

# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN PUNTLAND STATE



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# BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION IN PUNTLAND STATE

## Abstract

Countries worldwide introduce public policies to deliver essential services to their citizens. Effective implementation, however, requires institutional, organizational, and infrastructural capacity to translate policy into tangible outcomes. Many states struggle to achieve this, resulting in an implementation gap where policies remain unexecuted. These challenges are particularly acute in fragile contexts such as Somalia, where reliance on foreign aid compounds institutional weaknesses. This study examines barriers to policy implementation in Puntland State, drawing on 30 interviews conducted in Garowe between September and **December 2025**. Findings reveal that policy design flaws, limited institutional capacity, weak coordination, overlapping ministerial mandates, and inadequate policy tracking mechanisms are the primary impediments to effective implementation. To address these challenges, the study recommends clarifying institutional mandates, allocating sufficient financial resources, increasing stakeholder involvement to identify priority policies, and establishing a dedicated policy support unit to plan, coordinate, oversee, and monitor implementation processes.

## Introduction

Policy formulation plays a pivotal role in national development. It is a systematic process through which societal goals are translated into actionable plans, programs, and institutional arrangements that address public needs. However, formulation alone does not guarantee outcomes: policies must be implemented to realize their intended effects. In the past, the domain of policy implementation has not received the scholarly attention it deserved. The classical top-down approach to policy implementation treated implementation as a mere technical issue where policy goals are clearly defined by political leaders and administrators simply execute the tasks (Marume, Mutongi, and Madziyire, 2016). It was assumed that implementation is easier and follows a linear model after policies are formulated, until studies revealed the fact that what policy makers have intended at the top level can be dashed at the local level (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973). The evidence from both developed and developing countries reinforced these findings, showing that the challenges are even complex than it was envisaged.

Policy implementation encompasses those actions by public and private individuals that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decision (Van Meter and Van Horn, 1975). It can also be described as ‘the creation of a policy delivery system in which specific mechanisms are designed and pursued in the hope of reaching ends (Rahmat, 2015), and “the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired outcomes” (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973), underscoring implementation as the connective tissue that converts policy intent into measurable results.

Although formulation and implementation are at distinct stages, they are inseparable in practice. Effective governance requires a seamless bridge between the two: weak links in this chain produce policies that remain aspirational rather than operational. In many developing contexts, substantial progress has been

made in drafting policies, yet implementation remains a persistent challenge. Empirical studies identify multiple, interacting causes of implementation failure, including inadequate funding, ambiguous policy objectives, complex and fragmented government structures, constraints at the street-level bureaucracy, overlapping mandates, and weak monitoring and evaluation systems. Understanding these obstacles is a prerequisite for targeted governance reforms that can remove barriers to effective policy delivery.

Since its establishment in 1998, Puntland has invested in institutional development, establishing ministries and independent agencies responsible for policy formulation. This period produced numerous laws, policies, and strategic plans aimed at strengthening state capacity. Much of the policy drafting process has been supported by international partners, reflecting the government's limited fiscal and technical resources. Over the past two decades, Puntland has also pursued decentralization reforms designed to bring services closer to citizens. Despite these efforts, the delivery of basic services remains heavily dependent on external donors, and public service outcomes have not matched the ambitions of formal policy frameworks.

The implementation landscape in Puntland is shaped by a set of interrelated constraints. Resource scarcity—both financial and technical—limits ministries' ability to operationalize policies. Structural and coordination gaps across ministries create role ambiguity and interagency competition. Weak institutional capacity and discontinuity, driven by staff turnover and politicized appointments, erode institutional memory and technical competence. Deficient monitoring and evaluation prevent evidence-based course correction and learning. These factors interact to produce a durable implementation gap that undermines policy effectiveness.

Failure to implement policies has tangible governance costs. Unaddressed public problems persist, public trust in institutions erodes, economic opportunities stagnate, and institutional coherence deteriorates. Loss of institutional memory and recurrent policy discontinuities further weaken the state's ability to respond to emerging challenges. Recognizing the scale and nature of these consequences is essential for preserving past gains and for designing reforms that produce sustainable improvements in public service delivery.

This paper examines why public policies in Puntland are frequently formulated but rarely implemented. It situates implementation failures within the institutional, political, and resource constraints that characterize a fragile subnational context and aims to diagnose the root causes of the implementation gap to inform practical reforms that strengthen the link between policy design and execution. The analysis addresses a notable empirical lacuna: systematic research on policy implementation dynamics in Puntland is limited, and this study contributes evidence and interpretation to that understudied field.

## Problem Statement

Despite formal adherence to a standard policy cycle, Puntland ministries produce many policy documents that mostly remain unimplemented and unenforced. The draft study identifies recurring failures at multiple stages—poor problem diagnosis, regulatory-biased drafting, donor-driven agendas, weak stakeholder engagement, scarce implementation funding, overlapping mandates, and absent monitoring systems—that together create a persistent implementation gap.

Understanding these failures matters for two reasons. First, policies are the primary instruments through which governments translate public needs into services; persistent implementation gaps therefore have direct consequences for service delivery and state legitimacy. Second, Puntland's experience illustrates governance dynamics common to fragile and donor-dependent settings, making the analysis relevant for scholars and practitioners interested in policy capacity, state-building, and aid effectiveness.

## Objective of the Study

- To map out the formulation and implementation of policies in Puntland
- To identify institutional and political factors that hinder the implementation of policies
- To propose reforms required to strengthen implementation

## Contribution of the study

The paper contributes to the literature on policy implementation in fragile and donor-dependent contexts by demonstrating how formulation practices—especially regulatory drafting, donor-driven initiation, and weak problem analysis—function as upstream determinants of implementation failure. It underscores the need to treat formulation quality, institutional design, and financing as coequal components of implementation capacity

## Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the institutional, political, economic, and operational factors that impede policy implementation in Puntland. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables in-depth exploration of complex social processes, captures actors' perspectives, and uncovers contextual dynamics that quantitative methods cannot readily reveal.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify information-rich respondents with direct experience of policy formulation and implementation. A total of 30 key informants were interviewed between 5 November and 5 December 2025. Interviews were selected from diverse stakeholders including, policy makers, academic experts and civil society representatives.

The study concentrated on four principal state ministries in Puntland—Education, Health, Interior, and Environment—selected for their cross-sectoral relevance and the presence of active policy agendas. To enhance the transferability of findings, interviews were also conducted in four additional ministries (security, information, livestock and works). All minsters were in Garowe, the seat of the government. Selection criteria emphasized respondents' direct involvement in policy drafting, validation, oversight, or implementation.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) designed to elicit detailed accounts of policy processes, institutional roles, resource flows, coordination mechanisms, and monitoring practices. The KII approach was chosen because the study required specialized knowledge that is concentrated among a limited number of actors; KIIs, therefore, provided the most efficient and reliable means of accessing that expertise. The study employed thematic analysis to identify, interpret, and synthesize recurring patterns and core themes across interviews.

Lastly, the study conducted an in-depth desk review of policy implementation challenges. This includes reviewing existing policies, as well as the literature review about what scholars have written about the subject of policy formulation and evaluation

## Ethical considerations

Ethical protocols were observed throughout the research process. Prior to interviews, participants were informed of the study's purpose, the intended use of their insights, and their rights as respondents. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed: identifying details were removed from transcripts, and quotations were anonymized in reporting. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and accessed only by authorized research personnel.

## Analysis and Discussion

This section shall investigate the factors that impede the implementation of policy. According to Adam et al (2019), 'two factors are important in disconnecting policy outputs from aspired policy outcomes': 1) the policy design and 2) the establishment of appropriate administrative structures, capacities, and resources. Following this argument, we shall explore how policy design and implementation are organized in Puntland ministries and their contribution to the implementation gap.

## Policy Formulation and Design

As shown in the introduction section, research studies demonstrate that policy design profoundly shapes implementation outcomes, as vague or conflicting objectives make execution nearly impossible (Hill & Hupe, 2002). This study examines the policy formulation process within Puntland ministries, identifying principal actors and analyzing how design practices influence implementation. The study found policy development broadly follows the conventional policymaking cycle: identification of need, recruitment of experts or consultants, stakeholder consultations, drafting, technical validation, broad validation workshops, and final cabinet approval. Despite adherence to this sequence, the study identified several weaknesses in the policy design.

The most salient challenge is a limited conceptual understanding of what constitutes a policy. Participants reported that policies are often perceived as political symbolism rather than instruments for achieving concrete objectives. This stems partly from linguistic ambiguity, as "policy" and "politics" share the same meaning in Somali. Consequently, policy approval is viewed as a symbolic milestone rather than the beginning of implementation. Another weakness is inadequate problem identification prior to policy initiation. Problem analysis is the most critical step in policy formulation (Vesely, 2017), since public policies entail decisions and actions addressing matters of public concern (Cochran & Melone, 2014).

Respondents distinguished between diagnostic assessments conducted before formulation and needs assessments carried out after drafting decisions, noting that many policies lack clear objectives due to insufficient problem analysis.

The study further explored how policies are initiated, finding three main sources: donor-driven proposals, diagnostic assessments, and emergency-driven needs.

Donor-led policies are often tied to project financing, with international partners advocating specific initiatives and providing comparative evidence from other countries. While ministries may propose priorities, donor influence remains strong. This has produced a proliferation of narrowly scoped policies, diluting strategic priorities. Scholars describe this as “rule growth” or “policy growth,” where policy formulation outpaces administrative capacity, creating implementation stress. Administrations cope by prioritizing certain policies, delaying enforcement, or simplifying requirements (Steinebach, Knill & Casula, 2025; Limberg et al., 2021).

Needs-driven policies emerge from sectoral analyses during five-year development planning or annual performance reviews, though participants cautioned these assessments are often superficial. Identified proposals are incorporated into the long-term five-year development plan. and shared with donors when funding is sought. Finally, emergent issues compel rapid policy responses, such as sub-policies mandated by new policy frameworks or urgent crises like COVID-19, where ministers instruct teams to prepare immediate interventions. Together, these findings highlight how weaknesses in conceptual clarity, problem analysis, and donor dependency undermine effective policy design and implementation in Puntland.

Public policy experts interviewed identified a third weakness in design: most policies are drafted as regulatory frameworks, even when the intent is developmental. Regulatory policies are meant to manage behavior to protect public interest (Kakonge & Alfred, 2025), but this format has led bureaucrats to perceive policies primarily as instruments for strengthening institutional functions. As one respondent explained, "Policies are meant for improving the institution; they lay down the rules and regulations the ministry should follow." Even developmental policies often adopt a regulatory structure, a pattern attributed to the absence of unified drafting guidelines. Although the World Bank once proposed a standard guideline, ministries did not reference it. This aligns with Kalakaan's (2025) study on Puntland disaster risk management policy, which concluded that the policy failed to meet national or international standards, rendering it largely theoretical.

The study observed that the office of the presidency has established an office to harmonize laws; previously, the Ministry of Justice held supervisory responsibility. Nevertheless, experts noted that the tendency to draft policies in regulatory form remains entrenched, undermining enforceability and depriving many policies of effective mechanisms.

A fourth weakness is the dominance of bureaucratic actors in policy formulation. Street-level bureaucrats provide critical local knowledge and technical expertise essential for effective policy design and implementation (Steinbacher, 2024; Adams et al., 2019; Hudson, Hunter & Peckham, 2019). However, senior politicians retain decisive authority, often joining the process only after departmental officials and consultants have advanced the policy idea.

This dynamic reflects the bureaucrats' role as primary interlocutors with donors, who finance much of the formulation process. While bureaucratic involvement ensures technical rigor, the imbalance between bureaucrats and political leadership risks producing policies that are technically sound but lack political ownership, thereby weakening long-term implementation prospects.

## Policy Implementation in Fragile Contexts

Fragile and conflict-affected states face distinctive implementation challenges that compound the generic barriers identified in mainstream implementation literature. From the IMF (2025), more than half of sub-Saharan Africa's population lives in **FCS**, where weak institutions, political instability, and resource dependency create erratic growth and profound service delivery deficits. Unlike stable developing countries, fragile states experience what Son (2025) terms 'the discrepancy between de jure and de facto coverage' policies that exist on paper but remain systematically unenforced due to limited state capacity, corruption, and poor policy design. The World Bank (2020) emphasizes that implementation in fragile settings requires sensitivity to the political economy and to managing the incentives of various actors, especially spoilers.

A political economy lens reveals that implementation failure is not always unintentional; in some cases, non-implementation serves elite interests. As Laws and Desai (2025) argue, fiscal governance in fragile states is not merely technical but 'lies at the center of the compact between governing authorities and citizens. Where policies threaten rentier arrangements, patronage networks, or clan-based resource allocation, powerful actors may actively undermine implementation. Participants in this study alluded to this dynamic but did not explicitly articulate it. For instance, overlapping mandates that appear accidental may reflect deliberate institutional design that preserves multiple access points for political patronage. The failure to update ministerial mandates despite exponential growth in government functions suggests that ambiguity serves political purposes. Similarly, the absence of implementation funding in state budgets may reflect rational prioritization: symbolic policy approval generates political credit with international partners and domestic constituencies, while implementation would require politically costly resource reallocation. As Adam et al. (2019) observe, 'politicians are not accountable for policy failure because in the event of failure, the likelihood is that they have moved out or on,' a notion that incentivizes formulation over execution.

Emerging evidence from developing countries suggests that digital transformation offers unprecedented opportunities to address implementation gaps. Asmawa et al. (2024) identify key success factors for digital policy implementation, including robust infrastructure, clear strategic vision, stakeholder engagement, and capacity building. Countries such as Estonia, Rwanda, and Bangladesh have demonstrated that digital platforms can enhance policy tracking, reduce discretion-related corruption, and improve vertical coordination between central and local implementers. For Puntland, where institutional memory is weak and staff turnover is high, digitized policy registries, automated monitoring systems, and mobile-based citizen feedback mechanisms could mitigate some of the structural barriers identified in this study. However, as Heeks (2002) cautioned, digital initiatives in developing countries face high failure rates when they neglect local context and existing power structures, a warning pertinent to Puntland's clan-based governance dynamics. This study, therefore, treats Puntland not merely as a developing region but as a fragile subnational entity where implementation barriers are amplified by clan politics, external dependency, and incomplete institutionalization as elucidated below.

# Barriers to policy implementation

## 1. Poor coordination and overlapping mandates

Policy coordination is a crucial factor in successful implementation, defined as “managing interdependence between activities to be accomplished for achieving a goal” (Malone & Crowston, 1994, as cited in Ahsan, 2018). Scholars argue that policies often fail not because of flawed design but due to neglect in organizing implementation (Cosby, 1996). Rahmat (2015) emphasizes that “plan implementation requires cooperation, coordination, and commitment at all levels of implementing machinery, starting with the ministries at the central state level through the various non-secretariat organizations in the field.” Vertical coordination, which links policymakers with implementers, is particularly vital. Adam, Hurka, Knill, Peters & Steinebach (2019) note that implementers provide essential information for policy success, while Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham (2019) highlight that failures often stem from weak vertical coordination. For that reason, Steinbacher (2024) advances the idea of street-level integration, stressing institutional channels that allow frontline actors to feed back into higher-level policy design.

The study revealed weak coordination both vertically and horizontally. Local bureaucrats, despite their frontline role, often lack capacity and training, particularly in decentralized contexts (PDRC, 2024). Participants agreed with this assertion, claiming that weak vertical coordination stems from an incomplete decentralization process in which resources are concentrated at ministry headquarters, while field officers receive minimal training. Horizontally, coordination among ministries and agencies is equally problematic. Kaddu et al. (2023) identify overlapping mandates and fragmented planning as recurring barriers in Uganda, while Seopetsa (2020) finds similar obstacles in South Africa. In Puntland, participants reported that inadequate interministerial coordination fosters confusion and competition, rooted in outdated legal mandates. Law No. 4 (08/09/05) defined competencies for 15 ministries, but as government functions expanded, many new ministries emerged without updated statutory frameworks. This has produced overlapping mandates and institutional conflicts, undermining policy development. For example, a birth and death registration policy failed because ministries declined to collaborate. Such failures reflect a pervasive perception that policies are proprietary to individual ministries rather than collective governmental agendas. As Dirie et al. (2025) argue, Somalia’s health plans suffer from the absence of a “whole-of-government” approach, isolating health policy from critical sectors like water, sanitation, and security. Kalakaan (2025) similarly attributes barriers in Puntland to unclear governance roles, while Ahsan (2018) underscores that poor interagency information sharing further degrades coordination.

## 2. Institutional Capacity Constraints

Implementation of policies requires adequate resources as well as robust technical human resources with the requisite skills and substantive knowledge of public policy. Study participants identified inadequate institutional capacity—skills, knowledge, and resources—as the principal factors contributing to policy failure:

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## Resource constraints

The availability of financial and technical resources is a decisive determinant of policy success or failure. Studies consistently show that policies require substantial funding and capacity to move from design to practice. Marume, Mutongi & Madziyire (2016) argue that inadequate financial, human, and organizational resources severely constrain implementation, rendering even well-designed policies ineffective. Maluleke (2015) similarly observed that many possibilities remain “impossible dreams due to lack of financial resources.” Rahmat (2015) emphasized that policy implementation depends on adequate financial, human, and infrastructural resources, noting that agencies in developing countries often rely on unreliable government transfers or project-based financing. Effiong (2013) also identified resources as central determinants of policy implementation in Nigeria.

This study found that the absence of dedicated financial resources is the principal barrier to policy execution in Puntland. International partners commonly finance policy formulation activities, including occasional translation and dissemination, but their support rarely extends to implementation. As a result, responsibility falls to the government, yet the state budget contains no earmarked funds for policy implementation. Limited domestic revenues are primarily allocated to salaries and administrative overhead, leaving ministries unable to operationalize policies unless project funding becomes available. Participants agreed that this reliance on project financing not only weakens implementation but also narrows the range of policies considered. In practice, policies remain shelved without external funding, and implementation has not been accorded the priority it merits within the state budget.

The absence of dedicated implementation funding in ministry budgets reflects deeper public financial management challenges, which are a common characteristic of fragile states. As PeaceRep (2025) notes, 'fiscal practices shape enduring social relationships between people and with powerholders'; budget allocations are not neutral technical exercises but political settlements. In Puntland, limited domestic revenues (primarily from ports and taxes) are consumed by recurrent expenditures, leaving capital investments and policy implementation dependent on unpredictable donor project financing. This creates what Son (2025) identifies as 'the discrepancy between laws and practice,' where policies exist but lack the fiscal backing to become operational. Moreover, the project-based nature of donor funding fragments implementation, as policies are pursued only when aligned with partner priorities.

The IMF (2025) recommends strengthening fiscal institutions and improving public financial management as prerequisites for effective policy implementation in fragile states. For Puntland, this would entail (a) integrating policy costing into annual budget processes, (b) establishing dedicated budget lines for implementation of approved policies, and (c) strengthening treasury functions to ensure allocated funds reach implementing units.

## Technical capacity

Policies often fail not only due to insufficient resources but also because of inadequate staff capacity. Rahmat (2015) noted that many policies remain partially implemented because agencies lack qualified personnel at state, district, and local levels. This shortage is both numerical and qualitative, involving limited technical expertise, weak administrative skills, and insufficient specialization. In fragile states, the problem is compounded by political patronage and nepotism, where unqualified individuals are appointed to key positions, constraining effective performance (Booyesen, 2012). Other scholars echo these findings (Seopetsa, 2020; Effiong, 2013). Marume, Mutongi & Madziyire (2016) argue that successful implementation depends not only on staff capacity but also on motivation, attitudes, and incentives. In Somalia, institutional fragility, capacity deficits, and reliance on external aid remain major hurdles (Hussein et al., 2025; Federal Ministry of Planning, 2024). Respondents highlighted that despite years of capacity-building interventions, skilled personnel remain scarce, and technical teams lack stability since they are project-based. When project funding terminates, ministries are often unable to retain these experts; many consequently leave the public service, exacerbating knowledge attrition. This dynamic has eroded institutional memory across agencies. Participants recounted instances in which an entire policy document was lost when a single staff member who held the record departed the institution.

The hiring of technical specialists has also created antagonism between regular staff and specialists, undermining cooperation. As Ahsan (2018) revealed, "Inter-service jealousy exists in the Bangladesh civil service, particularly between generalists and specialists, as the former enjoy privileges over the latter," which hinders trust and coordination. Frequent leadership turnover further exacerbates the problem. Ministries suffer recurrent changes in ministers and directors, weakening continuity and managerial capacity. One participant explained:

*"Policies are worked on for months, then the minister is changed; the new minister has no interest in the policies of his predecessor; the policy just dies there, or you should start it from scratch." Another participant added, "In this ministry, only two executive directors and one minister with specialization in this field have come to the ministry; the problem is that when the technical team tries to convince them about the needed policies, sometimes it takes time to convince them."*

These testimonies reflect Adam et al.'s (2019) observation that "politicians are not accountable for policy failure because in the event of failure, the likelihood is that they have moved out or on." He further noted that "policymakers are more likely to get credit for legislation that is passed than for implementation problems." Participants concurred, stressing that ministers often celebrate cabinet approval as if policies were already implemented, as one participant put it, "Ministers strive to get the laws and policies passed by the cabinet; by thinking that they have achieved the policy objective once the cabinet approves, they celebrate as if it was already implemented." Yet numerous policy documents—including the illegal weapons policy and the ICT policy—never reached cabinet approval and remain unimplemented. Respondents also emphasized that routine ministry staff seldom benefit from targeted training in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Given the complexity of policy work, Puntland ministries should prioritize comprehensive training programs tailored to policy design, execution, and M&E, noting that specialized ministries such as health and education retain more technical expertise compared to others.

### 3. Stakeholder engagement and public awareness

Stakeholder participation is essential for policy legitimacy and effectiveness. For a policy to succeed, citizens must be involved in both formulation and implementation; absent such participation, success is severely diminished. A growing body of literature links implementation performance to citizen participation and public trust (Kaddu et al., 2023; Johnson, 2017; Kakonge & Ouma, 2025). Participation allows individuals to influence decisions affecting their lives, improves trust in government, and enhances perceived responsiveness (Abdi & Abdul Rahman, 2025). In democratic systems, participation is a legal prerequisite, yet Marzuki (2015) notes that involving the public is increasingly difficult due to time constraints and the slowing of policymaking when attempting to satisfy diverse stakeholders.

Johnson (2017) distinguishes between participation and deliberation, arguing that participation often involves symbolic consultation, while deliberation requires a “convergence of views” through evidence-based dialogue. Scholars emphasize that deliberation is most impactful during the problem-definition and option-appraisal stages. If engagement occurs too late, it merely manages dissent rather than shaping policy. Kalakaan (2025) found that Puntland’s disaster risk management policy failed partly due to minimal community engagement, noting that “senior local officials are also unaware of the DRM policy's existence.” This lack of ownership undermined implementation and highlighted the consequences of excluding citizens from early stages of policymaking.

The study revealed that stakeholder participation in Puntland is below expected levels. Most stakeholders are engaged only during validation workshops, contributing little to substantive design. Yusuf et al. (2025) similarly found that despite constitutional guarantees, civic engagement remains limited, with citizens often involved only after decisions are finalized. Public awareness of policies is also low. As one participant observed, “I don’t think even the majority of the staff are aware of the policies we have; public awareness has no information; the whole work is limited between the government and the partner supporting the policy.” Another added, “I place blame on the public, because the attitude of our people has become, they don’t expect the government to render any services; they were tempted to believe that it is less capable to help them.” The study reviewed 18 ministry websites and found that only the Ministry of Health had published some policies, while others lacked accessible documents.

while others lacked accessible documents. Officials admitted that dissemination funds are far below what effective outreach requires, leaving ministries to circulate soft copies by email, a practice that rarely elicits feedback.

Numerous challenges to civic engagement persist in Puntland, including public skepticism, clan-based politics, elite domination, and the absence of social accountability (SIDRA, 2019). These dynamics weaken legitimacy and hinder cooperation. Public awareness increases the likelihood that citizens will accept policies, demand implementation, and collaborate with authorities. To address these challenges, the Puntland government must promulgate and publicize policies more systematically. Mechanisms such as public forums, targeted outreach campaigns, and translation into local languages can strengthen awareness, foster ownership, and enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation.

## 4. Absence of policy tracking, monitoring, and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are indispensable for assessing policy performance and outcomes. Effective tracking requires dedicated units staffed with skilled personnel, measurable indicators, and recurrent resources for regular reviews. Studies underscore the crucial role of M&E in policy implementation (Kaddu et al., 2023; Effiong, 2013; Rahmat, 2015; Cosby, 1996). Marume, Mutongi & Madziyire (2016) argue that neglecting the “effective phase” of implementation and evaluation has contributed to governance failures in African states, stressing that evaluation systems shift outcomes from being “left to chance” toward structured feedback. Hudson, Hunter, and Peckham (2019) add that M&E distinguishes between “design failures” and “implementation failures,” enabling policymakers to identify where breakdowns occur.

The absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation reflects not only resource constraints but also a limited understanding of MEL as a governance practice. Contemporary MEL frameworks emphasize that evaluation should be embedded throughout the policy cycle, not merely conducted at expiry. The Theory of Change approach, which maps expected causal sequences from inputs to outcomes, provides a structured method for tracking implementation progress and identifying failure points. Recent innovations in fragile states include participatory evaluation methods that incorporate citizen feedback alongside self-assessment, an approach that, as Agolli (2025) demonstrates, often reveals significant discrepancies between official reporting and citizen experience. For Somalia, where trust in institutions is low (Abdi & Abdulrahman, 2025), such participatory approaches could simultaneously improve accountability and rebuild state legitimacy. Moreover, integrated MEL systems that link policy tracking to budget execution data would enable real-time course correction rather than post-hoc review of expired policies.

In Puntland, participants agreed that M&E is rarely conducted. Policies are typically reviewed only upon expiry or when funds are available, with occasional mid-course corrections prompted by emergencies. Although ministries nominally have M&E departments, these units are weak and undertrained. Respondents attributed the absence of routine tracking to funding shortfalls, noting that donor support is project-bound and unsustainable. As a result, expired policies remain unreviewed; for instance, the decentralization policy expired in 2020 and was never updated. Without evidence-based evaluation, revisions are ad hoc and incremental, often reverting to old formulations. One participant stressed that “policy designers cannot reliably determine what has worked and what has not.” Institutionalizing routine M&E is therefore imperative, as sustained evaluation is a precondition for successful implementation and iterative refinement of policy instruments.

## 5. Lack of inter-linkage between policies, laws, and strategies

Policy implementation is not an isolated exercise; it must be integrated with complementary instruments and mechanisms such as laws, sectoral strategies, programs, and projects. A policy should be accompanied by an implementation strategy that specifies sequencing, responsibilities, resources, and measurable indicators; it should be operationalized through programs and projects. In many cases, a policy also requires legal backing and parliamentary approval to create enforceable obligations. The study found a persistent disconnection among these instruments. At times, parliament enacts laws without an antecedent policy framework; a recent example cited by participants is the Police Act. This was attributed to the removal of the parliament as an actor in the policymaking process.

Prior to 2014, parliament approved policies; however, the executive subsequently assumed exclusive authority for policy approval to delineate the functions of government branches, and since then, the cabinet has been the approving body. Participants also highlighted the absence of coherent sectoral policies or strategies, a gap that further undermines implementation.

To address these disconnections, the study recommends a systematic review of policies that require accompanying strategies or legislative transformation. Sectoral strategies should be developed to translate policy intent into operational plans. There is also a need for closer cooperation between the executive and the legislature in both policy formulation and implementation oversight. The parliament has a constitutional and political role to track policy progress and to hold the executive accountable when implementation fails.

In addition to that, government officials interviewed observed three factors that affect successful policy implementation, including policy schedule, policy sensitivity, and sectoral policy coherence. Policies that have a clear and realistic implementation schedule tend to be implemented. Similarly, policies that carry on sensitivity that the public may feel their failure directly are also implemented. Lastly, comprehensive sectoral policies that provide strategic direction for an entire sector are more likely to be implemented, particularly when such policies are subsequently transformed into legislation. Sectoral frameworks create clearer lines of responsibility, enable resource allocation, and facilitate the alignment of programs and projects with policy objectives.

## Consequences of Policy Failure

The failure to implement policies has tangible governance costs. Public problems remain unaddressed, eroding trust in institutions and weakening the legitimacy of the state. Economic opportunities stagnate as reforms remain on paper, and institutional coherence deteriorates due to overlapping mandates and discontinuity. Loss of institutional memory further undermines the state's ability to respond to emerging challenges. Ultimately, the persistence of the implementation gap threatens to reverse gains made in institutional development and decentralization.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Increased coordination at the policy level.** There is an urgent need to strengthen coordination among ministries and public institutions. The first recommended task is a comprehensive review of ministerial mandates. One practical approach is to appoint an independent commission to assess institutional roles and propose solutions to the current impasse. Following the commission's report, the government should enact legislation that clearly delineates ministerial mandates; the current legal framework may not adequately address the needs of modern institutional arrangements and could benefit from an update. Clarifying mandates will reduce interministerial disputes and foster cooperation grounded in mutual institutional benefit.

**Establish a central policy oversight office.** Create an office mandated to supervise, monitor, and follow up on policy implementation. This office should serve as a formal link among the presidency, the parliament, and the executive ministries. Its responsibilities would include reviewing and updating policies, tracking implementation performance, and holding ministries accountable for failures to deliver on agreed tasks and to conduct regular follow-ups and ensure that policies are consistently reviewed and updated in accordance with evolving contexts, priorities, and resource availability. Accountability should be based on planned performance and empirical policy evidence. The office should also coordinate with parliament to ensure that policies requiring legal enforcement are supported by appropriate legislation.

**Allocate sufficient resources for formulation and implementation.** Currently, the majority of policy development is donor-supported, and external funding rarely covers implementation. The study recommends that the government allocate domestic resources for both formulation and implementation to strengthen ownership and achieve intended outcomes. Each ministry's annual budget should include a dedicated quota for policy implementation to augment institutional performance and reduce dependence on project cycles.

**Prioritize policies strategically** Policies are instruments for delivering public services and should be prioritized accordingly. The government should treat policies as operational instruments rather than symbolic documents. A systematic prioritization process is needed to address the current proliferation of policies—many of which were drafted without the capacity to implement them. The government should select high-priority policies and develop implementation strategies for them; less urgent policies can be retained as institutional assets but deferred until adequate resources are available.

**Provide comprehensive capacity building for staff** A critical constraint to implementation is the shortage of skilled staff with the capacity to translate policy into practice. Regular staff are often not trained to execute policies. The study recommends that ministries implement tailored capacity-building programs to strengthen competencies in policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Ministries should retain skilled experts by integrating technical specialists into the government payroll rather than relying on short-term consultancy arrangements. Salaries for these experts should be funded from recurrent budgets. Each ministry should designate at least one senior officer with the capacity to draft and shepherd policies through the approval and implementation cycle.

**Enhance public awareness and dissemination.** Policies are intended to improve citizens' lives; therefore, the public should be involved in both formulation and implementation. The government should conduct public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about existing policies and their relevance. Public forums should be organized to discuss policy utility and solicit feedback. Dissemination must be strengthened: policies should be translated into local languages and published on ministry websites and other accessible platforms so that academics, policymakers, students, and the public can read and engage with them.

**Improve policy tracking and evaluation.** Without routine monitoring and evaluation, policy success or failure cannot be measured. The study recommends strengthening M&E units by equipping them with trained experts and adequate resources. Ministries should undertake quarterly or annual evaluation exercises. There is also a need for a central unit to compile and synthesize M&E reports across ministries; the M&E department of the Ministry of Planning could play this coordinating role. This unit could organize an annual M&E conference where each ministry presents achievements and lessons learned, creating a forum for peer learning and cross-sectoral improvement.

**Link policies, laws, and strategies.** Effective implementation requires coherent linkages among policies, sectoral strategies, programs, and, where necessary, legislation. Each policy should be accompanied by a sectoral strategy or broken down into programs and projects that operationalize its objectives. Where legal enforcement is required, policies should be translated into laws and aligned with parliamentary processes. Clarifying these relationships will facilitate execution and enforcement.

**Enhance political commitment and ownership** Top leadership must actively guide policy direction and champion implementation. Policies should be treated as government-wide agendas rather than the proprietary domain of individual ministries. Strengthening political commitment and fostering collective ownership will increase accountability, improve interministerial collaboration, and enhance the sustainability of policy outcomes.

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