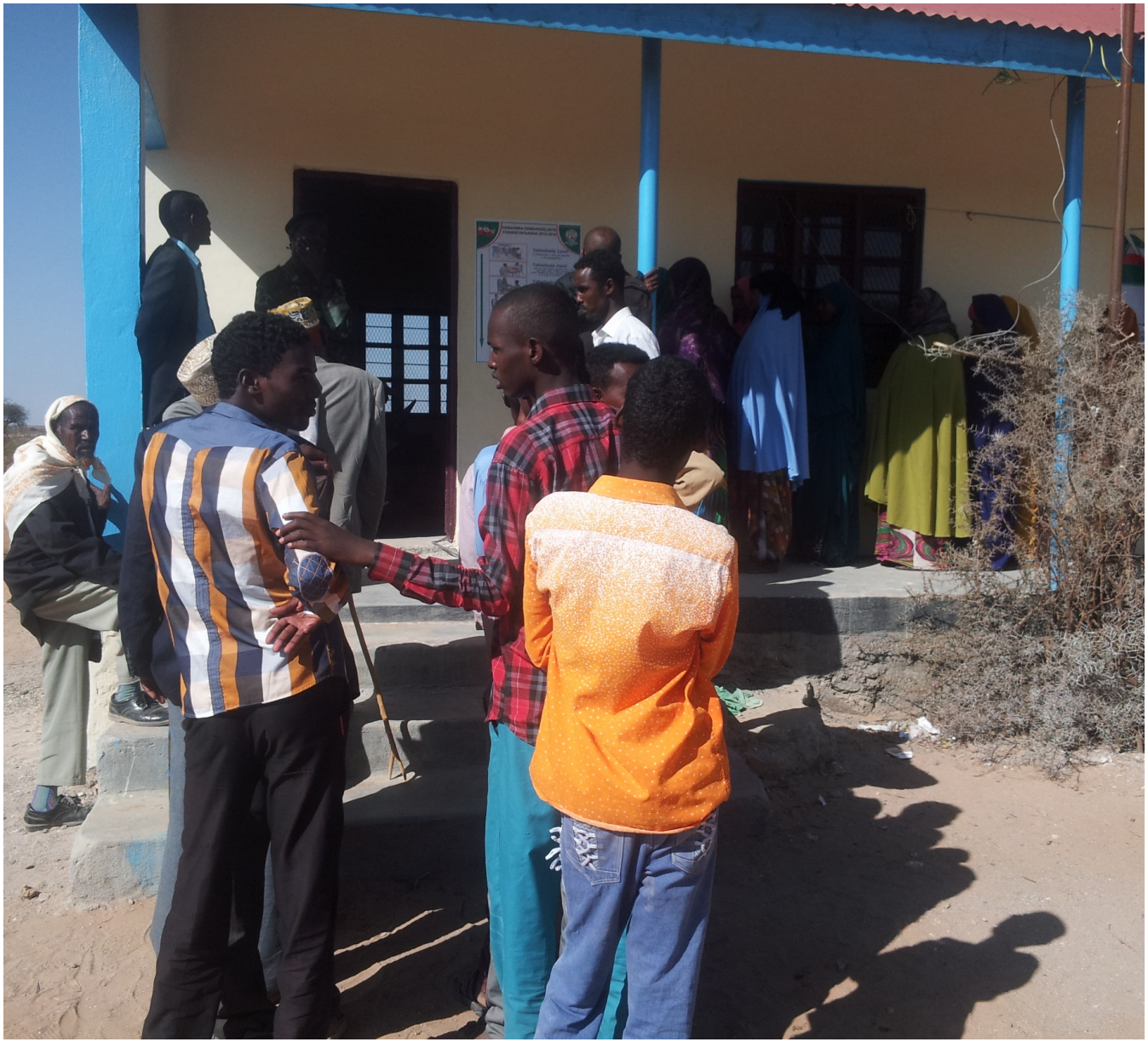


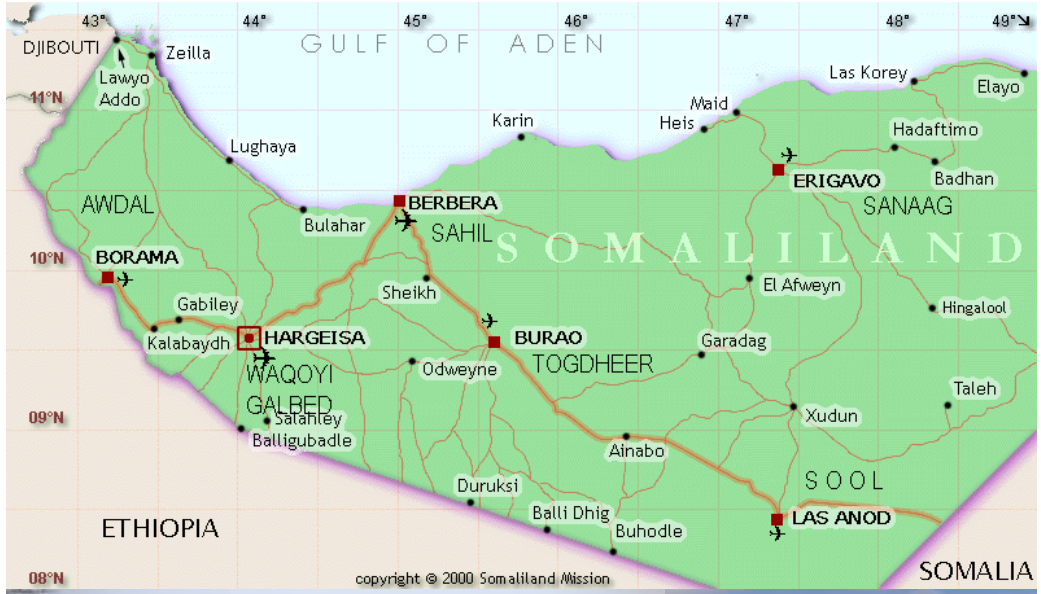
THE SOMALILAND EXPERIENCE

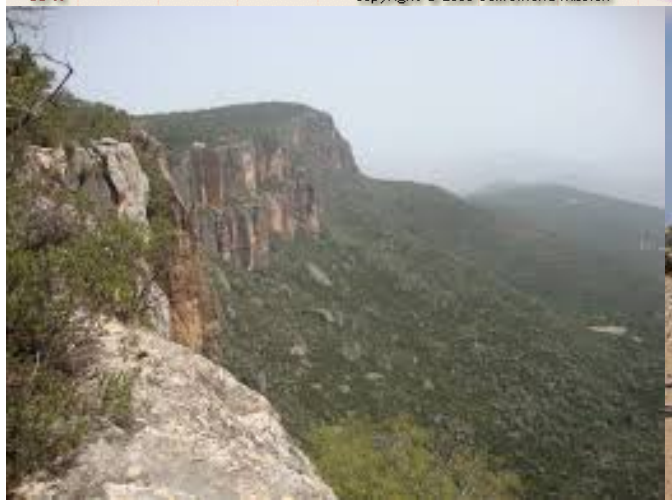
Pioneering New Ways to Build Reliable Voter Registers Quickly

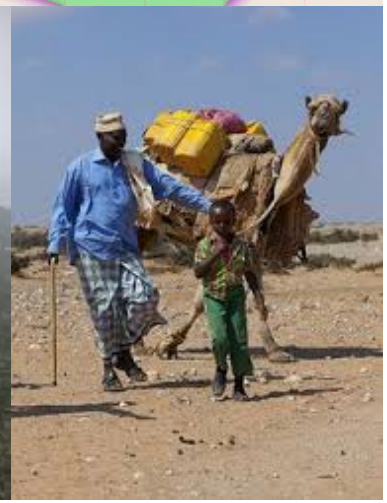
Exploring Iris Recognition

Somaliland Context

- Independent, self-governed nation
- Withdrawn from from the unconditional unification with Somalia in 1991
- Established 3-party democratic system in 2000 (constitutionally defined)
- 2 Presidential, 1 Parliamentary and 2 Local Council Elections held since 2002
- Approximate voter base: 1.2 million







National Electoral Commission of Somaliland (NEC)

- Established in 2000 – 7 Appointed Commissioners + Secretariat
- Responsible for all elections in Somaliland since their inception
- Mandated to deliver combined presidential/parliamentary elections in Mar 2017 and local council elections in Nov 2017
- Currently carrying out legally required Voter Registration throughout Somaliland
- Current process seeks to overcome the challenges/shortcomings of 2008/09 voter registration process

Why Voter Registration in Somaliland?

- Democratization assessments of Somaliland (NEC/International Observers) highlighted multiple-voting as biggest impediment to free and fair elections
- Currently, no effective identification system in the country to ensure one person, one vote principle of democracy
- Legislations put in place in 2012 requires all elections post-2012 to include a voter registry

Biometric Voter Registration in Somaliland

- Given there is no documented system for registering citizens of Somaliland, and carrying out a national civil registry was not possible, the government, parliament and political parties supported NEC's proposal to use biometrics in uniquely identifying each voter
- In 2014, NEC opted to conduct a field test using iris-scanning technology in lieu of finger-printing

Guddida Doorashooyinka Qaranka Somaliland

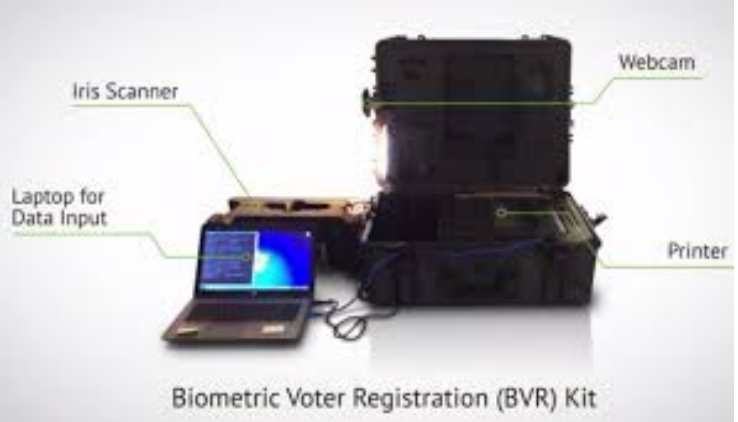
Diiwaangelinta Codbixiyayaasha 2015-2016

Biometric Voter Registration

- To overcome the fears of election corruption and to eliminate multiple voting, NEC/IP with donor support, selected biometric VR option using iris ID technology
- Before wider use, NEC conducted a field test for 5 days in each of 2 registration centers (urban/rural) to ensure Planning biometric VR accommodates the different needs
- The main objective of the field test was to thoroughly test the assumptions built into the planning of VR and to evaluate the technology and identify practical, technical, logistical , environmental, socioeconomic, and infrastructural challenges

Biometric Voter Registration in Somaliland

- Field tests were overwhelmingly successful, with strong buy-in from the population, civil society, and the political parties
- System was independently verified by Notre Dame University, USA
- Iris ID software technology was chosen as the superior system and incorporated into the specifications



IRIS ID

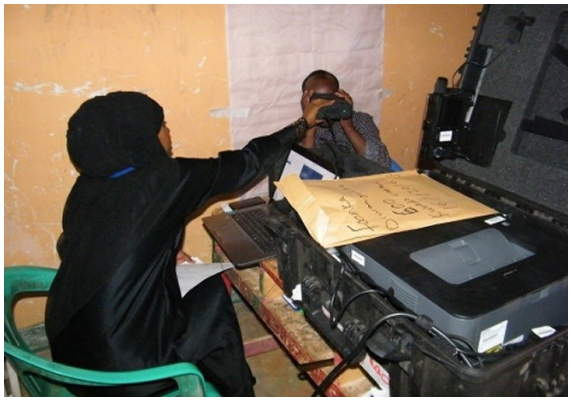
Key Challenges

- Political Buy-in
  - Those who benefit from weak systems will be threatened by proposed strong systems and will use misinformation to dissuade peers, constituents
- Donor Support
  - Sophisticated systems, those that can be ideal for lesser developed countries that need to by-pass slow-to-develop traditional bureaucracies, are cause for hesitation by donors due to cost and complexity
- Contextualization
  - Systems need to be adapted to the needs and understanding of the local context. This can be problematic for external designers, suppliers and experts

Key Strengths

- Provides Unique Identification in Sustainable Systems
  - The BVR system can create strong deterrents for voter fraud and establish a living registry that can be updated for newly qualified voters (age, citizenship, etc) and for archiving of deceased or disqualified voters.
- Politically Accepted
  - Unlike other systems (inked finger, one-off paper-based registration, electronic finger-printing associated with global ID databases, etc), the iris-scanning process has been relatively easy to get stakeholder (political) buy-in
- Economical
  - Taking into account the effectiveness against voter fraud, which can completely corrupt expensive electoral processes, the Iris Scanning BVR system is economical

Key Strengths – cont.



- Ease of Implementation of BVR
  - Relative to other technologies, the BVR system is straight-forward and easy to implement
- Effective Biometric Data Capturing
  - Unlike electronic finger-printing, which is very problematic in agricultural and pastoralist societies where manual labor effects biometric clarity, iris scanning is easy, simple/quick to capture, and reliable

- De-duplicating System
  - IrisID's deduplication software provides an effective backbone for all de-duplication needs, both in real time and in bulk de-duping efforts

IRIS ID

THANK YOU