half (43%) of those who participated in the household survey acknowledging the council’s presence. However, IDP discussants who played a more active role in their community were able to speak not only to the presence of the council but could also elaborate on the council’s structure and role within the community.

Committees were established in the sub-divisions and villages in order to facilitate interaction with community members. The council also used the media as a tool to sensitise the community on relevant initiatives. Among household survey respondents who acknowledged the council’s presence, approximately two-thirds stated that they had knowledge of channels of communication with the council. Despite this, respondents demonstrated a low level of awareness of the services which the council provides. Overall, respondents were most familiar with sanitation (28%), infrastructure (21%), security (16%), and health (10%) services. Added to this, only one in ten respondents (11%) stated that they had participated in any government consultations within the past year. The Mayor of Gardo admitted that the level of interaction between community members and the council was not as expected mainly due to what he perceived as gaps in community members’ awareness of the avenues of interaction.

When asked about pressing issues facing the community,
respondents cited a number of issues. The main issue of concern was unemployment (58%). Drought or lack of water (31%), the poor economy (37%), charcoal production (29%), and lack of infrastructure (24%) were also among the top five issues named by respondents. However, focus group discussants were of the opinion that the council was doing its best to cover all areas of community needs. They lamented that the council was left with limited options as the necessary funds and quality of facilities required to strengthen the activities of the local government were not in place. This positive perception of the council’s performance appeared to be shared by the household survey respondents. The majority (77%) felt that the council had, at the very least, maintained or improved its level of performance when compared with the previous year. More pointedly, 42% of respondents felt that there had been an improvement in the council’s performance during this time. Respondents also remained positive towards the role of the government, with 87% stating that they felt that it was important to have elected representatives.

**Conflict and Violence**

There was little experience with conflict and violence in Gardo during the past year. Approximately 7% of respondents stated that they had witnessed conflict between clans or groups, while only 3% sated that they had witnessed incidences of crime or violence during this time.

Traditional leaders identified clan-based differences and resources as the main factors contributing to conflict in the area. However, they noted that these were generally resolved by the community in a smooth manner. Family disputes were the most frequently cited reason for conflicts that were witnessed.

Despite the reported low levels of exposure to crime and violence by respondents in the household survey, discussants were able to comment on the types of incidents taking place within the community. Rape and robbery, particularly mobile phone theft, were the more frequently mentioned occurrences in the general community. IDP discussants also mentioned rape, but added that family disputes and youth related violence were most frequently witnessed among the IDP community. The Police Commissioner pointed out that although there were cases such as rape and robbery, the police forces always did their best to respond and to capture offenders.

The general perception towards safety among in Gardo was mostly positive. Approximately 87% of respondents stated that they felt very or rather safe in the area. In addition, a little less than two-thirds of respondents (64%) felt that the level of safety had improved compared with the previous year.