



# Project Report:

# D.R.I.V.E.R

# Democratic Rights Initiative: Voter Education and Registration

## **Executive Summary**

Somalia has been plagued with decades of political and economic instability, leading to low levels of human development and weak governance. A major source of Somalia's fragility has been its unstable experiment with democracy. Freedom House scores Somalia with a 1 out of 40 for political rights and a 6 out of 60 for civil liberties, resulting in a total freedom score of 7/100 and a classification of "Not Free".<sup>i</sup> With the 2021 election scheduled for December, there is a window of opportunity for electoral reform and hopefully a peaceful transfer of power. To engage as much of the country in this democratic process as possible, the Democratic Rights Initiative: Voter Education and Registration (DRIVER) project is proposed here. This project supports Canada's goal to champion democracy and human rights globally<sup>ii</sup> as it seeks to support a free and fair election in Somalia. DRIVER will train NGOs and CSOs to host educational courses on the rights and freedoms associated with the democratic process. The Somali CSOs then assist participants in registering to vote. Ultimately, this project seeks to build an electorate that is well informed and eager to participate in the election.

## **Section 1: Description of Project**

Somalia has not held national elections in decades and as such there is a lack of understanding amongst the citizens regarding the political system and how to participate in the upcoming election.<sup>iii</sup> The goal of this project is to create a voter education initiative which will partner with Somali NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) to increase education on the democratic process in Somalia, as well as increase awareness, democratic and civil rights and the principles of a fair and free election. In the long term, this project is designed to assist in conflict prevention by increasing the participation of citizens in democratic institutions which has been shown to increase state stability and reduce the re-emergence of conflict.<sup>iv</sup> Research has demonstrated that there are numerous international organizations currently operating in Somalia with the objective of electoral reform, including the United Nations Development Project (UNDP) and the United Nations Mission to Somalia (UNSOM). The focus of these organizations has been the coordination with the national government of Somalia to draft and implement elections legislation as well as the development of voter registration processes and elections infrastructure.<sup>v</sup> Based on the assessment of the current projects, it is apparent that the predominant focus is a top down approach with the majority of resources being directed at the pan-national level.<sup>vi</sup> As such, we have identified a gap in that there are currently no plans to provide the Somali population with the necessary information concerning the election. This project is a track two approach with the focal point being on the engagement with local level actors as opposed to international or national level actors. Global Affairs Canada has participated in projects of a similar nature in the past including the ELECT Voter Registration program in Afghanistan in 2009 that conducted voter registration in preparation for the 2009 and 2010 elections as well as educated the Afghan population on the electoral process and their democratic rights.<sup>vii</sup>

The main objectives of this project are:

- Empower the Somali CSOs to educate the Somali population on the new political system as well as the process to participate in the electoral process;
- Educating the Somali population on their civil, political and democratic rights and necessary markers that identify a fair and free democratic election;
- Increasing voter registration for the December 2021 national election and subsequently increasing the participation in that election;

- Increase the participation in civic institutions which in turn can increase the stability and legitimacy of the State of Somalia.

### **Stakeholders**

To achieve the objectives that have been outlined above, it will require a network of coordinated actors to ensure that as many members of the Somali population are engaged with the voter education initiative as possible. It is also important that with each of these stakeholders the project ensures that all relevant minority groups are being included as well. There are three overarching categories of actors that are the primary stakeholders of this project: Somali CSOs, Local Officials and Clan Leaders, and International Organizations.

*Somali CSOs:* As stated previously, this is a track two project that will engage with local level actors and as such, partnerships with the Somali CSOs are the most important aspect of this project. The design of this project requires the coordination within the state to be handled by local CSOs. Specifically, this project will partner with Somali CSOs that are focused on electoral reform, democratic and civil rights, and the elimination of corruption. These organizations include for instance, the Somali NGO Consortium, Marqaati, and the Somali Community Action Group.<sup>viii</sup> The intent of engaging with CSOs is to train them to conduct the voter education system as well as provide them with logistical, administrative and financial support to carry out the project.

*Local Officials and Clan Leaders:* Clan leaders and Sub-national governments, including those of Somaliland and Puntland must be engaged in the project. These stakeholders provide a connection between the local populations that they represent and the federal government and as such are an important actor.<sup>ix</sup> It is important that this project receives buy-in from these groups so that they can serve as a ‘multiplier effect’ for the initiative by first participating in the initiative themselves and then encouraging their members to participate in the education sessions and ultimately the election.

*International Organizations:* We will need to be engaged are organizations such as the UNDP and UNSOM. As mentioned above, these organizations are conducting complementary projects concerning the electoral process in Somalia. It is important therefore to coordinate with the projects that are already in existence like the creation of election legislation and the voter registration project since this project is dependent on the outcome of these initiatives as will be discussed in greater detail below.

### **Timeline and Phases of Project**

#### *Phase 1: Training and Dissemination of Material - May-June 2021*

This phase of the project will involve the designing of the training materials to be used during the Voter Education sessions. These materials include information on Somalia’s democratic system, explanation on how votes translate into seats in an electoral system, explanation on the election guidelines and polling locations as well as an overview of their civil, political and democratic rights. These materials will be designed in conjunction with the Somali CSOs as well as UNDP and UNSOM partners. Once these documents have been created, approvals will include receiving feedback from our Somali partners to ensure they are culturally appropriate and well suited for the context. Once approved the next step that will occur is the training of the Somali CSOs to carry out the voter education sessions. Program staff at GAC will carry out this training via video

conferencing. This is due to the current Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that the timeline does not allow for sufficient time to quarantine. We anticipate the training sessions to take 6-8 hours each and will cover how to give the voter education session, what materials they have at their disposal, how to ensure Covid-19 safety protocols are followed during the sessions, and how to carry out the voter registration process. The funding for this phase will be allocated to the creation and development of the materials, the printing and delivery costs of the education materials, purchasing of additional materials such as office supplies, personal protective equipment, and technical equipment to carry out the CSO training sessions as well as the voter education sessions.

#### *Phase 2: Voter Education Sessions - July - December 2021*

Once the CSOs have been trained, then we can move onto the second phase of the project which entails the administering of the Voter Education sessions as well as the voter registration process. We anticipate each education session to take 1-2 hours and then the additional time required for the voter registration process. During this phase we will also be carrying out public awareness messaging via the radio to inform citizens of upcoming training sessions and to provide information on the voting process. The funding for this phase will be allocated to the travel costs of the CSOs to carry out the education sessions in various communities, purchase or rental of any material needed to hold the session, personal protective equipment and sanitization products needed to ensure Covid-19 protocols are followed during the sessions and staff salaries for the CSOs carrying out the trainings.

#### *Phase 3: Assessing Impact of Project - December 2021*

Involves the collection and analysis of the election day statistics to determine how large of an impact the project has had. The project will also culminate in reports from the CSOs that evaluated the success of the project and identified areas that could be improved for future endeavors. Funding for this phase will be allocated to the renting of office space to carry out this statistical analysis, cost of purchasing office supplies and administrative material and salaries for the CSO staff who are gathering the statistical data.

### **Section 2: Pre-project risk assessment**

There are a wide variety of assessment pieces within the Pre-Project Risk Assessment. Infrastructurally, the country has not been through a large-scale, physically destructive conflict since 1991. This means that although there are some structural issues within the country, it may be possible to work within the existing infrastructure. Ultimately, DRIVER will work to support the larger goal of free and fair elections, which is necessary for state capacity building which will be essential to the further expansion and reconstruction of Somalia's public infrastructure.

More broadly, through our assessment, Somalia presents an open opportunity structure with perfect timing for the inclusion of DRIVER. Somalia has just experienced a disappointing delay in its quest for state functionality. The inability of previous state leaders to execute the planned 2021 elections was a difficult reality to accept. Somalia has been working towards the goal of democratic elections for several decades; however, as close as the country is to finally achieve its goal, it continues to meet obstacles in its path. Somalia is prepared to move on to the next institutional state-building goal which is elections. Somali political leaders have accepted UNSOM's support in the preparation of the election. Seeing as there is already large-scale leadership attempting to achieve this vital objective, DRIVER's goal of education and registration is directly aligned. Ultimately, this is as open as the opportunity structure has been in decades.

There are some project-specific considerations which further work to encourage a successful project execution. The lead organization in this case is the UNDP. The UNDP is supported by UNSOM and through the active political community in Somalia. The UNDP has extensive experience in holding successful elections in many countries with similar stability and development risks as Somalia. They are clearly experienced in depth and breadth with regards to development across the global south. DRIVER will be supporting these larger goals through its large network of Somali NGOs and CSOs. This will be done through the Somali NGO Consortium, and its deep connections to grassroots organizations across the country. This project will be working through a large variety of different stakeholders united around the main goal of voter education. Many of the stakeholders involved have experience working in potentially volatile situations such as Somalia. With that being said, we believe that the political risk is low seeing as the majority of Somali clan leaders share the objective of successful elections.

The largest political opportunity which presents itself in this project, is the breadth of political actors involved who share the same goal of successful democratic elections. These actors are both internal and external to Somalia. This is not to say that the shared position is unanimous. There are two main stakeholders who may stand opposed to this shared goal. The first group is Al-Shabaab. They exist mainly in Jubaland and may stand against voter education in the areas under their control. This is not based on any formal statement made by them; instead, this is purely speculative based on their opposition to democratic rule. In contrast, it is important to mention that there was no large-scale opposition by Al-Shabaab against the previously mandated election of 2021. The second group who may pose some opposition is Somaliland. Somaliland claims independent statehood and may pose a barrier to voter education in their territory as well. Although these opposition groups may exist, the UNDP has had success with similar opposition groups in the past and has found solutions to those issues. The scope of DRIVER is to educate voters, and the project will do that in partnership with the territories which the UNDP and the Federal Government of Somalia deem as part of their scope.

The Federal Government of Somalia is based representatively on a “4.5 scale” which refers to the 4 noble clans as well as the ethnic minority groups in Somalia. DRIVER will be using the same representation system to ensure marginalized groups are included in the political process.

### **Section 3: Operational Impact Monitoring**

Due to conflicting interests between local clans, the militant group Al Shabaab, and Somaliland, the project is at risk of losing support during its implementation if the electorate becomes engulfed in ideological or ethnic propaganda. While local clans appear to be supportive of the democratic process, Al Shabbab, as well as Somaliland, both of which have similar claims for independence and territorial control, may thwart the project due to such divided and politicized agendas. This, in turn, may delay the election, or even worse, escalate into violence and armed conflict. Such a situation could effectively force the project into a halt, with the danger of conflict spillover in the region, devaluing Canada’s investment and other election initiatives.

While the above scenario is speculative and largely based on a worst-case scenario prediction, being able to monitor the impact of the project on the likelihood of violence is necessary to ensure that the project remains sensitive to the adverse effects it may have on conflict.<sup>x</sup> Such operation monitoring will enable the Somali NGO Consortium to disengage if it becomes clear that the voter education campaign results in an increased likelihood of violence, thus ensuring that the project “does no harm” to the local communities.<sup>xi</sup> Halting the project would also preserve

Canada's policy objective of remaining unbiased in the election outcome, while also ensuring that the participating Somali NGOs and CSOs remain depoliticized and safe.

A well-positioned organization for such impact assessment monitoring is the International Crisis Group (Crisis Group). The Crisis Group is an independent NGO, whose mission is to track and prevent wars by providing early signs of conflict to governments, and has been tracking the conflict in Somalia since 2002.<sup>xii</sup> Canada has previously financed the operations of the Crisis Group, with the last investment made in 2014, so funding it as part of this project is consistent with Canada's international agenda.<sup>xiii</sup> The Crisis Group can thus be an integral part of a Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment for the project, by providing updates on incidences of restricted public participation by the electorate and staff of the NGO Consortium, or on the perception of individual or collective security as the clans, Al Shabbab, and Somaliland become concerned about the wider access to information on free and fair elections. These indicators are appropriate for Somalia as the above actors are capable of restricting the operations of the NGO consortium.

#### **Section 4: Post-Project Impact Assessment**

This project seeks to specifically increase voter registration, increase education on democratic rights and processes, increase political participation, and by extension increased legitimacy and decreased corruption. These areas can be measured through observing local participation and engagement and through the reports from our NGO and CSO colleagues. Some useful indicators to measure the success of DRIVER include higher numbers of citizens who are registered to vote, a significant portion of people who attended the classes that in fact followed through and voted, what percentage of the total Somali voters were from our project, as well as how many participants successfully referred another community member to encourage them to take the course as well. DRIVER's work complements the work of the UNDP project yet has a distinct impact as the UNDP does not have a voter education program so we can confidently identify that increased voter education comes from our project. We will assess this by following up and seeing how many of our participants voted in the election.

This project has long-lasting impacts because once Somalis have this knowledge of their electoral rights, it cannot be taken away from them. This knowledge can be spread by word of mouth to those who do not come to the learning sessions as well, but ideally, DRIVER would reach a majority of the community that is of voting age. Four years from implementation, Somalia would hopefully see successful elections with increased voter turnout from a diverse range of citizens. This project has the potential to transform into a longer-term initiative where we would launch the learning sessions again before each election. Further, we would like to eventually expand an adapted version of this program to schools where Somalis are taught about their democratic rights from a young age and see this as an accepted norm in society. This understanding of democratic rights and processes would strengthen Somali's defense of democracy, which is essential when these rights are threatened. A more informed voter base can speak up against corruption and advocate for increased transparency and accountability from their government. Getting more citizens registered to vote allows them to be politically involved and have a direct say in the type of leadership they wish to see lead their country through its recovery from numerous development struggles. It is essential that Somalia maintain free and fair elections, so the state has one less barrier to address as it attempts to decrease fragility; a transparent and legitimate government is fundamental to these endeavors. DRIVER has the potential to lead to long-lasting and systemic changes across Somali society as it works to establish and cement its democratic institutions.

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- <sup>i</sup> “Somalia.” Freedom House, (2020). <https://freedomhouse.org/country/somalia/freedom-world/2020>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Canada, Prime Minister of Canada, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mandate Letter, (mandate letter), (Ottawa: December 13, 2019), online: <<https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2019/12/13/minister-foreign-affairs-mandate-letter>>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Josh Linden, “Somalia’s Democratic Transition: A Framework for Electoral Systems Design” (2019) ACE: The Electoral Project Network, <<https://aceproject.org>> at 12.
- <sup>iv</sup> Timothy Sisk, "Pathways of the Political: Electoral processes after civil war" in the Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the contradictions of postwar peace operations, edited by Roland Paris and Timothy Sisk, 2009, Routledge: New York.
- <sup>v</sup> UNDP Somalia, “UN Electoral Support Project | UNDP in Somalia”, <<https://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/projects/un-electoral-support-project.html>>; UNSOM, “Electoral Support”, <<https://unsom.unmissions.org/electoral-support>>.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>vii</sup> Global Affairs Canada, “Project Profile - ELECT - Voter Registration”, *Government of Canada*, <<https://w05.international.gc.ca/>>.
- <sup>viii</sup> Somali NGO Consortium, <<http://somalianoconsortium.org>>; Marqaati, <<https://marqaati.org/en/mission/>>; Somali Community Action Group, <<http://scagsom.org>>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Linden, *supra* note 3 at 18.
- <sup>x</sup> Huma Haider, “Conflict Sensitivity: Topic Guide” (2014), online: *Governance and Social Development Resource Centre* <[gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-sensitivity/](https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/conflict-sensitivity/)>.
- <sup>xi</sup> Sam Englestad, Millicent Otieno & Davies Owino, “Do No Harm in Somalia” (2008) at 21, online (pdf):, *CDA Collaborative Learning Projects* <[www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Do-No-Harm-in-Somalia.pdf](http://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Do-No-Harm-in-Somalia.pdf)>.
- <sup>xii</sup> See “Who We Are”, online: *International Crisis Group* <[www.crisisgroup.org/who-we-are](http://www.crisisgroup.org/who-we-are)>, and “Reports and Briefings”, online: *International Crisis Group* <[www.crisisgroup.org/latest-updates/reports-and-briefings?location%5B%5D=12&lang=All&daterange=custom&datefrom\\_month=January&datefrom\\_year=2001&dateto\\_month=January&dateto\\_year=2005&total\\_item=5](http://www.crisisgroup.org/latest-updates/reports-and-briefings?location%5B%5D=12&lang=All&daterange=custom&datefrom_month=January&datefrom_year=2001&dateto_month=January&dateto_year=2005&total_item=5)> (filtered to show only reports for Somalia since 2001).
- <sup>xiii</sup> Global Affairs Canada, “Project profile — International Crisis Group - Institutional Support 2012-2014”, *Government of Canada*, <[w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/M013583002](https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/M013583002)>.