SOMALIA STABILITY FUND

A FUTURE BUILT BY WOMEN: HOW GARBAHAREY'S WOMEN AND DIASPORA ARE REDEFINING DEVELOPMENT

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WORKSTREAM 3:
DEMOCRATISATION & LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Women in Garbaharey, together with their counterparts in the diaspora, are emerging as a new force for positive change, jointly launching a women-led development project aimed at revitalising the district.

The 'Promoting Women's Inclusion in Democratic Governance' project, funded by the Somalia Stability Fund III (SSF III), was implemented by the Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD) through the Dowlad Wanaag Consortium, which is led by VNG International.

One of the outcomes of the project was the establishment of the Garbaharey Women's Governance Forum, comprising of 15 female leaders, aspiring politicians, civil society activists, youth representatives, and grassroots mobilisers. These women were identified and selected through a process of consultation with Garbaharey District Council, Jubaland's Ministry of Women, Family Affairs and Human Rights (MoWFAHR) and community leaders. Their mandate is to strengthen women's participation in local governance and decision-making and spearhead community-driven development in the district.

Habiba, training participant and Head of the Garbaharey Women's Governance Forum, reflected on the training: "I participated in several capacity-building trainings where I learned about governance, women's inclusion, and the role women can play in state-building when they are united and determined. I shared the idea with my sisters in the diaspora, they were inspired, and now our dream is becoming a reality."

Capacity building and resource mobilisation training have been instrumental in uncovering critical development gaps. The staggered support and training undertaken by women in Garbaharey has not only empowered them but also galvanised district women groups to actively pursue support from the diaspora for a development initiative. Capacity building and resource mobilisation training have been instrumental in uncovering critical development gaps. "Through collaboration between local women and women in the diaspora, the group has launched a bold campaign - Garbaharey Development Project - to mobilise resources and address longstanding development gaps in a region they believe has been politically and economically sidelined for years.

Their goal is ambitious - to raise USD 1 million to support major development priorities in Garbaharey, including the construction of a

AT A GLANCE

PARTNER

- Implemented by the Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD), part of a consortium led by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)

ACTIVITY DETAILS

- Promoting Women's Inclusion in Democratic Governance project

LOCATION

- Garbaharey District, Jubaland State

HABIBA ATHAR

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new airport - following the construction of residential houses close to the existing site - the rehabilitation of a bridge connecting the town to surrounding areas, the tarmacking of the central business district, and the establishment of a community-funded university on land donated by residents.

Habiba and her diaspora co-chair, Zahra Noor Hassan, based in the United States, have jointly driven this fundraising campaign targeting people originating from Garbaharey, including pastoralist families who have been encouraged to contribute either cash or livestock.

Habiba reflects on how the initiative began, "Our committee is made up entirely of women to ensure we achieve our objectives without interference. For now, men support us mainly by helping to mobilise funds."

To date, the group has raised USD 300,000 and will soon begin construction on the new bridge as their first deliverable and flagship project.

In December 2025, construction equipment and machines purchased through the women's contributions were officially unveiled in front of community members. This milestone was followed by the arrival of engineers from the area who conducted measurements for the proposed road. Subsequently, a domestic resource mobilisation committee was established, comprising diaspora women members, religious leaders, and representatives from the Garbaharey business community. The committee's primary role is to spearhead local contributions toward the project.

Between December 2025 - June 2026, the following contributions towards the construction were agreed:

- Large businesses - $20 monthly
- Small businesses - $10 monthly
- Each household - $5 monthly
- Large trucks transporting goods to and from Mogadishu - $20
- Small transport vehicles - $10

Bulldozers, tractors, and road grader machines arrive in Garbaharey, procured with funds mobilised through the Garbaharey Development Project.

The diaspora women's committee is expected to visit Garbaharey before June to officially witness and unveil the initiative.

Zahra Noor Hassan underscores the critical role diaspora women play in strengthening women's leadership at home: "Even though we live abroad, our hearts remain connected to Garbaharey. We felt it was our responsibility to contribute to development and to uplift women and families." She notes that diaspora communities can play a key role to encourage and mentor women aspiring to leadership positions, support capacity-building initiatives, provide financial contributions and visibility, and to help mobilise community support.

Zahra highlighted the challenges women face in leadership, noting that local leadership spaces are male-dominated and restrict opportunities that support women's participation in formal and active roles. Despite facing cultural barriers, lack of training opportunities, and limited representation, Zahra emphasises that Somali women continue to fight against narratives of vulnerability by demonstrating resilience, courage, and an unwavering commitment to community well-being.

Zahra credits the initiative's success to close coordination with Habiba and continuous engagement with the local committee and community members at large.

Garbaharey District Mayor, Mohamed Jamac Gaie, has expressed full support for the women-led initiative, describing it as a beacon of hope for a community lacking development partners and government resources. He has personally contributed to the fundraising efforts and mobilised colleagues and partners to do the same. "In Garbaharey, resources are limited. The diaspora has always stood with us, during droughts, floods, and peace-building initiatives. This women-led project gives us hope."

Why is this important?

The Garbaharey Women-Led Initiative demonstrates how local women, when organised and empowered, can lead transformative development - mobilising resources, uniting communities, and offering practical solutions where government resources are limited.

This initiative aligns with SSF III's focus on promoting inclusive governance, strengthening social cohesion, and advancing community-driven development. By placing women at the forefront of decision-making and project implementation, the initiative showcases women's capacity to address community needs, strengthen accountability, and model effective local leadership.