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| **Danish organisation** | Guryosamo |
| **Title of the intervention** | Increasing voting accessibility for people with disabilities in Somaliland’s upcoming presidential election |
| **Partner name(s)** | The Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF)  Somaliland National Disabilities Federation (SNDF) |
| **Amount applied for** | 99.600 |
| **Country** | Somaliland |
| **Period (# of months)** | 6 months |
| **If re-submission or in continuation of a previous intervention, please insert journal number** |  |

1. **Objective and relevance (the world around us)**

**Project summary**

In May 2021, Somaliland held combined parliamentary and local elections which were successful in many ways. Unfortunately, these elections also revealed Somaliland’s fragile democratic culture and limitations where youth, women and marginalised communities such as people with disabilities were severely under-represented in all constituencies in both high- and local level politics. Issues relevant for persons with disabilities (PWDs) were gravely neglected in the election campaigns, and not a single PWD candidate have ever run for an election. Even worse, only 3% of all polling stations were accessible for PWDs. Despite these challenges, all marginalised communities including PWDs are increasingly demanding more meaningful participation in political decision-making processes that influence their lives, wellbeing and future. And their political exclusion has a detrimental impact on the quality and durability of Somaliland’s democracy.

Against this background, Guryasamo and its local partners Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF) and Somaliland National Disability Forum (SNDF) have chosen to proactively focus on ensuring better democratic participation and voting accessibility for people with disabilities (PWDs) in Somaliland’s upcoming presidential election at the end of this year.

Specifically, Guryosamo and its local partners will advocate for the provision of accessible accommodations, as this is the most important requirement for PWDs to participate in elections without barriers. The project will facilitate a major election meeting with the presidential candidates and political parties to give the PWDs communities opportunity to raise issues relevant to them by addressing voting inaccessibility, including lack of political regulation and enforcement of existing laws that could improve the life and democratic rights of PWDs. A secondary component is to strengthen SNDF's 30 member organisations’ collaboration by aligning election activities and present a common front to amplify our outreach efforts. Specifically, the member organisations will be mobilised to faciliate awareness and information campaigns to educate voters, boost registrations and increase voter turnout. The project will also produce mobile wheelchair ramps to make 5 polling stations accessible for wheelchair user, and train 20 disability assistants to support the PWDs during election.

Lastly, the project will give us time to develop our new partnership with SONSAF and SNDF. We will through various online workshops identify main challenges and goals that will define and guide our future programming.

**Context and relevance**

The intervention is to be implemented in the fragile context of the unrecognised country Somaliland. It is, along with the rest of Somalia, considered extremely fragile according to OECD’s fragility framework. In addition, Somaliland is regarded as the least developed country in the world according to the World Bank and UN’s Development Index. However, unlike Somalia, Somaliland has attained peace and stability in a relatively short period of time, and it is recognised as a success story compared to the rest of Somalia. Since the declaration of independence in 1991, Somaliland has made tremendous strides in developing a self-funded, locally-led and culturally-rooted state formation process that combines modern democratic principles with the traditional Somali *xeer (common law)* system. The restoration of peace provided under the auspices of the clan elders, allowed Somaliland to rebuild, with moderate success, its own government institutions such as ministerial departments, military, security forces and judicial court system. Somaliland has both a constitution and multiparty system, and the unrecognised country has so far managed to hold eight free and fair elections (three presidential elections, three local council elections, and two parliamentary elections). All of these have been internationally monitored and competitive democratic elections followed by peaceful transitions of power. The peacebuilding process, national unity and subsequent democratic achievements are a major triumph for the entire continent. In East Africa, Somaliland is more democratic, peaceful and stable than most of its neighbours, and it has even a better rank than them on Freedom House’s political rights and civil liberty rankings. In addition, the democratic processes in Somaliland have created a high-trusted, peaceful and stable business environment that keep attracting major international investors. For example, one of the world’s largest logistics conglomerate, DP World, has invested up to USD 442 million to develop and expand Berbera Port. In 2021, the UK’s development finance institution, British International Investment, announced that they will invest GPB 1.72 billion in three ports operated by DP World, among them Berbera Port. These major foreign direct investments have already attracted other major companies to Somaliland that will further develop the country.

In sum, Somaliland has made significant gains in the areas of governance, education, democracy and security. For instance, Somaliland has managed to prevent and combat the many security threats that has destabilised Somalia such as the terrorist group Al-Shabab, pirates, gangs and to a certain decree clan-based violence. As a result, all major international organisations operate safely in Somaliland. Furthermore, the lack of recognition, combined with limited economic aid, has produced resilient and independent government institutions. Somaliland’s success is truly remarkable, and it is a beacon of hope and a role model for democracy and peace – not only for the rest of Somalia but the whole of Africa.

In Somaliland, it is estimated that 17 % of the population is known to be living with disabilities. This number is believed to be much higher, and several reports acknowledge that little research has been produced and further research is needed. The small number of studies have focused mainly on children with disabilities and on people with psychosocial disabilities (mental health conditions). Most estimates suggest that it is likely to be much higher than the global estimate of 15% because of the long period of conflict, poverty and lack of access to (mental) health care. One study in Somaliland found figures as high as 42% of households having at least one member with a disability. In either case, lack of data on disability in Somaliland has contributed to limited awareness of disability issues as well as inaction among policy makers, planners, community leaders, services providers and the general public.

People with disabilities are particularly marginalised and at-risk within the Somali society because of the numerous attitudinal, environmental and institutional barriers they endure daily – combined with the lack of adequate support structures and concerted efforts to include them. Negative social attitudes about PWDs underpin legal, social, political, informational, physical and economic barriers. These negative attitudes are reflected within the disability community as well as among family members, government officials and relevant in this case – election administrators and workers. Disability is seen as an obstacle which hampers the promotion of political rights of the disability community. In Somaliland, there is a pervasive stigma directed at disabled persons, who are still considered as undeserving of equal care, representation, and respect. This has grave ramifications for PWDs in every facet of their life including the right to exercise their political rights. Due to the negative stigma in society, PWDs in Somaliland are often excluded from societal interaction, and they have limited education and employment opportunities. This results in the lack of pro-active behaviour in expressing their opinions and claiming their rights. Consequently, PWDs see their own disability as the main problem rather than the hostile surroundings.

Despite legislation in Somaliland to include PWDs into society and improve their access to democracy, education, health, livelihood and other basic services, there exists a vast gap between policy and actual implementation. In terms of access to political processes, Somaliland’s General Law for National Elections and Voters' Registration (2020) explicitly stipulate in article 8(b) that PWDs must be able to participate in the electoral process. Nevertheless, 75 out the 2,709 polling stations are inaccessible to PWDs due to lack of ramps and handrails, inaccessible building entrances, equally inappropriate doors and corridors, door handles, stairs, pathways, sidewalks and curb ramps etc. Apart from inaccessible election facilities, PWDs with impaired vision or hearing and people with mental health problems all face many barriers to vote independently. The whole voting process become more challenging for these people, and they do not have adequate support due to lack of information and assistance from poll workers qualified to support PWDs. Moreover, representatives from the PWD community are not included in the planning stages or election management. In the run-up to elections, PWDs frequently lack access to voter registration information, and many are unable to register at all, let alone vote or understand their options as voters. Furthermore, the political parties have no strategies or plans to nominate or support candidates with PWDs due to negative perception towards them which further isolates the vulnerable community. All these challenges restrict and eliminate PWDs’ democratic rights and overall integration into society.

1. The partnership/collaborators (our starting point)

**Guryasamo**

Guryasamo was established in Copenhagen in 2003 to improve the lives of marginalised communities especially youth and women together with our local partners in Somaliland. Our focus is the development of civil society with a strategic focus on creating resilient and self-sufficient communities. Our projects in the Somali peninsula have mainly focused on emergency relief, education, healthcare and development. Guryasamo works to eliminate poverty and inequality, and we want to enable our beneficiaries to have a dignified life free from discrimination, suffering and injustice. We do this by providing better access to food, shelter, healthcare and education. In the past three years, Guryosamo has managed over DKK 4,5 million grants from CISU to implement several humanitarian interventions in Somaliland. This new project is a shift away from only focusing on humanitarian interventions to also integrate long-term development interventions in our programming that addresses the underlying challenges. Our new strategy will focus on capacity building local community structures to strengthen their self-organisation, advocacy and long-term development efforts. We believe that sustainability and long-term impact including social norm change that addresses ingrained challenges such as political exclusion, gender inequality, harmful practices, SVGB, clannism, climate change etc. can only be achieved by engaging and empowering the civil society.

In this project, Guryosamo will be responsible for the overall project (especially finance and administration) and together with SONSAF plan and facilitate partnership workshops, monitor activities and document learning.

**Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF)**

The nationwide umbrella organisation, Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum, was established in 2005 to promote democracy, peace, inclusiveness, justice and stability. SONSAF is the leading national civil society platform mandated to strengthen the voice of Somaliland’s Non-State Actors (NSAs), enabling them to have a vibrant space in policy dialogue with a particular focus on peacebuilding and democratisation. SONSAF’s approach is consultative, inclusive, and proactive in implementing programmes. SONSAF represents a coalition of 67 member organisations and other umbrella organisations from different sectors such as NGOs, associations, trade organisations, education institutions, academic organisations, religious/traditional councils and many actors from the private sector.

SONSAF has extensive programme experience, and it has successfully led; the domestic election observation mission of the presidential elections in 2010 and 2017; the local council elections in 2012; and the combined parliamentary and local elections in 2021. SONSAF also facilitated national voter registration and voter card distribution processes in all major elections since 2016. SONSAF also works closely with the Ministry of Interior’s (MoI) command centre to ensure safe, transparent and peaceful elections by observing and reporting all irregularities and conflicts directly to the command centre. SONSAF, as the leading Non-State-Actors Forum, is also responsible for ensuring Somaliland’s National Electoral Commission (NEC) follows all procedural and elections laws. NEC is an independent statutory body mandated by the government to plan, manage and oversee all national elections. Thus, SONSAF is mandated to; organise the CSOs in providing domestic election observation missions; support NEC with voting related civic education through media campaigns; and produce election reports with recommendations to all stakeholders, including NEC.

SONSAF also plays a significant role in the country’s peacebuilding process by mobilising its traditional and religious leaders, and it has conducted many interventions on peacebuilding through grassroots reconciliation and support to communities affected by clan conflicts. Currently, SONSAF is engaged in the programme “Supporting Clan Reconciliation and Peacebuilding in Sool Region”, where SONSAF together with relevant line ministries and local community partners are working on improving community level reconciliation in the eastern districts of Xudun and Kalabaydh in Somaliland’s Sool region.

Overall, SONSAF is a well-respected, trusted and non-partisan organisation with direct access to the government, municipal governments and other political parties. It regularly hosts high-level meetings and events with the government including the president, ministers, cabinet members, political party leaders and other principal stakeholders from all sectors. SONSAF’s significance and success has been widely recognized by all major international development organisations. For the last few years, SONSAF has managed in total EUR 6 million projects funded by donors such as EU, DfiD, Danida etc. to support the different peacebuilding and election processes in Somaliland.

In this project, SONSAF will provide project management, faciliate the major election meeting, distribute voting information materials and monitor project activities.

**Somaliland National Disability Forum (SNDF)**

SNDF is the national umbrella organisation for NGOs, service providers and other actors working with disability communities in Somaliland. SNDF was established in 2007 and represents 30 organisations across Somaliland’s 6 regions. SNDF is dedicated to empowering PWDs through capacity building, advocacy and lobbying for their rights. Its mission is to promote socio-economic inclusiveness by building the capacity of their member organisations through networking, awareness raising, knowledge sharing, advocacy and mainstreaming of development programmes, policies and decision-making processes. SNDF’s overall vision is to create an inclusive society where PWDs are not discriminated, fully enjoy their rights and have equal opportunities. SNDF have a strong presence and network across Somaliland where it monitors human rights violations and abuses against people with disabilities, disabled organisations (DPOs) and other vulnerable and marginalized groups. As the national body for PWDs, SNDF is uniquely placed and have successfully implemented various projects and programmes meeting the expected objectives owing to its capacity, knowledge and understanding of human rights issues affecting PWDs.

In this project, SNDF will mobilise and organise their member organisations on how to promote voting registrations and engage PWDs to vote in the upcoming presidential election. SNDF will also train 20 voluntary disability assistants

**New partnership**

SNDF is a member organisation of SONSAF, and they have previously worked together. This is the first time that Guryasamo is partnering with both SONSAF and SNDF. Guryosamo’s local partner SHiFAT (also a member organisation of SONSAF) introduced us to SONSAF. Since 2020, Guryasamo and SONSAF have had a continuous dialogue on shared values and goals including the political progress in Somaliland and potential areas of collaboration. This year’s presidential election became the best opportunity to implement a brief project to initiate and strengthen ties between the two organisations. Staff members of SONSAF and SNDF were involved in developing this application and aligning the project to their overarching interventions, strategy and goals. Lessons learnt from SNDF’s work and SONSAF’s earlier election projects funded by the EU, including feedback from target groups, volunteers, member organisations, have all guided the project’s objectives and activities.

1. Target groups, objectives, and expected results (our intervention)

**Primary target group**

Our main target group are wheelchair users who are eligible to vote and based in Hargeisa but have limited access to existing polling stations. We expect that our 5 newly built wheelchair ramps will faciliate voting access to 200 wheelchair users. We will deliver information materials to 2000 beneficiaries through SNDF’s 30 member organisations. There will be 125 PWDs attending our major election meeting. Lastly, we will reach many more beneficiaries through our radio spots

***Secondary target group***

* 20 volunteers recruited from SNDF’s member organisation who will be trained as disability assistants
* Representatives from SNDF’s 30 member organisations will participate in our workshop to coordinate election activities and faciliate awareness activities.

**Overall objective**

The intervention’s overall goal is to protect the democratic rights of people with disabilities by improving their access to the electoral process in Somaliland’s upcoming presidential election at the end of this year.

Specifically, the project will:

* increase voting awareness, registrations and participation
* increase polling stations’ accessibility and ensure PWDs are informed about disability friendly polling stations
* Educate PWDs on voting procedures
* Strengthen the collaboration, coordination and synergy between SNDF’s member organisations’ election activities

**Activities**

1. Faciliate a SONSAF-led workshop targeting representatives from SNDF’s 30 member organisations. The workshop will coordinate the disability organisations communication and election activities. The participants will receive latest news from the National Electoral Commission (NEC) including voting information materials and overview over disability friendly polling stations. The aim is to organise and synchronize the members’ election plans, remove duplication, create synergy and integrate election efforts to boost overall reach and impact. After the workshop the member organisations will go back to their communities to faciliate awareness campaigns and direct outreach activities such as:

* distribute voting materials and flyers with overview over accessible polling stations.
* Inform and educate the voters and encourage them to register
* engage the PWDs to participate in the election including our upcoming election meeting.

1. Faciliate a joint workshop between SONSAF and SNDF to train 20 disability assistants that will guide and support PWDs on the election day while observing and ensuring that their rights are upheld. These disability assistants will be placed in different polling stations. They will be responsible for among other things to:

* set up our 5 new wheelchair ramps
* guide and support the wheelchair users
* inform the voters about how to correctly fill out the voting card
* observe and protect their voting rights on election day by confronting discrimination etc.

1. Arrange a major election meeting between politicians, representatives from the 3 political parties, presidential candidates (if available) and members from the disability community. The election meeting will put a national spotlight on the plight of the PWDs. It will also give the PWDs opportunity to engage with the politicians and provide them with insight, advice and much needed perspective, including a chance to ask relevant questions and criticize the many unrealised political promises and generally influence the election agenda.
2. Produce and broadcast voting information over the radio. Most Somali households, especially marginalised people, have a radio, and it is the most effective way to reach PWDs. Radio Hargeisa is the most popular news source with over 2 million daily listeners across the entire country. Our beneficiaries will receive vital information about the election process including how to register and vote, which polling stations are wheelchair friendly and the importance of exercising their democratic right in order to improve their lives.
3. Design and print 2.000 election flyers that provide essential voting information. These flyers will have voting procedure information on the front and a map of accessible polling stations on the back. The flyers will be given to SNDF’s member organisations in Hargeisa, and they will distribute it to the target group.
4. Produce, in collaboration with a TVET institution, 5 wheelchair ramps that will be installed to increase the polling stations accessibility. We expect that these new ramps will provide access to at least 200 voters.