



# Every Voice Counts

## A Global Report on Women's Voice and Leadership



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## Foreword

My name is Hawa Abdalnabi and I am thirty-one years old. I live in Aljalbie village in East Darfur, Sudan.

Growing up we were very poor and at the age of fourteen my parents pushed me into marriage. Now we have seven children aged between two and fourteen years. Before the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme came to our village I used to stay at home, I didn't have any money and I didn't have a say in anything.

Through EVC, I received training and joined the Village Savings & Loans Association (VSLA) where I learned how to save money and start a small business. I initially took out a small loan to buy groceries to sell in front of my house. Slowly I built this up and I now run a grocery shop, a shop selling clothes and I have a peanut farming business, employing other people. I also now own a donkey to transport my goods.



The VSLA taught me the importance of speaking out and gave me new energy to develop myself and support other women to do the same. Men in our village are now encouraging their wives to follow my lead and I am advising them on running a business and how to participate in local decision-making.

As my influence started to grow, I was invited to attend village meetings which were previously only attended by men. There have been two major decisions made for our community following the involvement of women.

Firstly, a new midwife-led delivery room has been built. Previously, women had to travel to the city to give birth and women were dying because of that journey. Through CARE's Community Score Card process the community and the local authority were brought together and agreed that this delivery room was necessary. Our savings group paid for part of the delivery room and the doctor's accommodation.

Secondly, we have built a secondary school in our community for around 400 pupils. Previously, children were having to travel to the city for secondary school. This meant that girls were not going as the journey isn't safe and there wasn't enough money for transport. I wrote an official letter to the local authority from our community and a group of women, supported by men, led this process. As a community, we collected funds to pay for the school building, and the local authority will pay for the teachers.

I don't think either the delivery room or the school would have been built if it weren't for the involvement of women in decision-making. Before, men were just looking on whilst women were dying in childbirth or accepting that their daughters wouldn't attend secondary school. Thanks to EVC, women in our community are now participating in decision-making and our community is improving. Once women decide to do something we are determined and follow it through. Now I am speaking out like a man and people of all tribes are listening.

**“Now I am  
speaking out like  
a man and people  
of all tribes are  
listening.”**

I recently attended an EVC event to share my story and the local government invited me to become a role model and share my experience with other groups. Whilst I was away my husband took care of the children and the household chores, which is a new dynamic for us. I am now controlling the family finances and he is very proud of me.

My dream is to make my family happy, without financial worries, and for all my children to have the opportunity to go to university. I have started my secondary education and then I would like to complete university.

I also want to grow my businesses and buy a vehicle.

Supporting women to participate in decision-making and have their voices heard is so important. It not only benefits individual women like me, but it also has a lasting impact on our communities. I want to see more women in my community and around the world growing their influence. Imagine the impact if all women had the same opportunities as me!

**Hawa Abdalnabi, Entrepreneur, Sudan**

**“I want to see more women in my community and around the world growing their influence.”**





# Introduction

Every day, we see women living in fragile settings across the globe demonstrating great power and resilience. We know these women have ideas that will change their communities for the better. However, few have the opportunity to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. CARE's Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme, which ran from 2016–2020 in Afghanistan, Burundi, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan, aimed to change that status quo.

Despite making up half the population, women around the world are under-represented in political processes, currently holding just 24.5% of legislative seats.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, laws that discourage women's economic opportunities such as access to institutions, property and jobs, exist in 155 out of 173 countries.<sup>2</sup> In fragile settings, women are often structurally excluded from community and political decision-making. In addition, the average age in fragile settings is significantly lower than in other parts of the world, so the inclusion of youth in decision-making in certain EVC countries was critical.

EVC placed collaboration and dialogue at its core, bringing together men and women, citizens and local leaders. In cooperation with CARE country offices and partners, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Hague Academy for Local Governance and RNW Media, we fought to shift discriminatory social norms, supported women and youth to use their voice, and trained local authorities and civil society organisations to influence and implement more inclusive governance processes. From village elders agreeing to include women in local elections to civil society organisations helping to improve laws protecting women from violence, the impact of this programme was undisputable.

## Empowered women & youth

To support women and youth to advocate for themselves, we strengthened their understanding of their rights and supported them to establish groups through which they could collectively increase their impact. Over the past five years, we saw a marked increase in self-confidence, where women and youth were participating in decision-making, taking up leadership roles and speaking out on issues that were important to them. In total we saw 50,618 people with improved awareness of their rights.

**“EVC placed collaboration and dialogue at its core.”**

### Shifting social norms

Shifting discriminatory social norms cut across every aspect of EVC's work and contributed to both informal and formal power holders becoming more responsive and women and youth becoming more empowered. We saw community-wide behavioural changes, such as reductions in child marriages and domestic violence. As harmful practices reduced, so did perceptions about the role of women in decision-making. Women were finally beginning to influence decisions that affected their own lives in their homes and communities.

### Strengthened civil society

We trained local organisations and helped them build coalitions, so that they could advocate for their communities. Combined, these activities strengthened the capacity of 238 civil society organisations. Within the local civil society organisations that we worked with, we saw an increase in lobby and advocacy knowledge and skills. Together, these organisations were able to influence the implementation of 68 different laws and policies, positively affecting the lives of women and youth.

### Responsive power holders

We trained 221 public authorities in inclusive governance and they implemented 54 action plans as a result. We saw multiple local governments promoting increased participation of, and accountability to, women and youth in local planning. We also found that male power holders who were opposed to gender equality and inclusiveness at the start of EVC, are now in favour of it.

Many of the changes that were made through EVC will have a lasting impact. However, barriers persist, and inclusive governance must continue to be a priority if we are to ensure gender equality in these fragile settings, as a condition for genuine sustainable development.

### **Reintje van Haeringen** **Chief Executive, CARE Netherlands**



<sup>1</sup> *Women in National Governments Around the Globe*. Congressional Research Service (2019).

<sup>2</sup> *Governance and Women's Economic and Political Participation: Power Inequalities, Formal Constraints and Norms*. World Bank (2017).





# Programme Impact:

## Empowered

## Women & Youth

In Every Voice Counts (EVC) countries, women and youth are structurally excluded from community and political decision-making, often resulting in laws, policies and services that do not adequately reflect their needs. EVC focused on strengthening the inherent capacities of women and youth through training, forming community and savings groups and providing them with the opportunity to advocate for themselves.



**“In the past  
decisions were  
made for me,  
but now I am  
participating  
in making the  
decisions.”**

*Female VSLA member*

### Springboard to participation

There is a clear link between economic empowerment and public participation as women with independent financial means are able to become more active and influential in their communities. In three countries, EVC supported women through the creation of Village Savings & Loans Associations (VSLAs). Women took on leadership roles within the savings groups, resulting in increased confidence to speak out and be heard in their communities.

Following EVC's awareness campaigns in Sudan, traditional village leaders supported women to access formal financial services by providing collateral and other support. This resulted in groups of women being able to receive previously inaccessible loans to grow their enterprises. As women's economic status grew, so did respect for them. In many cases, this led to women being invited to participate in community decision-making, including in traditional spaces where women had never been invited before.



*Josee Uwizeyimana from Rwanda participated in EVC training.*



### Unprecedented participation

In Burundi, PCDC is the Communal Community Development Planning Process through which five-year plans are developed and budgeted for. Previously, women were not engaging in decision-making that affected their lives, however, following EVC awareness sessions and training, there was a marked change in women's attitudes to involvement. Following EVC advocacy efforts, central government ordered local authorities to include women and girls in planning and development committees and for the first time, women were involved in the 2019–2023 PCDC. In one instance, 120 women from six savings groups gathered together to exchange ideas to present to PCDC planning teams. In Vumbi, the local administrator selected seven women out of twenty people to become members of the PCDC planning team. Of these seven women, four were elected to represent their community at the zonal level, which was unprecedented.

### Advocating for themselves

In Somalia, young people were trained in advocacy, leadership, public policy formulation and inclusive governance. Following this, the EVC team set up a formal dialogue between youth and the Ministry of Labour, Youth and Sports. This gave young people in both Puntland and South-West State an opportunity to directly influence the youth policy and its implementation. One amendment that they succeeded in getting passed was the inclusion of language addressing the specific needs of female youth. EVC capacity strengthening also led to an increase in youth participation in the 2018 state level elections.

In Afghanistan, the EVC team established 80 local women's Community Advocacy Groups, creating a safe environment for women to come together to influence local decision-making. Through these groups, women were trained in rights awareness, social accountability, participatory planning, discriminatory social norms and advocacy. These groups contributed to the reporting of, and ultimately reduction in, harmful practices such as early marriages. The women also advocated for the enrolment of girls in schools, resulting in a shift in attitudes and families allowing their daughters to attend secondary school.

**“Young men  
and women have  
risen up. They  
have challenged  
the status quo.”**

*Mohamed Hamud,  
CARE International in Somalia*



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## The Chief tackling gender-based violence

Sylvie Twagirayezu, aged forty-two, became Chief of Kibimba in 2020, a hill community in Burundi. She lives with her husband, their five children and four orphaned children.

Sylvie herself was orphaned at a young age, she explains: “I lost both my parents to the civil war when I was only thirteen. I am the oldest of seven children so I had to leave school to take care of them. I was selling bananas and drinks to feed them.” These entrepreneurial skills have served her well and she now runs a drinks business with her husband.





Sylvie came into contact with the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme through her Village Savings and Loans Association, of which she is President. Sylvie and other women from her community were trained in women's leadership and women's role in decision-making.

As a result of the EVC training, Sylvie was inspired to run for public office as Chief of her community. She explains: "EVC really opened my eyes. With the knowledge I got from the programme, I felt the need to run in the 2020 elections. I saw the struggles that women in my community were facing. They had difficulties raising their problems in front of men, and ended up coming to me, while I was not an elected official. I wanted to represent them, to be a bridge between them and the authorities."

She continues: "It was not easy at first. The men who were already in elected positions doubted I could be a good leader, arguing that I wouldn't give up my business, or that I have a toddler and I would not have time. I almost gave up. But the women in the savings groups supported me all the way and I received 86% of the votes. I have great compassion for my community, I listen to those in need. I think that's one of the

**"Now women are no longer afraid to be part of decision-making bodies."**

reasons that I was elected almost unanimously. I can proudly say I'm now representing them well. Now women are no longer afraid to be part of decision-making bodies."

Since becoming Chief, Sylvie has already identified the most vulnerable in her community and helped them with housing, as well as helped make the roads more passable. She also represents eleven hill communities through a government programme fighting gender-based violence. Her dedication is unwavering, she adds: "My greatest ambition is to contribute to ensuring that there is no more violence against women in our community. I want Kibimba to be an example to surrounding communities, so that others can learn from us."

She concludes: "I would encourage other women to get involved in associations and to get elected into decision-making bodies. I believe that when we are more numerous, there will be less violence against women."





## Programme Impact: **Shifting** **Social Norms**

Discriminatory social norms linked to harmful practices, such as gender-based violence and early marriage, are key barriers to women's public participation. Women are often solely responsible for domestic work and men are usually expected to be the income generator and only decision-maker in the household. The Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme used a number of interventions to shift those norms, including engaging with power holders, running campaigns and working with role models.



### Engaging Imams

EVC worked with informal power holders, such as religious and traditional leaders, to challenge deep-rooted social norms. In Afghanistan, in consultation with government officials and religious leaders, booklets were developed addressing discriminatory social norms and women's rights. The booklets use Islamic references and verses from the Quran to discourage harmful practices. Imams received training and then addressed these issues during Friday prayers.

Whilst harmful practices have not been eliminated, a reduction in early marriages and an increase in girls staying in school has been seen. There has also been an increase in women's participation in decision-making spaces.

### Impactful campaigning

In Burundi, EVC partner RNW Media trained CARE staff, partners and the media in running campaigns aimed at challenging discriminatory social norms. The 2019 campaign focused on women's role in the household and public sphere, targeting community members through online and offline campaigns, supported by celebrities. Extraordinary change was seen in Giheta where Alexis

Manirakiza, the local administrator, fully embraced the campaign by bringing multiple organisations together and organising events. He also made a structural change by waiving the obstructive marriage registration fee in his community, as women in Burundi can only run for election if they are legally married. Alexis also now ensures equal gender relations are discussed during his weekly meetings with village chiefs.



*Administrator Alexis Manirakiza from Burundi speaking at a campaign event*



The campaign led to changed attitudes amongst public authorities about women's political participation and community leaders were mobilised to support the election of women during the 2020 elections. Men also began committing to include their wives in household decision-making. Using radio opened up space for women to share their experiences publicly and there are now weekly radio shows to address discriminatory social norms, as well as ongoing social media activities.

### Influencing from within

Identifying and working with community members as role models was also highly effective. In Rwanda, 100 male role models were recruited. Each was responsible for targeting eight men in their village who were restricting their wives from participating in public meetings or where there was family conflict. The role models challenged power imbalances by encouraging men to help with household chores, so that the women could have time to attend community meetings and have their voices heard. Some of those women have now been elected into leadership positions.



In Pakistan, 210 Community Groups were established, each group was made up of one woman and one man. Like Rwanda, each pair was assigned five households to work with in their village. Their role included advocating for equal access for girls and women to education and health services and preventing harmful practices, such as early marriage. These groups played a key role in influencing parents to stop child marriages, as well as allowing women and girls to continue their education.

**“We supported women to talk freely and engage in public spaces.”**

*Jean Claude Kayigamba, CARE Rwanda*



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## The Imam promoting women's rights

Sixty-four-year-old Maullawi Naqib Ahmad is an Imam based in Kabul province, Afghanistan. He lives together with his wife, two sons and their families.

Due to civil war and continued unrest in Afghanistan, Mr. Naqib Ahmad has spent much of his life living in other countries, including Pakistan and Iran where he received his religious education and worked as a labourer. When he returned to Afghanistan in 2003, he started work as a religious leader.

As part of the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme, CARE and its partners have worked with informal and formal power holders in communities to support them to spread positive messages about the participation of women in decision-making and to shift discriminatory social norms.





**“Harmful practices  
have decreased in  
our community.”**

Mr. Naqib Ahmad participated in EVC leadership and communication training alongside twenty other Imams. He explains: “As part of the EVC programme, I have been encouraging people to allow their female family members to get an education and have access to health facilities. I have also been encouraging them to allow women to be involved in decision-making processes so that our community can prosper, and we can move away from harmful practices, such as violence against women.” The Imam has conveyed his messages during Friday prayers, the largest gathering of the week.

Booklets were developed as part of EVC, addressing the importance of supporting women's rights and ending harmful practices from a religious perspective. Mr. Naqib Ahmad explains: “As Afghanistan is Islamic, you need to find a way to express your message from an Islamic point of view to have an impact. These booklets have helped us religious leaders to find Islamic references on these sensitive topics, resulting in less resistance from the community. The community is very happy with the booklets, especially women and girls. Because of them, families are now better informed. We have already seen a decrease in negative social norms.”

Mr. Naqib Ahmad draws on his own experiences to spread messages of hope, he explains: “In my family,

I obey women's and girl's rights. I call my wife ‘light of the house’.” He also influenced change in his own family. His relatives wanted to carry out the negative practice of ‘badaal’ where brothers and sisters are exchanged in marriage to ensure close family relations and lower marriage costs. Through persistence, the Imam successfully stopped this practice.

The Imam has seen a number of positive changes in his community influenced by the training and resources provided through EVC, explaining: “One of my biggest achievements in my religious life is prohibiting people from practicing harmful social norms. In our communities, there has been a decrease in harmful practices, such as violence against women, ‘baad’ [the practice of resolving conflict by giving a daughter for marriage], ‘badaal’, and high dowries. People are also allowing girls to get an education and access public health services.”

For the future, Mr. Naqib Ahmad would like to see women have the same role as men in the development of the community. He closes by quoting a verse from the Quran on women's rights: “Consult and involve women while stepping into a decision-making matter.” (*Surah al-Imran, verse No 159, Holy Quran*)





## Programme Impact: **Strengthened** **Civil Society**

Strengthening civil society was a key objective of the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme. EVC mobilised civil society organisations (CSOs) and community based organisations, bringing them together for joint advocacy. EVC strengthened their knowledge and skills through training in women's rights, advocacy and inclusive community engagement. The programme opened up new spaces for dialogue between communities, decision-makers and CSOs. As a result, CSOs gained new status within their communities as they advocated for positive change.



### A seat at the table

When the EVC programme started in Somalia, there was limited space for CSOs to interact and negotiate with public officials. Following capacity strengthening and mobilisation, CSOs secured a Memorandum of Understanding between themselves and the Puntland Parliament, which guarantees a seat at the table for CSOs to participate in legislative and budgetary meetings. CSOs are now helping to set the agenda and are contributing to discussions of particular importance to communities. CSO advocacy has also resulted in women now being represented on the Transitional Puntland Electoral Committee. This Memorandum will ensure that, even if there is a change in administration, the involvement of CSOs remains sustainable.

**“Our participation in the parliamentary hearings increased our confidence and legitimacy, as we were able to articulate the community’s voice and priorities.”**

*Faisal Warsame, Chairman of Puntland Non-State Actors Association*

### Changing the law

Following capacity strengthening in Rwanda and Burundi, CSOs came together to advocate for changes to gender-based violence (GBV) policies and laws. In Rwanda in 2019, EVC partner Pro-Femmes, together with other CSOs, suggested GBV policy revisions to the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion. As a result, Pro-Femmes and CARE were invited to lead the GBV policy review process. Widespread consultations showed women wanted to see more localised GBV services and increased funding for GBV victims. The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion is now finalizing the new draft policy, which has had significant input from civil society.

When EVC began in Burundi, the government had just approved a new GBV law, but contradictions with other laws made implementation challenging. The EVC team worked collaboratively with other CSOs to review the law, gather input from women and advocate for changes. Following this collaborative effort, Parliament formally requested input from CSOs for amendments to the law. The process of updating the law is now being finalised.



### Advocating together

In all countries, advocacy groups were established to expand the capacity of civil society. In Pakistan, these were called District Engagement Groups and included CSO representatives, community members, media and government departments. Members were trained in advocacy and community engagement. The engagement groups highlighted village issues at a district and provincial government level, enhancing communication. They focused on laws and policies related to the empowerment of women, for example enforcing the implementation of the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

Through advocacy meetings with relevant authorities and community awareness activities, there has been a change in attitudes towards child marriage, and a number of child marriages have been stopped. It is expected that the engagement groups will continue their advocacy work after the end of the EVC programme, ensuring the empowerment of women and a strengthened civil society in the long-term.

**“CSOs now have the skills and tools to mobilise and represent the needs of their communities.”**

*Ahad Nawabi, CARE Afghanistan*



*EVC partner in Pakistan CWSA signs an agreement with the Women Chamber of Commerce*



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## The community worker reducing child marriage

Thirty-nine-year-old Shanti Lal is from Sindh province in Pakistan and lives with her husband and two sons. Unlike many other women in Pakistan, Shanti was fortunate to have parents who supported all their seven children, including their daughters, to pursue their education.

Shanti explains: “Being a girl, I gained a higher education despite the local taboos of not sending girls to school. Among my friends, I was one of the lucky few who achieved this. People were not happy that I was sent for higher studies to another city, they did not appreciate that I got a job and was working with men. I was fortunate that my parents encouraged me at every step of my career.”





Shanti has worked for seventeen years in community development and is now the Programme Coordinator for Parkari Community Development Programme, which promotes girls' education and raises awareness on civil and human rights. The organisation serves one of the most marginalised communities in Sindh, where women make up less than 16% of the labour force, compared to over 21% in the rest of Pakistan<sup>1</sup>.

Shanti explains that, through her work, she has enjoyed identifying skills and knowledge within communities, helping them to use these more effectively. Her organisation supports communities in a range of ways, for example by representing their needs with government or supporting them through training to understand their basic rights.

Since Shanti's organisation was connected with the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme she has seen stronger links being developed with the government. Following training, her organisation has also been able to raise awareness on harmful practices, such as early marriage within the community, resulting in a reduction in child marriages.

As part of the EVC programme, District Engagement Groups were formed in Pakistan to better connect

communities with public authorities. Shanti is a member of one of these groups, alongside representatives from six other civil society organisations. She explains: "The main activities of the groups are to lobby district and provincial public authorities on the implementation of laws related to women, such as the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013." Shanti proudly lists all the achievements of the group, which include: the establishment of a district monitoring committee to monitor early marriages; identifying budget for safe houses for women; and training for the Police on implementing the Act.

It is clear that Shanti is passionate about supporting communities to advocate for themselves and, in particular, for women to have a voice, adding: "I have experienced people not wanting to hear about the importance of women's rights, but slowly we have started to change people's mindsets and gain their trust. Families are now supporting their daughters to have an education."

She concludes: "I want to help communities to become stronger by receiving an education and for women and girls to receive their basic rights. People are now well aware of their rights and are more confident and independent to take initiatives and resolve women related issues by themselves. My message to other women is to be strong, independent and know your rights."

**"We are beginning to see change in our communities, people are now well aware of their rights."**

<sup>1</sup> Sindh Employment Trends. International Labor Organization (2013).





# Programme Impact:

## Responsive

## Power Holders

The responsiveness and accountability of power holders is key to the effective participation of women and youth in decision-making. The Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme used advocacy, training and CARE's Community Score Card (CSC) approach to address this. The CSC is a social accountability approach developed by CARE, promoting dialogue between citizens and power holders.



### Embedding the approach

Through the EVC programme in Rwanda, the CSC was used for the first time to advocate for the participation of women in Imihigo, the local government planning and budgeting process. Public authorities responded positively and grassroots women are now being invited to contribute to Imihigo in their communities. In the Southern Province, where EVC operated in five districts, the Governor agreed to embed the CSC approach across all eight districts, ensuring its sustainability. The Ministry of Local Government also hopes to introduce the approach across the country.

In Sudan, the CSC process was introduced through the programme, presenting women with a new opportunity to have their voices heard. In Hashaba village in South Darfur, following women's involvement in the process, the local authorities and community came together to repair six hand pumps. Furthermore, women from the Village Savings & Loans Association provided a loan to the local authority to purchase spare parts to maintain the pumps. This collaborative way of working resulted in a local service for the community, specifically benefiting women who are the main collectors of water. Despite CSC being a new approach in Sudan, local authorities are already adopting it into their work.

**“The Community Score Card gives everyone the opportunity to express their views on the issues at stake.”**

*Drosca Uwiongabiye, Community Score Card Facilitator, Rwanda*



*Women in Rwanda participating in a Community Score Card meeting*



### Implementing early marriage laws

In Pakistan, district-level Sindh government departments, including Police and Social Welfare, participated in training with EVC partner, Community World Service Asia. The training aimed to enhance the responsiveness of public authorities by increasing their knowledge of gender-related policies and laws, with a specific focus on the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act. The Act was passed in 2013, but its implementation was delayed. The training provided an opportunity for these government departments to better understand the Act, the importance of its implementation, and its connection to the health, education, decision-making and income of women in the community.

**“I was unaware of many of the laws and policies related to gender, but this experience built a strong perspective towards women’s empowerment.”**

*Junaid Mirza, Assistant Director of Social Welfare, Mirpurkhas, Pakistan*

Following the training, District Monitoring Committees became operational and 115 cases of child marriage have already been stopped. Furthermore, women’s police stations, complaint cells and safe houses have been renovated to make services more responsive to the needs of women. One Police Superintendent also started an awareness campaign for all district police stations on the implementation of the Act.

### Responsive clan elders

As well as increasing the responsiveness of formal power holders, the programme also focused on informal power holders, such as traditional and community leaders. In Somalia, a campaign was run to influence clan elders, promoting the inclusion of youth in decision-making. This is particularly important in Somalia where the population is relatively young. In Puntland state, the campaign contributed to clan elders electing 28 youth out of 66 members of parliament in the 2018 elections. In local council elections in 2019, traditional elders appointed 20 youth to join Badhan Council out of a total of 28.



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## The Government Minister promoting youth inclusion

Twenty-seven-year-old Hodan Said, based in Garowe, Somalia, is the Deputy Minister of the Puntland Ministry of Labour, Youth & Sports. She was fortunate to grow up with parents who supported her education: “I was blessed to have a loving and supportive family, which many of my peers did not get. That has given me opportunities to do well in life,” she explains.

When the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme started in Somalia, Hodan worked for the Ministry of Internal Affairs & Democratisation in Puntland. In this role, she witnessed EVC connecting young people with government officials, giving them the opportunity to contribute to decision-making. Hodan herself participated in EVC forums focused on the importance of including women and youth in politics. “The programme motivated and energised me.





At the time, I was involved in building the local councils in Puntland. The highest number of youth are now in Puntland Parliament and that is a huge achievement. I think that EVC has contributed to that through its awareness raising and trainings. EVC has given youth the courage to run for political office and get elected,” she explains.

Hodan has since become a role model both within the EVC programme and beyond, representing the possibilities for young people, particularly women. She explains: “It is different when you have someone like you representing you at the decision-making table. I understand the situation of women and youth and will fight for them.”

When discussing what is holding young women back in Somalia, Hodan is very clear: “The greatest barrier to young women having their voices heard is the attitude of clan elders. They prefer men and discourage and discriminate against women seeking office. I have seen many well-educated, trusted and experienced young women being held back because clan members and communities are against women participating in decision-making processes.”

As both a power holder and a young woman, Hodan recognises the impact she can have. Through meetings with clan elders and communities, Hodan has persistently advocated for the inclusion of women and youth in decision-making. She explains: “When we were working

on the selection process for local councils we were provided with lists of male-only prospective councillors. Sometimes it took many days to convince elders to include women in the selection process. I have contributed to changing attitudes and a great number of female councillors were ultimately nominated, some of them reaching deputy mayor. I have contributed to changing the belief in our society that women cannot achieve or contribute to the public sector.”

Hodan is no stranger to these barriers herself, adding: “I have faced some resistance, challenges and discrimination from both colleagues and family. I sometimes faced workplace hostility and was excluded from some work because of my gender. I overcame that resistance through persistence and a proven record of good performance.”

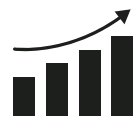
Hodan’s advice to other young women seeking office is to connect with and contribute to the community, adding: “They need to show persistence, patience, teamwork and decision-making skills when running for political and public office. I am also encouraging women who hold office to set a good example.”

As a young woman in public office, Hodan remains ambitious for the future, concluding: “My ambition is to reach higher positions of public service to be able to affect positive changes in the lives of my community.”

**“EVC has given  
youth the  
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elected.”**



# Programme Data



238

civil society organisations strengthened



726

community groups established with more than 10,000 members



55,362

people capacitated on lobby and advocacy



1,457

advocacy initiatives conducted



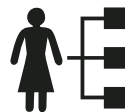
730

spaces for dialogue facilitated



221

public authorities trained



50,618

people with improved awareness of their rights



52

laws and policies adopted or amended



194

changes in social norms



68

laws and policies implemented

6 countries  
23 regions  
206 partners





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## The couple confronting domestic violence

Herman Shumbusho and Marie Savera Ufitamahoro live with their three young children in Nombe village, not far from the Rwandan capital. The couple has seen a complete transformation in their household since they became involved in the Every Voice Counts (EVC) programme.

Marie's childhood was difficult: "I grew up in a poor family and I was the fifth child out of ten. My dad did not have enough means to help us and I did not complete primary school. I thought marrying Shumbusho would be a hiding place for me. Little did I know that the man of my dreams would be tough on me," she explains. Shumbusho continues: "Instead of bringing home all the money I had earned in a day, I would come home drunk at midnight and beat my wife."





**“Before, I wouldn’t let my wife attend village meetings, now she is sharing ideas that can benefit the entire community.”**

It was when a role model from the EVC programme visited their home to discuss domestic violence, that things started to change. Shumbusho describes, “At the beginning it was not so easy. I would usually end discussions with Theogene the role model, but slowly I started to notice the importance of what he was telling me and then I started changing.”

Thanks to the regular visits and encouragement from Theogene, Marie started to earn an income through selling vegetables at the market and Shumbusho slowly started to value her contribution. He also gave up alcohol. Shumbusho explains: “I learnt that a husband and wife should respect each other and that every voice matters in a household and across the nation. The fact that men look only at their own interests hinders the development of women.”

Marie and Shumbusho are now making financial decisions together about their home and how to invest in their business. Shumbusho adds: “Marie also advised me to plan and we have now grown 500 eucalyptus trees and we are rearing goats.” They also now have water and electricity at home. Household chores are now a shared responsibility, from washing the children to cooking meals.

It is not just at home where the couple has seen change. Previously, Shumbusho did not allow Marie to participate in community meetings or a savings group. Marie explains: “I am now a member of a Village Savings & Loans Association from which I have taken out a loan to buy a small plot of land to grow vegetables on.” Marie has also grown so much in confidence that she has put forward ideas to the community assembly, including recommending that all women in the wider community join a savings group.

The couple has now been appointed as role models by their church, helping other families to resolve conflict. Shumbusho has also encouraged other men to allow their wives to participate in their community. Marie adds: “Women need to be daring in seeking more responsibilities. I have witnessed tremendous results from overcoming my fear to do business.”

Shumbusho is proud of all that Marie has achieved, adding: “Our neighbours are now confident that my wife can give a strong argument that can benefit the entire community. My wish is that she can share her testimony nationally.”





## About CARE

CARE Netherlands is a member of CARE International. We fight poverty by battling inequality. We offer emergency assistance and help improve community resilience to the effects of climate change and natural disasters. We contribute to more just and peaceful societies by promoting peaceful conflict resolution and inclusive governance. We also help create the right conditions for women to become successful entrepreneurs. What makes us different? We take a tailored approach: by consulting closely with local partners, communities and governments, we are able to determine what is required and what works. Because only by working together can we achieve sustainable results.

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