

**Decentralization and Service Delivery in Hargeisa:
A case study of Mahmoud Haybe District in Hargeisa City**

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1. Introduction

Decentralization policy has promise for improving the delivery of public services, but simply adopting decentralization as a policy does not change a situation. Decentralization, defined as the transfer of authority from central to local governments to perform certain duties, is seen as one of the constitutional rights to increase service delivery. Decentralization in Somaliland began in 2002 when the national constitution mandated the government to decentralize the system of governance, with the aim of promoting service delivery and enhancing local participation.

The Somaliland local government mandated public social services are no different from other local government institutions and services around the globe. The basic essential public services required from them by the entire resident population in Hargeisa include: to provide a regular public sanitation/hygiene service; to provide a regular public works and rural-urban development service for repairing and maintaining local public service facilities including water, solid waste dumpsites, markets, road maintenance, culverts, bridges, open-water storm drainages, public street lights and local road networks; and any other public social, economic and infrastructure or environmental services delegated by the central government administration.

Due to insufficient funding, the local government cannot deliver a good service, for instance the failure to maintain roads. For example, Hargeisa, the capital city of Somaliland, lacks service delivery capacities such as road maintenance and garbage collection. In particular, this means significant congestion and the slow movement of vehicles across Hargeisa.

The arguments for decentralization are reviewed against its success in improving service delivery in Hargeisa. The paper examines the different decentralized and centralized systems and their implications for service delivery. The paper goes on to examine the challenges of decentralization and proposes mechanisms that can make decentralization an effective tool for delivering services to local communities. Government and public documents, academic analyses and the findings of other research concerning decentralization and service delivery in Somaliland are considered.

Key words: Decentralization, service delivery, fiscal decentralization, efficiency, effectiveness and performance

2. Background

Somaliland municipalities have passed through numerous stages during the past two decades. During the 1990s, nominated mayors and deputy mayors were in charge of local governments. The first municipal election was held in Somaliland in 2002 and the second round of local government councilors were elected in 2012. However, the elected councilors did not meet the expectations of citizens due to poor service delivery:

“The national constitution mandated the government to decentralize the system of government. A suitable environment and opportunity for decentralization prevails. There is peace and public tolerance of government. A fear of a return to centralized rule also sustains pressure for the devolution of powers” (Abdirahman Jim’ale 2002).

“Progress in decentralizing fiscal, administrative and sector functions to councils has been slow. Sources of local revenue include registration and annual property fees, business licensing fees, sales tax, public employee tax, and livestock taxes collection in local markets. According to the UNDP over half of district budget are spent on staff salaries and allowance” (JPLG, 2011b)

“Improving service delivery has been a common factor for decentralization policy, however, decentralization has not always been effective in improving service delivery by local governments, mainly because of lack of adequate revenue assignments, inadequate access to financial markets, and lack of necessary administrative capacity on the part of local authorities. For decentralization to lead to greater accountability and hence to increased prospects that services would reach targeted groups, it is important to strengthen the institutional capability at the local level”. (Ahmed et al. 2005; Shah and Thompson 2004),

“Fiscal decentralization is essential for all forms of decentralization. If the local level receives decision-making powers to be active on local level, but not the funds required to implement such activities, decentralization will become void” (Ford 1999).

In light of the literatures quoted above, this study evaluates the effectiveness of decentralization in terms of service delivery, challenges, and comparing the appointed and elected councilors. The study addresses the following research objectives:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of decentralization in terms of service delivery in Hargeisa city from the perspectives of Mahmoud Haybe district residents; and
- To investigate the similarities and differences between the nomination system and election system in terms of service delivery.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative survey design in order to evaluate the effectiveness of decentralization and the extent to which it improves service delivery. Additionally, the study evaluates which system of local councils the people prefer to have with regard to appointed and elected councilors.

The study involved a review of secondary literature and the collection of primary data, using a common questionnaire with open-ended questions. The questions were qualitative descriptive. The participant group numbered a total of 10 respondents, all Hargeisa residents, who were selected through purposive sampling.

4. Summary Findings

The core conclusion of this study is that decentralization has not improved service delivery in Hargeisa due to a lack of funding.

How has the local government's service delivery changed since the adoption of decentralization?

The first objective of this study was to evaluate whether or not decentralization improved service delivery. Data analysis and interpretation revealed the following findings in this regard. The majority of respondents said that the decentralization policy has not improved service delivery in Hargeisa. This was for a number of reasons, including the fact that local councilors are slow to respond to the needs of the community such as road maintenance. It was also because the central government does not want to decentralize their powers, meaning that the service delivery of local government is not actually increased after the adoption of the decentralization policy.

What do you think about the quality of the roads?

Most of the respondents mentioned that the roads are not built to the appropriate quality even though the community has made a contribution of 30% of the total budget for constructing the roads because of a lack of adequate funding and capacity to deliver the service. The findings are also in line with Ford's (1999) argument that fiscal decentralization is essential for all forms of decentralization. If the local level government receives the decision-making powers required in order to be able to take action, but not the funds required to implement such activities, decentralization will become ineffective.

What are the main challenges decentralization has been facing in the last ten years?

Most of the respondents mentioned that the main challenge facing decentralization is the lack of adequate funding at the local level, and that this is largely reflected in the poor quality of the roads.

The local government does not have enough funding to deliver the service due to a centralized financing system, and in order to overcome this challenge I strongly recommended to decentralize the financial centralized system and allow the local government to collect the taxes such as road tax to repair the roads. The goal of financial decentralization was, after all, to transfer authority for collecting and allocating taxes to local governments.

Which system do you think is better when it comes to service delivery: centralization or decentralization?

Most of respondents are not in favour of the elected councilors, instead preferring the previous appointed mayors and deputy mayors. They explained that that the appointed councils were more qualified and effective, even though they were accountable to central government, whereas the elected councilors are not accountable to their elected constituency or the central government. Because they are not accountable to anybody, the participants said, they have misused their power.

What is the main purpose of decentralization? Does it give power to the people in ensuring good service delivery?

Most of the respondents are very much aware of the purpose of decentralization. Most of them were of the opinion that decentralization increases people's participation in decision-making and guarantees that the leaders are accountable to the people. In particular, they argued that the main purpose of decentralization is to place power in the hands of the people—rather than politicians—to safeguard good service delivery.

Summary

The findings outlined above are in line with Manor's (2000) predictions—he noted six major possible impacts of decentralization:

1. Decisions and decision-making processes become more visible and intelligible to the people at the grass roots.
2. Elected members of local bodies are better able to explain decisions in terms that ordinary people will understand.
3. The speed, quantity and quality of responses to citizens at the grass roots can be increased.
4. Decentralized authorities can act without seeking approval from a higher authority, thus improving the efficiency of governmental service.
5. People from the local level find it easier to gain access and influence, because elected representatives can be contacted much easier.
6. The elected members live close to the people that elected them, which set them under greater pressure than politicians higher up. (Crook and Manor 2000)

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the relationship between decentralization and service delivery in Somaliland. The results obtained in this study showed that the services delivered by local government are decreased due to absence of enough financing, basic skills and competences at local level, and due to lower technical and administrative capacities and inadequate funds. This means the service delivery can be improved if local governments are given the power to raise and retain financial resources from central government such as road tax and inland tax to fulfill their responsibilities and also local governments should have the ability to borrow money when they have the capacity to repay.

The results obtained additionally demonstrated that decentralization means to allow for the participation of ordinary people in the accountability of local governments. Finally, the study has shown that there is no significant relationship between decentralization and service delivery in Hargeisa, thereby supporting the claims of Ford (1999). Decentralization policy has had a significant effect on service delivery but the exact nature of that effect depends the form of decentralization that has been adopted: Somaliland's decentralization has been in the form of delegation, not devolution.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. In order to improve the performance of service delivery at the local level, the local governments must positively address their financial and technical limitations.
2. The local governments should strengthen their powers to collect taxes and generate revenues through either local activities and/or subsidies from the central government.
3. Local governments should motivate the community to participate in local fundraising activities and contribute financially.
4. The central government must work together with local governments in setting priorities, suggesting budget allocation and service delivery models and assessing progress.
5. The central government has a key role to play in building local capacity and there are two approaches available to it in this respect. The central government can provide training in traditional, top-down ways, and it can also create an enabling environment, utilizing its financial

resources and regulatory powers to help local governments define their needs (thereby making the process demand-driven), in order to deploy training to local governments from multiple sources. This would enable local governments to learn by doing as decentralization proceeds, and to establish learning networks within and between jurisdictions.

6. Even if decentralization is aimed at improving service delivery, it has been resisted by central government due to benefit it draws from the traditional centralized system. For instance, politicians and bureaucrats within the upper echelons of government may have been earning rents from the very same system that gave them control over the allocation of resources. These groups are likely to resist decentralization, and therefore in order to attain better service delivery for taxpayers the central government must hand over autonomy to the local government on these issues, thus allowing them to do their work without interference.
7. The central government must reform the centralized tax collection system, which has failed to deliver good quality services to the poor and has prevented the local government from being able to collect a road tax in order to repair roads and construct new ones.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The local councilors and civil servants were busy with their scheduled tasks and they were not available or willing to participate the study. Therefore, while this study interviewed Hargeisa residents about their experiences and expectations towards the decentralization and service delivery, future studies should attempt to interview government personnel on this matter.

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