



POLICY BRIEF

Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission: Prospects for the Somali Region

A survey-based assessment of awareness, expectations, and pathways to a more inclusive and effective dialogue process.





Executive Summary

Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission (ENDC) offers a historic opportunity to address the Somali Region's longstanding political, economic, and social grievances. Yet primary survey and qualitative data collected across the region show that awareness remains inconsistent, confidence in the process is fragile, and perceptions of fair representation are weak. Drawing on responses from 316 survey participants and key informant interviews with elites, traditional leaders, government employees, and civil society representatives, this brief finds that the Commission's prospects in the Somali Region hinge on how effectively it communicates, includes local actors, and commits to transparent, monitored implementation.

Seven priority recommendations aim to help convert regional goodwill into fruitful, durable outcomes.

Background

National dialogues have become one of the most widely used tools for managing political crises and transitions, convened in more than twenty countries over the past 25 years — from Benin to Yemen — typically to address constitutional reform, peacebuilding, or entrenched national grievances. Ethiopia's Federal Parliament established the ENDC in December 2021, at the height of the war between the federal government and Tigrayan forces, giving it a three-year mandate to forge national consensus on the country's most divisive issues.

The Somali Region's distinct socio-political history — shaped by regional autonomy debates, resource distribution, inter-ethnic relations, and unresolved historical grievances — raises open questions about how well the Commission is positioned to engage the region on its own terms. Hiraad Institute conducted a mixed-methods study — a 316-respondent survey, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document and policy analysis — around three objectives: assessing the Commission's prospects, evaluating its capacity to address historical grievances, and identifying what would make the dialogue produce fruitful results.

Key Findings

BASED ON 316 RESPONDENTS

1 · Fragile prospects for the Somali Region

Awareness remains inconsistent, driven by a coordination team perceived as unfamiliar with the Somali context and an information gap between urban elites and woreda-level residents. Regional ownership is nonetheless strong; confidence in implementation is weak.

2 · Limited capacity to address historical grievances

Grievances span social justice, economic development, political representation, human rights, service delivery, security, federal arrangements, and identity. Perceptions of representation closely track confidence that Somali agendas will be addressed.

3 · Pathways to fruitful results

Nearly half of respondents are uncomfortable with current procedures, and an overwhelming majority express concern about risks to success — chiefly low trust, political interference, weak inclusiveness, and poor communication.

Survey Indicator (n = 316)	Result
Express concern about risks to the dialogue's success	94.58%
Prioritize stronger implementation mechanisms	88.77%
Doubt Somali agendas will be seriously addressed	63.64%
Report trust in the process	54.86%
Perceive the process as transparent	52.87%
View participant selection as fair	24.32%
Consider community representation adequate	22.60%



Recommendations

1 · Strengthen Awareness & Communication

Clear, consistent, accessible messaging through local media, community leaders, and public engagement platforms.

3 · Enhance Relevance to Local Needs

Explicitly integrate Somali regional priorities — justice, development, governance, security, political inclusion.

5 · Strengthen Implementation

Clear institutional and legal frameworks, with defined responsibilities, timelines, and follow-up systems.

2 · Ensure Inclusive Participation

Meaningfully include elders, women, youth, and marginalized communities to address exclusion concerns.

4 · Build Trust & Transparency

Transparent participant selection and decision-making, backed by public reporting and independent monitoring.

6 · Strengthen Political Support

Promote a stable, supportive political environment that reduces interference and preserves credibility.

7 · Engage External Support Strategically

Welcome international technical support and monitoring, but keep it neutral and secondary to local ownership.

Conclusion

Ethiopia's National Dialogue Commission arrives in the Somali Region carrying genuine goodwill and high expectations, but also inherited skepticism from past unresolved grievances. Whether it becomes a turning point or another missed opportunity will depend less on its mandate than on its execution. Hiraad Institute recommends that the Commission, regional authorities, and civil society treat the coming phase as a test of credibility: for the Somali Region, this may be the most consequential dialogue of a generation.

