

Youth Democracy Clubs Initiative in Sanaag

Report





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01. Executive Summary

Between October 2015 and January 2016, SEDO Somalia, in collaboration with the Horn Dialogue Foundation and with funding from the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, implemented the Youth for Democracy Clubs (Y4DC) initiative in Badhan and Dhahar, two towns in the Sanaag region of Puntland State, Somalia. The initiative delivered civic education and awareness-raising sessions that introduced youth including university students, high school students, teachers, and community members to the foundational principles of democratic governance, human rights, peacebuilding, and civic participation.



150

Youth in **Badhan** gained key knowledge on democracy, peacebuilding, and good governance.

100

Youth and school students benefited from training and awareness sessions in **Dhahar**.

The project responded to a well-documented gap in Somalia's peace and governance architecture; although close to eight in every ten Somalis are under the age of 35, young people remain largely excluded from decision-making processes at the community, regional, and national levels. This gap is especially pronounced in Sanaag, a region whose contested administrative status between Somaliland and Puntland, combined with a history of clan-based governance, elevates both the risk of youth marginalization and the potential dividend of investing in youth as constructive civic actors.

Through interactive training sessions in Badhan and Dhahar, Y4DC equipped young Somalis with practical knowledge of democratic values, good governance, human rights, conflict prevention, and peaceful dialogue, while placing sustained emphasis on the inclusion of young women and girls in leadership and decision-making. The initiative directly supports Somalia's National Youth Policy (2012–2020), the Federal Government's National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, and the global Youth, Peace and Security agenda established under UN Security Council Resolution 2250 and its successor resolutions.

This report documents how the project was implemented in each location, summarizes the outputs achieved, and sets out the anticipated short- and longer-term impact of the initiative for youth, for the Sanaag region, and for Somalia's broader democratic and peacebuilding trajectory. It concludes with lessons learned and recommendations to guide the design of future phases.



02. Background and Rationale

2.1 Somalia's Youth Landscape

Somalia has one of the youngest populations in the world; in a country of close to 20 million people, nearly eight in every ten Somalis are under the age of 35. Youth are therefore not a marginal constituency but the demographic core of the country's future yet structural barriers, generational hierarchies, limited access to education and employment, and constrained civic space have historically kept young people at the margins of governance and peacebuilding decisions.

Somalia's Federal Government has taken deliberate steps to close this gap. The National Youth Policy (2012–2020) provides a comprehensive framework for youth development centered on inclusion, economic empowerment, and civic participation, and has since been reinforced by a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security that recognizes young people as central actors in peacebuilding rather than passive beneficiaries of it. These national commitments echo the global Youth, Peace and Security agenda established by UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and reaffirmed in Resolutions 2419 and 2535, which call on member states to expand youth representation in decision-making and to build dedicated mechanisms for youth participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.



2.2 The Sanaag Context

Sanaag is one of the regions where this national agenda carries particular weight. Administratively contested between Somaliland and Puntland, Sanaag – together with the neighboring Sool region – has experienced episodes of political tension and, at times, armed confrontation linked to this unresolved status. Local research consistently points to the same conclusion; durable stability in Sanaag depends on incorporating the views and agency of local populations, including the region's youth, rather than leaving governance questions to be settled solely at the political or clan-elder level.

Badhan, one of the largest towns in Sanaag and home to Maakhir University, and Dhahar, third largest city, are both towns where young people are directly exposed to the practical consequences of contested governance, limited service delivery, and constrained civic infrastructure. Equipping youth in these two towns with civic knowledge and dialogue skills is therefore not a generic capacity-building exercise it is a targeted investment in the actors most likely to shape how Sanaag's governance and identity questions are resolved over the coming decade.



2.3 Rationale for the Youth for Democracy Clubs Model



The Youth for Democracy Clubs model is designed to convert this demographic and political reality into an organized civic asset. Rather than a one-off awareness campaign, Y4DC establishes structured clubs through which young people continue to engage with democratic principles, governance, and peacebuilding after the initial training, sustaining dialogue, mentoring peers, and modelling constructive civic behavior within their schools, universities, and wider communities.

The model deliberately foregrounds the inclusion of young women, reflecting both the specific barriers women face in Somali political life and the evidence that inclusive peace and governance processes are more durable.

3. Project Overview

3.1 Goal

To strengthen democratic values, civic participation, and peacebuilding capacity among youth in Sanaag, Somalia, by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and platforms needed to become informed, engaged, and inclusive civic actors.



3.2 Specific Objectives



- Introduce youth in Badhan and Dhahar to core principles of democratic governance, human rights, and civic responsibility.
- Build youth understanding of practical approaches to conflict prevention, peaceful dialogue, and community-level peacebuilding.
- Promote the meaningful political and civic participation of young women alongside young men.
- Establish the foundation for sustained Youth for Democracy Clubs that continue civic engagement beyond the initial training.

4. Implementation

4.1 Approach and Methodology

Y4DC was delivered through interactive, in-person training and awareness-raising sessions rather than one-directional lectures. Facilitators from SEDO Somalia used guided discussion, question-and-answer exchanges, and group dialogue to explore democratic principles, governance, and peace-building in terms directly relevant to participants' own communities.

This participatory format was deliberately chosen to build participants' confidence in public dialogue itself a core democratic skill rather than simply transmitting information.



4.2 Badhan: Advancing Youth Leadership in Governance and Democracy

In Badhan, SEDO Somalia convened youth from across the town, including students from Maakhir University, for a training on democratic principles, good governance, and civic participation. Sessions covered:

- Foundations of democratic practice and governance
- Peace-building, conflict mitigation, and community-level dialogue
- Human rights and political representation
- The case for women's meaningful participation in political life and decision-making

Facilitators anchored the session in the recognition that Somali youth will play a defining role in the country's future, encouraging participants to see themselves as active contributors to peaceful, well-governed communities rather than passive observers of national events.



4.3 Dhahar: Empowering Youth to Champion Democracy and Peacebuilding

In Dhahar, the initiative introduced high school students to the Y4DC model through a civic education and awareness-raising session. The session covered:

- Democratic values and responsible citizenship
- Good governance and human rights
- Peaceful dialogue and conflict prevention
- Leadership skills and constructive civic engagement



As in Badhan, inclusive participation was a central theme, with facilitators highlighting the importance of engaging young women and girls in leadership and community decision-making. The session brought together students, teachers, and community members, positioning the school as an entry point for sustained civic engagement among adolescents.

4.4 Cross-Cutting Themes

- Gender inclusion: both sessions placed explicit emphasis on expanding pathways for women's and girls' participation in leadership and decision-making, reflecting the Y4DC model's commitment to inclusive civic space.
- Peacebuilding linkage: civic education content was consistently connected to conflict prevention and peaceful dialogue, reflecting Sanaag's specific governance context.
- Institutional anchoring: engagement with Maakhir University in Badhan and the high school system in Dhahar gives the clubs a durable institutional home for continued activity.

4.5 Summary of Activities

Location	Activity	Target Group	Key Themes
Badhan	Y4DC training and awareness-raising session.	University students (Maakhir University) and community youth	Governance, democracy, peacebuilding, human rights, women's political participation.
Dhahar	Y4DC civic education and awareness-raising session.	High school students, teachers, community members.	Civic responsibility, governance, human rights, peaceful dialogue, leadership.

5. Results and Outputs

The Youth Democracy Clubs initiative reached 250 youth and students across Badhan and Dhahar in Sanaag Region through two awareness and training sessions. The initiative engaged Maakhir University in Badhan and Dhahar High School, with participation from 150 males and 100 females, promoting inclusive youth engagement in democracy, civic participation, peacebuilding, and good governance.

As a result, four Youth Democracy Clubs were established to provide a platform for continued civic engagement and democratic participation among young people. The initiative also engaged 80 community members and teachers, strengthening community support for youth participation and creating a foundation for sustained civic education and dialogue.

The following table summarizes project outputs:

RESULTS & OUTPUTS

Youth For Democracy Clubs • SANAAG

2

Y4DC sessions delivered

2

Locations reached

250

Total participants

4

Youth for Democracy Clubs established

80

Community members engaged

PARTICIPANT SEX BREAKDOWN

250 total participants reached

Male 150

Female 100

Male Female

SESSIONS BY LOCATION

One session delivered in each location

Badhan 1 session

Dhahar 1 session

Locations reached Badhan • Dhahar, Sanaag

INSTITUTIONS ENGAGED

Maakhir University (Badhan)
Dhahar high School (Dhahar)

SUPPORTING THEMES

governance, democracy, peacebuilding, human rights, women's political participation, civic responsibility, peaceful dialogue, and leadership

6. Impact

6.1 Immediate Impact

The Badhan and Dhahar sessions produced an immediate shift in participants' civic literacy; young people who had limited prior exposure to structured discussion of governance, rights, and peaceful dialogue engaged directly with these concepts and connected them to their own communities. By explicitly foregrounding women's political participation in both locations, the sessions also began to shift local norms around who is expected to take part in civic and decision-making life.

6.2 Anticipated Medium-Term Impact

- A cohort of youth in Badhan and Dhahar with a stronger foundation in democratic governance, human rights, and peaceful dialogue, better positioned to participate constructively in local civic and political processes.
- Emerging youth leaders including university and high school students are able to model and transmit civic values to peers, reducing susceptibility to divisive or extremist narratives in a contested governance environment.
- Incremental progress toward more inclusive local decision-making, as young women gain greater confidence and recognition as legitimate participants in governance and peacebuilding conversations.

6.3 Contribution to the National and Regional Agenda

The project's significance extends beyond Badhan and Dhahar. It operationalizes, at the community level, the commitments Somalia has made under the National Youth Policy (2023–2030) and the National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security, and it advances the global Youth, Peace and Security agenda under UN Security Council Resolution 2250. In a region where governance legitimacy is actively contested, cultivating a generation of Sanaag youth who understand and practice democratic dialogue is a direct, if incremental, contribution to Somalia's longer-term stability.

6.4 Sustaining the Gains

Anchoring the initiative in Maakhir University and the Dhahar high school system means the civic knowledge delivered through these sessions has an institutional home through which it can be reinforced over time, rather than dissipating once the initial training ends. This institutional anchoring is central to converting a single training event into a durable, club-based civic infrastructure.

"The community has come to recognize that youth and women are essential to local development whether in raising awareness, preventing conflicts, fostering peace, or improving livelihoods."

Youth peacebuilding participant, Somalia (UN Peacebuilding Fund, 2015)



7. Challenges and Lessons Learned

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- **Contested Governance Context:** Sanaag's complex administrative and political context required the sessions to maintain a neutral and inclusive approach to civic education. In Badhan, participants expressed diverse views on Somalia's political issues and governance, making the discussions broader and more meaningful. The sessions reinforced the importance of respecting differing political opinions while promoting peaceful dialogue and constructive civic participation.
 - **Geographic and Logistical Constraints:** Reaching youth in remote locations presented logistical challenges, including difficult road conditions and venues that were not fully prepared as anticipated. This highlighted the need for stronger advance logistical planning, venue assessment, and travel arrangements when implementing activities in remote areas.
 - **Gender Participation:** Both sessions emphasized inclusive participation and encouraged young women to engage actively in civic and democratic discussions. The participation of 100 female participants demonstrated positive progress in women's inclusion, while also highlighting the need for continued follow-up and targeted engagement to strengthen sustained female participation in future activities.

8. Sustainability and Recommendations

- Formalize the Youth for Democracy Clubs in Badhan and Dhahar with elected leadership structures, regular meeting schedules, and a light peer-mentorship curriculum, so civic engagement continues between funded training cycles.
- Expand geographic coverage within Sanaag to additional towns, building on the credibility established in Badhan and Dhahar, in line with the demand signaled by national youth and peacebuilding frameworks.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation by establishing baseline and end line civic-knowledge assessments, disaggregated attendance tracking, and simple post-session surveys, to allow future reports to quantify shifts in participants' civic knowledge and attitudes with precision.
- Deepen women's leadership pathways by pairing awareness-raising with concrete opportunities such as designated leadership roles within the clubs for young women to practice the participation the sessions advocate for.
- Link clubs to local governance structures, such as district councils or youth committees, so that club members have a genuine channel through which to apply their civic training.



9. Conclusion and Acknowledgements

The Y4DC sessions in Badhan and Dhahar represent a meaningful, community-anchored contribution to Somalia's youth, peace, and democracy agenda. In a region where governance legitimacy remains contested and young people have historically been excluded from decision-making, the initiative gave university and high school students a structured, practical introduction to democratic values, human rights, and peaceful dialogue with sustained attention to the inclusion of young women. With continued investment in follow-up, institutional anchoring, and monitoring, the foundations laid in this phase can grow into a durable civic infrastructure for Sanaag's youth.





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