

Voice of the voiceless¹: Learning from SORADI's project to strengthen accountability in Hargeisa

Although citizens' ability to seek accountability from Hargeisa Local Council is highly constrained, SORADI's evidence-based, coalition-building model provides some clues as to what an effective approach might look like. Diverse, highly-networked, inclusive groups of citizens can work together to design and implement advocacy strategies, creating positive momentum for change. However, the development of capable, accountable and responsive authorities requires a step-change in the quality of the Councillors, who are responsible for leadership and oversight. Although it is too early to measure impact, valuable lessons have been learnt along the way.

This Policy Brief summarises the findings from an IAAAP-commissioned case study of a pilot project by the Social Research and Development Institute (SORADI) to strengthen accountability within Hargeisa Local Council (HLC). The project attempted to tackle demand and supply side challenges to accountability: on the one side, working with rights holders to raise awareness and demand for accountability through creating Accountability Fora at city and neighbourhood levels, and on the other side, building the capacity of duty bearers to better deliver services by training local council staff over a three-week period. The study captures the views and reflections of more than twenty individuals involved in the project, and what they learnt in this journey towards strengthening accountability.

The full report, by Emma Grant (Social Development Direct), can be accessed [here](#)

Key Findings

The power of diversity, or 'coalitions for change'

SORADI initiated Accountability Fora at both the city and neighbourhood level, engaging and motivating a wide range of thought leaders and activists to come together to strategise and implement advocacy campaigns based on robust evidence. This study found that the breadth and diversity of members in the fora has been fundamental to their ability to influence, and their authority rests on their collective weight: 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'.

The inclusion of women and marginalised groups in accountability initiatives requires intentionality

A wide range of cultural, political and religious norms actively inhibit women's participation, and thus need to be directly addressed in initiatives that aim to be inclusive. A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be robust enough to bring ordinary women or minorities into the conversation.

Understanding the rules of the game is key

Decision-making within the 'black box' of Government can be complex and opaque. Insiders who understand how the system works are often essential in understanding and providing the right entry point – as well as mapping out longer-term pathways to change. SORADI engaged former politicians and well-connected advisors within the Hargeisa Accountability Forum to help navigate the way, which appears to have been essential to their planning and achievements to date.

Aiming at the highest leadership is critical to ensure meaningful change – but requires careful consideration of (their) incentives and strategising

Capable and accountable counsellors are essential to making the hybrid governance structures function effectively. Offers of capacity building and workshops need to be carefully framed to incentivise counsellors' participation. Project cycles need to be flexible to accommodate political timetables.



Reform Meeting

Non-combative approaches appear to be preferable and more effective in this context

A collective passion for social justice can be channelled into very measured – even highly technical – actions and proposals (such as the draft election law) to great effect, without generating backlash from spoilers. This approach, which gives priority to relationships, echoes lessons from other DFID programming that give important to the building of relationships over tools.²

Changing deep-rooted accountability customs – and accountability vacuums – requires time

If project funding is for one year only, the ultimate success of a small project such as this depends on its sustainability. Committed volunteers and diverse funding sources are key. Communities themselves may be able to assist with data collection that can inform advocacy.

Recommendations

- Take time to understand the constraints to participation facing particular groups – cultural, social, financial and political - and challenge assumptions through careful research and analysis.
- Consider whether engaging influential religious leaders such as Sheikhs may be catalytic in helping to challenge social norms that constrain women's ability to play leadership roles.
- Don't underestimate the value of networking: facilitate opportunities for activists and thought leaders to connect and collaborate.
- Ensure locally-owned knowledge and strategies shape programming; this will increase effectiveness of the programme and minimise the risk of doing harm.

¹ Quote from member of the Reform Forum describing the purpose of the platform.

² Tembo, F. (2013). Rethinking social accountability in Africa: lessons from the Mwananchi Programme London, UK: ODI

For further information, please contact: info@somaliaccountability.org or visit www.somaliaccountability.org Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP) is a four-year UK Aid-funded programme aiming to generate and promote a robust evidence base that will inform, influence and support a broad range of Somali and international actors to hold government more accountable.