

- Realizing the Democratic Dream -

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Chairman's Message:
Electorates' Opinions on Democratization and Multi-Party System in Puntland

Following the launch of its 2020-2021 Strategic Plan, TPEC rolled out its planned activities and election road map across the entire State by starting visits to the 9 regions of Puntland. The first mission was from 30th January to 15th February 16 districts including; Garowe, Burtinle, Galkacyo, Galdogob, Buhodle, Dangorayo, Qardho, Dhahar, Badhan, Bosaso, Bargaal, Carmo, Waaciye, Eyl, Boocame and Uffayn were visited with the aim of launching the strategic plan at the regional/district levels and interact with communities and electorates to enhance their understanding of the process. The second mission was between 1st to 10th July in 13 districts in the 9 regions and its objective was to inspect the offices of political associations as part of the vetting process.

In these visits, the commissioners held several meetings with different electoral stakeholders including the youth, women, clerics, traditional leaders, rural communities, business community and university students to educate them on local council elections and activities in the electoral road map. The Commissioners also held consultative meetings with local residents and district administrators on the suitability of the early elections in 2020.

From the interactions with the different communities, majority of them were in favor of the resumption of the electoral road map activities. This was especially evident during our second mission where we met some of the people we had met in our first mission who had now become members of the different political associations. It was satisfying and encouraging to see that the youths and women were enthusiastic and committed to fully participating in this process as they believed this was their opportunity to play an inclusive role in policy and decision making processes.

From the discussions with the different stakeholders during the missions, we found out that majority of the people expressed their concern over the clan based system which they said were fed up of and believe it is very unjust and unfair to them as electorates as their voices and wants are not included in the election of their representatives. To affirm this, one of the participants in the interactions was Mr. Muhamed Muse a former army Colonel in his 70s. We met him at one of the political association's office in Bosaso. He shared, that his hope is to one day able to participate in a multi-party system again where he can directly choose his representatives by casting his own vote in a free, fair and independent manner. He recollected that during the last one person one vote election in Somalia in 1967, he was among the security personnel who were guarding the polling sites.

Another experience during the visits was shared by Ms. Sahro Mohamed from Galdogob a 19 year old student. She said that she wants to join a political association that shares common principles with her own and she wants to contest for the district council position where she believes she can do a good job of representing her community to improve service delivery within the district. These are a few of the signs of the citizens' hope and high expectations in the revitalization of democratic elections in Puntland. This shows that the enthusiasm in this process cuts across all generations as seen from this elder and the young lady. This is a clear indication that there is indeed light at the end of this democratic tunnel.

I therefore take this opportunity to urge all stakeholders to contribute to the success of this ground breaking process. We call upon the government, political associations, private sector, civil society organizations, international development partners and the wider society in general to support the people of Puntland to directly elect their political leaders whom they can hold accountable.

Guled Salah Barre
Chairman, TPEC



Cover Image: Inclusion of women and youth in TPEC's voter education drives was a high priority

"I want to join a political association that shares common principles with my own. I will contest for the district council position where I can do a good job of representing my community to improve service delivery within the district."

Sahro Mohamed,
Galdogob, 19 year old student

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1. Introduction

The Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) III was formally approved by the Parliament of Puntland on the 16th of November 2019 and it held a formal opening launch at its headquarters in December 2019 where it presented its 2020-2021 Strategic Plan and the Road Map for the Local Government Elections. This was in line with one of the major development priorities of Puntland Government which is to enable Political Decentralization & Democratization in Puntland.

Given full legitimate rights and authority, the Commission put into effect its obligations that include the preparation, organization and supervision of free and fair local elections in

Puntland and subsequently reporting factual and unbiased electoral results to the electorate. The commission is dedicated to performing its mandated duties within the guidance of democratic principles such as; independence, impartiality, inclusivity, transparency and accountability.

TPEC comprises of nine commissioners under the leadership of the chairperson and the deputy chairperson, with the responsibility for policy direction and strategic oversight. They approve policies, regulations, codes of conduct and directives to the secretariat. The day-to-day operation of the commission is the responsibility of the secretariat which is headed by the secretary general.



Image 1: TPEC commissioners addressing a section of the public during their Gardo district visit

2. Achievements

i. Development of TPEC Strategic Plan (2019-2021)

TPEC is mandated to oversee the following processes: (i) Management and conduct of local government election (LGE); (ii) Registration of political associations and eligible citizens to vote and (iii) Registration of the first three political parties following the LGE.

To realize this mandate, TPEC prepared and launched its 2019-2021 Strategic Plan (SP) to guide it in developing a realistic roadmap that will serve as a practical guide in the management and administration of the LGEs in the transitional context of Puntland and contributing to the realization of universal suffrage elections in Puntland.

The SP which is a blueprint was designed to: (i) Guide the management and administration of the LGEs in the transitional context of Puntland, (ii) Strengthen the commission's capacity as a credible institution and (iii) Contributing to the realization of universal suffrage elections in Puntland.

ii. Regulation of Political Associations

Deriving its powers from the Puntland Election Commission Law especially Article 8 (15, 16, 17, 18 and 19), TEPC regulates political associations and parties in Puntland. TPEC carried out an assessment to ensure that the legal framework allows all political parties, associations and candidates to compete in LGE on the basis of equality and fairness. Thus, candidates seeking office must be permitted to run as party/association candidates.

Following its Strategic Plan and the Electoral Road Map, TPEC carried out a thorough registration exercise of willing Political Associations that would participate in Puntland's forthcoming local elections. TPEC opened the registration exercise of political associations on the 14th March 2019. The first phase of this registration exercise successfully concluded on the 15th March 2020 where Seventeen (17) Political Associations successfully passed the initial phase of registration and were granted temporary registration status. The initial deadline was 15th March 2020, but due to the outbreak of COVID-19 this deadline was extended to the 22nd July 2020. The final list of vetted political associations that meet all the criteria will be announced in the 1st Week of August 2020.

iii. Legal Frameworks

TPEC carried out a critical study and review of the existing electoral legal frameworks. It is from one of the study recommendations that TPEC drafted the Voter Registration Bill. It was developed in consultation with all Puntland stakeholders including; registered political associations, civil society organizations, citizens and government organizations. The draft Bill is in the Cabinet for approval before it can be passed by the Parliament into a Law.

The Bill laid out a Voter Registration Methodology including the Policies and Procedures to follow during voter registration exercise as well as a comprehensive voter education and public outreach campaign to enhance voter understanding of the democratization process.

iv. Civic Engagement

TPEC kicked off its Civic Engagement exercise where it held citizen education drives on local council elections, their process during its regions and districts visits. The commission held several meetings with different electoral stakeholders including the youth, women, clerics, traditional leaders and university students where electoral knowledge and the procedures that will be taken towards reaching a free and fair local election exercise.

TPEC commissioners directly addressed the citizens during their State-wide visits to the electorates allowing them to openly air out their grievances, thoughts and suggestions about the 2021 local elections. TPEC was able to directly engage 10,230 residents from the 9 regions and indirectly engage more than 200,000 citizens through social media and prepared messages which were sent out to the citizens.



Image 2: Young women participating in the civic engagement exercise during the Commissioners' visit to Galkayo

V. Establishment of Stakeholder Coordination Mechanisms

TPEC established 5 levels of coordination mechanisms that will be used to ensure effective participation of all stakeholders and share updates, consult on matters of democracy and transparency among others. These mechanisms ensure participatory equity, accountability and transparency and partnerships and networks amongst different democratic stakeholders.

The 5 levels include: (i) Monthly Coordination Meeting with Civil Society Organizations; (ii) Monthly Coordination Meeting with Cabinet Task Force; (iii) Monthly Coordination Meeting with Political Association; (iv) Quarterly Coordination

meeting with Donors and (v) Quarterly Coordination meeting with all stakeholders.

The coordination mechanism has: (i) improved coordination between CSOs and TPEC which enhances community mobilization efforts related to behavior change through peer education, democratic and rights-based enlightenment; (ii) strengthened coordination between Cabinet Task Force and TPEC increasing political will and support from Government; (iii) strengthen the relationship with all stakeholders which allows the body to obtain reliable information, promote transparency, enhance operational efficiency and provide feedback from all relevant stakeholders and (iv) improve resources mobilization from different democratic development donors.

3. Challenges

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic rendered most of TPEC activities difficult to carry out due to unprecedented challenges including travel restrictions, lock-downs, quarantines, social distancing and other preventative measures that forced us to pause everything for weeks.

For example: (i) the finalization of the registration process of the Political Associations was affected by Covid-19 and the deadline was extended to allow more time for all interested associations to register on time.

The capacity assessment of the socio-political context of districts where local council elections would be held was

hindered due to the travel restrictions to curb the spread of Covid-19 across different districts of Puntland.

Furthermore, the stakeholder coordination meetings were also halted for some weeks as the stakeholders could not readily meet and hold the discussions due to the Covid-19 restrictions. These were switched to digital conferencing. But this also posed a challenge due to the fact that not all stakeholders can readily access or use such means.

Other activities like; citizen engagement which required TPEC's commissioners directly addressing the citizens and allowing them to openly engage them could not continue.

4. Planned Activities (July – December 2020)

In line with its Strategic Plan and the Local Government Election Road Map, TPEC will implement the following planned activities in the next half of 2020:

Activities

1. Continue civic engagement and voter education
2. Approve the voter registration bill and develop the electoral dispute framework
3. Commence the voter registration exercise
4. Finalize the demarcation of electoral district boundaries
5. Establish and operationalize TPEC Regional Offices
6. Complete the recruitment of key TPEC Secretariat/Regional staff
7. Announce polling stations for early elections
8. Prepare and hold early elections



Image 3: A cross section of community members and other stakeholders participating in a consultative workshop in a visit to Dhahar District

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