

Reflections on Use of Country Systems in Somalia: A government perspective

By Adil Korfa Garane*

'The start of any constructive conversation is the truth'... dialogue is the X factor.

The increased Use of Country Systems (UCS) continues to be a priority for both the Government of Somalia and international partners. There has been much progress in terms of the political, economic and social landscape in Somalia that has transformed the nation several times in the course of a very short period, for better or worse. The most recent change is with respect to the electoral process, the formation of stable governments and the heavy burden of building a nation from the ground up. The international community has been present in Somalia throughout all the years of difficult state-building and severe fragility. This presence has created a relationship and atmosphere of partial trust, even if from a safe and risk averse distance.

Somalia has come a long way, in a very short period of time. Still, due to the country's high dependency on international support and its relatively fragile institutions, national actors have had to be very open and honest about what it would take to transition from our current state towards greater resilience and ownership. The current administration of H.E. President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed and H.E. Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre have reinvigorated the charge and drive for greater dialogue and transfer of responsibility between Somali institutions and their international counterparts. There has been level of engagement not yet seen before from the highest offices in Somalia with partners to encourage UCS; this has led to an accelerated process in the goal of increased ownership for Somali institutions in delivering for the people of Somali. This has been a consistent policy aim from the President and Prime Minister. In particular, the way we think about the UCS has been transformed in Somalia, thanks to the relentless efforts of an active joint government and development partner working group on the issue that is part and parcel of the aid architecture. The 'Use of Country Systems Working group' focuses on cultivating and monitoring collective targets as well as the progress that has been made towards building greater trust through the transfer of responsibility to state institutions. Key to this, has been **dialogue – the 'x factor'** - which has allowed both parties to advance together on the basis of honesty and continuous exchange.

We often focus heavily on Public Financial Management (PFM) performance, mainly through a public expenditure and financial accountability framework, to gauge UCS-readiness. However, this is only one of many lenses to view the progress necessary in order to advance UCS and its wider implications. The PFM element is critical to determine the risk tolerance of partners working within the system. However, there are wider set of objectives that the Somali government has to

bear in mind, notably gaining more autonomy in delivering key services and providing the security and stability required for development. All these elements are vital for our government to build legitimacy among its citizens and to undermine the counter narrative of terrorism and corruption that has inundated Somalia.

What progress has there been in Somalia? What have you learnt about what works, and where there is scope for more progress?

We have taken great strides in Somalia to build trust and cultivate effective relationships with our international partners. This has been a slow and steady conversation that has taken some time, but the levels of complexity and perceived risks have delayed progress from all sides. Yet change has been possible due to the New Deal Compact, an agreement between the government and international partners. The aid architecture put in place to deliver on the New Deal Compact (2014-2016) helped to gradually close the gap in government and development partner thinking about UCS in Somalia. UCS now features prominently in the New Partnership for Somalia (NPS) agreement, established in London (May 2017), that together with the National Development Plan, has replaced the New Deal Compact, but still commits the government and international partners to “work together” to make quantifiable, tangible progress annually against mutual commitments and benchmarks laid out in the UCS Roadmap.

Why this is not an all or nothing scenario - building on seeds of progress.

There is much that the Somali government still has to do to encourage increased and improved UCS. The government should not – and indeed cannot - if it wants to see use of country systems increase, simply wait for donors to act. We must stay committed to PFM improvement and strengthening delivery systems. The government has to tighten its fiscal controls in collecting and spending its own revenues to reverse donors’ concerns that the increased fiscal space created by the greater use of country systems, will be used in proper and desirable ways. The government will continue to reach out to international partners to overcome tensions through dialogue, agreed benchmarks and will continue to engage on policy, political and economic reforms. We ask that international partners in turn to recognise the constraints that security challenges place on collaborative exchange and we encourage them to do more to create opportunities to build trust and overcome these challenges. Yet, as important as dialogue is, we call on partners not only to further their investment in discussions with government, but to ensure that the commitments they have made to changing their practices in the field, are actually delivered upon.

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