Pathways for National Dialogue - Policy Brief for National Stakeholders



1. Introduction

Somalia stands at a critical crossroad. The current stalemate and mistrust among political stakeholders stem from numerous unresolved political, economic, and social disputes. At its core, the very foundation of Somalia's state-building remains contested.

Somalia and Somaliland disagree on whether to maintain the union or seek separation while disagreements persist between some Federal Member States and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) regarding the structure of the federation. Puntland and Jubaland, along with the national opposition, remain outside the ongoing FGS-led constitutional and electoral process. Moreover, communities in Banadir, Hiran, Lower Shabelle, and Gedo harbor grievances toward the federal project.

Meanwhile, the deadly conflict between extremist groups, primarily al-Shabaab and Daesh, and the Somali authorities has persisted.

Somali political groups have often used peace processes and constitution-making efforts as mechanisms to address these conflicts. While these approaches have provided some progress, they have not been sufficient to resolve the underlying issues. In this context, the study informing this policy brief – *Beyond Divides: Pathways for Somalia's National Dialogue* – suggests that Somalia should initiate a genuine, Somali-owned, inclusive national dialogue to resolve its multiple political, economic, and social conflicts.

2. Main Findings

The study was based on a desk review as well as focus group discussions conducted in six Federal Member States and the Banadir region, where the respondents included civil society actors, women, young people, and members of marginalized communities – groups whose perspectives are often overlooked in national discussions.

It found that citizens do not trust political institutions or their leaders. Participants perceive that political leaders prioritize personal and clan interests over national interests, resulting in very low trust in government institution's ability to facilitate a genuine national dialogue.

The study also found that the participation of women, young people, and marginalized groups remains largely tokenistic.

Rather than elite-driven processes, participants expressed a preference for a broadly participatory approach convened by a neutral actor such as civil society, religious leaders, and universities or think tanks.

3. Major Priorities

Participants identified several key issues including the status of Mogadishu that should be prioritized in a national dialogue. The 4.5 clan power-sharing, which was intended as a temporary solution, was also seen as a significant problem. Participants believed it has outstayed its usefulness and called for it to be replaced by one based on genuine universal suffrage.

The study also found significant disagreement among Somali political groups regarding the nature of Somalia's governance system.

The current leaders of the FGS prefer centralizing power within the federal government and the presidency. Although the FGS has promised to revisit this system, no changes have been made to date.

FGS proposals such as constitutional amendments that include a new electoral system, a centralized election commission, and the establishment of only three political parties have also faced push back from the opposition, Puntland and Jubaland. All attempts at reconciliation have failed, and the FGS is proceeding unilaterally with constitutional changes and its controversial "one person, one vote" elections. Meanwhile, the Somali Future Council, which includes representatives from Puntland, Jubaland, and the national opposition based in Mogadishu, will explore a parallel election.

Clearly, Somali political leaders have been unable to manage their conflicts, and the international community has yet to intervene effectively.

4. Recommendations

The study highlights that the current stalemate, mistrust, and lack of inclusive national forums for citizen engagement could undermine stability during and after the 2026 political transition.

It recommends that, for now, political leaders refrain from unilateral constitutional or electoral changes and instead publicly commit to an inclusive national dialogue, ensuring the meaningful participation of women, young people and marginalized communities.

Federal and state institutions should agree on a neutral convening mechanism and establish joint committees to prepare for dialogue. Civil society organizations and academic institutions could lead the consultations and facilitate citizen participation, while traditional and religious leaders should promote trust and reconciliation throughout the process.