

COSONGO

CONSORTIUM FOR SOMALILAND NON-
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

CONSOLIDATED REPORT BY
DOMESTIC OBSERVATIONS UNITS
ON THE SOMALILAND LOCAL
COUNCILS ELECTIONS
HELD ON THE 15TH OF DECEMBER
2002

Hargeisa - December, 2002

Introduction

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) play a significant role in Somaliland reconstruction and development after the brutal years of civil war in the late 1980s and early 90s. These important institutions represent a great number of communities, including some of the most vulnerable and silenced. As an important "third sector", CSOs take part in the national decision-making process through their influence on public policy as well as their ability for mobilising and channelling the limited international aid that is given to Somaliland through international agencies – both the UN and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Democracy has been slowly emerging in Somaliland from 1997 onward. The process of democratisation came into full swing after the constitutional referendum held on 31st May 2001, where the Somaliland population approved the revised constitution, with a clear majority (97%), which affirmed the independent status of Somaliland and paved the way for a transition to a multiparty system of government. In order to conduct free and fair elections based on the nation's constitution an Electoral Commission was established in accordance with the electoral law passed by the national parliament. The first national popular elections on the municipality-level were scheduled for the 15th of December 2002.

The Consortium of the Somaliland Non-governmental Organisations (COSONGO) and NAGAAD were to contribute to good governance in Somaliland and organised themselves to play the role of domestic observers for the Somaliland Local Councils Election held on December 15th 2002. COSONGO and NAGAAD, which are both umbrella organisations with a membership of more than one hundred organisations - mainly NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) - have been entrusted to manage and coordinate the election observation task. This report presents a summary of the observations made by the observers deployed at the polling stations, and aggregated by coordinators at the district, regional and national levels.

Scope of the Observation Mission

The Domestic Election Observation Mission of the municipal local councils' electoral process was divided into three phases: the mobilisation of domestic observers; their training as observers; and the actual observation of the voting and counting processes. A final report will be presented on 28 December 2002.

Overall Goal;

Contribute to good governance in Somaliland through promoting participatory governance and by enabling civil society organisations to partake in the local councils election held on December 15, 2002.

Strategies;

Mobilise effective non-governmental organisations to facilitate a domestic observation mission by individuals and organisations from the six regions of Somaliland and seek technical advice from members of the EU/GTZ Technical Assistance Mission (TAM).

Activities;

Mobilising and identifying suitable local non-governmental organisations and individuals from their respective regions and districts.

Training of approximately 400 selected domestic observers from the regions and districts for the national election observation mission, educating them in electoral procedures and bylaws.

Deploying the trained domestic observers to about 400 polling stations located in all regions and districts.

Method;

A National Coordination Body was set-up in Hargeisa, the capital city, which consisted of 9 members headed by a focal person. Six regional coordinator units from reputable CSOs were also established, assisted by district representatives. At least 400 persons were deployed as domestic observers to about 400 polling stations throughout the six regions of the country.

Data Collection Tools;

Various forms were prepared in advance for data collection and summary. Copies of these formats are presented in the Annex.

1. Three forms were distributed to all domestic observers in order to record observations made during the Election Day. These were the field data-collection tools intended to gather facts and figures on the election process. These are:

- form A, opening observation form, containing 13 questions to be answered by each domestic observer at the time of the opening of the polling station and during voting.
- form B, closing observation form, containing 13 questions to be answered by each observer at the closing of the polling station and during the counting process.
- form C, tabulation observation form, containing 4 questions to be answered by each domestic observer at the time of the tabulation of results.

2. Tally sheets:

tally sheets were used at the regional level for the summary and reporting of the information and data collected from the polling stations through the above forms. These are three different tally sheets A, B & C, corresponding to the above forms:

- tally sheet A summarises data and information presented in Form A
- tally sheet B summarises data and information presented in Form B
- tally sheet C summarises data and information presented in Form C

Master tally sheets are used at the regional and national levels, and present summaries of information and data from regional representatives. Six master tally sheets were provided to the six regional coordinators, in which they would summarise and report the information and data on observations made during the election.

The national coordination unit in Hargeisa then prepared a consolidated master tally sheet, presenting an overall summary of the observations made by the CSOs represented by the COSONGO and NAGAAD Umbrella Organisations.

Collaboration and Networking

During the observation mission, COSONGO collaborated and networked with a number of institutions at both the national and international levels. The National Electoral Commission played a key role in accepting and welcoming the role of civil society during the observation mission. Technical and financial support were provided by the TAM. Networking and information sharing with a number of national civil society organisations in all regions has facilitated the entire observation mission.

Domestic Election Observation Mission

This part of the report summarises the progress of the observation activities carried out during 4th – 15th December 2002 in all regions. The activities consisted of the mobilisation and training of 400 domestic observers from the local NGOs and CBOs, including COSONGO and NAGAAD members, for participation in the local councils election procedures of Somaliland.

During the first two weeks of December, mobilisation and identification of domestic observers from effective civil society organisations and selection of their polling sites in the regions were done. The training and materials for domestic observers were also completed before the election Day. Regional coordinators met with local NGOs, CBOs, regional election committees and community members to discuss and explain the purpose and role of local domestic observations. In all the regions, about 400 domestic observers were selected and trained, then assigned to the polling stations as independent observers.

However, the main activities of the observation mission included the following:

- community mobilisation
- verification of participants and polling stations
- developing and conducting training for domestic observers
- regular monitoring and supervision of election process in all the regions.

1. Community mobilisation

The main activities during the mobilisation phase were as follows:

- identification of local domestic observers for polling stations
- orientation and mobilisation of domestic observers to attend training workshops
- passing all other relevant information to domestic observers.

2. Training of domestic observers

One day training sessions were conducted for domestic observers selected by COSONGO and NAGAAD local NGOs members, and a complete set of reference materials was given to the observers for them to bring to polling stations during the election. These sessions were attended by all participants in all the regions. The main objective of the workshops was to provide domestic observers with the necessary tools and skills to carry out their observations during the election day.

Election Process -

General Observations

At 07:00 am local time (04:00 GMT), the Somaliland public started voting in the first multi-party elections to be held for more than 30 years – the last local elections were held in May 1969, just five months before the late dictator General Siyad Barre seized power in a bloodless coup in the territory of the former Somali Democratic Republic, which included Somaliland.

The voting environment and process were largely peaceful and voting was successfully completed on time without any noticeable conflicts. This is perhaps surprising to many political observers and analysts at both the local and international levels, who had expressed cautions and anticipated conflicts during election day.

The Somaliland people voted for local council candidates nominated at the district level by six political organisations: ASAD, HORMOOD, KULMIYE, SAHAN, UCID & UDUB, all of which were registered and approved by the National Registration Office For the registration of political parties late last year.

Out of 23 Districts in six regions of Somaliland, local councils were elected for 20 districts, while voting did not take place in two districts in the Sool Region, including the capital town of Las-Anod. This was as a result of the recent incident related to the President's visit and the security precautions taken by the National Electoral Commission in response. In the Las-Qoray district of the Sanaag region, no political organisation had nominated candidates for the local council and therefore elections were not held in that district.

Voting has not taken place in three districts – two in Sanaag and one in Sool – but each district had their local councils elected on the basis of 'No Post', meaning that only one political organisation had nominated candidates in each of these three districts, and, based on the election law, was therefore allowed to fill the local councils without contest.

Specific Observations

The pre-election phase

- **Preparation of Polling stations**

Polling Stations were established generally in a satisfactory and timely manner. The recruitment of polling staff was carried out in the last days, and their training might have suffered as a result.

In some areas, it was reported that polling stations received the material (each polling station received two boxes: the ballot box and a larger wooden box with materials) late on the 14th of December due to inadequate transportation or no presence of staff.

It was reported that polling Stations were added in the Awdal and Hargeisa regions.

In general, transportation and security arrangements for the polling material seemed adequate which was aided by the last-minute decision to allow polling agents and monitors to accompany the material.

The Election Day

The domestic observer teams, composed of COSONGO and NAGAAD members supported by the TAM, visited 400 polling stations throughout the voting day, covering therefore more than 40 percent of the total number of polling stations. Due to inadequate financial funds the number of observers was too small to cover all polling stations.

- **Voting**

On the 15th December 2002, voting started at all target polling stations and the majority of polling stations opened between 6:30 – 7:00 am. Generally, people went to vote early in the morning.

The number of polling stations did on the whole not reflect the size of the population in towns and cities. This means that the number of polling stations was limited, leading to long queues where people were forced to wait for a long time. However, people were patient and did not seem to mind to wait in order to cast their votes.

The political organisations were helping their supporters by providing transportation to the polling stations in case of long distances.

Polling staff were competent and the security officers present also performed well. During voting, there were no reported clashes, disputes or conflicts at any polling site.

The election day was generally peaceful and people voted freely for the political organisation of their own choice. Mobilisations and campaigning for supporters using local mass media and demonstrations were banned one day before and during election day in all regions and towns. All transportation of people in large numbers using vehicles and buses was also stopped across district boundaries, but each political organisation was able to freely transport people, collect their supporters and drop them off at polling stations within the district. Political organisations publicly transported people within almost all districts, while some were reported to have transported people across district boundaries in some of the regions.

- **Observing the Election**

The representatives from political organisations and domestic observers were present in the majority of polling stations. However, some political organisations were not able to send representatives to all polling stations. For example, in the western regions, UDUB, UCID and HORMOOD were present and their representatives were visible. Representatives from UDUB, KULMIYE, UCID and SAHAN were present in the majority of polling sites in almost all the regions.

In addition, the regional coordinators visited and supervised polling sites in and outside of all the major towns. Interested individuals from various international organisations visited a number of polling stations and collected information and data from polling sites. The domestic observers generally reported information from their sites to the regional coordination, while the regional coordinators made summaries of reports. Information submitted by domestic observers in the target locations considered:

- the number of voters in each location
- evaluation of successes in or obstacles to a smooth election (strengths & weakness)
- the number of political organisations who had observers present in polling stations
- counting and scores for each party
- a general evaluation of the election process

- results and recommendations

The observer teams rated the polling process as "good" or "very good" in 90 per cent of their reports. Polling took place in an orderly way under the control of polling officials who acted in a professional and responsible manner.

Polling stations were closed at 18:00, and since there were still long queues, some people did not get the opportunity to vote.

- **Closing and Counting**

Closing procedures, especially with regards to the handling of polling materials and pick up, seem to have been less efficient than other procedures. This process needs to be reinforced in future elections. Although it is understandable that staff are tired after a long day of work, this part of the process is as important as the rest.

The counting was also generally carried out in a competent manner. The presence of polling agents, monitors and domestic observers in all polling stations during the counting process had a positive effect, and procedures were followed properly. The counting of votes in all the regions was finalised on 19th December 2002.

The election result

The provisional election results were declared on the 22nd of December 2002 by the Electoral Commission. The total number of valid votes was recorded as 440,046. This represents about% of the number of registered voters declared by the registrars of polling stations during the voting day on 15 December 2002.

Specific information and reports available from the majority of observers at the polling stations in all the regions indicate that approximately less than 40% of the total population in regional or district towns in all regions were able to cast their vote, while more than 70% of the nomadic and rural populations were not able to vote because of long distance of travelling to the polling stations.

Summary of the Election Votes

Based on the figures issued by The National Electoral Commission

Political organisations	W/G Region	Sahil Region	Togdher Region	Awdal Region	Sanag Region	Sool Region	TOTAL	%
Asad	10,943 5.8%	2,281 8.375%	9,283 13.938%	8,727 8.68%	6,655 12.53%	1,707 27.26%	39,596	
Hormod	29,104 15.615	1,188 4.362	1,454 2.183	7,229 7.19%	1,409 2.65%	154 2.45%	40,538	
Kulmiye	29,923 16.05%	5,309 19.49%	17,476 26.246%	13,679 13.611%	13,701 25.80%	3,070 49.03%	83,158	
Sahan	14,748 7.912%	2,054 7.54%	15,234 22.87%	4,499 4.476%	11,356 21.38%	51 0.814%	47,942	
Ucid	30,676 16.458%	2,900 10.648%	4,821 7.23%	7,422 7.385%	3,401 6.40%	224 3.577%	49,444	
Udub	70,989 38.08%	13,502 49.577%	18,330 27.52%	58,939 58.64%	16,574 31.215%	1,055 16.85%	179,389	
TOTAL	186,383	27,234	66,598	100,495	53,096	6,261	440,067	

Major Constraints reported

Common problems reported by the domestic observers and regional coordinators include the following:

- In all the regional towns, there were too few polling stations. Many people were not able to vote because of long queues in the hot sun at polling stations.
- Some of the villages were very far from any polling station and some people did not seem to understand the election process very well.
- The sign or mark of ink was removable. It was easy for young people to remove it with paint solvent, hide it with Henna or black cosmetics for fingers
- The registration of each voter was very slow and people in the queue were feeling bored and stressed.
- All polling stations were closed at 18:00, while there were still some people waiting to vote. The main reason for this was lack of security lights or electricity in some polling stations. The commission discussed with the political organisations before closing the polling station, and agreed on the closures since there were no alternative solution.
- Many votes were disqualified because the people were not aware of or given SAMPLE voting papers showing the voting process. Most of the people were illiterate and had difficulty understanding the logos and the way of marking.
- The question 'Are you able to read and write' was inappropriate and not useful because many illiterate people were too shy to say no, and then spoiled their votes because the ballot paper was filled out wrong.
- In a few places, the polling materials and the staff arrived late, around 07.00, due to detours on the way to the polling sites.
- The communication and networking in polling station were inadequate
- The registration staff in polling sites were tired and felt stressed to register the people without break time, since there were no substitutes.
- The numbers of domestic observers were also limited, leaving many polling stations unobserved.

Recommendations

The main points that have been reported by the domestic observers for the recommendation of the election are highlighted below:

- Extension of polling stations in ALL regions and town in order for people to get an equal chance to vote
- To control the people who are removing the voting ink, that means not allowing women who have Henna and black cosmetics on their fingers to vote, of which awareness must be spread before the election day and voting
- Training and selection of staff for last-minute registrations. It is also necessary to have two persons for registration in each poling stations
- Provision of alternative lights to the poling stations where there is no electricity, particular in main centres of voting.
- More awareness of election procedures and way of marking papers in order to avoid invalid votes.
- The question 'Are you able to read and write' should be omitted totally. The staff should ask the person to what political organisation he/she wants to give his/her vote. This would apply only to illiterate people who have difficulties to understand the signs and marking papers.
- Improve communication with and transportation to the polling stations
- Increase the number of domestic observers and their per diems and transportation.

Finally, the COSONGO and NAAGAD Local Council Election observation mission suggests that the EU continue its generous support for the upcoming parliamentary elections planned for early 2003.