2021 indirect elections update

In February and March electoral impasse remained unresolved. In February, a Technical Committee representing the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), Federal Member States (FMS) and Benadir Region met in Baidoa to find a technical solution to the challenges facing the implementation of the 17 September 2020 political agreement.

They provided recommendations to the following points: 1) the composition of the electoral management committees at the two levels Federal Elections Implementation Team (FEIT) and State-level electoral Implementation Teams (SEITs) 2) the appointment of members of the electoral committee on Somaliland seats; 3) dispute over Gedo region; 4) implementation of the women's quota; and 5) timetable for holding elections. On 18 March, opposition politicians announced the formation of the National Salvation Council, which is made up of members of the Council of Presidential Candidates (CPC), Jubaland and Puntland Presidents, and the Upper House Speaker. FGS-FMSs talks are expected to resume in April.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 2021 indirect electoral update
- IESG coordinates UN and non-UN electoral support
- Digital campaign: Social media videos on 30% women's representation
- Equipment delivery to JOCs is progressing

Engagement with the electoral committees

On 4 February, the SRSG James Swan and the chairperson of FEIT discussed the role of the FEIT and preparations for the upcoming elections. FEIT briefed on the drafted documents including the electoral procedures and the framework for the Upper House elections. Informal meetings were held between IESG and FEIT teams to discuss preparations for the indirect electoral process.

IESG and FEIT logistics teams held a number of informal meetings in February and March to discuss equipment needs as well as polling material for the House of the People (HoP) and Upper House (UH) 2021 elections.

Other informal meetings have been held between IESG, FEIT and Electoral Dispute Resolution Committee (EDRC) communications teams to discuss public outreach plans.

Women's 30% quota for Parliamentary seats

The decree appointing the Goodwill Ambassadors (GwAs) committee has not yet been issued by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). LeadNow! a grassroots movement dedicated to increasing women's participation in political and public office in Somalia, continues to play a critical role in highlighting the importance of women's political participation during the ongoing electoral process.

LeadNow! is calling for the UN and International Community to put pressure on the FGS and FMS leaders to agree on an inclusive electoral framework that comprises all stakeholders as well as women, youth and under represented groups.

The women leaders called for the reduction of candidate registration fees for women and the implementation of 30% minimum quota for women's seats in Parliament by adopting a mechanism similar to the 2016 indirect election one, where for every three seats one was reserved for and contested by women only.

On 16 February, the SRSG James Swan met with women leaders and discussed the need to maintain peaceful proceedings leading to elections. The women leaders requested support from the UN to prevent violence, and advocated for a minimum of 30% seats in Parliament and the reduction of the registration fees to facilitate their participation in the electoral process.

Engagement with the electoral committees (cont'd)

On 11, 14 and 24 March respectively, IESG Programme Management team held informal meetings with the Administration and Finance technical sub-committee of the Electoral Dispute Resolution Committee (EDRC) and the FEIT on the elections budget presented by the Minister of Finance to donors on 7 January.

The FGS rules and regulations for management of budget, finance, HR, procurement and financial management were shared with both electoral committees to familiarize themselves with the government's guidelines.

IESG supports UN and non-UN electoral assistance coordination

IESG continues to coordinate and facilitate information sharing on the electoral support across UN entities as well as the non-UN electoral support providers, through two mechanisms:

1. The Electoral Task Force (ETF), which is a UN electoral coordination platform that was launched mid-January 2021 and has been convening on a weekly basis since then with representatives from over 10 UN entities in Somalia including UNSOM, UNSOS, UNPOL, UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, IOM, UNFPA and UN Women. The platform allows for the exchange of information across the different UN entities through the weekly meeting which covers thematic electoral presentations and entities' updates. A weekly electoral update continues to be released every Monday covering the different activities that are taking place within the UN as related to elections. Some guiding documents such as the UN personnel code of conduct during elections was drafted and released.

2. The Electoral Assistance Partners Meeting that IESG hosts on a bi-weekly basis for the international electoral assistance partners which includes the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa EISA, Creative Associates (BUILD project), International Media Support (IMS), UNDP, UNESCO and UNSOM. The participating entities share information and insights on the different thematic areas of support that are being provided.

Coordination role of IESG
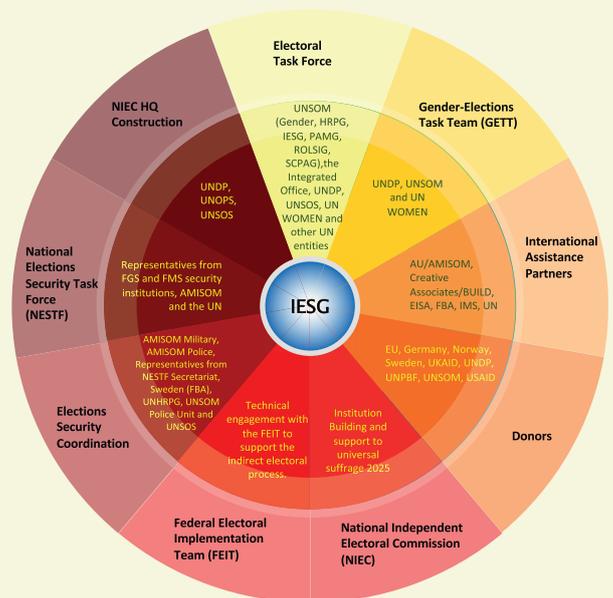
To ensure harmonization and coordination of efforts across the different electoral support providers, IESG developed a matrix of the electoral support projects/activities with a brief description about each activity, the implementing agency(ies), and the local partners. During the 9 February Electoral Task Force (ETF) meeting, IESG made a presentation on engagement platforms for the indirect elections. The presentation covered engagement platforms of several UN (IESG, UNDP and UNFPA) and non – UN entities such as Creative Associates, EISA and Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). Partners reported that this matrix was useful in mapping the different initiatives which facilitated coordination among the different electoral assistance partners.

Elections security preparedness

In spite of the continued constraints of COVID-19 and the heated security situation, IESG has completed the delivery of equipment to the Phase 1 Joint Operations Centres (JOCs) in the FMS capital cities and Mogadishu. The National Electoral Security Task Force (NESTF) Secretariat endorsed the full JOC Equipment Rollout Plan and so the deliveries to the Phase 2 JOCs, the second elections city in each FMS under the 17 September 2020 agreement on the indirect elections, commenced.

The Somali Police Force (SPF) communications engineers (one woman and six men) completed training on the tactical radio systems. In the last week of March, the SPF communications team successfully installed the system in the National

Elections security preparedness (cont'd)

JOC located in the Somali Police Force (SPF) HQ in Mogadishu. The SPF communications engineers will now install the systems into each JOC with remote support being provided by the Motorola experts. At the request of the Director of Communications for the Somali Police Force, the scope of radio equipment and related services were extended to provide additional capacity.

SPF Commissioner and Chair of the NESTF, through his Secretariat, has advised that the National Plan for Elections Security will not be finalized until a political agreement on the elections is reached.

Police Engineer familiarises herself with the tactical radio duplex system

Meanwhile, the NESTF Secretariat has formed a NESTF Coordination Meeting which will be meeting weekly. The first meeting was held on 18 February and was attended by the Secretariat, AMISOM Police and Military, the UN and Sweden. The main focus during March was on coordinating the elections security training of the Somali Security Forces (SSF) which involves Police Trainers Refresher Training, JOC staff training, Women's Situation Desk (WSD) staff training, a Station Commanders course, and Public Order Management training.

The key discussions were around who will deliver the training and that will be a combination of AMISOM trainers and Somali Police trainers, and Swedish trainers for WSD Training, and where the training will be delivered and when. The discussions are ongoing.

Capacity building for NIEC staff

IESG provided a number of capacity building opportunities to National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) staff to support administrative areas with a focus on procurement training (22 February and 8, 22 and 29 March 2021). The training sessions were delivered to the NIEC Directorate of Administration and Finance staff on: (1) Disposal of Supplies and Equipment (2) Procurement planning; and (3) Procurement process, tasks and responsibilities.

IESG completed the 20-session database training (October 2020-March 2021) for eight NIEC staff on Information Technology (IT) personnel. The trainees were introduced to the main features of the Microsoft SQL Server database management software: database design, data definition language, tables, data manipulation language, stored procedures, indexes and constraints.

IESG organized a specialized Graphic Design training on 21 and 22 March for 8 staff members from the Public Outreach Department and the IT of the NIEC. The training program was particularly tailored for the NIEC staff who are involved in the production of NIEC printed materials.

IESG delivered a report writing workshop to 9 NIEC participants on 29 March. Participants discussed criteria for preparing reports that are tailored for a specific audience and how to collect information required for reports.
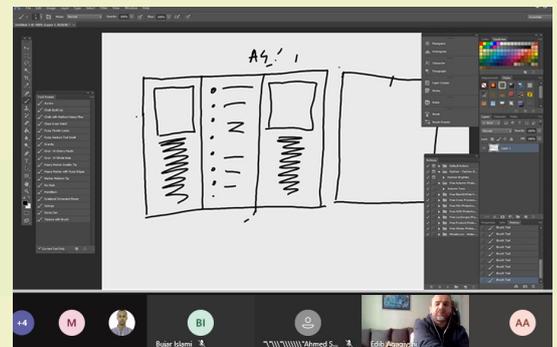
Capacity building for NIEC staff (cont'd)
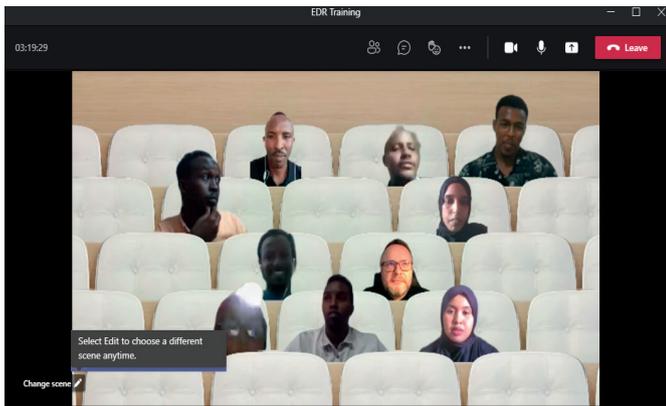
IESG conducted 4 training sessions on 11, 15, 23 and 28 March 2021 for the NIEC Legal Department. The modules covered: 1) Electoral cycle and Electoral Dispute Resolution (EDR), 2) General classification of EDR Systems, 3) Principles and guarantees of EDR Systems and 4) Basic elements of EDR Systems.

These training sessions represent ongoing capacity building to NIEC Legal staff for skills and capacity development and enhanced capacity to deal with electoral complaints. The knowledge and technical skills will help the legal team to review and develop proposals to improve the electoral legal framework in the electoral law.

Public information

The UNSOM Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group (SCPAG), with the support of IESG, finalized the production of the following communication products in support of the 2021 indirect elections: six public service announcements (PSAs); a series of ten social media-friendly videos reflecting Somalis' perception of the need to include women in the electoral process; a seven-episode radio drama series to explain the 2021 electoral process and English and Somali versions of two explanatory animated videos. The social media-friendly videos were broadcast between February and March on the UN virtual platforms and will be re-run during the next period.

OPPR registers two political parties

On 6 February, the NIEC Office of Political Party Registrar (OPPR) awarded two political parties with a certificate of temporary registration, bringing the total number of political parties registered since 2017 to 110. The two new political parties are: 'Justice and Prosperity Party' and 'Freedom and Equality Party'.

In order to facilitate the process of political party registration and with regard to the permanent registration phase, IESG is discussing with NIEC and OPPR a proposal to support the OPPR with the development of a software to enable an efficient registration of political parties. This new software would provide more flexibility to the OPPR.