Erigavo

Key Findings from the 2015 DCSA Report

The Observatory for Conflict and Violence Prevention (OCVP), based in Somalia/Somaliland, was established in 2009 as a non-political, non-denominational, and non-governmental organization with the goal of organising and supporting initiatives that promote peacebuilding, security, safety and sustainable development across all regions of Somalia. As a part of its efforts, the OCVP conducts ongoing District Security and Conflict Assessments (DCSAs) in order to obtain feedback at the community level in relation to four thematic areas: security; governance; justice; conflict and violence. The assessments are conducted using a mixed-method approach, including a household survey of district residents along with focus group discussions and key informant interviews with community representatives and key stakeholders in the local provision of governance, security and justice. (To find out more about the DCSAs, visit www.ocvp.org.) The second DCSA for the district of Erigavo was conducted in June 2015.

Erigavo (Ceerigaabo in Somali) is situated in northern Sanaag, the largest region in Somaliland. The city’s population is comprised of members mainly from the Isaaq sub clans, Habar Yonis and Habar Jeclo, and the Harti-Darooq sub clans, Warsangeli and Dhuulbahante. The heterogeneous clan composition has made the city notorious for clan undercurrents arising from its vulnerability to clan-based disputes.

The district lies approximately 60km from the olden city of Maydh and is home to a variety of flora and fauna due to its semi-arid climate. Along with the Daallo Mountain, Erigavo serves as a popular tourist attraction. Because of the high altitude, temperatures remain pleasant throughout the year and normally remain under 30 degrees Celsius.

The local government is led by a mayor and a local council. The district offers higher learning through the East African University (EAU) and the Sanaag University. There are also two hospitals available to the public.

Overall, the findings from the assessment indicate that the district of Erigavo was regarded as being relatively peaceful, especially considering its heterogeneous clan composition and proximity to disputed areas such as the Sool region and Eastern Sanaag (Sanaag Barri). There was an established local council and formal structures in place for the provision of services to the community, including security and justice. However, the traditional leaders - community elders and religious leaders - remained integral to the community and were often consulted regarding matters of conflict or dispute resolution and justice in general. While there had been no reports of major conflict within the area during the year preceding the assessment, approximately one in ten respondents reported that they had witnessed incidences of conflict during this time. During the period leading up to the assessment, competition over resources was identified as the main reason for conflict within the area. The majority of respondents reported feeling fairly safe or very safe; however, a sizeable minority was less optimistic. Notably, the perception of safety appeared to be largely influenced by respondents’ location within the district, with clear variations in the perception of safety and how safety had evolved over the past year among respondents in the various subdivisions.
### Governance

In keeping with Erigavo’s classification as a Grade A District under the Regions and Districts (Self Management) Law of Somaliland, the town has a Local Council, which is comprised of twenty-one (21) elected members. All respondents in the household survey were aware of the Local Council and most (78%) were able to identify at least one service that the council provides. However, 14% of respondents stated that they did not know what services the council provides, while another 8% declared that the council did not provide any services. Sanitation and hygiene, town planning and road maintenance were highlighted among the main services provided by the local council. Water, health, agriculture, education, and justice were also mentioned by a few respondents. Nonetheless, some survey participants argued that the council did not provide any tangible services other than garbage collection. In the council’s defense, poor communication with the community was put forward as one of the possible reasons for the low level of awareness regarding the various services that it provides. Indeed, only approximately one in ten household survey respondents (12%) said that they were aware of communication channels with the Local Council and an even smaller minority (3%) had participated in any government consultations in the year leading up to the assessment.

Most respondents were, however, able to identify what they regarded as pressing issues facing the community. Poor infrastructure (77%), poor health facilities (56%), poor education (41%), unavailability of water (32%), and poor sanitation (23%) were named as some of the main community challenges. Although the council was responsible for service delivery in these areas, its ability to fulfill this role was said to be negatively impacted by the lack of sufficient resources due to shortage of funding. The main source of revenue was taxes, but it was noted that there was a significant shortfall in this area, particularly since many residents did not pay taxes.

Despite the council’s limitations, community members generally maintained confidence in the electoral process, with more than three-quarters of respondents (77%) stating that they believe it is important to have elected local representatives. Conversely, one in five respondents (21%) did not share this perception, whereas 2% were undecided. The findings from the assessment also indicate that there was room for improvement as it relates to the level of confidence that community members had in the council. While one-half of respondents (50%) stated that they were fairly confident or very confident in the local council, it is noteworthy that a similar proportion stated that they had fairly or very low levels of confidence (41%), or did not know how to respond when asked to indicate their level of confidence (8%). Similarly, just less than one-half of the respondents (46%) felt that the Council’s performance had improved over the past year compared with a similar proportion (totaling 44%) who felt that the council’s performance had remained the same (30%), or declined during this time.

### Security

The police, with the support of community elders and village security committees, was the main security provider in the district of Erigavo. All respondents in the household survey acknowledged the presence of the police in the area. Approximately four in every five respondents (82%) estimated that the closest police station was within one hour’s walking distance from their homes, with just less than three-quarters (72%) of respondents confirming that there were two police stations in the district. However, the subdivisions of Daallo, Sha’abka, and October appeared to be in closer proximity to the police stations, with approximately close to two-thirds or more of respondents in each of these areas stating that they could walk to the closest police station within twenty minutes. On the other hand, those in the subdivisions of Xaafad Soomaal and Barwaaqo had less of an advantage in this regard as close to
one-half of the respondents in these areas estimated that it would take more than forty minutes to walk to the closest police station from their homes.

With respect to security provision, there appeared to be high regard for the role of formal institutions. Very few respondents stated that they would report any type of crime to informal community leaders, such as the traditional elders. Instead, when asked who they would opt to report various types of security issues to, the police was identified as the preferred choice for civil matters (78%), petty crimes (91%), and serious crimes (91%). Further to this, the police was also determined to be the preferred security provider for responding to crime and violence, as indicated by 84% of respondents. The main reason for selection of the police was said to be their fast response. Notably, it was stated that the police response was quite fast if the case was serious. However, the police was not free of criticism. It was suggested that their meagre salary encouraged a culture of corruption. Police officers were accused of requesting money and sometimes delaying their responses based on whether or not a payment was made. In addition, their responses were also said to be inhibited due to inadequate resources, such as vehicles and fuel. Further to this, limited man power assigned to a large geographical area was another factor which was cited as having the potential to impede the police response.

It was also suggested that the police did not have proper processes in place to support their work. Improper record keeping was cited as an example of this, with mention of the absence of records for suspects who had been booked at the station. Another criticism that was levelled against the police was their perceived “over-friendly” relations with the community. It was noted that the police officers in Erigavo were seldom replaced and that this sometimes led to friendships which had the potential to influence police activities, including their response to security incidents as well as their involvement in clan dynamics. However, it was, argued that there were also some positive aspects resulting from the police’s relationship with the community as knowing the community members can could serve as an advantage during investigations.

Despite the concerns regarding the police performance, most respondents perceived that there had been an improvement in police performance over the year leading up to the assessment (66%), whereas less than one in ten (8%) felt that there had been a decline in performance during this time. Overall, there was generally positive feedback regarding trust in the police, with three-quarters of respondents (75%) stating that they had fairly or very high levels of trust in the police. However, this trust was noticeably higher among female respondents. Approximately 85% of females indicated fairly or very high levels of trust in the police compared with 62% males. It is noteworthy that close to one-quarter of respondents (25%) indicated low or very low levels of trust in the police, including 38% against 14% of female respondents.
Justice

Erigavo, due to its status as a regional capital has a district court and a regional court, along with a court of appeal. However, like any other district in Somaliland, the informal justice system also plays a role in justice provision. There were no reports of Shari’ah courts in the district, but elders who employed the use of customary Somali law, called Xeer, were actively involved in administering local justice. Nearly all the respondents in the household survey (99%) acknowledged the presence of the court(s) in the district and the majority (75%) estimated that the court was less than forty minutes away from their homes by foot. Approximately 10% of the respondents also stated that they had used the court in the twelve months leading up to the assessment. A similar proportion (9%) also stated that they had consulted the elders for matters of justice, while 1% had consulted religious leaders during this time. Usage of justice providers, whether formal or informal, was notably higher among males, with 20% and 18% of males stating that they had used the courts and traditional elders during the past twelve months compared with 2% of females in each case. Approximately 3% of men had also used the services of religious leaders, while none of the women had done so.

It was noted that formal justice providers were the first point of contact when initiating a case in urban areas. However, following this, the choice regarding whether the case would be settled through the formal courts or informal channels was negotiated and agreed on by the disputants. However, similar issues were generally referred to both the formal and informal justice providers. Business disputes, land disputes, household violence and assault were mentioned among the types of cases that respondents reported taking to the courts and traditional elders during the past year. However, the elders often played a role in the enforcement of judgments that were administered by the courts. When settling a dispute, the court would request the presence of the elders of both parties and ask them to be responsible for the enforcement of the outcome. Furthermore, traditional elders were highly regarded, with more than one-half of respondents (56%) identifying elders as the entity that they trust most to solve cases. In comparison, the court was most trusted by 36% of respondents, while 4% stated that they trusted religious leaders most in this regard. The main reasons that were cited for selection of traditional elders as the most trusted security provider were their reliability, affordability and independence from politics. Those who selected the formal court cited their fair judgements, fast decisions, and reliability as the main reasons for their selection.

Despite the preference for elders, the general opinion regarding the formal justice system was mostly positive. The majority of respondents (75%) stated that they were very confident or fairly confident in the formal justice system. However, although reported usage was higher among men, women indicated higher levels of confidence in the formal justice system, with 82% of females compared with 67% of males reporting that they were fairly or very confident in the system. Nonetheless, males and females had similar perceptions regarding the change in the court’s performance over the past year. Approximately 44% of respondents felt that the performance of the court had improved over the past year, while 13% felt that there had been a decline.
There were no reports of any major incidents of conflict or violence in Erigavo during the year preceding the assessment. However, approximately one in ten respondents (12%) stated that they had witnessed conflicts between clans or groups within this period. Notably, this experience was much higher among males, with just less than one-quarter of male respondents (23%) stating that they had witnessed such conflict compared with only 5% of females.

With respect to crime and violence, 8% of respondents said they had witnessed an incident of crime or violence against someone outside of their household in the last twelve months. These included 17% of male respondents and 2% of female respondents, thereby suggesting that experience with crime and violence was higher among males. Competition over resources, such as land and water, crime, youth violence and the perceived lack of justice were identified as the leading causes of conflict and violence in the district. Disputes over land were said to be most prominent. In particular, the enclosure of public land that was dedicated to grazing for private purposes was a frequent cause of dispute and a contributor to insecurity and violence in the community. These types of disputes often resulted from conflicting proof of ownership due to weak land regulation. Revenge killings, rape, and the district’s geographical location were also identified as contributors to insecurity in the area. Erigavo’s location in the Sanaag region, close to disputed areas such as Sool and Eastern Sanaag, was regarded as a cause for concern as, because of this, disputes could potentially escalate into a wider district problem fueled by clannism.

Despite these incidents, there was generally a favourable opinion regarding the level of safety, with two-thirds of respondents (67%) stating that they felt very safe or fairly safe in the area. Males and females had similar perceptions of the level of safety, with 67% of males and 66% of females stating that they felt very safe or fairly safe. However, it is noteworthy that the remaining 34% of respondents, including similar proportions of both males and females (34% respectively) did not share this perception, and instead stated outright that they felt very unsafe or rather unsafe. Further analysis indicated that respondents had varying perceptions of the level of safety based on their subdivision, with over nine in every ten of those in the Sha’abka (94%), October (97%), and Daallo (100%) subdivisions indicating that they felt very or fairly safe. On the other hand, only 20% of those in Kulmiye and 7% of those in Xaafad Soomaal, along with 62% of those in Barwaaqo, shared similar opinions.

Overall, there was some optimism regarding the change in safety over the past year, as approximately one-half of respondents (51%) felt that safety had improved during this period. Again, there was little variation by gender. However, within subdivisions, the majority of respondents in Kulmiye and Xaafad Soomal (80% and 87% respectively) felt that there had been a decline in safety over the past year, whereas the majority of respondents in all the other subdivisions felt that there had been an improvement.