

WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE BRIEFING NOTE

Women play a critical, but often undervalued, role in local governance in Somalia. Governance processes that exclude women contribute to fragile, unrepresentative institutions and weaken social cohesion (Rift Valley Institute, 2023).

Despite their frontline roles in education, health, community welfare, and dispute mitigation and resolution, women remain largely excluded from formal governance bodies at district and state levels. Implementation of the 30% quota of women in government remains inconsistent and often symbolic rather than substantive.

However, over the past decade, Somali women have shown growing engagement in political processes, supported by their professional experience, strengthened networks, expanded access to education, and sustained involvement in civic and activist spaces.

The Somalia Stability Fund III (SSF III) integrates women's inclusion across all of its programming. While gender inclusion is mainstreamed across the portfolio, SSF III also funds targeted, women-centred initiatives through its two consortias working on democratisation and local governance:

The Finn Church Aid (FCA)-led consortium operates in Banadir Regional Administration (BRA), Hirshabelle and Galmudug States.

Consortium members: Horn Centre (HC) and Somali Youth Development Network (SOYDEN)

The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)-led consortium operates in Jubaland, Puntland and Southwest States.

Consortium members: KAALO Aid and Development, Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA), Somali Family Services (SFS), Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD) and Somali One — operating in Puntland, Jubaland, and Southwest States.

KEY RESULTS

40
Peace
Mothers



18
women
District
Councillors



8
Women's
Caucuses



160
Women's
Caucus
members

SUPPORT TO PEACE MOTHERS AND WOMEN DISTRICT COUNCILLORS THROUGH THE FCA CONSORTIUM

Between 2024-2025, SSF III supported women district councillors and Peace Mothers in South Galkayo and Abudwaq (Galmudug) and Jowhar and Warsheikh (Hirshabelle) to build women's leadership skills in the areas of local governance and peacebuilding.

District councils in both states have struggled to meet inclusion targets. Hirshabelle has the lowest women's parliamentary representation in Somalia at just 13%. Whilst women's representation in Galmudug's administration declined by 50% in the last federal election.

OBJECTIVES

- Equip women leaders with the skills and confidence to participate in district governance.
- Strengthen women's influence in peacebuilding and reconciliation.
- Build networks of women across districts, linking grassroots women's groups with national advocacy efforts to enable long-term mentoring of aspiring women leaders.

ACTIVITIES

- 1. Consultations and Engagement:** Structured dialogues with women leaders, elders, and local officials created local ownership and opened political space for women's participation.
- 2. Leadership & Peacebuilding Training (29 women):** Women district councillors and aspiring leaders received targeted training on leadership, advocacy, conflict resolution, nonviolent communication, negotiation, and mediation, enabling women to act as peace champions in their communities. This activity was done in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior Federal Affairs and Reconciliation (MoIFAR).
- 3. Psychosocial Resilience Training (58 women):** Wellbeing sessions equipped participants with stress management tools, addressing the emotional burden of leadership in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

- 4. Peer-to-Peer Support Networks:** New district-level women's leadership networks were established across four districts, linking grassroots women to national advocacy platforms and consolidating fragmented groups into a structure better able to advocate and participate in governance. This network was linked to existing governance bodies—the district council, community monitoring groups, and dialogue forums—ensuring women had a recognised role in stability architecture.



Women district councillors and Peace Mothers in Abudwaq, Galmudug State, receive training on conflict resolution.

RESULTS

- ✓ Women leaders report increased confidence engaging with local authorities.
- ✓ Peace Mothers—long recognised informally as mediators—now have structured pathways into governance processes.
- ✓ Distinct networks of women leaders are emerging across the districts, improving knowledge sharing, coordination and visibility.
- ✓ Training participants in Galmudug cascaded the training down to 60 additional aspiring female leaders through the Women's Network.
- ✓ The Women's Network, and their dedicated building in Abudwaq (Aqalka Haweenka), have transformed into a vibrant hub for female leaders and women aspiring to leadership positions.
- ✓ The training participants in Galmudug State participated in seven major peacebuilding processes. Whilst the Hirshabelle participants engaged in 10 peacebuilding processes. All of these efforts resulted in lasting peace agreements.

EMBEDDING WOMEN'S CAUCUSES IN THE INCLUSIVE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (ISA) FRAMEWORK THROUGH THE VNG CONSORTIUM

The **ISA framework** is a community driven approach through which rights-holders (e.g. Women's Caucuses, Youth Caucuses and other community groups) use participatory mechanisms and processes to directly engage with duty-bearers (district councils, local administrations, and/or other service providers) to demand accountability and actively participate in district-level decision-making.

OBJECTIVE

To embed Women's Caucuses within formal structures that guide district decision-making processes in a way that endures beyond the lifespan of the project, supporting long-term accountability and inclusive governance.

Core components of the ISA Framework:

- 1. Equitable Participation:** Meaningful roles for marginalised stakeholders through the inclusion of Women's Caucuses and Youth Caucuses.
- 2. Transparency:** Open information flows on policies, budgets, and monitoring findings.
- 3. Responsiveness:** Authorities commit to act on community-identified priorities. Jointly developed action plans specify timelines and responsibilities; monitoring dashboards track progress; and follow-up sessions ensure adjustments as needed.
- 4. Empowerment:** Building the capacity and agency of community members—through training of trainers, peer exchanges, and embedding caucus representatives in oversight structures.

Women's caucuses were either established or mobilised in: Barawe, Afgoye (Southwest State); Afmadow, Dollow, Luuq, Garbaharey (Jubaland State); and Badhan and Dangorayo (Puntland State).

CASE STUDY

Despite limited access to formal governance spaces, the Women's Caucuses have demonstrated strong responsiveness to community concerns. The Women's Caucus in Badhan District, Puntland spearheaded a campaign to mobilise community resources for the most vulnerable, raising funds for newly internally displaced communities affected by the recent drought in the

Sanaag region. The Women's Caucus provided sanitation units, distributed food assistance to 40 vulnerable households, and organised water trucking support. Approximately 280 barrels of water were distributed to 140 households. These contributions were made possible through the leadership and the advocacy of the Women's Caucus at Badhan who mobilised funds and resources from the diaspora and the host community. This demonstrated women's capacity to lead crisis-responsive initiatives and shape district priorities through social accountability mechanisms.

Several members of the Badhan women's caucus cited increased or improved service delivery, as well as increased confidence amongst Women's Caucus members. A Women's Caucus member in Badhan said [SSF III trainings through KAALO] "...equipped us with the confidence and courage to serve our community and improved our access to the local government. During the sessions, we met district council members, built relationships, and became familiar with one another. These connections later made it easier to engage with them on community matters."

"Previously when I visited Badhan, I rarely saw active community members or functioning committees. Today, however, there are well-organised community committees that approach officials and openly discuss local issues. This level of organisation did not exist in Badhan two years ago." SSF III key informant interviewee, Puntland MoIFAD.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP & DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE VNG CONSORTIUM

The VNG consortium implemented the 'Promoting Women's Inclusion in Democratic Governance' project in Kismayo and Garbaharey, Jubaland.

OBJECTIVES

- Establish platforms where women's voices have potential to directly influence local decision-making processes.
- Enhance the capacity of women and their organisations to engage effectively in governance processes.
- Strengthen women's groups' capacity to advocate for the establishment of elected inclusive local councils as mandated by law.

ACTIVITIES

- 1. Establish Spaces for Inclusion:** Formation of Advisory Committees – approximately 30 members per location. These committees serve as consultative bodies to inform and influence local policy decisions. Additionally, Women’s Governance Forums were launched to provide a structured space for women to raise their concerns, propose policy ideas, and engage with local administrations on governance issues. Four stakeholder dialogues - two per location - brought together the women participants, Advisory Committees and local administrations to review local governance issues and integrate women’s input into ongoing governance processes that address drivers of instability. Monitoring mechanisms were established to track women’s contributions in the forums and stakeholder dialogue sessions. These mechanisms ensure that women’s voices are not only heard, but that their inputs and suggestions are acted upon.
- 2. Build Women’s Capacity:** Participants received training on advocating for the inclusion of women in governance, community-centred development, and resource mobilisation. Networking and mentorship programmes were established and, inter-district exchange visits were coordinated.
- 3. Advocate for Elected Local Councils:** Conducted advocacy and legal framework workshops with participants. Implement policy advocacy campaigns, including media engagements (radio and social media campaigns) and community town halls to raise awareness about the importance of elected councils and gender inclusion. The Women’s Governance Forum members developed an inclusive governance roadmap which outlines actionable steps, milestones, and accountability measures towards institutionalising women’s leadership in the districts.

RESULTS

In Garbaharey, women who participated in the training 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. The women mobilised diaspora resources to rehabilitate local infrastructure (airstrip and bridge), demonstrating women’s ability to drive community-prioritised development. The development projects are estimated to serve more than 350,000 people. The full story can be found on the SSF III website, [here](#).



Members of the women’s Advisory Committee in Garbaharey at the launch of the development project.

SSF III LOOKING AHEAD

Across these programmes, SSF III supports women district councillors, aspiring female leaders, Peace Mothers, women’s caucuses, and women’s governance forums to engage meaningfully in local governance processes, influence decision-making, and contribute to Somalia’s stability.

These activities are demonstrating that when women participate meaningfully in local governance, communities become more representative, more resilient, and more peaceful.

SSF III will continue scaling up women’s participation across Year 4 planning, including:

- Supporting new and established district administrations to institutionalise inclusive decision-making.
- Continuing ISA Framework cycles in Puntland, Southwest and Jubaland.
- The expansion of the ISA Framework to additional districts.
- Continued partnerships with state ministries, local councils, and women’s networks.
- Going beyond the inclusion of women in governance structures to ensure meaningful participation.

Embedding women into local governance is a crucial step for building stable, inclusive, and responsive political systems in Somalia. SSF III’s dual approach—mainstreaming women’s inclusion across all activities while implementing targeted women-centred programming—is unlocking new leadership pathways, strengthening community cohesion, and improving accountability by providing women with a structured platform to engage on critical issues that have an impact on stability.