

A Memo For Somalia's New Leaders on The Priorities of Citizens

Key Messages

- The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) conducted a public opinion perceptions survey from January 9-23, 2017. HIPS asked a total of 1,364 adults aged 18 and older in Boosaaso, Beledweyne, Mogadishu, Baydhabo and Kismaayo about the policy areas they want the incoming government to focus on. Tackling insecurity was the number one concern followed by fixing the broken education system, healthcare services and unemployment.
- Education was the second most important priority. Considering that more than two-thirds of Somalia's population is under 30 years of age¹ and 70 percent of Somalia's children are out of school, the importance placed on government leadership in education is clearly understandable.
- Healthcare was the third key priority area for majority of the Somalis in the five cities surveyed. Somalia does not have a semblance of even rudimentary public health systems. Government leadership is necessary for all facets of public health infrastructure. That includes putting in place national health policies, regulation and enforcement mechanisms, disease control and monitoring capabilities as well as community health education and awareness strategies. However, decades of instability and institutional fragility have resulted in poor or non-existent healthcare service delivery across the country.
- Unemployment was the fourth priority identified by participants with respondents in Mogadishu having the greatest worries about the lack of jobs. The drought that has engulfed Somalia has driven over 440,000 people from their homes into the main towns and cities in the past five months.² This unprecedented displacement will undoubtedly contribute to the high unemployment rate, particularly among young people.

Background

On 8 February 2017, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo was elected as Somalia's new president. During the presidential campaign, two-dozen candidates for the presidency each gave a speech at the parliament highlighting the issues they would prioritize if they won. Farmaajo said he would make security a top priority, calling his political manifesto 'nabad iyo nolol' meaning peace and livelihood.

On 23 February, the new president chose Hassan Ali Khaire, a political newcomer and former aid worker and oil executive, as the country's prime minister. Farmaajo presented Khaire as technocrat who would implement his political vision. Khaire, who received the unanimous approval of the country's federal parliament, subsequently formed a 68-member cabinet. Despite 38 percent of members of the federal parliament expressing initial dissatisfaction about the new cabinet and calling

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for adjustments, parliament overwhelmingly voted to approve the new government on 29 March.

HIPS completed this large-scale survey to gain an understanding of the policy issues that the Somali people deem most important for the next government. A total of 1,364 adults, aged 18 and older in the cities of Mogadishu, Baydhabo, Beledweyne, Boosaaso, and Kismaayo, took part in the survey, which was conducted from January 9-23.³

Respondents listed security, education and healthcare as their top three priority issues. Job creation, justice and the rule of law, fighting corruption and universal suffrage were other issues mentioned by respondents.

The findings

Security: 53 percent of respondents cited security as their top concern. Those interviewed in all cities, with the exception of Kismaayo, said security was their top priority. Respondents in Mogadishu were the most concerned about security. Looking at the insecurity prevailing throughout the country, particularly in Mogadishu, it is no surprise that the majority of respondents have these concerns.

Education: 45 percent of respondents indicated that education was a priority. For citizens in Kismaayo, education was the primary area of concern as the security there is better than elsewhere in the country. The regional government of Jubaland is responsible for Kismaayo's security, and it is often referred as the most secure city in the south. This should remind the new national leadership that regions have achieved successes that could be replicated in other jurisdictions. Likewise, when the national government is funding or seeking support for the regions, each region's actual needs and priorities should be taken into account rather than assuming these needs or assuming all needs are similar. Those interviewed in Baydhabo, Boosaaso and Mogadishu mentioned education as their second priority after security while those in Beledweyne listed education as their third priority.

Health: 39 percent of those surveyed stated that healthcare was a priority. Baydhabo, Boosaaso and Kismaayo cited healthcare as their third priority. Access to health services and the quality of care remains low. The cost of private hospitals is high, and the majority of citizens cannot afford to pay.

Unemployment: 35 percent of respondents cited unemployment as their fourth priority. 12.5 percent of those surveyed in Mogadishu were concerned about unemployment. Residents of Beledweyne, Kismaayo and Baydhabo also saw unemployment as a concern. Respondents in Boosaaso were the least worried about unemployment with only 4.7 percent reporting it as a concern.

Implications

Before his election, Farmaajo was by far the most popular candidate with many calling him the people's candidate. The election, which was televised live, was watched by many across Somalia and by those in the diaspora. Even before he was declared the winner, members of the armed forces started shooting into the air in celebration. Soon after his victory thousands of cheering Somalis – mostly young – took to the streets of Mogadishu and other cities and towns across Somalia to celebrate.

Farmaajo, who in 2010 served as the country's prime minister for eight months, is remembered for his anti-corruption efforts and paying the salaries of the armed forces and civil servants regularly. His popularity during the election season is believed to be down to his promises to restore peace, improve people's living conditions and fight corruption.

Against all odds, Farmaajo triumphed in an election, which was monopolized and manipulated by others and marred by the meddling of foreigners - mainly neighboring (Arab and African) countries, which sought to install their favored candidates as Somalia's president. Now that Farmaajo's pick for prime minister and his cabinet have been given a mandate to govern, Somalis are eagerly waiting to see how the new government will tackle the country's multi-faceted challenges.

Farmaajo declared that restoring peace and security is a priority. Nevertheless, security was also a priority for successive Somali governments. Despite their promises, 22,000 African Union (AMISOM) peacekeepers and equal numbers of national security forces, Somalia remains deeply insecure. Large swathes of the countryside - particularly in the south and central regions - are in the hands of Al-Shabaab.⁴

The majority of those surveyed said that access to education must be a priority for the new federal government. Since the state collapse in 1991, Somalia's education sector has become highly privatized, disadvantaging the poor who cannot afford to pay for private education. Only 30 percent of Somali children are in school, meaning the majority are out of education.⁵

While the school umbrellas and private schools and universities provided vital education services when there was no functioning government, there remains major concern about the quality of all levels of the system. That includes primary and secondary schools and universities. The absence of a unified curriculum and qualified teachers at lower levels and lack of regulation in the higher education sector has resulted in a substandard system.⁶

Efforts to revive the education sector were made by successive administrations. The federal government has drafted secondary school curriculums and implemented national exams for students at the end of secondary schooling in some parts of the country. However, efforts to establish public schools have been limited. Government-supported schools are more organized in some older regions such as Puntland than in recently created regions such as Hirshabelle or even the Southwest and Jubaland. Citizens see access to public education as vital. The new government should focus on establishing public schools and regulating primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Moreover, the findings show that Somalis see healthcare as an essential priority. Access to healthcare and the quality of service remains low. The cost of private hospitals is high, and the majority of citizens cannot afford to pay.

Other cited challenges include unemployment, which is a major problem throughout Somalia. The effect of the raging drought which has decimated livestock, the backbone of the Somali economy, will mean more unemployed youngsters streaming into cities and towns, creating further pressures including insecurity. The government needs to study the scale and effect of unemployment and come up with short-term coping strategies and long-term solutions to this debilitating, chronic problem. Curbing corruption and creating an environment where the private sector can thrive, including attracting diaspora and foreign investment, should be considered. Likewise, reorienting the citizens' focus to the

country's natural resources such as the fisheries sector, agriculture and livestock requires new strategies as the recurring droughts show rainfall alone is not sufficient to sustain these main engines of Somalia's economy.

Conclusion

The federal parliament has given Khair's government a mandate to govern, and Somali citizens have high expectations. The government has meagre resources and many challenges to overcome, and it may be helpful to pay attention to what citizens want when prioritizing how to spend them. Our survey has shown that security, education, healthcare and jobs top citizens' priorities.

Policy considerations

Security: Insecurity is clearly a major concern for almost all Somalis. As it repeatedly pledged, the new federal government is well advised to keep a strong focus on security. Collaborating closely with the regions, the new government must lay strong foundations for functioning security institutions. That includes an inclusive, well-trained, disciplined and paid national army, police and security apparatus. Likewise, the government must understand that brute force alone cannot secure peace. The new leadership should seriously explore and strategize on how to bring Al-Shabaab to the negotiating table. Al-Shabaab must also realize that the majority of citizens interviewed see insecurity as the biggest challenge they face. In many instances, Al-Shabaab is the source and purveyor of carnage and violence in urban centres. They must not ignore the priorities and sentiment of the citizens.

Education: Access to an equitable and quality education is not a privilege, rather it is a constitutional right for Somalia's children. Youth are the backbone of every society, and educating Somalia's youngsters is vital for the country's development. The fact that more than two-thirds of children are out of school is disturbing. The new government should therefore establish a framework that restores the public education system. Creating a strategic plan to restructure the education system and creating regulatory bodies and a standardized curriculum should be started in earnest.

Health: Lack of access to healthcare services is a major concern for many Somalis. The new federal government should prioritize rebuilding the country's shattered public healthcare system. It should start with the formulation of a national health policy, the creation of key institutions that can safeguard public health and the revival of public hospitals, particularly hospitals in the regions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable citizens – mothers and children.

Unemployment: The government should fight corruption to attract investment. With an extensive coastline and livestock in the millions, the government should invest in and exploit Somalia's marine resources, its agriculture and livestock. The livestock sector requires infrastructure such as the digging of wells as the recurring droughts show rainfall is not sufficient to sustain the main engine of Somalia's economy.

Notes

1. "Education in Somalia", <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/education.html>; "About Somalia", <http://www.so.undp.org/content/somalia/en/home/countryinfo.html>
2. "Somalia: Drought Response Situation Report No. 2 (as of 31 March 2017)", http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_somalia_situation_report_2_drought_response_31_march_2017.pdf
3. This survey was conducted in January at a time when the impact of the drought had not yet been felt in the urban areas surveyed.
4. Williams & Hashi (2016). Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia, <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Exit-Strategy-Challenges-for-the-AU-Mission-in-Somalia.pdf>
5. "Education in Somalia", <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/education.html>
6. HIPS (2013). The State of Higher Education in Somalia: Privatization, rapid growth, and the need for regulation, http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/HIPS_Higher_Education_ENGLISH.pdf; Hussein, A. (2015). Educational challenges in post-transitional Somalia, http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Educational-challenges-in-post-transitional-Somalia_ENG.pdf



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