



Strengthening Local Governance in Bosaso: Prospects and Challenges of the District Development Committee

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Summary

- » The Bosaso District Development Committee (DDC), created through presidential decree, seeks to improve service delivery in Puntland's main commercial center but emerged later than similar committees in major towns – such as Garowe, Qardho, and Galkacyo – due to Bosaso's more complex social and political landscape.
- » The committee's composition of respected businesspeople and community figures positions it to mobilize local resources, build public trust, and address priority needs such as roads, water, electricity, sanitation, education, and health.
- » Key institutional challenges include unclear legal status, overlapping mandates with the local government, and concerns about accountability arising from presidential rather than municipal appointment.
- » Community dissatisfaction with the proposed one-dollar utility charge, combined with weak municipal capacity, may hinder the committee's effectiveness unless transparency, coordination, and trust-building are strengthened.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a nonprofit public policy and administration research organization based in Mogadishu. Its aim is to advance understanding and improvement of public administration and public services in Somalia through evidence-based research and analysis.

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Introduction

Bosaso, the commercial hub of Puntland State, is one of the region's most economically significant and diverse urban centers. The city hosts Puntland's primary seaport and plays a central role in regional trade, connecting Somalia with Gulf States through livestock exports and imports of foodstuffs and consumer goods. Despite its economic importance, Bosaso faces serious governance and service delivery challenges. The local government has struggled with limited fiscal autonomy, weak institutional capacity, and low public trust.

To address persistent service delivery gaps, the Puntland government authorized the creation of a District Development Committee (DDC) in Bosaso. Its purpose is to strengthen collaboration between local authorities and residents. Similar committees exist in other Puntland districts—such as Garowe, Qardho, and Galkayo—and have contributed to urban development and resource mobilization.

This governance brief analyses the prospects and limitations of the Bosaso DDC as a mechanism to enhance local service delivery. It examines the background of district development committees in Puntland, the reasons behind the delayed formation of the Bosaso committee, and the committee's intended role in improving service delivery. It further assesses constraints and challenges and concludes with recommendations to strengthen its effectiveness. Comparative reference is also made to similar mechanisms in Somaliland, where decentralization initiatives and committee-based governance have been in place for longer.

This brief is based on five key informant interviews with stakeholders in Bosaso, selected from the local council, academia, the district development committee, the private sector, and civil society. Four men and one woman were interviewed between 24 October and 8 November 2025 through phone and WhatsApp calls, chosen for convenience given the interviewees' schedules.

Background of the Bosaso District Development Committee

District development committees are not new to Puntland. They have been established in several municipalities to supplement local government service delivery. These committees typically consist of respected businesspeople, religious scholars, and traditional elders who command credibility in their communities. Their primary function is to collect small community contributions—often through charges on utilities such as electricity and water—to fund priority district projects.

In many Puntland districts, district development committees have played a visible role in improving service delivery. For instance, committees in Qardho and Garowe have contributed to road construction, emergency response during natural disasters, and support for community infrastructure (Somali Gender Hub, 2021). Interviewees cited the case of

Qardho, where the local committee reportedly raised funds and responded rapidly during a major flood, stepping in when the municipal government was either unable or slow to act.

Their formation processes typically involve consultation between local government authorities and influential community representatives, who then agree to select individuals perceived as credible, neutral, respected within the community, and capable of mobilizing resources for the committees' membership.

The establishment of the Bosaso DDC followed a similar pattern, though with notable differences. According to a local council official, discussions on forming the committee gained momentum after the district administration took office in late 2023. Following consultations between the municipality and state authorities, the Puntland President formally appointed nine committee members, including two women, on 3 September 2025, after agreement was reached on the composition and representation. Other district committees in Puntland have long used a one-dollar charge on utilities to raise local funds for development activities. The Bosaso committee is now adopting the same one-dollar utility charge to follow this established and widely used model.

The emergence of the Bosaso DDC reflects broader public concerns about governance performance. Some interviewees stated that recurring community-led committees in Puntland are often a response to gaps in local government service delivery and to low levels of public trust in local authorities. In this regard, one civil society representative explained:

“The reason this committee was created, despite the existence of a local government, is mainly due to a lack of trust in the local government’s ability to carry out its responsibilities in Bosaso. Generally, the public has little confidence in government institutions at all levels, which has led to the repeated formation of such community-level committees.”

Criticisms of the Committee Formation Process

Bosaso, despite being Puntland's largest commercial hub, remained without a development committee long after other major districts such as Qardho and Garowe had established theirs. Interviewees highlighted several criticisms relating to both the delays and the manner in which the committee was ultimately formed, suggesting that these issues may influence the committee's future performance.

Most key informants noted that Bosaso's social and political complexities played a central role in slowing the committee's establishment. As the city hosts diverse clans and business interests, achieving consensus on representation was considerably more challenging than in a district dominated by a single sub-clan. A local council official explained that negotiations were often prolonged:

“Bosaso is home to many different clans and political groups. The diversity made it difficult to agree on the committee members and delayed its formation. Unlike more homogeneous towns such as Qardho and Garowe, Bosaso’s diversity required balancing multiple interests, slowing consensus on membership and leadership.”

Institutional and legal ambiguity also emerged as a point of concern. Some respondents argued that the presidential appointment of the Bosaso Development Committee raised questions about alignment with local governance principles. While other district committees in Puntland were appointed through local government structures, the current Bosaso District Development Committee was appointed directly by President Said Abdullahi Deni through a presidential decree on 3 September 2025. This raised concerns and doubts about accountability and the balance of authority between the local government and the state. According to an academic respondent, this approach risks blurring responsibility for city development outcomes:

“I believe this appointment undermines the accountability of the local government of Bosaso. It is unclear who will now be held responsible for the city’s development—the committee or the local government.”

A private-sector participant further linked the delay to longstanding frustration with the municipal government's performance. They argued that persistent shortcomings in service delivery, coupled with weak public trust in the municipality's ability to manage resources, contributed to public pressure for an external committee. From their perspective, the committee was eventually formed not as part of a planned governance process but as a response to governance limitations within the municipality.

Prospects for Facilitating Service Delivery

Despite existing governance and institutional challenges, several interviewees stated that the Bosaso District Development Committee (DDC) has the potential to contribute to service delivery in the city. Respondents highlighted that the committee's composition, particularly the inclusion of influential businesspeople, positions it to mobilize resources and gain the trust of local residents, who increasingly believe that businesspeople are less likely to misuse community funds.

The committee also presents opportunities to strengthen community participation in service delivery. Members indicated that their approach involves consulting residents to determine priority needs such as road rehabilitation, electricity, water, sanitation, education, and health services. One committee member emphasized this commitment, noting that they:

“Will work with the community to identify their needs and priorities, whether it is roads, electricity, water, sanitation, education, or health.”

Such engagement can promote a sense of local ownership and reduce the disconnect that many citizens have long expressed toward municipal authorities.

Interview responses also suggest that the committee benefits from a degree of financial independence which, if well managed, may enhance transparency and operational efficiency. The committee operates its own bank account and holds full authority over expenditure and project implementation, although coordination with the local government occurs on planning and prioritization. As one committee member described:

“All financial decisions, including expenditure and project management, are handled independently by the committee.”

This structure could allow more direct and accountable management of development funds, provided that oversight mechanisms are maintained. However, a local council official noted that the local government will implement projects and take advice from the committee:

“Their role is to collect funds and present the project plans to the public, while the local government will oversee project implementation, contractors, and its implementation.”

Constraints to the Functionality of the Committee

Most respondents highlighted that one of the most significant constraints facing the Bosaso DDC is the blurred accountability between the committee and the local government. Interviewees stated that both institutions operate independently of one another with no clear legal framework defining their respective roles. This ambiguity creates gaps in responsibility and weakens overall oversight. According to one academic respondent, the absence of a structured governance arrangement increases the risk that “no clear authority” will be held accountable when service delivery fails.

Another major constraint relates to the perceived impact of the committee on the authority of the democratically elected local council. Some interviewees argued that because the committee was not appointed by the local council but instead through presidential decree, this process may undermine local ownership and weaken the committee's legitimacy. This concern is particularly strong in Bosaso, where governance dynamics are already more complex than in other districts due to the city's size, economic importance, and the higher number of state and non-state actors involved. The addition of the DDC intensifies this complexity, raising fears of overlapping mandates, reduced municipal authority, and growing confusion over who is ultimately responsible for city development.

Financial pressures on residents further complicate the committee's ability to function effectively. Respondents emphasized that the potential one-dollar charge on utilities has generated dissatisfaction among citizens who already face high living costs. A civil society representative

described it as a “double burden” for households that pay taxes while also contributing to the committee's fundraising efforts. High electricity prices, in particular, remain a long-standing public concern in Bosaso and may erode community support for the committee if left unaddressed:

“The committee's additional one-dollar charge on both water and electricity bills adds another financial strain to residents, who are already paying taxes. Electricity, which was already expensive, now costs even more. Instead of lowering electricity costs, an extra charge is being added. It's a double burden.”

In addition, while the committee can mobilize funds for development projects, ultimate success depends on the capacity of the local government. Weak institutional performance within the municipality risks delaying projects and reinforcing accountability gaps between the local government and the committee. Unless the municipal administration is strengthened, the committee's efforts may face constraints beyond its control.

Despite these challenges, interviewees acknowledged that similar committees in other districts have delivered results. They cited examples such as Qardho, where the development committee mobilized resources and responded effectively during a major flood, helping fill gaps left by the local government. As one civil society representative stated, such committees often enjoy greater public trust than municipal authorities because they are perceived as more responsive and community-driven.

District Development Committees in Somaliland: A Comparative Case

Somaliland has implemented a similar decentralization mechanism through the Joint Programme on Local Governance (JPLG) and Decentralized Service Delivery, supported by the UN and UNCDF. Under this framework, several district development committees were formed in municipalities such as Berbera, Burao, Gabiley, and Hargeisa, focusing on infrastructure, waste management, and financial transparency. According to UNCDF, three districts—Berbera (Somaliland), Garowe, and Bosaso (Puntland)—now manage most of their service delivery using local revenue and state transfers, requiring little external donor support (UNCDF, 2022).

Some benefits of Somaliland's local development committees include enhancing citizens' participation in decision-making, transparent budgeting and reporting systems, and improved delivery of waste management, road maintenance, and education. Digital governance tools have also been introduced to improve efficiency and accountability (Somaliland Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, 2023). These experiences demonstrate that when committees operate within clear legal frameworks and in coordination with elected local councils, they can significantly strengthen municipal governance and service delivery.

Conclusion

The Bosaso DDC represents both an opportunity and a challenge for local governance. It offers a platform for mobilizing resources, engaging citizens, and complementing municipal services, yet it risks deepening institutional ambiguity due to the lack of clear regulation. The success of the Bosaso DDC will depend on clarity of roles, transparency in financial management, and effective collaboration with the local government.

The lesson from Somaliland suggests that well-governed local development committees can significantly improve service delivery when embedded within transparent and accountable governance systems. For Bosaso, building trust through openness, prioritizing community needs, and institutionalizing coordination between the committee and municipality will be crucial to achieving sustainable local development.

Policy Considerations

The following policy considerations aim to guide the Bosaso DDC, the local government, and relevant Puntland state authorities in strengthening service delivery, enhancing accountability, and addressing institutional challenges identified in this paper.

1. Clarify Roles and Lines of Accountability

Clearly define the legal status of the DDC and its relationship with the local government, including who sets priorities, budgets, and implements projects.

Establish accountability mechanisms and publicly disclose the funds collected and how they are spent.

Ensure the DDC publishes regular reports on funds collected and expenditures.

Share detailed financial information with the public to maintain transparency.

2. Enhance Community Participation and Transparency

- Announce publicly which projects funds will support, such as roads, schools, or other services, before collecting contributions.
- Encourage public cooperation with the committee to ensure effective fulfillment of responsibilities.

- Maintain a clear distinction between responsibilities and accountability lines.

3. Prioritize Projects and Ensure Value of Needs

- Conduct baseline needs assessments on key city challenges and service gaps—sanitation, roads, electricity, tree planting, or security—and prioritize projects based on community needs.
- Ensure collaboration between the local government and the committee to jointly address challenges and find solutions.

4. Building Trust through Accountability and Communication

Position the committee as a link between the community, the local government, and the state government.

Conduct public awareness campaigns to encourage citizens to contribute to development projects.

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This governance brief is the eighth in a series of District Council-driven research publications under our EU-funded project, Increased Opportunities for Somali Citizens' Scrutiny of Fiscal and Financial Governance, which examines critical issues related to fiscal governance and federalism at the district level. The topics explored in this series are identified through close collaboration with District Council members, and Civil Society Organizations' (CSOs) representatives during workshops held in Bosaso, Adado, and Jowhar on a quarterly basis, ensuring the research remains grounded in local governance realities.