



HORN CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY

NURTURING DEMOCRACY

REGIONAL DEMOCRACY CONFERENCE ON THE HORN OF AFRICA

A vital platform for fostering dialogue, sharing best practices, and tackling shared challenges on the path to stronger, more inclusive democracies

MARCH 11–12, 2024

ADDIS ABABA

CONCEPT NOTE

WITH FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM



BACKGROUND

The democratic context of the Horn of Africa (HoA) is complex and fluid, with a long history of political instability and conflict. In recent years, there have been some positive developments regarding democracy and good governance, but many challenges still need to be addressed. The HoA region is managing parallel forces of historic rapprochement, the opening of political spaces and transitions contrasting with growing threats to democracy. High inflationary economic conditions, conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies continue to threaten regional stability.

Generally speaking, the democratic landscape across the HoA is bleak. It could be argued that there is a trend of democratic backsliding in the region, and there are few signs of progress in building more democratic and accountable governments, as well as conflict, which, coupled with other contextual factors, could weaken democracy. The challenges to democracy and good governance continue to be the lack of accountability for human rights violations, corruption, and the increasing downward curve in respect for the rule of law. It also includes avoiding accountability to the public by shrinking the civic space where the public exercises oversight.

Therefore, the region's trajectory will likely continue to balance separate perspectives – offering competing narratives of growth, political opening and stability against repression, instability and conflict. As such, further analysis of the ramifications of such dichotomy on inter and intra-state democratic progress and its impact is needed.

THE HORN CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY (HCD)



The Horn Center for Democracy (HCD) is an independent, not-for-profit policy advocacy and research institution based in Addis Ababa. The main objective of the Center is to foster and entrench the culture of democracy, good governance, and inclusive citizen empowerment in the HoA countries. For HCD's undertaking, the Horn of Africa/HoA region consists of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda, as members of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) - the leading regional organisation in the Horn.

As a think and do tank, the Center also engages in program implementation, mainly with objectives of policy advocacy, capacity building and convening actors on democracy and governance in the Horn of Africa. In line with this, the Center strives to create broader alliances with CSOs, networks and think tanks working on democracy, good governance, and human rights at regional and national levels. HCD aims to provide a convening platform for dialogue, coordination, and exchange of best practices at national and regional levels among national and regional CSOs, citizen movements, governments and intergovernmental regional institutions in the HoA, such as IGAD. In this process, the Center aims to generate evidence and identify policy options on effective ways of democratisation, human rights, and governance issues.

REGIONAL DEMOCRACY CONFERENCE

In the Horn of Africa, a region grappling with complex challenges and yearning for lasting stability, convening a Regional Democracy Conference holds immense significance. It would serve as a vital platform for diverse actors – from government officials and civil society leaders to academics and youth activists – to engage in open dialogue, share experiences, and collectively chart a path towards deeper democratic roots. Through knowledge exchange, peer learning, and constructive debate, such a conference could foster regional solidarity, identify best practices in democratic governance, and address shared hurdles impeding progress. Ultimately, it would offer a much-needed space to envision and work towards a brighter future where democratic values become not only aspirations but also lived realities across the Horn of Africa.

Accordingly, HCD plans to host a Regional Democracy Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia- with relevant regional stakeholders, technical experts, representatives of international organisations and Addis-based diplomatic missions. The first day of the Conference will also be the platform at which HCD will be officially launched and provide a strategic networking opportunity for the organisation and its regional partners.

OBJECTIVES

The key objectives of the two days Regional Democracy conference are:

1. To provide a platform for information and knowledge sharing through conference presentations of various thematic studies and engaging in dialogue on democracy and democratic governance in the HoA while anchoring cross-cutting issues on human rights, peace and security, rule of law and accountability, citizen participation, civil society and media;
2. To enhance the dissemination of study results and contribute to a more contextualised democracy and governance understanding in the region;
3. To promote uptake of the study findings and incorporation of a comprehensive democracy lens, as provided in ACDEG , in policy design, law reform, legal practice, academic offerings and other democracy and governance efforts in the region;
4. To stimulate and provide the space for dialogue and ongoing exploration of good practices, experience sharing, networking and collaboration among the democracy and governance actors in the HoA region.
5. To spark crucial collaborations, ignite innovative solutions, and elevate the region's collective voice on the global stage.

CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES AND PLANS

At the methodological level, HCD acknowledges the importance of a multi-thematic approach and multi-actor and multi-stakeholder engagement in any democracy-related intervention. This is in the sense that democracy and governance-related interventions, especially in regions with complex realities such as the HoA, should be designed in a manner that considers the intricate political, economic, cultural and ethnic realities and the recurrent armed conflict and violence.

For this purpose, HCD has commissioned various thematic baseline studies on the state of democracy in HoA, including: -

- a. Study on the Political, Democratic, Human Rights and Good Governance Context in the HoA Region;
- b. Mapping Study of Pro-democracy Actors in the HoA Region;
- c. Conflict Sensitivity Analysis of the HoA Region;
- d. Gender Analysis on Democracy and Governance in the HoA Region.

Through these studies, HCD wishes to develop a baseline to set the benchmark for any democracy-related programmatic undertakings in the Region. Therefore, the findings of these multi-thematic studies will be presented at the Conference as a starter to the conversation on the state of democracy in the HoA. This endeavour is intended to lead to further in-depth analysis and a more consolidated engagement in the political, democratic, conflict, gender and civic actors' landscape in the Horn of Africa.

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

The Conference will include:

- Keynotes by leaders in the region and experts in the field
 - Presentations of the four thematic studies' findings, conclusions and recommendations
 - Dialogue and diverse Plenary sessions to contribute to the studies and potential democracy-related intervention in the region.
 - Program Strategy and co-convening approach discussion and framing
 - High-level networking opportunities.
-

For the Conference, a plenary discussion will be held at the end of each presentation of the studies, where key issues will be discussed and session recommendations derived. In addition, break-out sessions to gather consolidated recommendations on potential strategic and programmatic interventions of HCD and its partners in the HoA will be held on the second day of the conference. A detailed program will be developed to guide the conference.

KEY AUDIENCES

The conference will target participants drawn from the HoA region, with a diverse group of researchers, policymakers, academia, representatives of international organisations, government and intergovernmental organisations, civil society, and grassroots democracy advocates working on democracy and governance in the HoA region.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- i. The four thematic studies presented, and a dialogue held among the audiences on the multi-disciplinary aspects of democracy and governance and contribute inputs and recommendations on the studies;
- ii. HCD is officially launched and introduced; and established linkages and networking among democracy advocate CSOs, governmental and intergovernmental organisations, diplomatic communities, the academia, and policy think tanks;
- iii. The study results are disseminated to promote contextualised knowledge generation and sharing on democracy and governance in the HoA region and promote the uptake of study findings into policies and legal reforms.

ⁱDemocratic Backsliding is a newly emerged terminology that describes democratic states slipping backwards in terms of their democratic performance. [iii] It also includes increased manifestations of authoritarianism, including undermining collective choice in decision-making and implementation. See <https://www.idea.int/blog/explainer-democratic-backsliding>

ⁱⁱCouncil on Foreign Relations. (2021). Authoritarian Trends in the Horn of Africa Require New Policy Approach. Retrieved from <https://www.cfr.org/blog/-authoritarian-trends-horn-africa-require-new-policy-approach>

ⁱⁱⁱUlf J. D.(2006).The Reconstruction of Good Governance in the Horn of Africa. ISBN: 91-7267-216-1 Department of Social Anthropology, Lund University available at <https://www.soc.lu.se/ulf-johansson-dahre/publication/d31628b0-f5bb-4942-961b-7bf78b73dc89>

^{iv}African Union.(2007).African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance(ACDEG).Retrieved from <https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36384-treaty-african-charter-on-democracy-and-governance.pdf>



HORN CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY

NURTURING DEMOCRACY