Voters’ Expectations of Elected Councilors in Burao, Somaliland

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VOTERS’ EXPECTATIONS OF ELECTED COUNCILLORS IN BURAO, SOMALILAND

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<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labor Organization</td>
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<td>JPLG</td>
<td>Joint Programme for Local Governance</td>
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<td>LNGO</td>
<td>Local Nongovernmental Organization</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study on voters’ expectation of elected local councilors in Burao was conducted between May-August 2016. The overall aim of the study was to identify the expectations of the voters from their elected councilors in Burao. Other specific objectives were to identify the main motive of the voters, to evaluate the extent to which voters understand the role and the functions of the councilors, and to analyze the level of voters’ satisfaction with incumbent councilors; and to predict the readiness of the voters to elect new councilors.

In order to achieve its overall aim, the study employed a qualitative methodology which fully described the whole story of each interviewee. More specifically, the study used Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and one-on-one interviews. In this regard, the study deployed one FGD containing representative people including: an elderly male, an elderly female, a male youth, a female youth, a civil society worker, religious man, and an academic. In addition, the study interviewed five more community members with the same characters as the above representatives in terms of gender balance.

In line with the research questions and objectives the study identified that the main voters’ expectation of elected councillors was for them to represent voters’ personal and clan interest related issues. The voters depicted that they have been expecting the councillors to facilitate whatever personal or clan interest they, the voters have, in the local government. The study found out that the expectations of the majority of voters were not satisfied.

The study revealed that the major factor behind voting is tribalism. All the participants have unanimously described that the motive behind voting was to elect a councilor who will represent their clan in the council. The study also found that all the participants were aware of the functions of the local councilors. In addition, the study discovered that most study participants were convinced that the performance of the current councilors has been very poor while very few were optimistic about their work in the district.

The study has shown that participants wish to vote in the next round of local elections. The majority of the participants articulated their readiness to vote in the coming elections. However, some participants explained that they were not ready to vote as they felt that their votes in previous elections had not led to positive change.

The study found out that there are some participants who wish to elect a councilor based on tribal affiliations rather than ability and qualification. However, some participants have recently changed their attitude towards tribalism and mentioned they would vote for a candidate who had a convincing program. Additionally, female participants declared that they would vote for female candidates rather than their clan’s candidates. Overall, most of the participants agreed
the candidate they would like to elect should be an educated, nationalist, and religious person, and understand individual voters' background.
RESEARCH QUESTION

Do voters meet their expectation of elected councillors in Burao District?

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Burao is the second capital city of Somaliland. The population in Burao is estimated between 350,000-400,000 according to a Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralised Service Delivery (JPLG) report in 2010. The estimated employment rate in Burao district is 28% (ILO, 2012). The district is rich in livestock and is the centre of the livestock market in Somaliland, and as such, it is an important commercial centre. It has the largest livestock market in the region, and brings together traders from as far as Bossaso in the North East of Somalia, Luq, on the boundary with Kenya, in the South, and Djibouti in the West (University of Burao, 2005). In Somaliland, decentralized governance is provided in the constitution as well as in main Local Government Law known as Law #23/2007. Despite these provisions in the law, little progress has been made in the transformation of these laws into reality (Abdi, 2011). Currently, there is an initiative called the Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralised Service Delivery (JPLG), run by five UN organisations (UN Habitat, UNDP, UNICEF, ILO and UNCDF), which educates district level management about decentralization and how it is utilised. However, the fact that this effort has been ongoing since 2009 means that the extent to which its objectives have been achieved is in question.

In 2012, the second local government elections were held by the national electoral commission. Burao was among the main six districts and 21 councillors were elected by local Burao residents from 7 parties: namely Kulmiye, Wadani, UCID, Xaqsoor, Ummada, Dalsan and Rays (National Electoral Commission, 2012). A study by OCVP in 2015 states that “elections are not based on merit and competence but rather on the clan system” (OCVP, 2015). The study adds, “Some people (councillors) have different capacities, background and some people may come with wrong attitudes caused by lack of experience or young age of some councillors” (OCVP, 2015). Moreover, the study depicts some participants’ pessimistic views about the number of councillors, arguing that “owing to the poor economy of the country, 21 councillors who require remuneration and other benefits create burden” (OCVP, 2015).

This study will highlight what community members are expecting from their elected councillors. In addition, the study will evaluate whether or not the voters’ expectations have been satisfied. Moreover, the study will analyse the motives behind voters’ choices of candidates.
RESEARCH: OVERALL AIM AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Objective: the overall aim of the study is to identify the expectations the voters have of their elected councilors in Burao. Specific objectives include but are not limited to: to identify the main motive of the voters, to evaluate the extent to which voters understand the role and the functions of the councilors, to analyze the level of voters’ satisfaction with incumbent councilors, and to predict the readiness of the voters to elect new councilors.

EXISTING KNOWLEDGE AND HOW THE RESEARCH WILL ADD TO IT

Among the key challenges for this project is the fact that the available data on Somaliland local governance and specifically on Burao district is very limited. However, this study will address this gap by contextualising relevant data on neighbouring countries that are similar to Somaliland. This study will establish foundational research regarding voters’ expectation from the elected councilors in Somaliland and more specifically to Burao councillors. In addition, the report developed from this study constitutes a crucial reference for researchers interested in extending the project.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study uses purely qualitative methods. Specifically, the study uses Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and one-on-one interviews. In this regard, the study will employ one FGD containing representative people including: an elderly male, an elderly female, a male youth, a female youth, a civil society worker, religious person, and an academic. In addition, the study interviewed five more community members with the same characters as the above representatives in terms of gender balance. This study refers to existing literature on the subject as secondary data. With regards to the recording of primary data, this study used a voice recorder to capture the information given by the respondents.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher will use the HQRS consent form and will only conduct interviews if he receives full informed consent from all the concerned participants. In addition, the researcher will avoid plagiarism and deception. Moreover, the researcher will preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations of the study include insufficient literature on decentralisation/local government in Somaliland, the researcher’s inexperience in non-academic individual research projects, as well as the limited amount of time available for the study.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions

“Decentralization can be defined as the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations or the private sector” (Rondinelli, 1999: 2). “In the classical sense, this concept, which refers to the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources from central government to local governments, has a decisive role in central government local government relations” (Eryılmaz, 2011: 103).

“Decentralization can be defined most simply as the opposite to centralization. While centralization denotes a high concentration of power…… by a few within an organized social group”, decentralization denotes “the process or situation in which powers or responsibilities are transferred from central authority to others, usually more local, organs” (NDI, 2004)

Forms of Decentralization

“Administrative decentralization has three major forms—Deconcentration, Delegation, and Devolution—each with different characteristics” (Ozmen, 2014).

“Deconcentration: refers to a central government that distributes the responsibility to provincial organization within the scope of a particular policy. This transfer function affects the geographical distribution of authority, but does not significantly change the autonomy of the entity that receives the authority. The central government retains authority over the field office, and exercises that authority through the hierarchical channels of the central government bureaucracy” (Schneider, 2003).

“Delegation: involves the transfer of administrative tasks; but with such tasks is transferred some degree of responsibility. In such context …… the centre still retains the right to override or return any decision or policy taken by the decentralized authority” (NDI, 2004).

“Devolution: the strongest form of administrative decentralization. It involves the transfer of powers for decision making, finances, and management from the central administration to independent local governments, usually the municipalities with locally elected organs and clearly defined territorial responsibilities” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).
Local governments’ performance

The Somaliland constitution offers sole power and mandate to work by local governments under law No 23/2002. For example: “The law No: 23/2002 (Regions and District Self Management law) stipulates the services that local councils should be responsible for providing public services. These services include water, sanitation, health and education among others” (OCVP, 2015). The constitution has also encouraged a decentralized system of governance. For instance: “The Somaliland Constitution provides a framework for a decentralized system of government. The districts are given the primary responsibility for service delivery at the local level” (Harun and Mark, 2012).

Though much effort and resources have gone into the effort to speed up the development of a comprehensive decentralized system in target districts, “Progress in decentralizing fiscal, administrative and sector functions to councils has been slow. Sources of local revenue include land registration and annual property fees, business licensing fees, sales tax, public employee income tax, and livestock taxes collected in local markets. According to the UNDP over half of district budgets are spent on staff salaries and allowances” (JPLG, 2011b).

The sustainability of any progress towards decentralization is a major challenge because there are districts which have no economic base to sustain the required services. “Furthermore, many of these districts, and even some of the regions, are not self-sustaining due to the lack of adequate and taxable economic base. In the larger and more urbanized districts with elected councils, some capacity exists for both local resources mobilization, public expenditures management, and implementation of a level of public services, including infrastructure maintenance” (JPLG, 2011a).

The sources of income for current elected councilors include subsidies from central government and local fundraising (for example taxation), given that external funding from outside sources is limited. “But, while the elected councils have the mandate to raise their own funds through local taxation and resources (including international donor sources), most of the appointed councils depend on central government for subsidies” (Bradbury, 2011).

Community concerns relate to the fact that the performance of Burao local government is deteriorating in some places. For example, one interviewee noted:

The IDP camps do not have water, hospital and schools in close proximity to their area. The local authority never goes to the IDPs even for checking. No NGOs operate in the IDPs and we hear that they were dismissed by the local authority (OCVP, 2015).
The indicators that decentralization in Somaliland has not been fully implemented include the power of local governments to collect tax in Burao which is mainly held by central government. For example, a study by OCVP in 2015 interviewed the mayor of Burao who mentioned that the local authority’s major challenge is tax collection—“Burao which has the biggest livestock market in the country does not tax its livestock” (OCVP, 2015).

Similarly, local governments in Kenya to which councilors are elected have no authority to take critical decisions at the district level. This is indicated by a study on Kenya’s democracy and political participation: “Although Kenya had a local government structure, its effectiveness was limited by the central government. Moreover, local government was a structure of administrative decentralization; it lacked financial and political independence to make decisions” (Kanyinga, 2014).

Unlike the decentralization in Somaliland is the one in Uganda whereby the local governments in Uganda have sole authority to act tax collection. This is indicated by a study in decentralization and development in Uganda in 2014, which noted that “There has been improved revenue collection in Local Governments” (UNDP, 2014).

**Opportunities in Somaliland’s decentralization policy**

Somaliland’s decentralization policy offers incentives to the citizens to participate in meetings and decisions at the district level. For example: “The right of citizens to participate in the political process without undue influence or pressure is another key feature of political decentralization. This is enhanced by the requirements on the local governments to provide information on the policies and plans for their community and to provide open forums for discussion of these issues, both during election processes and in the political campaigns” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).

An additional statement in the decentralization policy strengthening the above statement notes that “Citizen participation will be developed to the maximum extent possible through the adoption of citizen participation charters at the local government level that will require the conduct of community forums on local development and budgeting decisions, formation of community based committees for sector areas, such as health, education, water and sanitation services, and community infrastructure planning and construction” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).

However, a study by OCVP in 2015 finds that “participation in the local councils’ consultative meeting across sub-divisions indicated that a broad majority (nine in ten or more) of the respondents in each of the sampled sub-divisions indicated lack of participation” (OCVP, 2015). This means that the majority of citizens do not exercise their right to participate in key community-concerning issues at district level. That study of OCVP is supported by a statement in Somaliland decentralization policy saying “The level of citizen participation is still relatively weak at the district levels” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).
Moreover, in Kenya the participation of citizens in local meetings and elections is diminished by lack of decentralization in the local governance system as this quote depicts: “There was little participation in local government affairs and even elections, because the units at this level were seen as low-value and providing inadequate services” (Kanyinga, 2014).

Despite a complaint by the Mayor of Burao (as quoted above) on tax collection problems, the newly approved decentralization policy offered the highest advantage to local governments for them to plan and decide in line with district needs and priorities. This was exemplified in the “Decentralization Policy Statement: Local councils and executive management will have full authority to determine the local physical planning requirements for their local governments, subject to national level planning guidelines and citizen participation in planning decisions at the local level” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).

Somaliland’s decentralization policy recommended that “Devolution will be the preferred method of public service delivery guided by the principle of subsidiary and the capacities of the local government based on their classification system of these local units” (SL Decentralization policy, 2013).
DATA ANALYSIS

Participants voted in the last election

All of the study participants have indicated that they have voted except two participants, both male. One of them explained that he was away from the country while the other said that he could not wait in the long queues at the voting stations.

The motive behind voting

All the participants in the discussion agreed that their primary motive for voting was clan representation within local councilors’ seats in the district. However, some participants added that among the choices of voting were to foster democracy and to exercise their right to vote. In addition to that a participant said:

Though I agree the aforementioned points, my extra motive was to empower the youth representation at district level because it was the first election 25 years old youth have been given the access to candidacy (FGD discussant, 2016).

Participants understanding of the functions of a councilor

Participants’ levels of understanding on local councilors’ functions were diverse. The participants included in their list of the functions of local councilors: enhancing the status and the image of the city and surrounding villages; enhancing hygiene and sanitation; improving democratization by decentralizing national policies to the district level; enhancing social services like health, education, transport and so on; filling the gaps in the ex-councilors’ plan or program; and to make their internal laws and policies more transparent and measurable in order to improve accountability.

Participants’ expectations of what the councilor will do for him/her

The interests of the respondents on the expected return of their votes were varied. However, among the most frequent points mentioned were: to fulfill the needs of his/her clan; to represent his/her interests when making changes in the city; to facilitate the services addressing his/her needs in the local government; and to allocate to him/her portions of the resources that the municipality receives, such as development projects, scholarships and so on.
Participants’ expectations of what a councilor will do for the community

Most study participants indicated that voters give priority to their personal and clan interests rather than common interests of the community as a whole:

To be realistic, we have elected our clan representation in the local government is present and so that the villages of our clan receive at least their fair district resources if extra not possible. (FGD Discussant, 2016)

However, some participants were optimistic that community interest is their top priority:

I have elected them to perform better for the social services and plan community resources as fairly as possible so that community common needs are addressed and satisfied. (FGD Discussant, 2016).

Some other participants mentioned that they were expecting from the elected councilors: to work for the community and provide quality services; to enhance the image of the city by enhancing the services and working on the development of the region; to specifically put more efforts into enhancing the services provided for the villages that their clan/tribe resides in; and to balance between the work the councilor is doing for their clan and the community.

Distribution of the voters whose expectations were met by their elected councilor

All of the study participants except one said that their expectations were not met by their elected councilors. Only one respondent indicated otherwise: “I only once requested him to add me a list of temporary employee and he did it” (Interviewee, 2016).

Performance of the local councilors

Some very small numbers of participants have mentioned that they believe that current Burao local councilors have done something that they perceive to be positive. The key issues they have mentioned in this respect include: that local councilors keep the district stable, secure and calm, and that they have built some new roads and renovated others. However, the rest of the study participants have agreed that current local councilors have ignored the will of the community. These participants listed the failings of the councilors: they did not abide by the laws nor the government’s systems; corruption levels increased; there was regular dispute and conflict among local politicians, which confines the community; they were a financial burden on district income; there was no transparency and accountability because there were no financial reports since their term in the office; they increased the taxes on the community in order to gain more money for themselves and yet never worked for the community; and they
never created the laws and the policies that they should themselves abide by and work towards.

**Participants’ wish to vote in the next local elections**

The majority of the participants are ready to vote the upcoming local elections. The few who have shown lack of readiness for the forthcoming elections mentioned that they were dissatisfied with the fact that their regular voting had not led to positive change.

**Reasons of voting in the coming local elections**

Though the majority of the participants pointed out that the incumbent councilors did not meet their expectations, some participants are ready to elect the incoming councilors based on tribalism:

There is rope in our neck and we can’t get it out. The rope is the clan and whatever quality or democracy is mentioned I am enforced to elect the candidate of my clan. No matter his/her qualification, experience and background (FGD Discussant, 2016).

However, some participants are optimistic that they would vote for the candidate with the most convincing program:

The reason why I should vote is that the experience of human beings shall ever be stuck only to negative side, therefore, I believe the evolution of democracy would finally bring us good deeds (FGD Discussant, 2016).

Some other participants have mentioned they would vote in order to motivate young people and women to take part in the next council.

**Recommendations of the participants on what they like to change or add in the forthcoming local elections**

The participants described the characteristics they would like the councilor to have: to be educated; to be patriotic; to be conscientious; and to be able to secure resources for their clan and facilitate services for them. There was also a preference from some participants for female candidates, and also to have a quota within the council for female representative. Further, participants indicated that they wished for external authorities to create laws and policies for the next council to abide and work by and be accountable to.
I once went in a car with three councilors, so one of them have stopped us in front of the Municipality office and went inside the building, when he came back to us, the two other councilors asked him to give them some money, he said that he doesn’t have any money, they replied to him that they will not accept that a councilor went inside the office and came back with empty handed (FGD Discussant, 2016).

I and another guy were hired as consultants to make a customary law for the municipality, and we had a difficult time to get it done, as we had to work voluntarily on this. After completing the first draft, we have submitted it to the mayor and his deputy to read and then discuss it. They have changed the points and laws that were difficult to them to abide or simply talks about them before they come to the discussion meeting. In the meeting, we have submitted the copies we had given to the mayor and his deputy while they have distributed the edited copies to the participants. The participants had two different copies of the laws, which created some moaning among them. One of the councilors collected all the papers and cut them into pieces and closed the meeting. Since then, no other meeting was held to solve that issue, nor does anyone want to talk about it ((FGD Discussant, 2016).
CONCLUSION

The study has identified that overall, expectations of the voters were for the councilors to satisfy their personal and clan interests. A very few participants had different expectations of the councilor, expecting them instead to improve the city’s appearance, resources planning and district representation.

The study has found that the majority of the participants’ expectations were not satisfied by their elected councilors, with only one exception.

The study has revealed that the most important factor behind voting is tribalism. All of the participants have unanimously described that the motive behind their voting was to elect a councilor who would represent their clan in the council. Despite the study discovering some other factors such as youth representation and fostering democracy having an effect on their voting, clan representation was predominant issue for all of the study participants. Therefore, qualification, experience and background of the candidate are not a matter of importance to these participants.

The study has disclosed that the participants are aware of the functions of the local councilors. However, whether or not councilors meet the qualification and experience necessary in order to fulfil these functions is not often under question in the community. In addition, the study revealed that very few of the participants are convinced that local councilors have done something good for the community, and yet the majority of the participants have insisted that the incumbent councilors of Burao district have neglected their mandate and are concerned instead with individual property collection. Some participants were relatively neutral and held that the incumbent councilors have both a good side and bad side.

The study has demonstrated that participants wish to vote in the forthcoming local elections. While the majority of the participants depicted their readiness to vote in the next round of elections, however, some participants have said that they are not ready to vote as they were not satisfied that their previous votes had led to positive change. The majority of participants’ readiness for voting can be taken as a sign that those candidates considered to be potentially effective councilors who work for the community could be elected in the future.

The study tested participants’ attitudes toward the forthcoming local elections. The study found that some participants still intend to elect an incoming councilor based on tribalism rather than their qualifications and experience for the role. However, some participants have recently changed their attitude towards tribalism and mentioned that they will vote for the candidate offering the most appealing program. Additionally, a number of female participants declared that they would vote for female candidates rather than their clan’s candidates. The study discovered that the type of candidate
most participants would recommend to elect would be educated, nationalist, religious and understanding of the participants’ individual backgrounds.
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