

Overall improvement of SAI performance in a challenging situation

Catching up through strategic leadership (SAI Somalia)

By Auditor General Mohamed M. Ali, Office of the Auditor General, Somalia

Many SAIs in fragile states have vast potential for change and improvement, yet are often hindered by numerous obstacles to progress. Most notably are the external environment and the limited internal capacity, which work against the policies made towards change.

Is it still possible for a highly challenged SAI to make substantial leaps forward in a year's time? If so, what does it take? Yes, but it requires a streamlined vision and tangible cooperation among all critical parties.

From mid-2017 to mid-2018 we in the Office of the Auditor General of Somalia (OAGS) finalized a new strategic and operational plan, introduced quarterly reporting, completed backlog audits, and developed a new draft Audit Bill that allows us to leap from an antiquated, twentieth century policy into a twenty-first century structure equivalent to other neighboring countries. The Office fostered and strengthened relationships with key stakeholders at the federal level, development partners, as well as with the Federal Member States audit offices.

How did this all happen? Our progress is a testament of our strategic and professional leadership, built around a young staff keen to see improvements, and flexible support mechanisms. We understand that priorities and actions must be based on the particular situation at hand.

During this first year, leadership focused on establishing a professional and respectful dialogue with the staff. Our SAI has a staff of about 70 people. When given trust and responsibility, the staff is willing and able to take initiative. One good example is the development of the new website (www.oag.gov.so). Another example is an initiative to organize a stakeholder relations seminar for key government officials, Parliamentarians, civil society groups, academia, business groups and religious leaders. The staff spearheaded both initiatives and received impressive feedback.

Most importantly, the audit office developed and finalized a strategic plan, giving the office the direction and vision for change. Although the completion of the plan is a vital milestone, actual strategic management is often much more difficult. Through focus on selected priorities, such as the backlog audits, and the new draft audit bill, systematic follow-up of progress and strategic management is still possible.

However, scarce resources still present a major hurdle to attaining our goals. During the year our SAI received little in financial resources. Moreover, in 2018, the government budget was cut. Yet, a trustful peer-based partnership with the IDI and AFROSAI-E enabled several activities to be initiated, such as workshops for audit work, printing of the strategic plan, and seminars in Mogadishu. This was possible thanks to the allocation of funding and support from the Norwegian Embassy in Kenya. The World Bank also provided a short-term consultant to work with the office and was especially helpful in crafting the draft audit bill and regulations.





In spite of these achievements, several challenges persist. The Parliament has yet to enact the Federal Audit Bill and therefore implementation has stalled. Federal audit procedures still are not improved and quality enhanced. Furthermore, the Office will need additional technical and financial support to sustain recent changes and implement all of the goals expressed in the strategic plan.

Our general lesson learned of this year is that a lot can be achieved in just one year for a SAI in a fragile state, if there is a clear and supportive leadership, sufficient external support and staff willing to take new initiatives forward. Ultimately, we at the OAGS are confident great change is within our reach and we look forward to accomplishing progress in the years to come.