

COMPANION BRIEF TO POLICY PAPER 01 · 2026

Five tests for institution-building

Questions to ask before designing
institutional support in Somalia



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Before designing institutional support

Each test is a question a programme should be able to answer before design is fixed. None requires new research; all of them require a decision to be made explicitly rather than by default.

01 The power test	Have we tested this as an incentive, authority and political-economy problem before treating it as a capacity problem? Which of technical competence, budget, legal mandate, political authority, territorial reach or legitimacy is the binding constraint here?
02 The function test	For the function we are supporting, who decides, who pays, who delivers, who holds the information and who answers to citizens when it fails? How many of those five currently sit outside Somali public institutions, and which of them will this programme move?
03 The relationship test	What institutional relationship will exist after this programme that did not exist before it? If the honest answer is none, the programme may still be worth funding – but it should not be described as institution-building.
04 The transition test	Which functions move from substitution to partnership to transfer to public accountability, on what conditions, and by when? What would have to be true before responsibility changes hands, and who judges whether it is true?
05 The ownership test	Who decided there should be a programme, who controls its resources, who can change it during implementation, and who remains responsible after external financing ends? Consultation does not answer any of these.

USING THE TESTS

The tests are diagnostic, not disqualifying. A programme that fails several may still be the right thing to fund – humanitarian delivery, for instance, is justified on its own terms. The purpose is to stop programmes from being described as institution-building when they are substituting for institutions, and to make the difference visible at design stage rather than at evaluation.

The full argument, including the fiscal record and its sources, is set out in Radar Consultancy Policy Paper 01, *Beyond capacity building: rethinking aid, institutions and the Somali state*, available from info@radar-consultancy.com.