Improving Delivery of Public Services to Citizens through Decentralization Legislation - Puntland

In 2014, the State Government of Puntland approved legislation passed by both the Parliament and President endorsing a Decentralization Policy¹. This provides the political, administrative and financial scope to decentralize service delivery, to districts with sufficient capacity, in prioritized sectors which are health, education, water/sanitation and roads. It also gives District Councils the authority to make local decisions on planning, finance and human resources. Support to the evolving process of decentralization in Puntland has been provided through the UN Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Services (known as “JPLG”). In 2015, JPLG continues to focus on strengthening local governance and decentralization across Somalia.

Decentralized service delivery allows District Administrations’ to play a stronger role in their own development. It makes optimum use of local knowledge on service needs and reduces administrative congestion within line ministries. It promotes the active involvement of citizens in the planning and policy formulation process, through district community forums, giving citizens more influence and control over their lives. It brings representation closer to the people increasing accountability and legitimacy.

JPLG/UNDP has been supporting Puntland to build district capacity since 2008, working through the Ministry of Interior as well as with selected pilot districts. This early groundwork enabled the piloting of decentralized service delivery in districts in 2014. It also educated District Councils’ and their communities on the functions of local government which resulted in a broad range of stakeholder interest in subsequent decentralization policy consultations. These were held between 2010 and 2013, supported by JPLG/UNDP, where devolution was chosen as the preferred method for decentralized service delivery.

In 2010, the legal framework was reviewed, supported by JPLG/UNDP, to ensure that the development of a Decentralization Policy was in line with the Federal Republic of Somalia’s 2012 Provisional Constitution, the Transitional Federal Charter (TFC), the Puntland Constitutions and existing laws. JPLG/UNDP also provided technical support to the development of a Decentralization Policy Paper which included stakeholder input from decentralization policy consultations (2010-2013).

JPLG/UNDP continued to provide input to the policy formulation and institutional environment in 2011/2012. This led to the Vice President of Puntland being appointed as Decentralization

¹ Puntland Decentralization Policy 2013 - 2020
Champion, by the President of Puntland – and he played a critical role in getting the Decentralization Policy approved. It also led to the establishment of Inter-Ministerial Committee on Local Government in 2013. The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Local Government is composed of Ministers from sector ministries as well as the Ministry of Interior ensuring government ownership of the decentralization process – and leading to the roll out of Decentralization Roadmap. In Puntland, water is being piloted in BenderBayla, Eyl and Jariiban and health in Garowe, Bossaso and Gardo.

In May 2015, JPLG/UNDP supported a two day programme review meeting for the government of Puntland, including six Mayor’s, to assess and reflect on their progress on decentralized service delivery.

The Mayor of Eyl, Muse Osman Yusuf said: “Decentralized service delivery is improving the relationship between the District Council and our communities. We now work together to provide services. In Eyl, our District Council feels like a small Parliament. Previously external support to our district came from the State Government of Puntland.

Now decision-making in our district involves elders, religious leaders, youth, women, fishermen, everyone in our communities, coming together to make decisions that meet the priorities of the communities in Eyl. Trust has increased. There is more understanding on taxation. There is less tension between Eyl local government and State Government of Puntland because decentralization has helped to clarify our roles.” He highlighted: “Sector ministries (in Garowe) were not convinced that a district could make decisions on their own and implement and finance their needs. Now Ministries are piloting services. We are all moving forward and the system is getting better. Even the connection between central government and local government is closing and soon we will be in the same boat.”

At a Consultative Forum on Prospects for Decentralization in Puntland in 2015, convened by the Ministry of Interior and supported by JPLG/UNDP, the Vice President, Abdihakim Abdullahi Omar Amey, who serves as the Government’s Champion for Decentralization, hailed the unprecedented gathering of key decision-makers and local representatives as: “...a significant platform for maintaining momentum on decentralization by channeling the ideas and initiatives of Puntland’s various communities.”

In attendance were over 100 government officials including mayors, local councilors and governors who engaged with their ministerial and government agency counterparts to explore key policy themes, cooperative arrangements and administrative best practices related to local governance and service delivery in the region. The Mayor of Qardho District Government, Mohamed Said Hogamo said: “The opportunity to establish relationships and communication between far off districts will be invaluable to finding common solutions to problems related
to decentralization. Not only will those representing districts with longstanding partnership with JPLG, such as Qardho, continue to pass on our experience to the younger districts, but we have established the networks from which we can work together to push for greater implementation of the decentralization programme.

With the generous support of the European Commission, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UK Aid, JPLG works closely with local counterparts in promoting improvements in the ability of local governments to provide equitable services to communities. In 2015, JPLG/UNDP continues to strengthen district capacity in support of improved public service delivery to citizens in seven districts in Puntland - Gardo, Bosaso, Eyl, Jariiban, Banderbeyla, Garowe, Galkayo. JPLG/UNDP support to the Puntland government helps them create policies, regulations, manuals and guidelines. The momentum towards improved systems and processes is encouraging the rehabilitation of vital community infrastructure, creating economic opportunity and improving the delivery of basic health, education and sanitation/water services.