



**Building knowledge and empowering  
young women in Puntland through  
capacity-building**



Women are the backbone of Somali society, playing an essential role in nurturing families, sustaining livelihoods, contributing to community development, and promoting peace. During Somalia's prolonged civil war and periods of instability, women assumed even greater responsibilities. As many men were killed, displaced, or directly involved in conflict, women stepped forward as breadwinners, taking full responsibility for sustaining their families. Through small-scale businesses, such as selling food, clothing, and household goods, they ensured their households survived. Their resilience and economic contributions not only saved individual families but also helped stabilize communities and local economies during times of crisis.

Despite their indispensable role in Somali society, the participation of Somali women in leadership and politics remains significantly limited. Although women constitute more than half of the population, deeply entrenched cultural norms, male-dominated traditions, and social expectations continue to constrain their political and public engagement. Clan-based power-sharing arrangements often prioritize male dominance, leaving women marginalized and underrepresented in decision-making structures. Cultural perceptions that leadership is a male domain erode women's confidence and discourage their political ambition..



In addition, women face limited economic opportunities, restricted access to resources, and inadequate institutional support, which further weakens their ability to influence governance and participate meaningfully in politics. As a result, many women hesitate to engage in political spaces, while those who dare to participate encounter numerous structural, social, and cultural barriers. Nonetheless, Somali women continue to demonstrate strength, leadership, and determination, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive policies, cultural transformation, and institutional reforms that recognize and support their rightful role in shaping Somalia's future.

It is important to note that, in recent years, women, particularly young women, have significantly increased their level of education. Parents' attitudes toward educating girls equally with boys have also greatly improved. Despite these gains, it is unfortunate that educated girls are not afforded sufficient opportunities to serve their communities and are underrepresented or absent in both private and public workplaces. This not only constitutes a denial of individual rights but also a source of discouragement for the girls who studied and the parents who invested their time and resources in supporting them.

In that respect, the **Puntland Development Research Center (PDRC)** recognized the need for practical programs that empower women to gain knowledge, leadership skills, and political awareness, enabling them to actively participate in the development of Puntland, leadership, and decision-making processes on critical national issues. In 2021, **PDRC** launched a training program to empower young female graduates and current students. The purpose of this program was to build young women who possess knowledge and confidence and who can participate in leadership, research, and community development. Between August **2021** to February 2022, a total of **45 young** women benefited from this training. Upon completion of the training, the graduates did not stop at receiving certificates or individual knowledge; rather, they chose to unite and collectively apply the skills and knowledge they had gained to give back to society. This shared vision led to the establishment of an organization called Hanbila Youth Development Initiative (HAYDI).



**Hanbila Youth Development Initiative** is an advocacy organization established to coordinate collective action among youth through empowerment and leadership in the spheres of social, economic, political, environmental and legal to meet the Somali youth aspirations. The organization's primary goal is to promote youth aspirations and improve their status through capacity building and education, enabling them to participate equally and actively in all matters that directly affect them.

Since its inception, **HANBILE** organization has actively participated in the local council elections with particular focus on ensuring that women were included in the democratic system, which Puntland was transitioning to. From that election experience, they learned that there was a need to further strengthen the capacity and knowledge of women. In response, **HANBILE** decided to implement training programs modeled on those previously received from PDRC, targeting university girls and graduates, since there was still a need to have girls/women with knowledge and leadership skills.



As “**Maria Salad, HANBILE Director** reflected: *It is a great joy for us to continue and give back to society the knowledge and experience we inherited from the training PDRC provided us in 2021, and they are still our partners.*

To make this possible, Hanbile once again turned to PDRC, the institution that served as the foundation of their organizational vision and development. They requested technical and knowledge support to ensure that the training would be well organized and of high quality. PDRC welcomed the request and committed to playing an important role in the program's implementation by providing the training venue, technical support, and academic assistance, particularly in research.

After the training was widely advertised on 2/8/2025, a large number of girls applied. After examinations and rigorous selection, **40 girls** were chosen, consisting of both university graduates and current students. Here are some of the reflections of the selected girls.



#### **Fatima Habiib Dirie (Fellows)**

*During this program, I gained knowledge, skills, and various experiences. This program greatly improved my personal development, my understanding of leadership, community collaboration, and my research skills. It also strengthened my self-confidence and my sense of responsibility as a leader.”*



#### **Samira Saed Salah (Fellows)**

*Samira Said Salah: While I was part of this program, I received the opportunity to acquire broad knowledge, practical skills, and valuable experience that significantly changed my overall understanding. The program played an important role in enhancing my leadership abilities, teamwork skills, and research capacity*

**The training lasted for three months and covered topics including:**

- Women in Leadership
- Political Systems and Political Party Structures in Puntland
- Building Leadership Skills and Confidence
- Overcoming Barriers to Women's Political Participation
- Creating a Personal Action Plan
- Research and Data Collection Skills

During the training period, research was emphasized as a central component of the curriculum, and the girls collectively conducted six research studies addressing critical issues that directly impact the community. The topics explored included:

1. Women's Leadership and Political Participation in Puntland
2. Social and Psychological Impacts of Child Labor on Children in Puntland
3. Challenges Hindering the Modernization of Livestock Production in Puntland
4. Assessment of the Quality of Locally Available Medicines in Puntland
5. Effects of Unemployment on Youth and Parental Relationships in Puntland
6. The Relationship Between Hunger and Students' Educational Performance in Puntland

# Conclusion

In the partnership between **PDRC** and **HANBILE** is a clear example of how training, knowledge, and collective action can drive meaningful change. It is an experience that demonstrates that when women and youth are given the right opportunities and support, they can play a leading role in the development of Puntland and Somalia as a whole. Finally, the training successfully concluded on 25 December 2025, marking a significant milestone for both the participants and the program. A total of 33 young women completed the training and proudly graduated, equipped with new knowledge, confidence, and practical skills that will enable them to contribute more effectively to their communities and future careers.



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