

Policy paper

Supporting more accountable and responsive local governance in Puntland: Challenges and opportunities

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No	Glossary of acronyms, words and phrases	
1	CSO	civil society organization
2	DDF	District Development Framework
3	DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
4	FGD	focus group discussion
5	JPLG	Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service Delivery (United Nations programme)
6	KII	key informant interview
7	OPOV	one-person-one-vote
8	PDRC	Puntland Development and Research Center

Background

Puntland state in Somalia faces significant challenges in achieving sustainable local governance due to a myriad of socio-political and economic factors. The region is prone to natural disasters such as recurrent droughts, flash floods and periodic cyclones that affect coastal areas, which exacerbate existing vulnerabilities and strain the capacity of local councils to achieve their mandates. Limited sources of revenue to generate the necessary financial resources further compounds these challenges, hindering the provision of basic services and the implementation of developmental projects in remote and hard-to-reach areas.

Despite these obstacles, there is remarkable improvement in Puntland local governance after the recent local council elections. In May 2023, Puntland successfully conducted its first one-person-one-vote (OPOV), or universal suffrage-based, local government elections after numerous failed attempts since its establishment in 1998. These elections were conducted in 33 districts, in which the majority had had no previous local councils. These elections were hailed as peaceful, free and fair, marking a significant milestone in democratic progress across the Puntland region.

Persistent challenges plague all the newly elected district councils, however. To better understand what these challenges (and opportunities) are and how to constructively address them, the Puntland Development Research Center conducted an assessment in four target districts from 2–14 May 2024: Galkayo, Burtinle, Gardo and Badhan in the Mudug, Nugal, Karkaar and Sanaag regions, respectively¹. Additionally, the center also used data collected in April 2024 from Bargal, Rako, Armo, Dhahar, Iskushuban, Harfo and Hafun, which reveals similar capacity shortfalls. The combined data offer greater insight into the ongoing issues that local councils face. Significant institutional capacity gaps exist and create challenges in the delivery of healthcare, education, sanitation and infrastructure development. Inadequate training for newly elected members—especially in governance, budgeting, revenue collection, procurement and social service delivery—exacerbates these challenges, which are further compounded by limited citizen engagement. Together, this underscores the need for coordinated efforts, substantial investments and international support.

Improved collaboration between local councils and the communities they represent, as well as between local councils and the Puntland government, is imperative to overcome these hurdles. Enhanced government cooperation, greater accountability and openness are also essential to addressing these issues. Making capacity building projects a top priority and providing local councils with assistance are critical to improving their capability to provide communities with necessary services. In addition, fostering a culture of

public participation and citizen engagement can also contribute to greater transparency and accountability in local governance.

To address some of these challenges, the PDRC implemented programmes through the Talo Wadaag² initiative and provided trainings to elected local district councils in select districts, with a focus on district councillors. The objective was to capacitate them with the necessary skills and knowledge to enable them effectively to discharge their responsibilities, including financial management, governance processes and social service delivery mechanisms.

This policy paper provides relevant information for decisions and actions related to local government structures and service delivery that could potentially enhance their functioning for the benefit of citizens in Puntland by highlighting problems and providing feasible solutions. It also formulates recommendations for enhancing efficiency and transparency based on an evaluation of the current state of the art of local governance in Puntland.

Aims and objectives

Enhancing grassroots democratic processes and empowering local communities are the ultimate objectives of the study upon which this policy paper is based. To this end, the PDRC intends to understand to what extent local elected district councils in Puntland are accountable to their citizens and respond to their needs. The study aims to explore both the major challenges hindering them in effectively discharging their duties and the existing opportunities that can be tapped to enable them to overcome these obstacles. Finally, recommendations for key actors are proposed to support an accountable and responsive local council system in Puntland.

In sum, the study upon which this policy paper is based sought to:

- Explore the extent to which local governments are accountable and responsive to the citizens
- Identify the major challenges facing local governments to strengthen more responsive and accountable local governments
- Suggest possible options to support more responsive and accountable local governments

¹ All districts besides Badhan are JPLG-funded

² Programme funded by Sweden – Implemented by a consortium comprising of PDRC, APD, HIPS and Interpeace that focuses on peace and state building.

Research methodology

The study employed qualitative and quantitative methodologies, including a desk review of existing literature, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KII) and field observations. In total, 16 FGDs and 8 KIIs were conducted for each of the 4 districts, along with 8 FGDs with members of the elected local councils and local government staff, and 8 FGDs with civil society organizations (CSOs), including women's groups, youth, elders and private sector actors. An additional 8 KIIs were conducted with district mayors and state officials. Overall, 29 women and 54 men participated in the study. Based on input and feedback from an inclusive range of study respondents, this methodology ensures that the data collected reveals both the most pressing challenges and the most constructive opportunities facing the newly elected local councils of Puntland.

Gaps identified in district institutional capacities

Prior to the recent democratic local government elections, district council members were nominated by clan elders and executive secretaries nominated by the ministry of the interior of Puntland. This approach resulted in a mismatch of roles at the municipality level. As with their predecessors, the newly elected local councils operate in public buildings that are in poor condition as they date back to the former Somali administration and have not been renovated since then. Limited human resource capacities and operational supplies are another key issue. The lack of proper infrastructure and resources hinders district abilities to effectively address the needs of their constituents; for example, they do not have the necessary know-how or office equipment to collect taxes or store data about their district.

After district council elections, surveys and assessments were conducted by the Puntland Research and Development Center (PDRRC) to evaluate the current state of the art of local governance in Puntland. The key findings reveal critical gaps in the capacity and support structures necessary for the elected councils to effectively discharge their duties and meet public expectations, as follows.

Lack of technical expertise and experience

The newly elected district councils lack essential technical expertise and experience in governance and administrative processes due to their young minimum age of 25 years and limited experience in managing public offices. This deficiency poses significant challenges for their ability to navigate complex decision-making and address the diverse needs of their constituents.

Disputes among elected councils and local government staff

The role of the democratically elected council is to develop policies, procedures and plans that address local needs, as well as oversee their implementation. The ways of working of the councils stipulate biannual meetings to discuss district development plans and administration, with standing committees such as social services, land management, and revenue and taxation standing committees, meeting on a biweekly basis. Compared to their clan-nominated predecessors, the new democratically elected local councillors regard themselves as a more genuine authority to represent citizen interests and needs. Based on what they regard as their popular mandate, they want to actively engage in daily executive roles and request irregular meeting sessions with the local government staff. This situation is compounded by misunderstanding on the part of some newly elected local councillors, who mistakenly assume that they have an implementation (as opposed to an oversight and management) role. This creates tensions and leads to clashes with local government staff, who are responsible for implementing the policies, procedures and plans developed by the elected councils.

Financial difficulties and inadequate revenue collection

The district councils face financial constraints exacerbated by a lack of revenue collection expertise and collection mechanisms. Some district councils are entirely lacking in knowledge about the local government taxation systems they oversee and govern. Without sustainable revenue streams, these councils struggle to fund essential services and development projects, further hindering their ability to effectively fulfil their mandates. As Table 1 shows, the amount of the monthly revenue collected in the four districts selected for this study does not allow for the execution of district development plans. In terms of district revenue, on average 80 per cent is used to pay for staff salaries and operational expenses, with only 20 per cent left over for development projects.

Table 1: Monthly revenue in USD, by district, source and main expenditure

District	District grade	Est. monthly revenue (USD)	Source	Main expenditures
Galkayo district (Mudug region)	A	100,000	Inland taxation and custom duties	Security operations, staff salaries and sanitation services
Burtinle district (Nugal region)	B	20,000	District development fees from trucks using the main road	Salaries and sanitation services
Gardo district (Karkaar region)	A	28,000	Inland taxation and customs duties	Salaries and sanitation services
Badhan district (Sanaag region)	A	8,000	Airport taxation	Salaries and sanitation services

Source: Author compilation based on study data.

Inadequacy of financial or incentive support as democracy dividend

Despite their pivotal role in local governance, elected district councils do not receive adequate financial support or incentives from the Puntland state administration or international partners. This serves to undermine council legitimacy and hamper capacities for elected officials to serve their communities optimally. Because most districts do not collect enough revenue to run their operations, they must request budget support from the state government, which collects an estimated monthly revenue of approximately USD 8 million.³ In the 11 districts funded by the United Nations Joint Programme on Local Governance and Decentralized Service

Delivery (JPLG) from March 2018 -2023 (with renewal expected for 2024 – 2029), the state government contributes 15 percent of the development budget and the district 5 percent, and the remaining 80 percent covered by the JPLG. These 11 districts are the only districts that receive budget support from the state government.⁴ According to the JPLG focal point in Puntland, although the state government committed to continuing its 15 percent contribution in case of a JPLG exit or funding gap, but it has not followed through on this commitment.⁵

Box 1: JPLG Program in Puntland 2022

Under the United Nations Joint Program for Local Governance (UNJPLG), an amount of \$3,831,521.22 was allocated to local government capital funds and social service delivery through two main components: Local District Funds (LDF) and the Service Delivery Model (SDM).

Local District Funds (LDF): A total of \$2,709,257.41 was invested in the construction of roads and various local district facilities, including office premises.

Service Delivery Model (SDM): An amount of \$1,122,263.81 was allocated to improving social services, particularly in sectors such as water, health, and education.

³ Ministry of Interior of Puntland, "Local Governance and Fiscal Challenges," unpublished internal document, 2024; see also Puntland Ministry of Finance, "Puntland Parliament Approves Gov't Budget for Second Half of 2024," Halqabsi News, 2 July 2024, <https://halqabsi.com/2024/07/puntland-parliament-approves-govt-budget-for-second-half-of-2024/>

⁴ See an example of funding explanation for year 2022 in Box 1.

⁵ Interview with JPLG focal point for Puntland, 7th August 2024.

The contributions for this program were as follows:

UNJPLG: \$2,682,333.42 (70%)

State Government of Puntland: \$734,689 (19%)

11 target districts: \$414,498.55 (11%)

Local District Fund (2022)

This fund focused on capital development infrastructure, including the construction of tarmac roads and other local government facilities, such as office premises.

Contributor	Amount (USD)	Percentage
UNJPLG	\$1,831,269.61	67.6%
State Government	\$563,689.25	20.8%
Districts	\$314,298.55	11.6%
Total	\$2,709,257.4	100%

Service Delivery Model (SDM) 2022

Contributor	Amount (USD)	Percentage
UNJPLG	\$851,063.81	76%
State Government	171,000	15%
Districts	100,200	9%
Total	\$1,122,263.81	100.00%

District mayorship election methods

Puntland Law Number 7 is a significant piece of legislation that governs the political party system in Puntland, Somalia. Enacted to facilitate the region's democratization process, the law outlines the rules and procedures for the formation, registration, and operation of political parties within Puntland. Before the amendment of Law No 7, after local council elections, another election for the mayor and deputy mayor would take place at the seating of the council and its first meeting. This allowed any council member to run for those positions, as was the case in the three early election districts that took place in 25 October 2021 in Eyl, Gardo and Ufeyn. After amendment, Law No 7 stipulates three options for appointing the mayor and the deputy mayor. First, the party that has majority in a district can select the mayor and deputy

mayor. Second, if there is no majority, parties can seek to form a coalition to appoint the mayor and deputy mayor. Third, if coalition parties disagree, an internal council election is held to select the mayor and deputy mayor. This amendment of the law no 7 reduces the chances of potential councilors to run for the mayorship as the law allows parties to agree make coalitions and nominate the mayors and deputy mayors. In Bosaso for example the government party of Kaah and Sincad had a coalition with Sincad being given mayorship despite having only 4 councilors, some councilors are against this coalition and have been attempting to pass motions of no confidence.

Box 2: Puntland decentralization policy

The Puntland Decentralization Policy was formulated in 2013 and later adopted in 2014, the Puntland decentralization policy aims to devolve local service delivery to district government. It focuses on political, administrative and fiscal decentralization to establish a fully decentralized government system by 2020. The policy assigns revenue and expenditure responsibilities to local government, ensuring that functions follow finance; that states in the decentralization policy: “The local councils and their administrative staff will have full authority to implement their expenditure and revenue requirements within a formalized budget process compatible with national level financial requirements”. Local governments, through their elected councils and administrative personnel, are granted the autonomy to manage their own finances. This includes the authority to:

1. **Expenditure Management:** Local councils can independently plan, approve, and execute their spending on public services and infrastructure based on their local needs and priorities. They are responsible for deciding how to allocate their budgeted funds across different sectors.
2. **Revenue Generation:** Local councils have the authority to collect revenue from local sources, such as taxes, fees, and other income-generating activities. They are responsible for managing these revenues to fund their operations and public services.
3. **Budget Process:** The local councils must operate within a formalized budgetary framework that aligns with national financial policies and regulations. This ensures that while they have autonomy, their financial practices remain consistent with broader national standards for accountability, transparency, and fiscal responsibility.

In essence, the policy empowers local councils with significant financial control, while ensuring their operations are integrated into a cohesive national financial system.

The decentralization policy was developed with support from the UN-JPLG and involving several UN agencies. It includes pilot fiscal decentralization schemes to facilitate budget allocations from FMS or FGS to local government.

The impact of climate change on local governance

In many areas of Puntland, flash floods followed by prolonged droughts and unprecedented high temperatures are observed. This negatively impacts the capacity of local government, as these climate events directly worsen the livelihoods, economy and health of Puntland residents. In Galkayo and Gardo, for instance, the recent autumn flash floods incapacitated service delivery in these districts, simultaneously resulting in reduced revenue

and an increased workload for local government staff responding to the emergencies created by the flash floods. As many businesses have been affected by the floods, districts are struggling with reduced tax revenue, while also dealing with an increase in the demand for services from their communities.

Weak community participation in local governance

Study findings indicate that local government has weak capacities for involving communities to participate and contribute to the development of district plans, which lowers their responsiveness and accountability to their communities. Only districts that benefitted from the JPLG collected information on the priority needs of their communities and involved them in selecting priorities for their local government. Moreover, this practice has not been sustained after the end of the JPLG in 2022. Unlike other districts, Badhan administration is striving to engage communities to support both the start of tax collection and a waste management initiative, which the local government is now undertaking. The public, however, has no direct oversight opportunity to know if the expenditures in their districts are aligned with their priorities. Only the district council has access to oversee budget implementation.

Deficiency in district strategic plans

The District Development Frameworks (DDF) that were developed for districts under the Joint Programme on Local Governance (JPLG) are nearing expiration. These frameworks served as essential roadmaps for local governance and development. However, many districts outside the JPLG have never had a DDF or any other strategic plans to guide their activities. This lack of updated or existent frameworks presents significant challenges for newly elected councils. Without strategic plans, it becomes difficult for councils to oversee, monitor, and evaluate the performance of mayors, deputy mayors, and administrative staff. Additionally, the absence of these plans hinders efforts to maintain local government transparency and accountability, as there is no clear benchmark or set of objectives against which progress can be measured.

As for the current status, some newly elected councilors are actively working to develop new strategic plans or update existing ones. However, progress has been uneven, with certain districts lagging due to limited resources, capacity, or external support. The lack of comprehensive planning documents exacerbates governance challenges, leaving these councils without a clear direction for their mandate. Consequently, the disparity between districts with robust plans and those without is growing, further complicating efforts to achieve cohesive regional development.

Insecurity

In several districts, newly elected local council members have expressed serious concerns about their ability to carry out their mandates due to ongoing security challenges. Clan militias, which often have conflicting interests,

pose a significant threat to local governance. These militias actively obstruct government operations, such as efforts to open blocked roads or plan new infrastructure projects. The resistance from these groups not only hampers the physical development of districts but also undermines the authority and legitimacy of the local councils.

The situation is particularly dire in districts where the government's presence is weak, and the militias hold considerable influence. In some cases, councilors have been forced to negotiate with these groups or seek external support to ensure their safety and the continuation of their work. The persistence of such insecurity not only disrupts development plans but also threatens the stability and functionality of local governance structures in these areas. This ongoing issue highlights the urgent need for improved security measures and stronger government interventions to support the newly elected councils in fulfilling their duties.

CSO responses to the identified challenges

In response to these critical gaps, efforts have been made to empower district councils and enhance their capacity to govern effectively. Three key initiatives are underway. These include:

Induction training facilitated: In collaboration with the state ministry of interior, CSOs have conducted induction training sessions for newly elected council members. These sessions cover essential topics such as fundamental principles of governance, financial management and community engagement strategies. This training has equipped council members with the necessary skills and knowledge to make informed decisions and serve their constituents effectively.

Advocating for financial support and incentives: Recognizing the essential role of financial support and incentives in enabling effective governance, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are actively advocating for the Puntland state administration and international partners to provide substantial assistance to the elected district councils. These advocacy efforts focus on securing financial resources and incentives that can serve as a "democracy dividend" to bolster the councils' ability to fulfil their mandates and meet the needs of their constituents. The advocacy is particularly concentrated on ensuring that newly established districts, which were created as part of Puntland's ongoing administrative expansion, receive the necessary support to develop and implement their strategic plans. These new districts face unique challenges due to their nascent administrative structures and lack of established financial mechanisms. As part of this effort, CSOs are urging for the inclusion of these districts

in phase 4 of the Joint Programme on Local Governance (JPLG). Phase 4 of the JPLG represents the latest stage in the program's ongoing efforts to strengthen local governance across Puntland. This phase focuses on expanding the reach of the program to more districts, enhancing capacity building, improving service delivery, and fostering greater community participation in governance. By advocating for the inclusion of the new districts in this phase, CSOs aim to ensure that these areas receive the comprehensive support necessary to establish effective local governance structures and achieve sustainable development outcomes.

Recognizing the critical role of financial support and incentives: in enabling effective governance, CSO advocacy efforts are being undertaken to urge the Puntland state administration and international partners to provide adequate assistance to the elected district councils. This includes advocating for the provision of financial resources and incentives as a democracy dividend. These efforts focus on supporting local councils to fulfil their mandates and meet the needs of their constituents in the form of covering a specific percentage of the budget for their development plans or through the expansion of these new districts into phase 4 of the JPLG.

In conclusion, while Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can address some of the challenges mentioned above through institutional capacity building, this alone is not enough. To truly empower the elected district councils and enable them to provide effective service delivery to their constituents, there is a pressing need for adequate funding and resources. Without sufficient financial support, even the best capacity-building efforts will fall short. Therefore, CSOs and other stakeholders should not only focus on leveraging existing opportunities but also advocate strongly for increased financial investment in these councils. This includes securing consistent and reliable funding streams, ensuring that councils have the necessary resources to implement development plans, and meeting the growing needs of their communities.

Opportunities to improve local governance

There are two categories of district council, each of which has distinct characteristics that create different opportunities for better enabling local councils to fulfil their mandates.

Mother districts created by previous governmental bodies, such as colonial governments: The JPLG only recognizes this category of district. Out of a total of 21 such districts,

⁶ Regional distribution of the 21 districts: 1 in Ayn region; 3 in Mudug region; 3 in Sool region; 4 in Nugal region; 4 in Sanaag region; and 6 in Bari region.

of district. Out of a total of 21 such districts,⁶ 11 have had the opportunity to develop local council capacities and service delivery such as infrastructure, health centers, WASH, etc. The newly elected councilors in these mother districts have a greater advantage as they have taken over governance in districts that are more functional in terms of tax collection systems. Overall, the collaboration between the JPLG and the former councils in the mother districts has been instrumental in promoting local development and empowerment.

Districts that are established in the aftermath of the civil strife: These were mainly satellites and offshoots of a mother district that were founded and promoted to village (district) status to satisfy the desire of the presiding sub-clan. They do not have previously existing infrastructure. These new entities have boosted the number of districts in Puntland from 21 to 53. While they have gained recognition, these new districts have very limited capacities to collect taxes and provide public services. Some of the newly elected councilors have received induction training and are working to create systems for revenue collection in districts that tend to have limited resources.

In addition to these two district categories, study participants identify two other characteristics of the recent OPOV elections that create new opportunities to bolster local governance.

Positive public perceptions of the newly elected local councils: According to community respondents who participated in this study, the newly elected councils mostly consist of educated youth who have greater credibility and public trust than the clan-nominated councilors of the past. As they have campaigned and interacted with voters, the new democratically elected councilors are known by their constituencies. As such, community members indicate that they can directly contact their district councilor—either through a phone call or by initiating a meeting. This works two ways: Local councilors are also more receptive to interactions with their constituencies as they need their support during elections.

Existence of district development committees: Some districts such as Galkayo and Gardo have replicated the Garowe model of community-led development. Established in 2022, this is an initiative based on forming a community development committee comprised of elites well-known and respected personalities of Garowe residents such as medical Doctors, former ministers, women, mayors, the actual mayor etc. The committee is set up to generate revenue for district development projects by collecting USD 2.00 from the households in the district.⁷

These four specific characteristics that define the landscape of the newly elected district councils give rise to several opportunities for fostering more effective development, while empowering local government and communities alike. These opportunities have varying starting points.

First, in the case of established mother districts, the groundwork laid by previous administrations and the support provided by the initiatives implemented under the JPLG have created a basic working infrastructure that includes tarmac and gravel roads, furnished office premises and equipment, schools and health centers. This groundwork also provides a capacity-building framework for training programmes that includes the establishment of relevant departments and internal systems, the development of policies and procedures, and an electronic financial management system linked to the state bank. Groundwork is also laid for service delivery models that aim to devolve fiscal and administrative powers to local government. These existing foundations empower elected councils to more effectively serve their communities through enhanced social service delivery such as town planning, cleaning and sanitation, contributions to health, education, water and electricity services, construction and rehabilitation of roads and feeder roads, etc. The collaborative efforts between the JPLG and the former clan-nominated councils in these districts have been pivotal in promoting local development and empowerment.

Second, districts that have emerged in the aftermath of civil strife present a different set of opportunities, as is made clear during town hall meetings and citizen–council forums. While lacking the inherited infrastructure of their predecessors, citizens in some of these districts express their willingness to support their local council through the payment of taxes. In particular, the citizen–council forums reveal strong willingness among residents to engage with their newly elected councils. Although challenges lie ahead, such as meeting high public expectations and addressing priority needs identified through inclusive and participatory processes, these districts are poised for growth and collaboration.

In essence, both types of districts offer fertile ground for harnessing local potential and driving positive change. By leveraging existing infrastructures such as JPLG initiatives, increasing community engagement to support district development plans through tax collection, state financial and technical support to districts and overall better devolution, the elected councils in these districts can chart a course in the direction of inclusive development and empowerment. Some districts selected for the study are also tackling climate change. Efforts in Gardo district is a key example. The district watershed management plan diverts the recurrent rainwater that would otherwise flood the town by building embankments for the streams and demolishing settlements in rainwater runoff areas. The Gardo local government has also established a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) office to help local communities in assessing disaster risks and providing

⁷ USD 1.00 is collected through the electricity bill and USD 1.00 through the water bill.

the local government with relevant information for planning and decision-making. Galkayo is another example. In this district, local government has established an emergency coordination center with a task force consisting of

elected council members, businesspeople and local and international NGOs. This task force is also mandated to develop drainage plans for the district.

Conclusion

The challenges facing newly elected district councils in Puntland are multifaceted, ranging from inadequate training and infrastructure to limited citizen engagement and financial constraints. At the same time, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and development. The positive public perception of the newly elected councils, coupled with a willingness among residents to support local governance through taxation, offers a solid foundation for progress.

The recommendations provided herein emphasize the need for coordinated efforts among various stakeholders, including the Puntland government, CSOs, elected councils and international donors. By implementing the decentralization policy, providing technical and financial support, and fostering inclusive community participation, local governments can enhance their capacity to deliver essential services and drive sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

Recommendations

Puntland government

1. Implement decentralization policy: Devolve political, administrative and fiscal powers to local governments to enhance local governance.
2. Provide technical and financial support: Allocate resources and expertise to local governments to build their capacity for service delivery.
3. Support infrastructure development: Facilitate the construction of new structures, and the rehabilitation and expansion of existing facilities to ensure adequate workspaces for local government staff.
4. Equip local governments: Provide office equipment, furniture and solar power to district offices to improve their operational capacities.
5. Replicate successful models: Implement community-led development initiatives, similar to those in larger districts, in smaller districts with elected councils.
6. Enhance waste management: Supply lorries for transportation and waste management in districts lacking these facilities.

CSOs play a crucial role in building the capacity of local governments through training and community engagement initiatives. For their part, elected councils focus on developing strategic plans, improving tax collection, and promoting transparency and accountability. Donors and international partners can significantly contribute to democratization by funding capacity building programmes, investing in infrastructure and offering relevant technical support.

Overall, the path to more accountable and responsive local governance in Puntland requires a collaborative approach that leverages existing opportunities and addresses the challenges that have been identified. By working together, all stakeholders can ensure that local governments are well-equipped to meet the needs of their constituents and foster inclusive sustainable development in the region.

Civil society organizations (CSOs)

1. Facilitate induction training: Conduct training sessions for elected district councilors on governance principles, financial management and community engagement strategies.
2. Capacity building: Offer training programmes to improve the technical capabilities of departmental staff in local government.
3. Organize citizen forums: Foster community participation in local governance by bringing together district councils and their constituents to enhance decision-making and responsiveness.
4. Support district planning: Provide technical expertise to assist districts in preparing comprehensive district plans.
5. Advocate for financial support: Work with the Puntland administration and international partners to secure financial resources and incentives for local government, positioning these as a democracy dividend.

Elected district councils

1. **Engage with communities:** Increase transparency and inclusive community participation by holding regular forums and town hall meetings.
2. **Develop district plans:** Create strategic plans that align with community priorities and ensure effective implementation and monitoring.
3. **Enhance tax collection:** Develop systems to efficiently collect local taxes, however small the amount, and utilize these funds for community development projects.
4. **Promote climate resilience:** Implement disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures, such as watershed management and emergency coordination centers, to address climate-related challenges.

Donors and international partners

1. **Support capacity building:** Fund and facilitate training programmes for newly elected council members and local government staff.
2. **Invest in infrastructure:** Provide financial assistance for the construction and rehabilitation of public buildings and facilities.
3. **Encourage collaborative initiatives:** Support projects that promote cooperation between local governments and community organizations.
4. **Enhance technical support:** Offer expertise and resources to help local governments develop and implement strategic plans.