1.0 INTRODUCTION

Bareedo Platform is a non-governmental and non-profit youth-led organization founded in 2015 in Somalia by youth members to promote democratic values and institutions, participatory and inclusive society, open government, and digital rights in Somalia. Bareedo Platform, fully registered as a non-governmental organization in the state of Puntland in Somalia, serves the entire country. The mission of Bareedo Platform is to promote democratic values and institutions, a participatory and inclusive society, an open government, robust digital literacy, skills, and security, with the ultimate goal of achieving a country that upholds the core democratic values, principles, and standards, the human and political rights of all people, and the openness of government.

Bareedo Platform generally focuses on three thematic areas: a) participatory democracy; b) open government; and c) digital rights. In line with these three core focus areas, Bareedo Platform implemented three projects, including a) the promotion of meaningful and active participation of youth, women, and displaced people in the decision-making processes in Somalia; b) the promotion of citizen engagement through the innovative use of data and digital technologies in Somalia; and c) the climate democracy program in Somalia.

This report summarizes the key activities, achievements, challenges, and recommendations of the projects implemented by Bareedo Platform in Somalia from January 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023.

2.0 KEY THEMATIC AREAS OF FOCUS

Bareedo Platform focuses on the following key thematic areas:

✓ **Participatory Democracy**: The Bareedo Platform promotes inclusive, transparent, and accountable public institutions that contribute directly to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 16. The platform advocates for widespread political participation, specifically emphasizing the involvement of youth, women, minorities, and individuals with disabilities.

✓ **Open Government**: Bareedo Platform advocates and promotes open government principles to enhance public access to information by utilizing modern, open technologies. It also aims to reflect public needs in decision-making to achieve various policy outcomes within the framework of the 2030 Global Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

✓ **Digital Rights**: Bareedo Platform defend and promote digital rights by building citizens’ digital literacy and digital security skills, responding to emerging digital threats and monitoring of violations such as Internet disruptions, illegal surveillance, arrest of bloggers and the passage of hurtful legislation.
3.0 GEOGRAPHY OF FOCUS

Bareedo Platform encompasses the entirety of Somalia, except for certain activities specifically implemented in specific localities, such as projects specifically implemented in the state of Puntland in Somalia.

4.0 PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY
4.1 Promotion of Meaningful and Active Participation of Youth, Women, And Displaced People in the Decision-making Processes in Somalia

After decades of unrest, conflicts, and instability, Somalia is developing its nascent governance structure, but sadly, young people, who comprise 70% of the population, remain excluded from political processes and decision-making. Young people turned to negative coping mechanisms such as illegal migration, engaging in organized crime, and even joining violent extremist groups. Particularly, the infrequent engagement of young people from socially and/or economically disadvantaged communities undermines the process of constructing an inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous society. Young people lack the skills and experience around networking, campaigning techniques, lobbying, and public speaking to make their voices heard and exercise their role as responsible citizens.

In response to these challenges, Bareedo Platform builds the leadership and civic skills of young people, particularly those from marginalized communities who are entirely underrepresented in the social, political, and economic spheres. In particular, this project focused on the training of 75 trainers who can teach and deliver the skills they have learned to other young people in their community to maximize the number of young people with the skills and capacity to foster positive change on a variety of issues that affect their lives. The project activities were entirely implemented in the cities of Garowe and Mogadishu Somalia although they have the largest marginalized communities who are underrepresented in decision-making process in Somalia. The project equipped these young members with skills and practical experience around networking, campaigning techniques, lobbying, and public speaking, as well as how to use the media to influence the decision-making process and exercise their role as responsible citizens in the country.
This project also included awareness-raising activities that used social media platforms, educated the public about the importance of young people's participation in decision-making, and taught young people about their legal and constitutional rights and responsibilities to influence the decision-making process and exercise their role as responsible citizens in the country. These awareness-raising messages reached more than 800,000 online audiences in Somalia.

4.1.1 Bareedo Platform Commemorates and Honors Some Great Youth Members on International Youth Day

Bareedo Platform is a youth-led organization and marks International Youth Day each year on the 12th of August and celebrates the contribution that young people make in social and public matters in Somalia. In this year and third year in row, Bareedo Platform organized online campaign to commemorate the International Youth Day with hashtag of #IYD2023. The event was held online and most of the activities were related to honoring Somali youth members who contributed to the social development in their communities. The posters and personal impact stories of 5 youth members were featured on social media platforms during the commemoration of International Youth Day. The honor of these youth members was aimed to recognize their contribution to the community and inspire others to follow suite.

4.1.2 Commemoration of International Women's Day by Encouraging Women's Active Participation in Decision-making Processes in Somalia

Bareedo Platform organized an event to honor International Women's Day, a yearly celebration on March 8 that serves as a focal point in the women's rights movement. International Women's Day, with the hashtag #IWD, gives focus to issues such as gender equality, reproductive rights, and violence and abuse against women. In this event, Bareedo Platform focused on better
understanding the political barriers faced by women in Somalia and, in doing so, finding practical ways of increasing their political participation. Patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and cultural barriers, with women predominantly perceived as homemakers with caregiving responsibilities.

High-level officials, including female parliamentarians, deputy ministers of sports and youth from the state of Puntland in Somalia, activists, and stakeholders, attended the event held in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, on March 8, 2023.

The officials made remarks about women's political participation, as well as increasing efforts to ensure full participation and equal participation of men and women in decision-making.

“Despite some progress in women's participation in decision-making, the target remains elusive. Until we end these patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, we cannot reach the desired target.” says Sharmake Yusuf, a senior member of Bareedo Platform

“The recent local government elections in Puntland showed a good number of women councils, although the number is not significant. It is a good sign of progress. We must maintain these advancements and double our efforts. We must ask the parliament and cabinet to take further measures to ensure women's political participation.” Says Hodon Said, the deputy minister of sports and youth

The participants and women rights stakeholders commended Somali women for their increased motivation to participate in politics, which stems from their professional backgrounds, support networks, increased educational opportunities, and activism experience. Beyond this, women’s leadership in public spaces remains inadequate at all levels.

With the gradual progress of women’s participation in decision-making, the process has been making slower progress recently, falling short of the previous milestones to decline in women’s parliamentary representation in the recent federal elections in 2022, despite introducing a non-legally binding quota.
The key recommendations made during the event include increasing public perceptions of women's participation and decision-making in politics to overcome patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and cultural barriers that hinder women's full participation in Somalia's decision-making. The recommendations also included beefed efforts and commitment toward realizing the quota reversed for women in the federal parliaments of Somalia.

4.2 Promotion of Citizen Engagement Through the Innovative Use of Data and Digital Technologies in Somalia

4.2.1 Specific Kinds of Resources and Technical Support are Essential for Transitions to Digital Democracy

Somalia has the cheapest telecommunications and internet in Africa. The country’s private sector is taking advantage of this and increasingly moving into the digital age, but the public sector still relies on legacy systems, and 89% of the people would like to see the digitization of public services too. Citizens' participation and engagement are low in Somalia due to insecurity, political instability, and the absence of a democratic governance system. Despite these challenges, Bareedo Platform has been promoting the adoption of e-participation, with a focus on local governments in Somalia. With the support of Bareedo and the Garowe City Government, the capital city of Puntland State in Somalia successfully adopted the Talo-Wadaag e-participatory platform for the first time, a move that had previously seemed impossible. Identitizens in Garowe adopted and used the platform quite successfully. The existence of a peaceful and stable atmosphere and previous face-to-face engagement are some factors that helped Garowe do this easily.

As part of these initiatives, Bareedo Platform conducted research that studied the impact of e-participatory platforms on citizens in Somalia cities such as Garowe and Mogadishu. The study also investigated how other local governments replicated e-participatory platforms. The research paper describes experiences in Somalia to introduce the Talo-Wadaag e-participation platform to enhance democratic processes. The research concludes that technical and financial limitations, coupled with a lack of citizen awareness and trust, hampered e-participation despite its enthusiasm and promise. To overcome these challenges, the paper recommends expanding e-participation with more resources, enhancing accessibility through technical support, awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building, and promoting e-democracy and civic education among the public.

The full research report can be found here: “Adoption of e-participation by the local governments of Garowe and Mogadishu in Somalia”,

4.2.2 Side Event on Digital Participation at the OGP Global Summit 2023
The 2023 OGP Global Summit was hosted by The Estonian Government in Tallinn, Estonia on September 6-7. The Summit brought together the Heads of State and Government, representatives of civil society and policy makers around the world. The Summit focused on open government in the digital age, the potential of technology to make governance and policy-making more transparent and accountable, and the preservation of democracy.
In collaboration with People Powered members like Participatory Factory, i4Policy, SFU, and People Powered, Bareedo Platform organized a side event to engage summit attendees in interactive discussions and knowledge sharing about digital participation tools, platforms, and systems for social problem-solving.

In this event, Bareedo Platform reminded participants briefly about digital participation (using, for example, the People-Powered-Developed Guide to Digital Participation Platforms). The Digital Participation Platforms Resource Center at People Powered also shared a brief update on the introduction of the e-participatory system by two local governments in Somalia and how this has shaped the participation and engagement of the residents, particularly the marginalized groups.

The side event produced some positive results, such as participants' increased interest in and understanding of digital participation, as well as their understanding of the tools, platforms, and systems available for digital participation and how to use them to address social issues in their workplaces or countries.

4.3 Climate Democracy Program in Somalia

4.3.1 Somali Rural Community Water Management Manual
Somalia is currently facing the worst water scarcity in many decades as a result of successive droughts. The amount of freshwater per person has been decreasing over time, going from 2,087 cubic meters in 1962 to 411 cubic meters in 2017 according to a World Bank report 2020. This is well below the ideal level of 1000 cubic meters per person set by the UN. Some 70% of the rural population has limited access to safe drinking water, according to the Save the Children report from February 2021.

The persistent reduction of fresh water and repeated droughts, mainly attributed to the climate crisis, have resulted in fierce competition for water resources that cause fighting in rural communities in Somalia. While many factors related to climate change contribute to water conflicts, a lack of community-based governance structures over water management and access has remained at the heart of every conflict.

With a one-year fellowship from the Bertha Foundation in 2022, Abdikhayr Mohamed Hussein, a senior member of Bareedo Platform and Bertha Challenge Fellow 2022, worked with Somali rural communities, particularly clan elders and Somalia water stakeholders, throughout 2022 and developed a guideline manual for the management of rural water resources and the reduction of conflict over water resources among communities in the rural areas of Somalia.

The manual, which is the first of its kind is meant to help Somalia’s traditional elders and rural community leaders set up their own community-based water management structures to help them manage and share water resources equally and find solutions to water-related conflicts.

The manual, which is available in Somali and English, is now available to the public and can be downloaded from the below link.

5.0 OPEN GOVERNMENT

5.1 Bareedo Platform Observes Open Data Day in Somalia

In Garowe, Somalia, Bareedo Platform organized an event to observe Open Data Day (ODD). Open Data Day is an annual celebration of open data all over the world, where groups from around the world create local events to promote open data or use open data in their communities. The event, which was held on March 5, 2023, was attended by different participants from the government, civil society, and private sector and focused on the challenges and opportunities around the openness of data. The participants of the event underlined the challenges hindering full and unrestricted access to data in Somalia, which include limited awareness of the government on open data principles and also the value of open data for the government, but the government institutions and all other data-holding stakeholders still maintain a culture of secrecy and closeness. Another challenge is the limited public awareness and understanding of the open data, as well as the limited use of the limited open data available in Somalia.

During the event, the participants commended the Ministry of Finances of specific authorities in Somalia, such as Puntland and Somaliland, and the federal government of Somalia for opening their government budget reports and data to the public. These reports are the only open data available in Somalia. Only 3 out of 7 finance authorities in Somalia have made their government budget reports open to the public, while the rest have not yet done so. Except in Somaliland and Puntland, the Ministry of Finance of the Federal Government of Somalia publishes such data infrequently, and there seems to be a data gap of years.

Despite the existence of a conducive environment and necessary policies and strategies, data is not open, and the government and all other actors still maintain a culture of secrecy. The limited concentration of implementation of open data policies and strategies adopted by the Somali government and state authorities in Somalia, as well as the lack of funds and resources dedicated to the promotion of these initiatives, make the process and progress very slow.

The participants also stressed the importance of open data, which enables citizens to be much more directly informed and involved in decision-making. This is more than transparency; it's about creating a full "read/write" society—not just knowing what is happening in the process of governance but being able to contribute to it.
In the event’s conclusion, the participants called for more efforts and investment in opening data to the public and educating the public about the importance and use of open data. The participants also underlined the importance of organizing forums and talk shows to further discuss the challenges hindering the full adoption of open data in Somalia.

The action points included organizing a talk show to engage the decision-makers and open data activists in Dhusamareb of Galmudug State, Baido of Southwest State, and Kismayo of Juballand State in Somalia to push these state authorities to adopt open data principles.

6.0 DIGITAL RIGHTS

6.1 Monitoring of Internet Shutdown and Surveillance in Somalia

6.1.1 Internet Connection Was Cut Off in Las’anod Town in Somalia for 12 Hours

The security forces of Somaliland, a self-declared region in northern Somalia that broke away and declared independence from Somalia in 1991, forcefully shut down the internet access in the northern Somali town of Lasanod. Clashes between anti-government protesters and security forces started in Lasanod town on December 26, 2022, and have been ongoing for a week until January 2, 2023. The deployment of many security forces to Lasanod forced the local internet providers, Somtel and Golis, to shut down the internet connection early on January 1, 2023, and cut off electricity for several hours to control the protesters' coordination and document the brutality of the security forces. The night saw the restoration of the Internet connection, which had been unavailable for nearly 12 hours.

In the same way, Somaliland shut down the Internet in August 2022 to stop protests postponing the region’s presidential election. On August 11, 2022, Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition of which Bareedo Platform is a member, criticized the move. The return of this kind of violation on January 1, 2023, is unfortunate, and Bareedo Platform is calling on Somaliland authorities to end this and ensure free and open access to the internet.

6.1.2 Digital Help Desk

Somalia is the world’s most dangerous country for reporters, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. On a day-to-day basis, online harassment and censorship against journalists
and social rights activists in Somalia are on the rise. Most journalists depend on the Internet and digital communications for research, interaction, and news distribution. Journalists extensively use Internet and social media networks for news distribution, interaction with audiences without basic digital safeguards and for this reason, they come under constant threats in online settings by a variety of means, including by disseminating threats and disinformation, stalking and broadcasting private or personally identifiable information against them while authorities have set up dedicated teams who troll reporters and report them to Facebook’s standard enforcers in order to disable their accounts and silence critical media voices. According to a report by Amnesty International in February 2020, these growing threats have led to many journalists quitting their jobs and others leaving the country. In 2022, a small survey revealed that 89% of Somalian journalists had personally encountered security issues at work and were not familiar with the widely available strategies and sophisticated digital security tools that could safeguard them in the digital realm.

Bareedo Platform has set up a Digital Help Desk that provides timely technical assistance and advice to journalists, media organizations, and activists in Somalia who are under or at risk of a digital threat. The desk provided timely assistance and support for the following cases:

- 31 journalists and workers in the media
- 21 human rights activists / defenders
- 11 women-led organizations and feminist movements
- 76 women in politics or public affairs

The desk assisted 60% of the cases with technical assistance related to lost or hacked social media accounts, including Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Additionally, 38% provided tips and guidance on secure email services, data encryption, and the use of IP blocking services to conceal
sensitive online activities, as well as basic security and privacy features for smartphones, Windows computers, and online accounts.

7.0 PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING

Bareedo Platform reached out and secured new partnerships, collaborations, and cooperation with new partners, donors, and networks at local, regional, and global levels. Some of the partnerships secured this year include the following:

→ Bareedo Platform and the Digital Defenders Partnership (DDP) signed a regional partnership fund to implement a project aimed at supporting initiatives promoting online freedom and digital protection for human rights defenders and civil society in Somalia. This project will be implemented in 2024.

→ Bareedo Platform signed a collaboration agreement with the Somali Women Journalists’ Rights Association (SOWJRA), a women journalists-owned non-government and non-profit organization founded in 2017 in Somalia. Both Bareedo Platform and SOWJRA agreed to work together toward the promotion of gender equality, women’s political participation, and the provision of digital security capacity programs for women journalists and other vulnerable groups in the media.

→ Bareedo Platform joined and was admitted to the Optimists’ Network, a community for innovative local actors—those who have advanced democratic principles through the use of technology—to connect, share, inspire, and learn from one another and to be connected with needed resources.
Bareedo Platform maintained and strengthened collaboration and active networking with the following potential partners, movements and networks:

→ Bareedo Platform maintained close collaboration with People Powered, a global hub for civil society organizations promoting participatory democracy or direct participation of community members in making the policy decisions that affect their lives. Bareedo Platform’s program team actively participated in the meetings, collective initiatives and learning sessions organized by People Powered or among the member organizations.

→ Bareedo Platform also maintained a close relationship with Design for Democracy Coalition (D4D), a coordination mechanism between groups of democracy and human rights organizations around the world that are working at the forefront of technology and democracy issues. And also, Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC), the largest membership pan-African civil society organization and resource centre that promotes citizens right of access to information in Africa. Open Data Charter (ODC), a collaboration between over 150 governments and organizations working to open up data based on a shared set of principles.

8.0 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The year 2023 has been a challenging year, and unanticipated insecurity and instability in Garowe, the capital city of the state of Puntland in Somalia, and the seat of our headquarter office due to clashes and direct confrontations between local militias and security forces over
disputed elections, have forced us to shut down our office and freeze operations and the implementation of some important activities. These incidents delayed the implementation of some vital activities and disrupted our movement and plans. These unanticipated security challenges have been odd and strange for us, although Garowe City and generally the state of Puntland, an autonomous region of Somalia, have maintained peace and stability for the last two decades compared to the rest of the country, particularly the south and central Somalia, which have been in conflict and instability for the last thirty years. The repeated fighting and confrontations that have taken place several times in Garowe not only affected our operations, but also damaged our office building and endangered our staff’s safety.

As a result, we recommend the immediate adoption of a security and safety policy and plans to increase security awareness among all staff and office premises. The plan should include installing a complete and advanced fire safety and emergency system in the office, setting up emergency and evacuation protocols and measures, and training the staff on basic security and safety, as well as first aid.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Despite of unanticipated security challenges and hostile environment, Bareedo Platform implemented some impactful activities that connected these three projects: a) promotion of meaningful and active participation of youth, women, and displaced people in the decision-making processes in Somalia; b) promotion of citizen engagement through the innovative use of data and digital technologies in Somalia; and c) climate democracy program in Somalia.

Bareedo Platform implemented activities that trained 75 young people as trainers for leadership and civic skills to maximize the number of young people with the skills and capacity to foster positive change on a variety of issues that affect their lives. Promoted and advocated for active participation of youth and women in the decision-making process and taught more than 800,000 about their legal and constitutional rights and responsibilities to influence the decision-making process and exercise their role as responsible citizens in the country.

Bareedo Platform promoted citizen engagement through the innovative use of data and digital technologies in Somalia. Conducted the first research that identified the impact of current digital participation platform on citizens engagement and participation in decision-making process in the local governments of Garowe and Mogadishu cities in Somalia, and also possible recommendations and plans of expanding the platform to other local governments in Somalia.

Bareedo Platform promoted digital rights and safe use of digital platforms and as result, provided and assisted 139 journalists, human rights activists / defenders, women-led organizations and feminist movements and women in politics or public affairs in Somalia who have been facing digital threats and risks.