



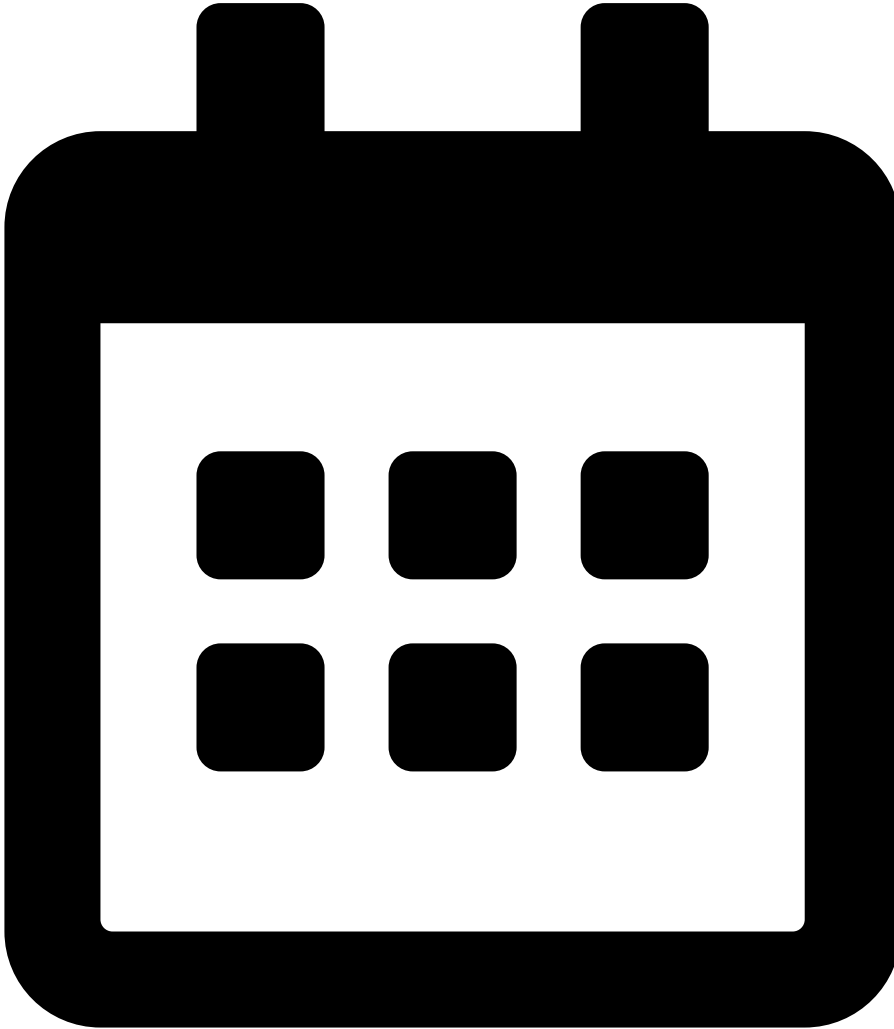
Bridging the gap between policies and people: A Reflection



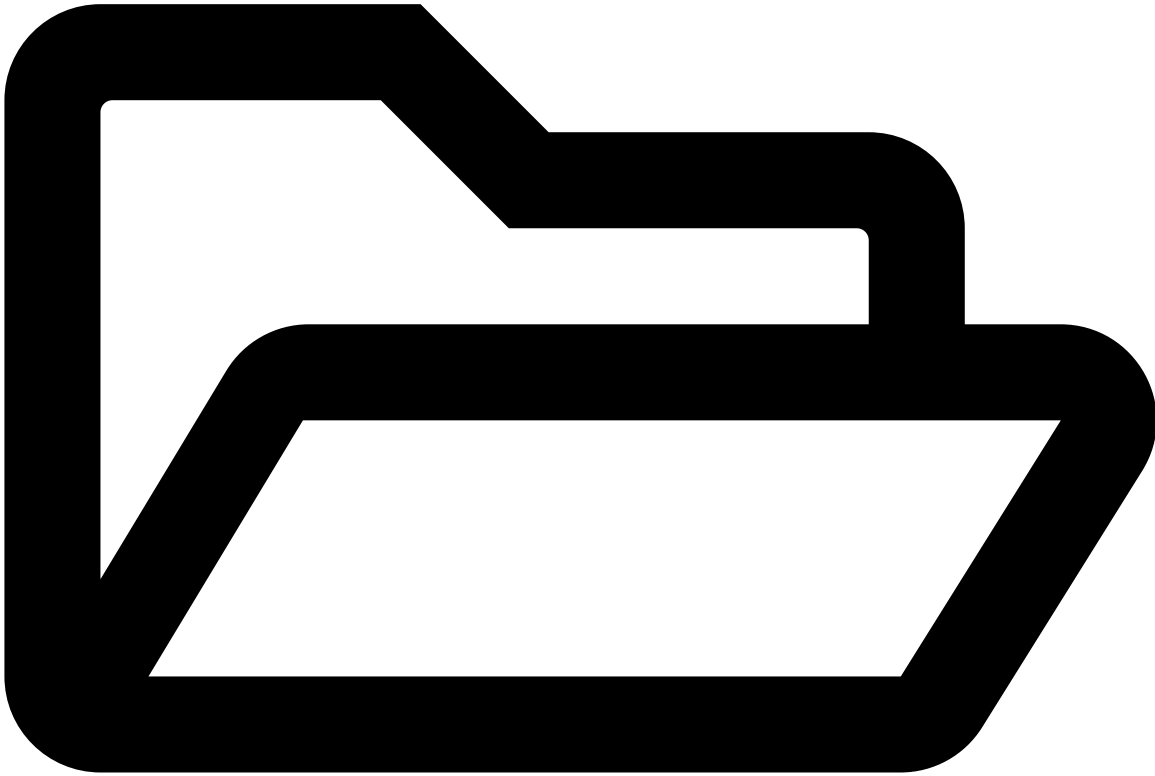
Bridging the gap between policies and people: A Reflection



Aweis Ahmed



September 17, 2022



Reflections From Our Team



Since I was in high school, I have been interested in exploring and contributing to public policies and services. It is the reason I studied governance and international relations at various universities. Therefore, joining Somali Public Agenda as the Director of the SPA Policy Lab (previously Center for Public Policy and Service Design) was a significant opportunity for me to work on improving public policies and services in Somalia. At SPA, I joined an outstanding team where everyone from the top-level management to the entry-level employees feel a strong sense of belonging within the organization. The workplace environment, cohesive team relations, and authentic leadership have created an amazing setting, and have instilled a sense of place and purpose for me at SPA.

The SPA Policy Lab is the first of its kind in Somalia. Its purpose is to co-designing public policies and services in a citizen-driven and evidence-based approach with governmental and non-governmental institutions. Since I started leading the Lab in February 2021, I have studied policy design labs, developed tools, and engaged policymakers to bridge the gap between policymaking and people in Somalia. Building this portfolio for SPA has been both challenging and exciting. I explored new materials, attended courses, watched videos, and listened to podcasts to absorb how other institutions approached policy design. Working through these materials could be overwhelming and arduous, but overall, it felt like a valuable journey.

One of the most exciting things I learned during this period is how the public sector is

adopting new evidence-based approaches. These depart from past best practices, which cannot deal with the new technological opportunities and increasing demands from citizens and the private sector. However, the sad truth I have learned is that Somalia's public sector does not even adopt those old best practices. Besides, the Policy Lab requires design experts who can help its innovative policy design in Somalia. Therefore, I contacted several international design experts in private and public design labs worldwide. For them, it was strange that there was such a creative public policy lab in Somalia. We exchanged several emails and Zoom calls discussing and explaining the SPA Policy Lab, what it does, and how it works.

For many in Somalia, including public officials, designing public policies and services is a new phenomenon. Somalia's nascent public institutions have been fragile, and the capacity of the bureaucrats is often limited. Subsequently, there were few opportunities for citizens to engage effectively in the creation or implementation of public policies and services. As a result, government policies do not often reflect citizens' needs and priorities.

Furthermore, due to the Somali government's fragility and limited capacity, international humanitarian and development agencies provide many of the services typically expected to be delivered by the government. However, despite spending billions of dollars in Somalia providing lifesaving security, and humanitarian and developmental assistance to the Somali people, these organizations often lack understanding of the local context and have limited access to interact with people on the ground. Therefore their interventions often fail to address specific local needs.

After we developed the SPA Policy Lab conceptually with a methodology and plan for activities, we needed to create awareness and engagement with policymakers. Consequently, the Lab has been engaging with governmental and non-governmental institutions to help them understand our work in designing policies and services centered on citizens' needs and experiences, to create a lasting impact. Establishing a working relationship with public officials to develop innovative policies and services that are citizen-driven and evidence-based has been and remains difficult and has required more time than expected. However, the policymakers, civil servants, practitioners, politicians, members of civil society, and local and international non-governmental organizations who we engaged with have seen the Lab and its work as something unique that can contribute to the betterment of public policies and services in Somalia.

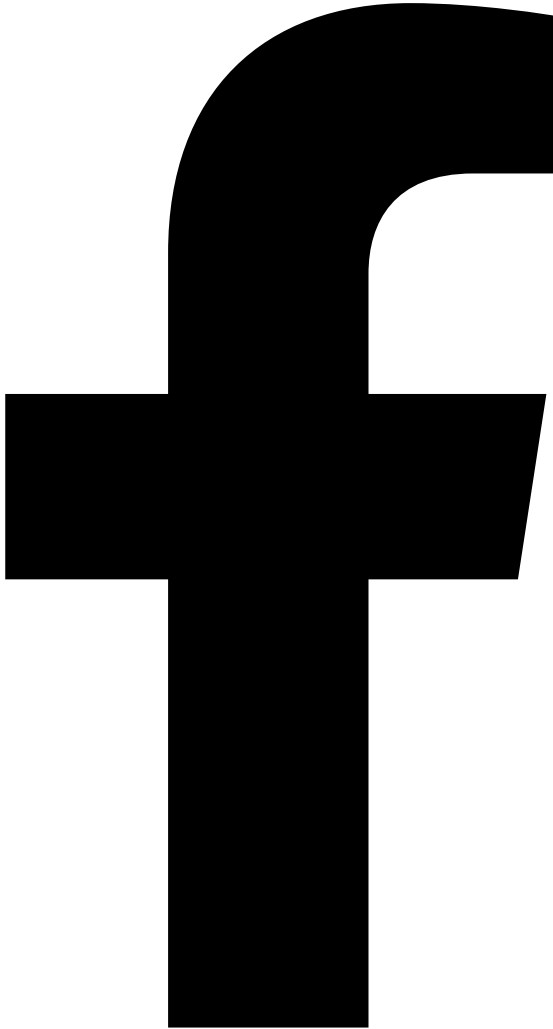
In addition to the engagement with key stakeholders, the Lab has been producing design-related knowledge, developing context-specific design tools for Somali government-led policies, and localizing policies designed by international organizations.

Still, the challenges ahead for co-designing policies and services with public institutions are abundant, and it will take time to find collaborative solutions to some of the pressing governance and service matters in Somalia. Despite the impediments, the Lab is working to assist public institutions, and hopes for developing sound public policies designed in a human-centered manner are rising.

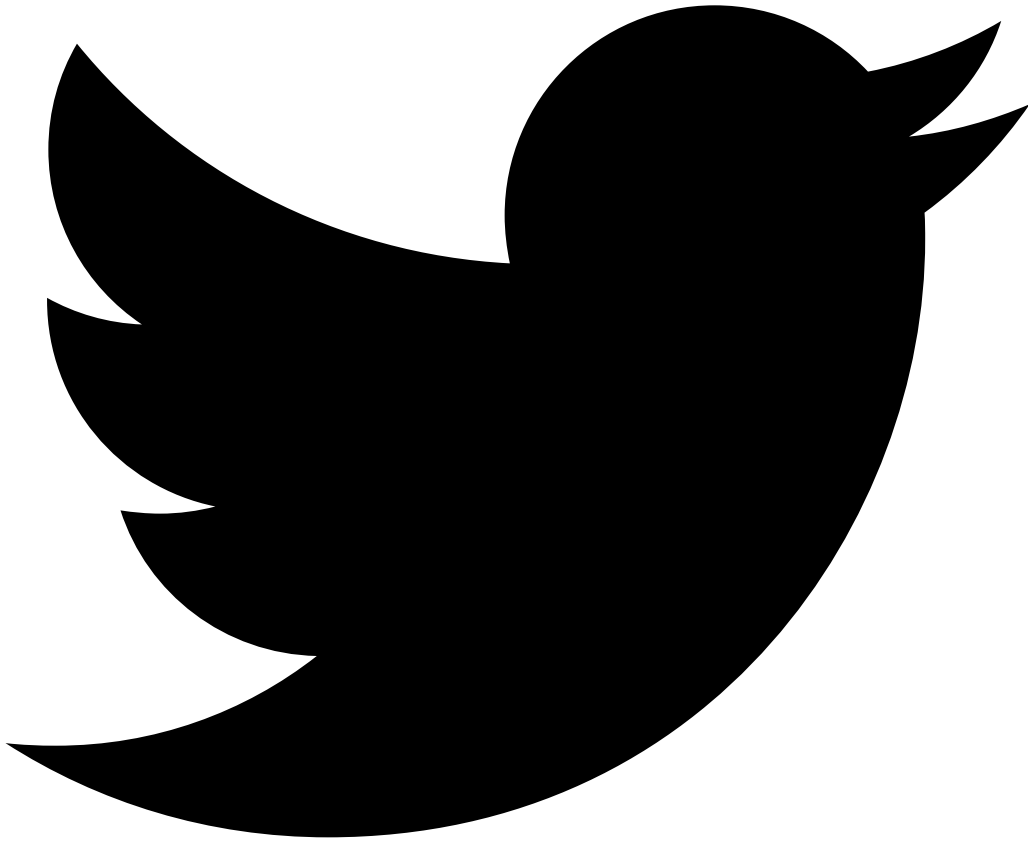
As director of the SPA Policy Lab, it has not only been a learning process over the past year and a half. It has also been a career development opportunity for me in designing public policies and services. This has not been easy, and without my colleagues at SPA, it would not have been possible to progress the Lab's achievements in the coming years. The past year and a half stand for experience gained and a lesson for the coming years. The rest is anticipation – as Einstein said, 'Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.'

[Aweis Ahmed](#) is the director of the [SPA Policy Lab](#).

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2 Responses

1.  **Abdullahi Ali** says:
[September 17, 2022 at 8:09 am](#)

Astonishing reflection, of course, you have learned from yesterday that is the year and half you have been building this Lab, and you are living today sharing with us this amazing reflection. The tomorrow as you anticipated we can see ahead this Lab making sense in designing policies and localising them from and to Somalia. Big cheers Uweys.

[Reply](#)



2. **Sakariye** says:

[September 17, 2022 at 10:36 am](#)

Masha allaah, waa guudmar iyo warbixin turxaan baxsan. Agaasime waxaan kuu filaya howla badan oo waxtar bulsheed leh. Waxaan sidokale rajaynaa in barnaamijyada inta badan la af-Soomaaliyeeyo, si cida dhibkeeda la xalinayo loola falgalo. Mahadsanidiin.

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