



# Mashruuca Dowlad-Wanaag

## Iskushuban District Authority

### Capacity Assessment Report

February 2025

Technical Lead  
Ahmed Ali Mire

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This capacity assessment presents a detailed review of the governance and institutional capacity of Iskushuban District Authority. With a total score of **64 out of 336** (19%), the findings reflect significant deficits in governance systems, human resource development, financial management, service delivery, and disaster preparedness. The district's structural limitations and underfunded services are compounded by a lack of formal monitoring and evaluation frameworks and limited community participation.

Despite these challenges, **Iskushuban** demonstrates important enablers for reform. There is openness to participatory decision-making, community trust in local leadership, and strong interest among stakeholders in addressing service and accountability gaps. If strategically supported, the district can transition from fragile administration to a more inclusive, accountable, and performance-oriented local government.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Short-term (within current planning cycle):**

- Initiate public performance reporting for transparency and accountability.
  - Establish structured community forums using diverse media (radio, SMS, public meetings).
  - Develop and institutionalise digital and paper-based community feedback mechanisms based on the district and specific community plans with KPIs quantified and fitting with the community forums for accountability.
  - Establish the base for participatory budgeting processes and basic financial reporting fitting with community feedback, and forums.
- Build a district disaster management plan and how this incorporates community with identified people leading the work linked in a committee structure fitting to wider governance and organisational work.
- Research how to improve local revenue collection systems, reinforcing participatory budgeting and community/social accountability under the plans developed
- Explore asset-based community development as a means to deliver services through public-private partnerships and social and solidarity enterprise development.
- Explore diaspora support with business case development, fitting with DRM and development plans, and disseminated through identified, appropriate, channels.

### **Mid-term (within council tenure):**

- Develop and implement a monitoring, evaluation, and accountability (MEA) framework with key performance indicators (KPIs) developed in participatory, inclusive approach reinforcing social accountability.
- Expand engagement platforms and physical outreach fitting to the seasonality of people moving in and through the district, for marginalised groups, youth, and women through inclusive planning forums and the further dissemination of plans and how to be involved in defining who is responsible for what and how they are being held accountable to deliver results (measuring by citizen feedback).
- With Puntland State technical personnel, launch capacity-building tracks in financial management, procurement, governance, and ICT. This to be built on a blended learning approach with specific input, distance learning, on-the-job practice supported by mentoring and coaching.
- Introduce clear job descriptions (fitting with Puntland guidelines), merit-based recruitment, and gender and inclusion guidelines in staffing policy.
- Institutionalise annual governance and strategy reviews against the established plans.
- With established procurement policies and SoPs, fitting to social and solidarity (MSME and cooperative) enterprise development, take forward public-private partnerships (PPPs) for co-developed, socially inclusive openly participative, infrastructure and service delivery.

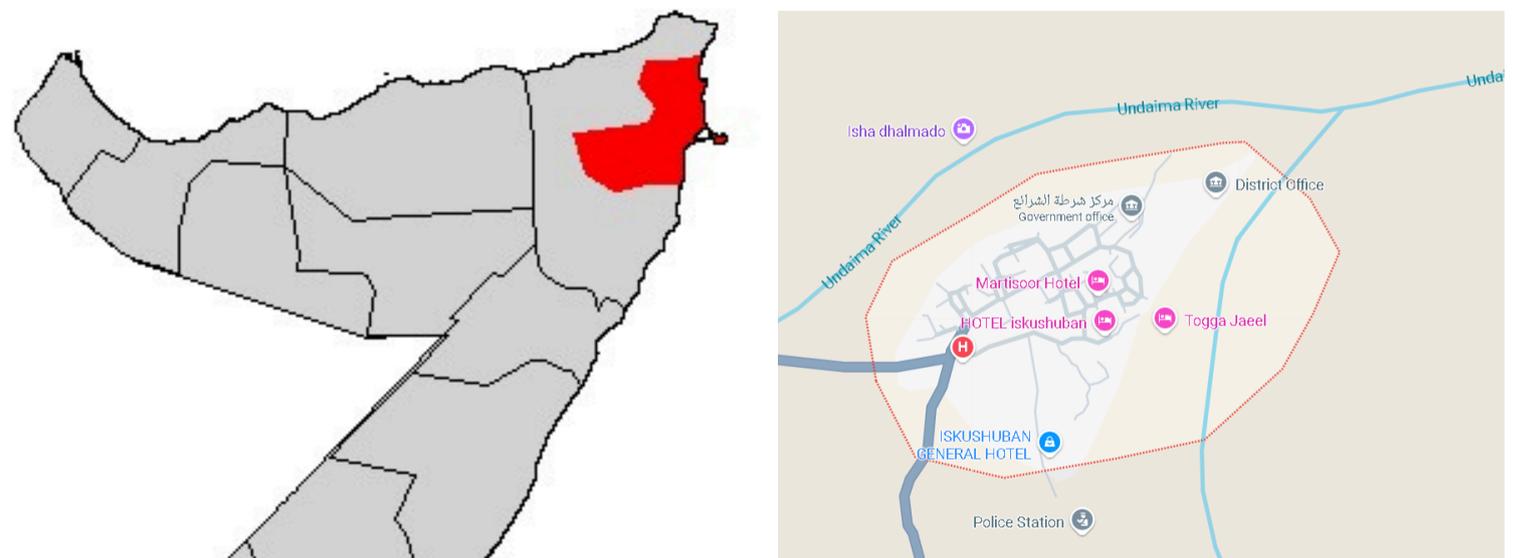
### **Long-term (aligned to Puntland development strategies):**

- Digitise governance systems including budgeting, payroll, all revenue and expenditure tracking, and service monitoring fitting with community scorecard development and wider incorporation in further reinforcing community/social accountability.
- Introduce performance-based contracts and career development systems for district staff.
- Introduce open access reporting dashboards based on community scorecards with grievance redress mechanisms.
- Through ALGAPL, support Puntland State to have policy frameworks to regulate and facilitate replication of PPPs and revenue diversification initiatives.
- Establish technical partnerships with Puntland universities and external development agencies.
- Establish procedures that reflect accountability through government and socially inclusive governance structures. This will allow the district, with State oversight, to manage financial flows related to disaster mitigation, response, and recovery. These efforts should align with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, reinforcing local accountability and community stability.

# INTRODUCTION

Iskushuban District, one of Puntland's oldest administrations in Bari Region, is a critical yet challenged local governance entity. While rich in historical and cultural significance, the district faces systemic constraints including financial shortages, human capacity gaps, weak institutions, and infrastructure deficits collectively inhibiting effective service delivery and development. These structural weaknesses have created a governance paradox – where Iskushuban plays an essential role in regional administration yet struggles to fulfil its basic mandates.

## OVERVIEW OF ISKUSHUBAN DISTRICT:



Iskushuban District, located in the Bari region of Puntland, Somalia, faces significant governance and development challenges due to its geographical, climatic, and socio-economic conditions. The district's governance capacity is shaped by its vast and rugged landscape, limited infrastructure, water scarcity, and reliance on a pastoral economy. Effective service delivery is hindered by seasonal migration patterns, weak institutional structures, and inadequate fiscal resources.

Iskushuban's scale and topography complicates communication and transportation networks, making it difficult for authorities to maintain roads, establish administrative outreach, and deliver consistent services to remote communities (World Bank, 2022). Iskushuban receives less than 100 mm of rainfall annually. (FSNAU, 2006). This erratic rainfall pattern results in chronic water shortages, reducing agricultural productivity and increasing dependence on external support for water and food security (NBS, 2024).

The district's economy is dominated by pastoralism, with the majority of residents engaged in livestock herding with seasonal migration being key, presenting challenges for governance, particularly in population registration and active involvement. The livestock economy is vulnerable to climate shocks severely affect household incomes and food security. Other economic activities include frankincense collection, fishing, and small-scale trade. All these are underdeveloped because of infrastructure weakness linking production to markets. The absence of financial institutions in Iskushuban further restricts business expansion and economic diversification (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021) with limited socio-economic data meaning limited investment capability.

Local governance structures in Iskushuban operate under Puntland's decentralisation framework. The district government has a weak revenue base, with limited capacity to collect local taxes or secure adequate budgetary allocations from the Puntland government (Puntland Ministry of Finance, 2023). As a result, local authorities struggle to fund public services, infrastructure projects, and address disaster, humanitarian, causes and effects. The systems and structures can be learned through peer engagement and Puntland State policy, however, the district haemorrhages quality people due to expectations for better livelihoods and wellbeing.

Education services in Iskushuban are inadequate, with only eight primary schools across the district (FSNAU, 2006). Limited school infrastructure, teacher shortages, and low enrolment rates—especially among girls—are key concerns (UNCDF, 2021). Cultural factors and economic pressures force many children to engage in pastoral activities rather than attend school. Mobile education programmes have been proposed as a solution but remain underfunded and inconsistently implemented (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021).

Healthcare infrastructure in Iskushuban is similarly constrained with only one maternal and child health (MCH) centre and two health posts, which lack essential medical supplies and trained personnel (FSNAU, 2006). High morbidity rates, poor maternal health outcomes, and vulnerability to disease outbreaks, such as cholera and diarrhoea, underscore the need for expanded healthcare services and improved sanitation (NBS, 2024). Water scarcity is a critical challenge, particularly during the dry season.

Iskushuban is highly susceptible to environmental shocks and the district lacks adequate disaster preparedness mechanisms with adequate resources flowing to support prevention of catastrophic conditions fitting with social safety net development, (Ahmed & Yusuf, 2021)

# FINDINGS

## DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

### Grade B

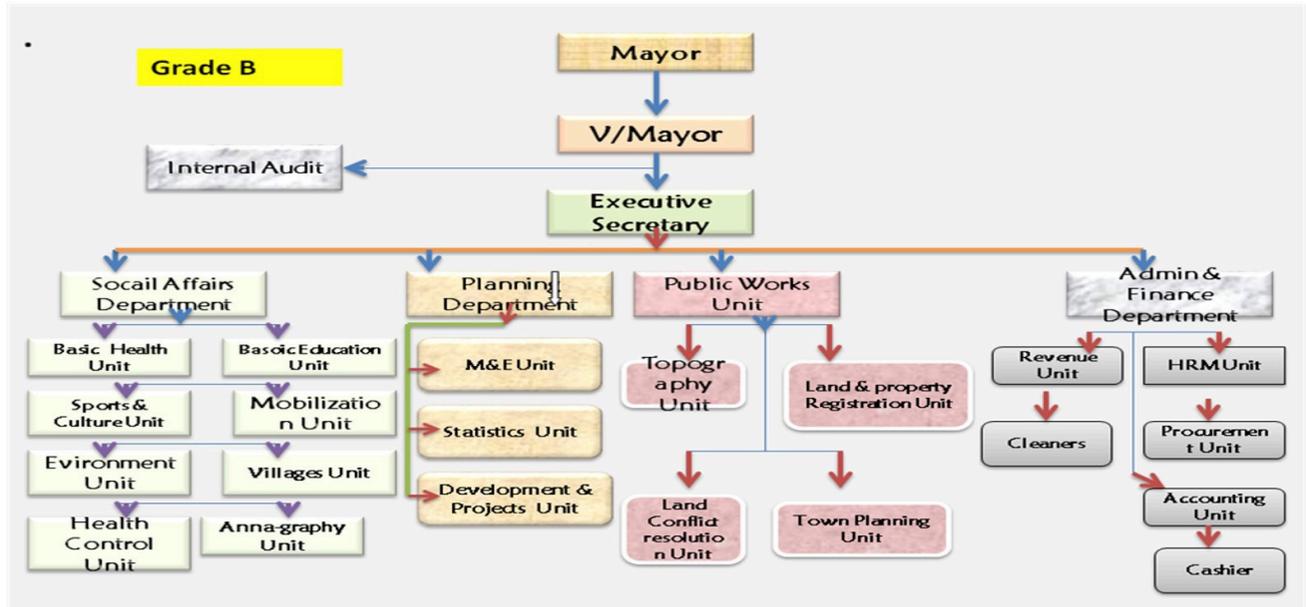


Diagram : MoIFAD District B Structure

Iskushuban District, classified as a grade B local government under MoIFAD, maintains the required four-department structure but operates only 12 of the recommended 21 functional units. While the existing framework meets basic organisational requirements, the unit shortfall potentially creates operational inefficiencies and service delivery gaps.

A critical component of Iskushuban's governance structure is the Executive Secretary position, mandated under Article 36 of Law No. 7. Appointed by the Minister of Interior, this key official serves as the operational lynchpin between policy and implementation, directly reporting to the District Mayor. The Secretary's multifaceted role encompasses financial management, staff supervision, daily administration, and safeguarding employee rights – responsibilities for the district government's functionality.

## DISTRICT CAPACITY ANALYSIS

Below chart presenting the ratings of Iskushuban District highlights key areas of performance and challenges across various sectors. The district achieved an overall score of 64 out of 336 (19%), reflecting significant room for improvement in governance, service delivery, and other key sectors.

## Iskushuban District Capacity

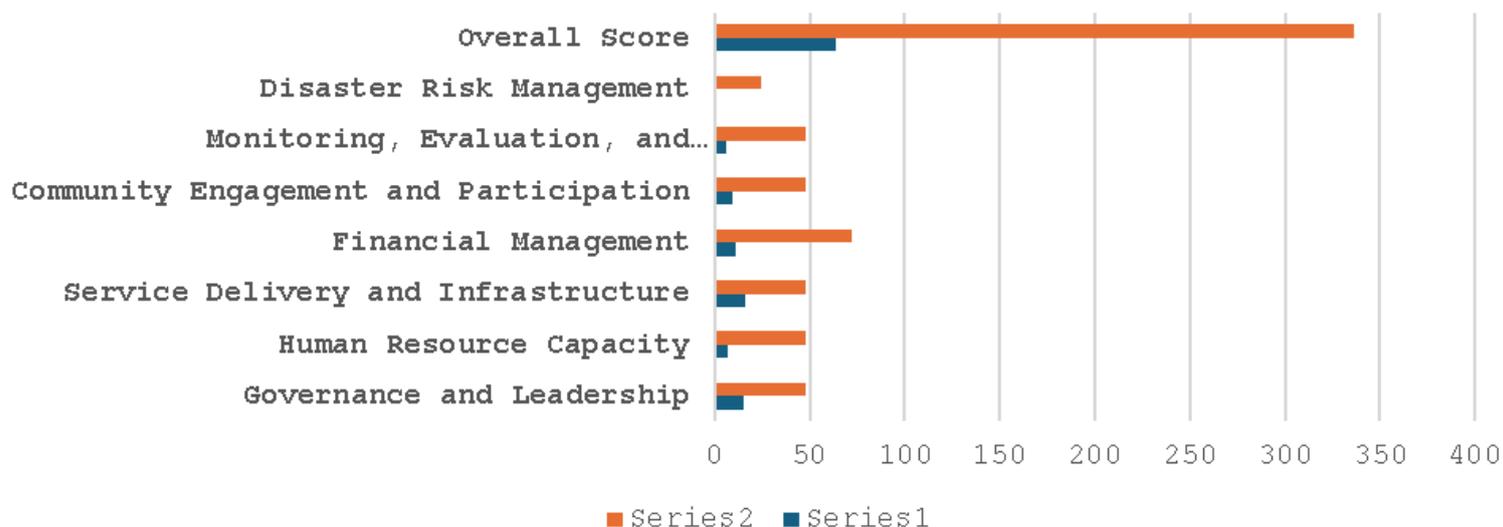


Chart 1: Iskushuban District Capacity Performance Scores Across Key Areas

### a) Governance and Leadership

The district has made progress in participatory planning and maintaining regular community consultations. To build on this, people in governance need to address decision-making where due process and structured participatory consultation remain largely informal. The need now is to structure multi-media engagement approaches built on a full district stakeholder analysis and planned community participation throughout any project cycle from defining priorities through the implementation and accountability feedback loops. With limited written policies, a paucity of mentoring and coaching to support people's and institutional initiatives, the frustrations are in how to structurally engagement in good governance work developing the social contract to reinforce good governance in the context of the district. A structured approach will facilitate marginalised group engagement on a consistent basis and build the feedback, accountability mechanisms.

#### Key Gaps:

- No strategic planning and policy implementation review cycles
- Lack of formal decision-making guidelines with a fit to good governance, social inclusion needs to change how resources are viewed, developed and used in an accountable way
- Weak interdepartmental coordination inside the district, district to district and with Puntland technical support teams

## **Recommendations:**

- Develop structured governance approaches and policies for inclusion and participative project management, reinforcing accountability for resource use and basic service delivery in financial requirements for the district to report in the government system and developing accountability on the basis of participatory (and gender based?) budgeting
- Institutionalise engagement approaches to prioritise people's needs, how any work is managed and accounting for with quantitative reporting mechanisms facilitating inclusivity and open accountability
- Embed inclusive planning in all decision-making processes as base for quality procurement and engagement of local resources, including people's skills and knowledge

## **b) Human Resource Capacity**

People are limited by lack of further education and exposure to improved ways to access knowledge leading to an underqualified and imbalanced workforce with only 20% of staff having a tertiary level qualification and no women in leadership roles. Staff turnover is high anecdotally linked to the poor employment conditions with no career path mapping shown with the absence of training in the last two years (all inputs have been donor intermediary driven).

### **Key Gaps:**

- No merit-based recruitment process to mirror democratisation of legislative councillor elections. Allowing citizens to view process and have confidence the district executive is the technically the best to deliver of jointly developed priorities and plans
- No formal assessment and evaluation of people noting the paucity of knowledge on systems for accountable government resulting in no structured training or induction for legislative and executive people
- Severe mismatch between qualifications and roles noting the need for further peer-to-peer learning and mutual support plus Puntland frameworks for structures and systems development.

### **Recommendations:**

- Develop clear job descriptions with input from proforma base ToRs from Puntland State noting their further support on structures and systems. Peer-to-peer learning for standard frameworks across districts and, where appropriate, sharing of technical knowledge and expertise.
- Launch capacity-building approaches fitting to career path development based on full analysis of structures and systems with what skills are needed to deliver on these plus take initiatives on good governance reinforcement
- Implement recruitment based on merit, gender and social inclusion
- Explore public-private developments and how aspects of work can be resourced through the social inclusion approach

### **c) Service Delivery and Infrastructure**

Service delivery is constrained by failing or non-existent infrastructure, limited resources, and extremely low coverage in rural areas. Potable water for people and adequate water (and related fodder and forage provision) for animals is critical where PPP approaches can be a key to unlocking developments. While sanitation and security are functional given the environment considerations although this does not mean investment in WASH and promotive health should not be undertaken fitting with greater community awareness of cause and effective of ill-health), education, health, and WASH services are insufficient. Education and health are not fully baselined although it can be said neither meet even humanitarian basic standard provision for people (and their animals in terms of veterinary services).

#### **Key Gaps:**

- Inadequate health and education infrastructure
- No water development strategy fitting to DRM, addressing causes of conflict and changing opportunities for livelihood development (addressing animal health and food security challenges)
- No maintenance budgets for any public infrastructure nor lateral thinking in how PPP or social and solidarity approaches can be used to develop and maintain critical infrastructure
- Marginalised groups excluded from planning and a shortfall in all citizen engagement through government in the implementation and satisfaction with any works or service provision
- Communication and engagement approaches reflecting the pastoralist community and their seasonal movements

#### **Recommendations:**

- Define priorities in essential infrastructure and develop SMART plans for their development
- Create dedicated maintenance funding noting PPP and social and solidarity approaches underpinning inclusive engagement and participation for all (public serving) infrastructure
- Institutionalise inclusive service planning, development, delivery and feedback through community engagement and development of related, community-engaged, feedback
- Develop a comprehensive, real-time, mapping and status of all water, health and education facilities alongside wider infrastructure mapping and analysis

## **d) Financial Management**

The district lacks a functioning budget framework, accounting system and links to Puntland's emerging formal audit systems. There is meaningful revenue diversification, noting the inability to develop a budget or build inclusive budgeting practices and open, community, accountability on income and expenditure. Revenue collection is ad hoc and dependent on narrow sources noting the lack of property demarcation and registration blocking any basic land tax and the use of digital money meaning the possibility of any value add or expenditure tax is in the corporate domain and still removed from Puntland State as well as the district government.

### **Key Gaps:**

- No budgeting process to involve people as the basis for justifying resource mobilisation and accounting for expenditure
- No audit or accounting established process to facilitate open books approaches for citizen engagement
- No digital systems to support development of accounting and accountability
- Lack of trained finance staff
- Absence of procurement systems

### **Recommendations:**

- Introduce necessary software and hardware as basis for budgeting and accounting processes facilitating inclusive budgeting (fitting to community engagement)
- Skill up finance teams in the use of accounting software and practices fitting inclusive budgeting and open procurement
- Explore resource mobilisation noting moving beyond finances to costing people skills, knowledge and time to deliver on plans through social and solidarity enterprise, PPPs and development of business/public investment concept notes in developing diaspora contributions

## **e) Community Engagement and Participation**

Public consultations exist but lack a structured and systematic approach. Feedback mechanisms are informal and largely inaccessible to women and marginalised groups. There is potential to build on community trust and improve mechanisms for regular engagement through a communications support approach allowing the use of different media to reach the different social groupings. This would facilitate strengthening participation of people throughout the cycle of defining and prioritising works, developing approaches based on local resources and capability to mobilise funding, then the monitoring and evaluation of performance.

## **Key Gaps:**

- No structured and agreed approach to engage, development and report on services and projects to be developed and delivered.
- Underrepresentation of marginalised and vulnerable groups highlighted by the movement of people and the paucity of mapping how they move and can be engaged
- Poor communication of any processes and decisions being taken on any resources being made available

## **Recommendations:**

- Establish public feedback platforms meeting people's wants and needs in terms of accessibility and ability to engage on all aspects of establishing needs, prioritising, being part of delivery and feedback on efficiency and effectiveness of work
- Undertake research in how different stakeholders (to be defined) can be reached and actively engaged in the above processes
- Structured consultations and active, community, engagement on performance through different approaches covering meetings, messaging and other approaches found to be of value from the research

## **f) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability**

There is no existing M&E framework. There are no KPIs used to track district performance, and decision-making lacks data support highlighting the need for base data and related skills to draw through information. Accountability remains dependent on informal complaints, with no structured grievance systems. The development of governance processes to employ the resources citizens have in the district will be a critical element in developing the data. However, it requires systems and investment in equipment and skills facilitating the collection, collation and then use of data to support the district throughout the PCM.

### **Key Gaps:**

- There are no defined performance indicators nor approach to assess performance
- No monitoring / review processes to reinforce the participation and inclusion starting to be developed.
- Use of different media to engagement all stakeholders in the MEL/MEA cycle including feedback mechanisms where there are grievances requiring confidentiality (to underpin approaches reinforcing stability achieved in the district through grievance handling procedures)
- Limited staff skills for the whole MEL/MEA and PCM cycles and no supporting equipment plus processes to reinforce developments on inclusion

**Recommendations:**

- Develop MEL/MEA framework with KPIs agreed in participatory approaches to reinforce governance and reinforce stability achieved
- Establish a district dashboard and reporting cycle with a complete communications approach to reinforce inclusion and sponsor PPP
- Train staff (and citizens) in data collection, collation and analysis

**g) Disaster Risk Management**

Despite recurrent drought and other climate shocks, no preparedness or mitigation strategies exist. The absence of early warning and coordination systems is a critical vulnerability requiring a concerted engagement based on the fragility of the district's environment where disaster risk management is not a separate approach but a fundamental element to be included throughout all district development frameworks. This requires a DRM approach built into the DDF and how the district is to build given people, and their livestock, are moving seasonally as a matter of livelihood and coping strategies are then built from this given climate change is exacerbating the weather extremes impacting primary production.

**Key Gaps:**

- No disaster risk mapping reinforcing the need for baselines to be developed, trends and patterns mapped and noted given possible causes of conflict over natural resources
- No trained technical people on predictive approaches, community engagement to take forward community action planning on prevention, mitigation and response
- Fitting with HR, develop capacity to manage different humanitarian response work – selection of beneficiaries, distribution approaches and the MEA elements, all fitting to social and solidarity and PPP approaches to reinforce government management and governance principles
- No integration with development plans fitting with the capability to use cash-based approaches to reinforce social safety nets and undertake employment-intensive infrastructure programming.

**Recommendations:**

- **Develop** a DRM approach to build business continuity in the district administration and a local preparedness plan reflecting what can be done with asset-based approaches, and when and how to escalate, bringing in other resources
- Build the baseline data and how the district is integrated in keeping this near real-time facilitating decisions at different levels of operation set by the criticality of crisis and resources to take action
- Integrate DRM in DDF and service planning as a cross-cutting consideration given the cyclical nature of shocks
- Engage communities in how to develop adapted ways of working on wellbeing and social safety nets to have realistic resilience programming

## h) Staff Capacity

Iskushuban District's workforce of 20 staff members faces significant capacity gaps that hinder effective administration. Gender imbalance is a key issue, with only 20% female representation (4 women) and none in leadership roles, limiting women's perspectives in decision-making. Educational qualifications are generally low: 40% of staff have only a high school diploma, 25% hold technical or vocational certificates, and just 20% possess bachelor's degrees. There are notable skill gaps in critical areas such as law, environmental studies, and ICT—only one staff member is ICT-qualified, and none are trained in the other disciplines.

The mismatch between qualifications and assigned roles further weakens institutional effectiveness. For example, the Head of Planning holds a diploma in education, not planning. More than half of the staff (55%) have less than two years of public service experience, especially in key departments like Social Affairs and Revenue & Taxation. Furthermore, the complete lack of professional development or training opportunities over the past two years has exacerbated deficiencies in governance, financial management, and digital literacy. Only 5% of staff possess ICT skills, severely limiting the district's capacity for data-driven decision-making and digital service delivery.

### Recommendations:

- Build HR approach, strategy and SMART plans, for the development of people inside the required systems and structures for the district. Complement with skills development for the development, delivery and MEA of the DDF
- Partner with Puntland institutions for long-term training on core elements – PFM, PCM and MEA
- Build good practice based on Puntland's gender and equity policy in recruitment and promotion for personnel development and career building approach to reinforce public service.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Contact Us

[www.punsaa.org.so](http://www.punsaa.org.so)

[info@punsaa.org](mailto:info@punsaa.org)