

# HOW SOMALI YOUTH ARE INCREASINGLY INFLUENCING LOCAL DECISIONS

## BRIEFING NOTE

11

Youth Caucuses



233

Youth Caucus members (140 male/ 93 female)



70

Youth involved in Mogadishu Youth-Led Peace Club activities



160

Youth/4 districts involved in environmental stewardship project in Galmudug and Hirshabelle



**“We used to wait for others to solve problems for us. Now we organise ourselves, identify the issues at hand, and engage our local government directly.”**

Somalia is one of the world’s youngest countries, with around 70% of the population under the age of 35. Yet many young people feel excluded from decisions that affect their daily lives. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, there are few legitimate pathways for youth to participate meaningfully in decisions shaping their future, which can lead to grievances, lack of trust in governments and vulnerability to mobilisation by irregular armed groups.

Through support from the Somalia Stability Fund (SSF III), young people across Somalia are increasingly working alongside local authorities to address community challenges, shape policies and improve local services.

From flood prevention work in Afgoye to youth-led peace initiatives in Mogadishu and contributions to Jubaland’s first Youth Policy, young people are showing that when they are given the opportunity

to participate, they can become powerful agents of positive change.

## WHAT CHANGED?

Research, conducted by our partner, GIST, found that young people who participated in SSF III-led youth groups and discussions with local authorities felt more confident speaking about community issues and were more likely to believe their views were being heard. Many participants also reported greater trust in local government and a stronger commitment to helping solve local problems. While many non-engaged youth described feeling “present but not consulted”, engaged youth cited tangible experiences of being heard and influencing local priorities.

Many participants linked youth exclusion to frustration, irregular migration and vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups. By contrast, young people who were involved in community and local government activities felt more connected to their communities and more able to make a difference. The research suggests that when young people are given opportunities to participate and be heard, they are more likely to trust local authorities and play an active role in solving local challenges.

# INCLUSIVE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY (ISA) ACTIVITIES

SSF III is leading a community driven approach in Jubaland, Puntland and Southwest States, through which youth - alongside other historically marginalised groups - co-create solutions with government actors.

By integrating 'youth caucuses' within development plan consultations, public forums, and review meetings, the ISA Framework approach helps youth engagement move from informal mobilisation towards a formal, recognised role in decision-making.

This work is implemented by a consortium led by the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG).

## Afgoye Youth Caucus: From exclusion to influence

SSF III enabled young people in Afgoye, Southwest State, to become recognised partners of district administrators. A key milestone was the signing of a one-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Afgoye's Youth Caucus and the Afgoye District Council, formally recognising youth representatives and integrating them into local governance structures.



The agreement established a clear role for the youth caucus in civic education, community mobilisation, and support to district development initiatives. This formal partnership marked a significant shift in the relationship between young people and local authorities, creating a structured mechanism for youth participation in governance.

Following the agreement, the Youth Caucus quickly demonstrated its value as a bridge between communities and government. Caucus members conducted assessments of river conditions and sanitation risks ahead of the rainy season, gathering evidence and presenting their findings to local authorities. Building on these findings, the Youth Caucus organised sanitation awareness campaigns to discourage dumping of garbage into the river and led community sensitisation efforts on the flood risks associated with settlement expansion near river embankments.

In response to the evidence and advocacy generated by the caucus, the District Council enforced a four-metre buffer zone along sections of the river to reduce environmental and public safety risks.

As trust increased, authorities increasingly sought the views of caucus members and involved them in identifying solutions to local challenges. Youth Caucus members noted that this represented a departure from previous governance practices, where decision-making spaces were often limited and youth and other minority groups had little visibility or influence. As one youth participant reflected, *"We used to wait for others to solve problems for us. Now we organise ourselves, identify the issues at hand, and engage our local government directly."*

Afgoye provides compelling evidence that low-cost investments in dialogue, facilitation, and organisational capacity can empower young people to become active contributors to local development while supporting more responsive and inclusive governance.

Youth face different drivers of exclusion, marginalisation, and instability across Somalia. While the overall objective is to strengthen youth participation in local governance, the pathways to achieving this differ according to local realities. By addressing barriers to participation and creating avenues for youth to engage constructively with local authorities, SSF III activities help to tackle the key drivers of instability, including social exclusion and weak state-society relations.



### **Environmental action opens doors for youth participation in Hirshabelle and Galmudug**

In Hirshabelle and Galmudug, SSF III supported youth-led environmental stewardship initiatives as an entry point for promoting civic responsibility, strengthening relationships between young people and local authorities, and building awareness of governance processes. Through this work, youth groups highlighted gaps in youth engagement in local budgeting and decision-making. In response, local authorities established formal liaison mechanisms that gave young people greater access to planning and budget processes, creating new avenues for their priorities and perspectives to be considered in local governance decisions. These activities are implemented by a consortium led by Finn Church Aid (FCA).



### **Mogadishu: Young people leading change in their communities**

In BRA, however, FCA recognised that the scale and complexity of youth-related challenges require a more targeted approach. As Somalia's largest urban centre and home to a significant youth population, Mogadishu experiences high levels of unemployment, displacement, social exclusion, and competition for opportunities, alongside persistent security risks. These interconnected pressures increase young people's vulnerability to violence, criminality, and extremist recruitment, making meaningful youth inclusion both a stability imperative and a governance priority. In response, SSF III supported dedicated mechanisms that enable young people to play a more active role in decision-making, peacebuilding, and civic engagement.

The Mogadishu Youth Peace Club (MYPC) has emerged as an important mechanism for strengthening youth participation in governance and community participation in BRA. Established through an inclusive consultation process and supported with training in peace education, conflict analysis, non-violent conflict resolution, leadership, and civic engagement, the initiative has helped transform young people into active contributors to governance processes. A cohort of 70 youth (27 women and 43 men) developed the Club's own governance structure, terms of reference, and action plan, to create a sustainable, context-relevant and youth-led platform.

Members have participated in consultations for the Mogadishu Transformation Plan; undertaken voluntary community service activities, such as beach-cleaning campaigns; organised Ramadan donation drives and food distributions; and delivered peace education and awareness

campaigns in schools and universities. The Club has also engaged in counter-narrative initiatives, addressing irregular migration and negative social influences affecting youth.

**“The training [provided by SSF III through FCA] helped me understand my role as a young person in promoting peace and positive change. After the training, I immediately discussed what I learned with a group of youth in my neighborhood, focusing on the issue of garbage accumulation in our streets and how we can work together to keep our environment clean.”**

Zakariya, MYPC Chairperson

Collectively, these activities have increased opportunities for constructive youth engagement, fostered trust between citizens and local authorities, and demonstrated how organised youth platforms can contribute to conflict prevention, accountability, and inclusive governance in BRA.

These activities were not framed as standalone climate or inclusion initiatives. Instead, they served as entry points for visible cooperation between youth groups and local authorities, reinforcing shared responsibility and more responsive local government.

## YOUTH HELP SHAPE GOVERNMENT POLICY IN JUBALAND

Government institutions at district and state levels are increasingly inviting youth to participate in development planning discussions, community consultations and policy dialogues, on issues ranging from service delivery and environmental management to social cohesion and community security.

A clear example of this shift is the approach taken by Jubaland’s Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), which, with support from SSF III, sought to ensure that the Jubaland Youth Policy was informed by the priorities, perspectives, and lived experiences of young people. Rather than developing the policy through a traditional top-down process, the

Ministry actively engaged youth in consultations and policy discussions, recognising that youth have a critical role to play in shaping governance decisions and identifying solutions to the challenges facing their communities.

The dialogues included youth from rural areas, women, internally displaced persons, and people with disabilities—through structured consultations in Afmadow and Dollow.

The process enabled youth to shape a consolidated set of recommendations that informed the first draft of the Youth Policy. As a result, youth demonstrated increased confidence and capacity to advocate for their interests, while the Ministry and district councils gained a clearer understanding of youth needs. The process also reinforced the role of district councils as legitimate intermediaries between citizens and the state.

By embedding inclusive participation in policy development, the initiative enhanced the responsiveness of state institutions, increased public trust, and fostered a sense of ownership among young people—who are central to Somalia’s demographic and its future stability.

Throughout the consultations, youth called for increased investment in employment and skills-development initiatives to address high levels of youth unemployment, while also highlighting the importance of accessible recreational spaces, including sports facilities, that provide opportunities for personal development and positive community engagement. Youth also advocated for more structured and sustained mechanisms for dialogue with government, arguing that their perspectives should be regularly incorporated into decision-making processes at district and state levels. Importantly, youth engagement did not end with the consultations; youth have continued to advocate for the policy’s adoption and implementation.



# WHY YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN GOVERNANCE MATTERS FOR STABILITY



**“Youth capacity alone is limited. It is often difficult for young people to bring government officials to the table for accountability discussions. SSF III played a crucial role in making this possible.”**

Youth Caucus member, Badhan

Across Somalia, these examples show that young people want to contribute to their communities when given the chance. When local authorities actively listen to young people and involve them in decision-making, communities benefit. Young people help identify problems, mobilise others, and develop solutions. At the same time, trust grows between citizens and government.

Increasingly, government institutions are recognising youth not as a group that needs support, but as valuable partners in shaping Somalia's future.

