Summary

Policies, programs, and projects that are designed and implemented to serve the needs of Somalia's citizens often fail to achieve their objectives. Regrettably, this observation is so widespread and noted so often that it is easy to gloss over it as an area for dedicated attention. After all, there are many forces at work that prevent sound policymaking. However, even well-functioning and democratic states (like Canada and Denmark) have noticed that policies designed in closer cooperation with the population can create more nuanced, local, legitimate, and ultimately effective solutions that "designing from above" cannot achieve. Policy design centers are innovation initiatives that are being built and utilized worldwide and — with some adaption and creativity — could bring notable advances to Somalia and even to the region as a whole. This brief explains how policy design thinking has evolved globally, and the wider role of Policy Design Centers. It then focuses on particular needs that Somalia faces in this area, and the role that the Somali Public Agenda Center for Public Policy and Service Design is emerging to play.

About Somali Public Agenda

Somali Public Agenda is a non-profit 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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Bridging the Gap between Policies and People in Somalia: Introducing Policy Design Centers

Aweis Ahmed Mohamed

Introduction: Evolving approaches to policy design

The design of policies and services intended for the public of a country is often dominated by the officials in the public administration. In contrast, the citizens who are the end-users of government services may rarely be involved or reflected in policy blueprints (Nesti, 2018). This has occurred since the establishment of the modern state system and the realm of public administration. However, tenacious developments of user-driven design innovation have acted as a catalyst for dynamic efficacy in market institutions. Recognition of this led to the emergence of 'New Public Management' in the late decades of the twentieth century. One of its hallmarks was the emphasis on user-centered policies and services in the public sector. This entails making government organizations more like the business sector to improve their competence in numerous aspects, mainly designing policies and services with respect to the citizens who are the ultimate recipients.

It can be argued that the public sector has made improvements regarding its previous ineffectiveness for public problem solving compared to the business sector. However, the scale of these results was constrained as there were tremendous impediments to applying models and approaches borrowed from the private sector. These included: the marketization of the public sector; competition of service delivery between the public and private service providers; decentralization that causing organizational fragmentation; focus on singular 'Best Practice' in a complex world; and the current technological opportunities that enable new demands from citizens and private stakeholders. These factors provided some of the impetus that hastened the second paradigmatic shift in the public governance (Torfing, et al., 2020). Accordingly, 'New Public Management' shifted to 'New Public Governance'. This put forward new approaches to deal with the contemporary challenges confronting the public sector.

New Public Governance postulated the concept of the co-creation of policy solutions in the public service delivery where government institutions collaborate, rather than compete, with a wide range of non-government actors, which include profit and non-profit organizations, civil society or citizens, for finding public problems, innovating, and designing more reliable solutions (Torfing, et al., 2016). It has boosted the focus of 'Next Practice', which transcends the traditional process of policy designing and emphasizes persistent, innovative ways that look for new policy solutions in the future. It has also firmly accentuated the active involvement of the end-users – who were previously seen as passive – in co-creating and co-designing innovative solutions for various policy areas. Moreover, the emergence of Policy Design Centers (PDC), also known as Public Sector Innovation Labs, Innovation Labs, Public Policy Labs, or Policy Labs, is considered to be one of the mechanisms, as a non-governmental policy actor with innovative and citizen-driven approaches, that the New Public Governance paradigm incorporates to enhance the capability of policy design in the public sector.

Towards a Solution: The Nature and Function of Policy Design Centers

Policy Design Centers (PDC) or Policy Labs have been increasingly created by either governmental, profit, or non-profit institutions over the last couple of decades (Lewis, 2021). A PDC is an instrument that helps governments (at national, regional, and local levels, sometimes in cooperation with industry) address challenges that arise from the traditional and routine ways of identifying societal problems and deal with them with inventive policy solutions using experimental and 'Design Thinking' approaches. PDCs can have varying forms, and their links with the government and international organizations and agencies differ from one to another. They are sometimes embedded in governments, as in Denmark and the UK; might be located at universities as in Australia and the U.S.; and may be separate profit or non-profit entities. Think tank organizations have been active non-governmental policy institutes in the process of policymaking for almost half a century. Indeed, looking at the typology of think tanks closely, policy design centers can be seen to partly fit this model.

However, although Policy Design Centers and think tanks generally share certain aspects, PDCs differ because they do not only serve research needs but also engage with high-level government officials as can be seen in, for instance, organizations like Brookings, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), or Chatham House. PDCs will often work closely with communities to conceptualize new activities, identify problems, prototype solutions, model new possible actions, test, roll out, and help adjust and adopt solutions. In this way, they are 'think and do tanks,' which represents a new model of bringing knowledge to action in public policy (McGann, et al., 2021). This close cooperation can have profound and often under-appreciated benefits, including:

• It can help with identifying the right problems and challenges for attention rather than the ones assumed to be the core concern by people who are too distant to precisely know.

• Possible solutions can be floated to a community for consideration long before they are expensively implemented only to learn of problems after the fact.

• It can help remove the worst ideas from consideration much sooner and — because the work is evidence-based – it can tactfully help dismiss the more politically-driven ideas that are popular but will not be effective (or, worse, could exacerbate problems) if they were funded and employed.

PDCs play a role as crucial centers of learning where servants in the public sector can develop their capabilities about reframing public problems, designing and innovating new ways to solve them. Besides, they facilitate the collaboration of the public and private sector as it is essential to have a consistent dialogue between them.

PDCs' clients are not confined only to government bodies but also deliver invaluable service to international organizations, assisting with massive programs and policies for developing countries, whether in the peace and security, development, or humanitarian sectors. PDCs usually start their work by grasping the essence of the problem and reframing it through the users' experiences and — because of their policy expertise — help bridge the gap between the policies and the people.

They provide to their clients – governments and international actors – evidence-based recommendations that help them avoid making hazardous decisions on policies or investments. PDCs utilize various methodological frameworks while conducting the design and innovation process. The first and most regularly used frameworks is the Human-Centered Design method, which employs ethnographic fieldwork, interviews or focus group discussion, and user testing tools to document service users' experiences. Evidence-based and agile methods are the second and the latest methods utilized by the PDCs (Lewis, 2021). PDCs have so far contributed and led to changes in designing programs and policies in the public sector of many countries, mainly in the West.

Collaborative Policy Design Centers and Practices in Somalia

Following more than two decades of destructive conflict that ruined government institutions, infrastructure, essential social services and created a massive loss of qualified human capital, Somalia has entered a new era of relative peace and stability since 2012. This was when the first non-transitional government was elected in Mogadishu and a provisional constitution was endorsed. With the abolishment of the prolonged transitional period and the adoption of the federal system, the country has experienced incremental recovery and reconstruction. However, the state institutions remain in their infancy and relay heavily on constant technical and financial assistance from international development partners. In addition to that, the capacity of the civil servants vis-à-vis the necessary skills to develop novel initiatives to solve public problems is highly restricted.

The Capacity Injection Project for Somalia was initiated in 2015 and has been continuing for several years to fill the shortage of skilled human resources in the country's public sector. The government is still struggling to create credibility and trust among the citizens due to the inability of the public sector to implement effective services and develop reflective policies as well as oversee program and policy implementation. Therefore, there is a critical gap between the government's policies and the recipients of the policy results or services. This gap needs to be bridged with state of the art thinking and action on civic innovation. This will include policy design and service design; innovation that Somalia can introduce at limited cost and with an expedited timeline through centers like the SPA-Center for Public Policy and Service Design.

With its international network of relations and fellows in this area, SPA CPPSD provides a unique offering in the wider region. Besides, Somalia has adopted a federal system in which essential public services are decentralized at the federal, state, and local levels. Each level entails an extensive and pioneering service delivery structure since the previous centralized system of governance was destroyed during the civil war. There will be significant demand for designing services going throughout the new federal structure, and PDCs could be a great instrument for the filling of this gap.

The insecurity and political instability produced by ongoing armed conflict and recurrent natural disasters have also resulted in persistent humanitarian crises. Humanitarian and development assistance have been pouring into the country for many years. The official amount of aid received in Somalia was estimated at almost two billion US$ in 2019 (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020). In spite of saving countless lives, its efficacy in the long-term recovery and economic development on the ground needs to be re-evaluated. A stumbling block of aid effectiveness can be ascribed to the absence or weakness of functioning government structures, which are essential for delivering effective public services.

Humanitarian and development agencies have been relying on their own structures with the help of local NGOs and community leaders in delivering essential services (Medinilla, et al., 2019). Most of the policies and services channeled through these institutions are designed by foreign professionals who are (most cases) unable to interact with the local people and have inadequate knowledge of the deeper cultural reality on the ground. Despite contributing to the well-being of millions of Somalis, such policies and services could be devised in a more productive manner that would reflect the precise demands of the beneficiaries and impact more positively over a longer period. Thus, there is a need for policy design centers with utmost urgency and have the capacity to develop a user-design led method of policy and service. For example, The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research identified thirteen barriers to the successful diagnosis of policy needs, design of policy solutions, and implementation of those designs. While all are relevant to Somalia, we would emphasize:

- **Accountability over impact:** Too much attention is spent on creating what is measurable and reportable rather than what is desirable and needed.

- **Planning over design**: Too often, professionals move from "problem to planning" because they think they have seen a similar problem before rather than making space to attend truly to the local, specific, and even cultural challenges they actually face. Unfortunately, by skipping over the design phase, they may be rushing down the wrong road entirely.

- **Complicated cooperation**: Everyone uses different management frameworks to which they are accountable (across countries, institutions,

organizations, and more), and this can make cooperation very difficult. If, however, they were designed together, they could operate from the same understanding then feed it back into their management structures in ways that make sense and make it much easier to work together down the road.

With these issues in mind, policy design and service design solutions could make direct, Somali-led contributions. Policy design centers in Somalia that employ a heterogeneous staff of designers, researchers, and technical experts of design thinking could add tremendous value in designing public policies and services in Somalia. PDCs can work with state institutions and help create novel initiatives to solve public problems and deliver services better. They may also operate as centers that connect policy maker's more utopian desires with citizens' grounded and practical viewpoints. The centers can build a strong partnership with certain government entities and international donor organizations or agencies that work toward collective policies by locating and analyzing societal problems from various outlooks, innovating, testing, and creating prototypes for their practical application.

The Public Sector Capacity Injection Project for Somalia, which was developed to improve the human resources capacity of several state and federal institutions, can be taken as an example of how such centers would improve designing policies by framing solutions differently. The CIP has been in progress since 2015 and has a total budget of US$ 40 million, according to the World Bank. Policy design centers can help the government and international partners design similar projects for Somalia using human-centered approaches.

PDCs can work closely with the international donor organizations and agencies as they have their response system to deliver services. Apart from the service structure, which has been functioning for a long time, policy design centers can help craft solutions to public problems by incorporating the most vulnerable and in-need population groups and designing potential steps using a human-centered approach. Such centers can do so because of their capacities to use various methods to understand, generate, and apply important local or indigenous knowledge, while international agencies mainly comparatively apply policies designed for other countries. It is often unhelpful to expect an impactful solution in applying a similar design method while the local actors, culture, and language are different. If an international donor organization even attempts to tailor a policy design that fits into the local environment, the cost would be significantly higher compared to the likely spending of local PDCs. Therefore, there is a need to shift the attention from top-down, international 'expert'-led policy designs to local, bottom-up, design center-led practices.

A prime example of how local design centers could play a key role can be seen in the Baxnaano project. This was developed and led under the name of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, but UN agencies run the operation and implementation of the project with a total budget of US$ 65 million (World Bank, 2019). It has been ongoing since 2019, intending to provide cash transfers to the poor and vulnerable people to increase

their resilience in the face of protracted humanitarian crises. The income support designed for the project is one of the standard 'social assistance interventions' that policymakers in many countries consider shock-responsive social protection (O'Brien, et al., 2018). However, in Somalia, instead of designing the project by providing cash transfers, just because policymakers in other countries have tested this, the Baxnaano project would benefit from adaption in collaboration with such local policy design centers in ways that reflect context-specific needs to achieve a better solution.

As cash transfer is the only means of social protection under this project, Policy Design Centers could help contribute to the inclusion of many aspects such as governance and livelihoods. It is important to note that providing cash grants alone may not always be the most efficacious method. However, the combination of cash and in-kind transfers or income generation intervention might seem more suitable. For instance, Somalis are said to be people with great creative energy and ambitious entrepreneurs. Instead of just distributing cash to the vulnerable people to spend in a short-term period, PDCs could interact with the beneficiaries and design an approach that can better respond to the needs on the ground and enhance earning opportunities of the recipients over a more extended period.

Putting a PDC to Work in Somalia

SPA has launched the Center for Public Policy and Service Design and aims to make the center advance collaborative design practices in Somalia. The center is currently building a network of experts to help it become a leading innovation center in Somalia. It is formalizing relationships with other policy labs around the world to share methods and expertise and become embedded in the most relevant and helpful global discussions on public policy. Furthermore, the center is looking to bring these efforts to the attention of government institutions as well as the international actors who share the same orientation towards effective and value-for-money policymaking and programming solutions.

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