

**Policy Brief
August 2026**

**FROM AWARENESS TO
ACCOUNTABILITY:**

**Rebuilding Public Understanding,
Participation, and Trust in Somaliland's
Legislative Institutions**

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The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR)

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POLICY BRIEF

FROM AWARENESS TO ACCOUNTABILITY: REBUILDING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING, PARTICIPATION, AND TRUST IN SOMALILAND'S LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS

August 2026

Ahmed Y. Hersi

Core message:

Somaliland's primary challenge is not a shortage of democratic institutions; rather, it is the ever-widening gap between constitutional promise and everyday legislative practice.

Closing that gap requires Parliament to become more visible, capable, accessible, and answerable to citizens, not only during elections, but throughout the life of every law.

1. Executive Summary

This Policy Brief is an extension of an earlier assessment carried out by the **Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR)**, titled, '*Public Awareness of Legislative Institutions in Somaliland: Enhancing Citizen Understanding and Trust in Governance Reforms*'¹.

The earlier assessment examined citizens' understanding of Somaliland's bicameral Parliament, assessed perceptions of legislative performance, and investigated barriers to meaningful participation through a mixed-methods approach comprising a nationwide survey of 404 respondents, as well as purposively sampled *Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)* and *Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)*. This complementary brief translates the findings from the study into practical policy options by comparing Somaliland to other countries in Africa which have undergone parliamentary reforms, particularly Kenya, Uganda and Sierra Leone. These countries have also attained internationally recognised principles of democratic governance, a status that Somaliland still aspires to achieve. This brief therefore combines evidence generated from Somaliland with comparative lessons from these countries, particularly in regard to strengthening legislative accountability, transparency, public participation, and institutional effectiveness. Somaliland's Parliament is widely recognized but insufficiently understood and observed.

The ISIR assessment found that 44.3% of respondents lacked a clear understanding of the two chambers, 74% relied on social media for legislative information, and a majority of the respondents expected MPs to deliver services rather than legislate and provide oversight to the activities of government. These findings reflect an institution with limited public records, weak regional access, under-resourced committees, executive dominance and "few credible routes for citizen input".

This brief recommends that as a policy priority, the Somaliland Parliament should move from awareness to answerability. Parliament should also publish an auditable legislative record, strengthen committee research, standardize consultations and petitions, establish regional access points, and measure inclusion. Evidence from **Kenya², Uganda, and Sierra Leone** as cited in this brief shows that low-trust legislatures can still build practical accountability infrastructure through Hansard transcripts, live proceedings, role clarification, open-parliament initiatives and structured pre-legislative hearings³. Somaliland should incorporate these mechanisms into its bicameral and customary governance context.

2. The Policy Problem

The core problem facing the Somaliland legislative institutions is the gap between constitutional authority bestowed upon them and their limited practical capacities. For instance, the Somaliland parliament has law-making

and oversight powers. In addition, the constitution states that citizens may initiate constitutional amendments with 5,000 signatures, yet the assessment reports that the origins of bills and parliamentary records are difficult to access. This leads to a cycle of low information, distorted expectations, patronage-based representation, and declining trust.

3. What the Evidence Shows

Issue	Assessment evidence	Policy Significance
Legislative Literacy	44.3% lacked a clear understanding of the two chambers; many confused legislative and executive functions .	Citizens cannot assign responsibility or evaluate performance accurately
Information	74% relied on social media (which have muddled messaging). Official channels and parliamentary records were "little known or inaccessible".	Rumors, selective reporting, and polarization fill the information vacuum
Participation	Consultations were rare, centralized, and often excluded women, youth and rural citizens.	Laws risk weak legitimacy and poor fit with lived realities.
Capacity & Independence	Committees lacked <i>research staff, resources, and offices</i> ; executive-sponsored bills dominated.	Scrutiny, amendment and oversight remain weak.
Representation	Only one woman was reported in the House of Representation; age and clan structures restricted youth influence.	Large social groups see Parliament as distant and unrepresentative.
Public Priorities	Peace and security (32.9%), jobs (21.3%), education (16.1%) and health (10.4%) led citizen concerns.	Legislative relevance should be assessed against these priorities.

Methodological caution. The survey population consisted primarily of highly educated, urban, and the youth: 79.5% of respondents held university or postgraduate qualifications, and more than three-quarters were aged 18-24. Purposive and snowball recruitment and an online instrument pose a limit to population-wide generalization of the findings. The results should therefore be treated as a strong diagnostic of engaged citizens, not as a "nationally" representative opinion poll.

The policy case is strengthened, however, by triangulation, i.e. the convergence of results across the survey, interview and focus-group evidence.

4. *Analysis: From Parliamentary Visibility to Public Answerability*

a. Information failure has become an accountability failure

Somaliland's information deficit prevents accountability. Citizens cannot evaluate their Members of Parliament and other political representatives when agendas, drafts bills, attendance registers, votes, committee findings, and ministerial responses are unavailable. With 74% of respondents relying on social media for this kind of information, dramatic political claims circulate more easily, and the routine evidence needed to assess performance is absent (ISIR, 2026).

Kenya is a useful benchmark in this regard precisely because transparency has not necessarily raised the levels of trust in parliamentary processes: only 44% of Kenyans expressed confidence in Parliamentary processes in 2025, according to Afrobarometer (Sep 2025). Nevertheless, the Kenyan Parliament publishes searchable Hansards, Order Papers and live or archived proceedings, creating an auditable record for citizens, journalists and civil society (Otele et al., 2025; Parliament of Kenya, 2026). Somaliland should adopt the same procedural transparency as a minimum standard, making them available in the Somali language. These records should include agendas, bills, committee notices, attendance registers, records of voting processes, reports, ministerial replies, and plain-language summaries of proceedings.

b. Executive dominance turns constitutional authority into procedural dependence

The executive origin of roughly 90% of bills cannot be traced, which creates challenges because committees cannot research alternatives, determine necessary amendments, or compel answers. As a result, parliament reviews proposals late and with less technical information than the institution it is mandated to oversee. This reflects a wider African pattern of executive supremacy and weak legislative capacity (International IDEA, 2023).

Uganda faces similar criticism: in 2025, 36% of citizens in a survey claimed that the president often ignored parliament, and only 15% believed MPs listened to citizens regularly according to Afrobarometer's Summary of Results (2024). Uganda's parliamentary records include a permanent Hansard department, online bills and records, and clear public explanations of MPs legislative, representative, budget and oversight roles (Male & Nakayima, 2025; Parliament of Uganda, 2026). Somaliland should establish a non-partisan *research and budget service*, professional committee secretaries, mandatory explanatory and fiscal-impact notes, and a tracker of government responses to committee recommendations.

c. Participation must become a rule-bound stage of law-making

Consultations are weak when they are done late, localised to just Hargeisa, and conducted without draft texts or without explanations of how submissions

changed a bill. The constitutional citizen-initiative route becomes performative without rules for *validation, referral, hearing*, and response deadlines (ISIR 2026). Sierra Leone⁴ is a relevant *post-conflict* comparator. After strong public criticism of MPs as ineffective and unresponsive, Parliament introduced Open Parliament days, pre-legislative hearings, and, with civil society, a Public Hearings and Participation Toolkit (Afrobarometer, 2020; UNDP, 2019; Parliament of Sierra Leone, 2025). Somaliland should require 21-30 days' notice for major bills, regional and hybrid hearings, mobile or audio submissions, publications of evidence received and a short "what we heard, what changed" statement.

d. Representation gaps are produced by institutional design

Exclusion is not only cultural; it is procedural. The candidacy age, campaign costs, clan gatekeeping, centralized hearings, and limited regional offices combine to filter out women, youth and peripheral communities. The sections of the population most affected by unemployment, health, and education failures are therefore most likely to be excluded from processes that influence relevant laws.

Sierra Leone's approach combines MP capacity-building, a Women's Caucus, outreach, e-governance, and civil-society social accountability (UNDP, 2026). Somaliland can act before constitutional reform by setting regional hearing targets, publishing sex and age-disaggregated participation data, reserving space for women's and youth groups, supporting travel from outside Hargeisa, and requiring committees to report which evidence shaped their decisions.

e. Trust depends on demonstrated responsiveness

MPs rarely make visits to constituencies once they are elected, as cited by respondents; similarly, individual MPs' contributions on the parliamentary floor are not distinct given the absence of records to that effect.

On the other hand, constituents assess their MPs based on clan relationships and personal favours rather than community-wide impact, a dynamic that ultimately breeds a "culture of patronage"

Country comparators show that transparency must connect to consequences. Somaliland should publish a *quarterly dashboard covering attendance, ministerial questions and response rates, petitions resolved*, bills changed after consultation, and implementation of audit findings. Regional parliamentary offices should hold an annual public session requiring ministries to report against earlier recommendations. Trust grows when citizens can trace a concern to an answer and identify who failed to act.

f. Benchmarking lesson: adopt mechanisms, not models

Kenya, Uganda and Sierra Leone remain imperfect and politically different from Somaliland. Their value lies in adaptable mechanisms: public records, permanent Hansard capacity, clear role descriptions, structured hearings, open-parliament events, and measurable follow-up. Somaliland can combine these tools while grounding them in the Somali language, regional access, and its bicameral system of elected and customary representation.

5. Policy Options

A civic-education-only approach is inexpensive but cannot rebuild trust in an opaque institution. A digital-transparency-first approach creates a public record but risks excluding rural and low-literacy communities. This brief recommends a phased *Open and Responsive Parliament* programme combining records, committee capacity, formal consultation, regional access, and inclusion. This would address both citizen knowledge and institutional performance.

6. Priority Recommendations

Recommendations are hereby offered to the Parliament, as most of the points are concerned with in-house capacities; it is for the Parliament to institute these practices, procedures and mechanisms i.e setting up a parliamentary research and budgetary services.

- (i) Publish a legislative information package: bills, explanatory notes, agendas, attendance, votes, committee reports, ministerial responses, livestreams and Somali summaries.
- (ii) Establish a non-partisan Parliamentary Research and Budget Service and professional committee secretariats.
- (iii) Adopt consultation standards, including regional hearings, minimum notice periods and "what changed" reports.
- (iv) Create shared "regional parliamentary offices" that collect concerns and refer service complaints to responsible agencies.
- (v) Support independent media and civil-society monitoring of attendance, votes, consultations, and implementation.
- (vi) Measure inclusion through disaggregated data and remove procedural barriers affecting women, youth and regions.

7. The Way Forward

Strengthening Somaliland's Parliament requires reforms that improve transparency, institutional capacity, and participation. Building on the findings of the ISIR assessment, priority should be given to **making legislative information publicly accessible**, strengthening parliamentary committees through an independent **Parliamentary Research Service**, expanding regional public consultations, and promoting sustained civic education.

International experience demonstrates that stronger parliamentary accountability is achieved through greater openness, professional legislative support, and

meaningful public engagement. By adapting practical reforms implemented in countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Sierra Leone, Somaliland can reinforce Parliament's constitutional role, improve public confidence, and build a more responsive and representative legislature that better reflects the priorities of its citizens.

The findings of the ISIR assessment suggests that strengthening Somaliland's Parliament requires a gradual shift from episodic public engagement towards continuous accountability, transparency, and evidence-based law-making. Priority should be given to publishing parliamentary proceedings, strengthening committee oversight through a **Parliamentary Research and Budget Service**, expanding regional consultations, institutionalizing citizen petitions and integrating civic education into schools, universities, media and community programmes.

International experience demonstrated that legislatures earn public trust when citizens can see how decisions are made, understand the role of their representatives, and observe Parliament responding to public concerns. Somaliland need not replicate other parliamentary systems; rather it can adopt proven mechanisms, including Kenya's *Hansard and Parliamentary Research Services*, Uganda's *parliamentary outreach* and Sierra Leone's *Open Parliamentary reforms*, to fit its own constitutional and customary governance traditions.

Notes & Citation

1. Afrobarometer. (2020, September 15). MPs are failing at the jobs that Sierra Leoneans want them to do <https://www.afrobarometer.org/articles/internationaldayofdemocracy-mps-are-failing-jobs-sierra-leoneans-want-them-do/>
2. International IDEA. (2026). The role of parliament in delegated legislation: Principles for safeguard legislative transparency and democratic accountability. <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/html/role-parliament-delegated-legislation-principles-safeguarding>
3. M'Cormack-Hale, F., & Laveli, A. (2025, December 15). Sierra Leoneans urge political cooperation as trust in the electoral commission falls to a new low, Afrobarometer.
4. Parliament of Sierra Leone. (2025, December 22). Parliament and CSOs validate its public hearings and participation toolkit to strengthen citizens' engagement <https://parliament.gov.sl/press-release-10.html>
5. Parliament of Uganda (2026b). Roles of MPs <https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/roles-mps> Parliament of Uganda. (2026a). The Department of Official Report <https://www.parliament.go.ug/index.php/departments/departments-official-report>

6. United Nations Development Programme. (2019). Parliament of Sierra Leone opens doors to citizens for the first time in history <https://www.undp.org/seirra-leone/news/parliament-seirra-leone-opens-doors-citizens-first-time-history>
7. United Nations Development Programme. (2026). Inclusive democratic governance: Sierra Leon <https://www.undp.org/sierra-leone/inclusive-democratic-governance>

Source and analytical note. Assessment findings are drawn from the attached ISIR report. Comparator evidence is used to benchmark practical reform mechanisms; it does not imply that the cited legislatures have resolved their accountability deficits.

Endnotes

- 1 The policy brief is principally based on the ISIR assessment 'Public Awareness of Legislative Institutions in Somaliland: Enhancing Citizen Understanding and Trust in Governance Reforms' (2026), which provides the primary empirical evidence. <https://isirthinktank.com/2026/06/public-awareness-of-legislative-institutions-in-somaliland/>
- 2 Uganda has strengthened public access through official parliamentary records, outreach programmes, committee hearings and public explanations of MPs' constitutional roles. These initiatives improve citizens' understanding despite continuing governance challenges. <https://www.parliament.go.ug/index.php/departments/department-official-report>
- 3 Kenya's Hansard is the official verbatim record of parliamentary debates, votes and proceedings. Kenya's Parliamentary Service provides independent legal, economic and policy analysis to committees and MPs, improving legislative scrutiny and oversight. Somaliland could establish a similar non-partisan service to strengthen committee work and reduce dependence on executive-sponsored legislation. See <https://hansardna.parliament.go.ke/>
- 4 Throughout its Open Parliament Initiative, Sierra Leone expanded committee hearings, public participation, and collaboration with civil society after periods of weak public confidence. The emphasis has been on making Parliament more accessible and accountable <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/AD1092-In-Sierra-Leone-trust-in-electoral-commission-drops-to-new-low-Afrobarometer-13dec25-.pdf>

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