

NEXTGEN SOMALIA: YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY FORUM

EVENT REPORT

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA
AIRPORT HOTEL
AUGUST 20TH, 2025



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NextGen Somalia: Youth at the Forefront of Peace and Democracy Forum, convened by Agents of Peace Somalia on August 20th, 2025 in Mogadishu, brought together over **50** participants—including government representatives, civil society leaders, electoral institutions, international partners, and Somalia’s vibrant youth. This landmark gathering amplified youth voices in governance, peacebuilding, and democratic transformation.

Recognizing that over **70%** of Somalis are under 30, the forum emphasized that youth must move beyond symbolic participation to meaningful leadership. The program featured keynote speeches, high-level panels, Q&A sessions, and multimedia presentations, centering on five thematic areas:

- **Youth in Electoral Processes** – advancing youth as voters, candidates, and observers while tackling systemic and literacy barriers.
- **Youth-Led Peacebuilding** – showcasing youth roles in mediation, reconciliation, and security.
- **Governance & Leadership** – strengthening collaboration between youth, state, and civil society.
- **Digital Advocacy & Civic Awareness** – countering misinformation and expanding digital civic education.
- **Gender & Youth Inclusion** – empowering young women and addressing cultural and institutional barriers.

The forum achieved four major outcomes:

1. **Intergenerational dialogue between youth and decision-makers.**
2. **Policy-relevant recommendations on conflict-sensitive electoral planning, voter education, and gender inclusion.**
3. **Amplification of youth leadership, with real experiences highlighting resilience against systemic exclusion.**
4. **Strengthened partnerships for mentorship, advocacy, and youth engagement programs.**

Key lessons included the urgency of bridging policy and practice, ensuring rural and marginalized communities have equitable access to electoral information, and investing in digital literacy to safeguard civic spaces.

Ultimately, the forum reaffirmed that Somalia’s democratic renewal and long-term peace hinge on youth leadership. By shifting youth engagement from tokenism to genuine inclusion, the event laid a foundation for sustained collaboration and policy influence, placing Somali youth firmly at the center of governance, peacebuilding, and national progress.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Somalia today stands at a critical juncture in its political and social transition. After decades of conflict, fragile governance, and recurrent humanitarian crises, the country continues to grapple with the challenges of state-building, reconciliation, and democratic consolidation. Central to these challenges is the question of inclusive governance—particularly the role of youth, who make up an estimated **70%** of Somalia's population. This demographic reality positions young people not as a marginal constituency, but as the very backbone of Somalia's future.

Despite their demographic weight, Somali youth often face systemic exclusion from political decision-making. Barriers include entrenched clan-based power-sharing arrangements, limited access to voter education, weak institutional mechanisms for youth participation, and the persistence of cultural norms that undervalue the voices of young people, particularly young women. As a result, a generation with extraordinary potential is at risk of political alienation, disillusionment, and disengagement from formal governance structures.

At the same time, Somali youth have demonstrated remarkable resilience, innovation, and agency. Across the country, young people are driving peacebuilding initiatives, creating small-scale enterprises, leading digital advocacy campaigns, and contributing to community resilience in ways that challenge stereotypes of youth as passive victims or potential spoilers. Their role in shaping narratives during critical moments—such as mobilizing for peace during electoral disputes, responding to humanitarian crises, and organizing civic education campaigns—underscores their capacity to lead meaningful change.

Globally, comparative evidence reinforces this point: countries that invest in youth participation record higher levels of democratic resilience, conflict prevention, and social cohesion. For Somalia, where the intersection of conflict, fragility, and demographic pressures creates both risks and opportunities, empowering youth to play a central role in governance and peacebuilding is not optional—it is essential.

It is within this context that Agents of Peace Somalia convened the NextGen Somalia: Youth at the Forefront of Peace and Democracy Forum. The forum provided a timely platform to elevate youth voices, build intergenerational dialogue, and align national and international stakeholders behind a shared vision of inclusive democratic transformation led by young Somalis.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

The NextGen Somalia Forum was designed with clear and strategic objectives that respond directly to Somalia's pressing governance and peacebuilding challenges:

1. Amplify Youth Voices in Governance and Democracy

- Create a national platform for young people to share perspectives, articulate priorities, and present policy recommendations on governance, electoral reform, and peacebuilding.
- Ensure that youth are positioned not as observers, but as active contributors to Somalia's democratic future.

2. Strengthen Youth Participation in Electoral Processes

- Address barriers to youth involvement as voters, candidates, and electoral observers.
- Promote youth-centered voter education programs that reach marginalized and rural communities, where access to information remains limited.

3. Foster Intergenerational Dialogue and Collaboration

- Bridge the gap between decision-makers and youth by facilitating direct engagement with government officials, parliamentarians, civil society leaders, and international partners.
- Build trust and identify areas of collaboration to institutionalize youth participation in governance structures.

4. Advance Gender and Youth Inclusion in Political Spaces

- Spotlight the role of young women in politics and governance, while examining the cultural and institutional barriers that limit their participation.
- Promote strategies for meaningful gender inclusion as a prerequisite for democratic legitimacy.



EVENT FORMAT & AGENDA

The forum's agenda was carefully curated to balance knowledge sharing, dialogue, and action planning. The day began with an opening ceremony, including a recitation of the Qur'an, welcome remarks from the Director of Agents of Peace Somalia, and keynote speeches from government and international representatives.

The program then transitioned into four core thematic sessions, each addressing a pressing dimension of youth engagement in governance and peacebuilding:

1. Youth in Electoral Processes
2. Youth-Led Peacebuilding
3. Governance & Leadership
4. Gender & Youth Inclusion

These were complemented by interactive Q&A sessions, plenary discussions, and multimedia presentations showcasing youth-led initiatives and success stories from different regions of Somalia. The closing session synthesized key outcomes and presented a collective roadmap for youth engagement moving forward.

Format

The forum was deliberately structured to be participatory and inclusive. Rather than relying solely on top-down presentations, the design emphasized dialogue, debate, and experience sharing. Each thematic panel featured a mix of policymakers, technical experts, and youth leaders, ensuring that discussions reflected both institutional perspectives and grassroots realities.

- Opening Ceremony: Inspirational addresses and framing of the forum's objectives.
- Panel Discussions: Thematic deep dives with expert and youth-led contributions.
- Interactive Sessions: Audience-driven Q&A where youth participants directly engaged with decision-makers.
- Multimedia Showcase: Short films and digital stories highlighting youth activism, digital innovation, and peacebuilding efforts.
- Closing Reflections: Consolidation of lessons learned and recommendations for follow-up actions.

This format ensured that participants were not passive recipients of information but rather active contributors to shaping Somalia's democratic and peacebuilding discourse.

KEYNOTE SPEECHES & PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The forum featured a high-level panel discussion designed to provide evidence-based insights, policy guidance, and youth-centered perspectives on the role of elections, peacebuilding, and governance in Somalia. The session was structured as a moderated conversation between key national stakeholders and young participants, with an emphasis on practical strategies for inclusivity, stability, and accountability.

Panelists

1. Mohamed Amin Hassan Abdullahi

Chairperson, National Electoral Implementation and Boundary Commission (NEIBC)

Mr. Mohamed Amin brings extensive expertise in electoral management, policy formulation, and governance systems. He has contributed significantly to Somalia's ongoing democratization process.

Key Questions Addressed:

1. Given the demographic reality of Somalia, what initiatives are currently in place to actively involve young people in electoral processes, both as informed voters and emerging political leaders? Furthermore, how does the Committee ensure that youth in marginalized or rural areas receive equal access to electoral information and voter education?
2. In striving for fair and credible elections, what strategies is the Committee adopting to build public trust, particularly among young citizens who may feel disengaged from political processes?

2. Ms. Halima Abdullahi Sheikh Rashid

Program Advisor, Somali Women Peace and Security Center

Ms. Halima is a seasoned advocate for women's rights, peace, and inclusive governance. With over a decade of experience in peacebuilding, gender equality, and civic engagement, she has played a central role in amplifying women's voices in Somalia's political transitions. She continues to advise programs that link gender inclusion with broader state-building agendas.

Key Questions Addressed:

1. What role do Somali women, especially young women, play in shaping democratic processes, and what structural barriers need to be dismantled to ensure their active political participation?
2. How can women-led civil society organizations contribute to enhancing electoral transparency, civic awareness, and community resilience during periods of political transition?

KEYNOTE SPEECHES & PANEL DISCUSSIONS

3. Mr. Abdiaziz Abdirahman Yusuf

Executive Director & Founder, Baasham Research and Consultancy (BRC Ins. Mr.

Abdiaziz Abdirahman Yusuf

Mr. Abdiaziz is a policy researcher and governance expert with a strong background in electoral systems, social cohesion, and conflict transformation. As the founder of BRC Institute, he has led several studies on democratic governance, peacebuilding, and institutional reforms in fragile states, with a particular focus on Somalia's unique political context.

Key Questions Addressed:

- Somalia's electoral landscape is complex, shaped by decades of conflict, clan-based power-sharing arrangements, and fragile governance systems. Ensuring that elections are conducted in a way that mitigates conflict and promotes stability is critical. Given the current socio-political environment, what strategies are most effective in ensuring that elections foster peace rather than exacerbate tensions? How can young people be engaged in these strategies to guarantee inclusive and stable elections?
- Based on your regional and international experience in electoral processes, what lessons can Somalia draw from other contexts that could be adapted to its own unique challenges?

Summary of Discussions

The panel emphasized the following key themes:

- **Youth as Catalysts for Change:** Panelists agreed that Somalia's demographic reality—where over 70% of the population is under 30—presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Effective civic education, mentorship programs, and youth-led initiatives were highlighted as pathways to meaningful inclusion.
- **Building Trust in Electoral Institutions:** Transparency, accountability, and community outreach were underscored as crucial for bridging the trust gap, especially among disengaged youth.
- **Gender and Inclusivity:** Women's active participation was described as not just a matter of rights but also of sustainable peace and legitimacy.
- **Conflict-Sensitive Approaches:** Panelists stressed the need for electoral processes that are locally owned, context-driven, and designed to reduce rather than fuel tensions.
- **Learning from Global Experiences:** Comparative insights from other African countries highlighted practical measures that Somalia can adopt, while tailoring them to local realities.



OUTCOMES & RECOMMS

The NextGen Somalia: Youth at the Forefront of Peace and Democracy Forum successfully translated dialogue into actionable commitments, generating a set of concrete outcomes and forward-looking recommendations. The event marked a shift from discussion to direction, offering clear pathways for strengthening youth inclusion in Somalia's governance, peacebuilding, and democratic transformation.

Key Outcomes

- **Youth Empowerment Elevated**
 - The forum repositioned youth as central actors in peacebuilding and democratic renewal, moving beyond tokenistic involvement.
- **Policy-Relevant Insights**
 - Panel discussions produced actionable strategies for conflict-sensitive electoral planning, gender inclusion, and the use of digital platforms for civic engagement.
- **Cross-Sectoral Partnerships**
 - The convening created space for government, civil society, international partners, and youth-led organizations to forge new collaborations.
- **Narrative Shift**
 - Young Somalis were recognized not as passive beneficiaries but as active decision-makers, innovators, and credible partners in governance and stability.

Recommendations:

Electoral Processes

- Launch youth-centered civic and voter education campaigns, particularly in rural and marginalized communities.
- Reform candidacy requirements to lower structural and financial barriers for young aspirants.
- Institutionalize youth observer networks to enhance electoral transparency and accountability.

Peacebuilding

- Support youth-led mediation and reconciliation platforms in conflict-affected regions.
- Provide targeted resources for grassroots peace initiatives and integrate youth into local security and stabilization frameworks.

Governance & Leadership

- Establish youth advisory councils at both federal and state levels to institutionalize youth engagement.
- Develop structured mentorship and training programs to prepare young leaders for roles in governance and public administration.

Gender Inclusion

- Implement affirmative action policies to ensure meaningful representation of women in governance and electoral processes.
- Establish mentorship and leadership networks for young women to address systemic barriers.
- Conduct sustained community-level dialogues to address cultural and social resistance to women's participation.

LESSONS LEARNED

The forum offered several critical lessons that underscore the urgency of moving from rhetoric to tangible action. These insights provide a foundation for designing future policies and programs that meaningfully engage Somali youth.

Key Lessons

- **Policy–Practice Gap**
 - While Somalia has adopted policies promoting youth and gender inclusion, implementation remains inconsistent. Closing this gap requires stronger advocacy, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.
- **Equity in Outreach**
 - Youth in rural and marginalized communities often lack access to civic education and electoral information. Equitable outreach is vital to prevent deepening political exclusion.
- **Youth as Peacebuilders**
 - Discussions highlighted that youth are not only participants in elections but also central peace actors whose active involvement prevents violence, strengthens reconciliation, and builds resilience.
- **Digital Divide**
 - Social media is a powerful tool for mobilization, but low levels of digital literacy leave youth vulnerable to manipulation and misinformation. Investing in digital skills is critical.
- **Women Face Double Barriers**
 - Young women navigate both gender-based discrimination and youth-related exclusion. Addressing this requires integrated strategies that dismantle structural, cultural, and social barriers simultaneously.



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