

BILAN SOMALIA: CONCEPT NOTE OCT 2022



WHAT IS BILAN?

Bilan is Somalia's first all-women media unit. Launched in April, this unprecedented team is made up of six women journalists with total authority to decide what they want to cover and how.

Based in dedicated offices in Mogadishu, their reports go out twice a week on one of Somalia's biggest TV and radio networks and periodically in international outlets such as the Guardian and the BBC.

They are blazing a trail for women in the media and shining a light on issues that are usually ignored.

In its first few months Bilan has:

- ▶ Produced reports on issues ranging from the rising problem of women's drug use to features on successful female politicians that have been seen by >3m people online, regularly outperforming content produced by male journalists on the same channels
- ▶ Brought in household-name journalists, including the BBC's Mishal Husain, ITV's Rageh Omar and Channel 4's Lindsey Hilsum, to provide training and masterclasses
- ▶ Set up content partnerships with the Guardian, the BBC and El Pais, to bring

Bilan's content to an international audience and raise the profile of Somali women journalists

- ▶ Secured global coverage in major print, radio and TV media and developed a network of reporters and media groups who are keen to work with Bilan and see it succeed
- ▶ Achieved huge recognition inside Somalia: from the PM's office, which has involved Bilan in policy consultations, down to individual women in local communities who call up to say thanks for bringing women's voices to the TV and radio; Bilan is quickly becoming a household name recognised for doing something new and doing it well
- ▶ Established an internship programme with two local universities to provide women journalism graduates a first opportunity in the media

More details, including links to Bilan's reporting, bios of the women journalists and selected coverage in major international media can be found on Bilan's website:

www.bilan.media.



“Some people might not like the fact that I play football and lead a media team, but nobody will ever change my mind.”

NASRIN MOHAMED
CHIEF EDITOR

HOW WAS BILAN CREATED?

UNDP Somalia created the project that set up Bilan. The project provides:

- ▶ **Funding:** We pay for Bilan's salaries, equipment, office space and dedicated airtime for their reports on radio and TV. All of these costs are set at rates competitive with local market prices for journalism and facilities.
- ▶ **Training and mentoring.** Our CTA, Mary Harper (ex-BBC Africa and an authority on Somalia), oversees a programme that brings in the best international and local talent to provide technical trainings and mentoring sessions on everything from how to record sound in the field to how to deal with harassment in the office.
- ▶ **Management, publicity, fundraising and partnerships.** The UNDP comms team, Mary and the ERID portfolio, run the project, promote it, fundraise and set up partnerships with international media and organisations like the Overseas Development Institute and the Marie Colvin Foundation. They will also handle anti-harassment activities, including lobbying social media platforms, and a new aspect of the programme that will allow women journalists in similar environments to share experiences and offer mutual support.

WHY IS BILAN UNIQUE?

It's the people. The project team's extensive media contacts and experience have allowed us to bring in world-leading media organisations and household-name journalists. Our local knowledge helped us to identify the best media partner and recruit Bilan's impressive team of women journalists

It's focussed and practical. By offering long-term training to a small group of women journalists, Bilan has created a new media institution that can genuinely compete with any other inside Somalia. This is real journalism having a real impact

It's impactful and sustainable. Partnerships with Dalsan and international media companies provide guaranteed channels for mass distribution both locally and globally and also offer a clear path to sustainability.



“As an all-women media house we are going to be able to bring taboo subjects into the open. Our sisters, mothers and grandmothers will talk to us about issues they never dare speak about with men.”

FATHI AHMED
DEPUTY EDITOR

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR WOMEN?

- ▶ Bilan’s stories are changing the news agenda inside Somalia, shining a light on ignored issues like women’s drug use and the treatment of women in prison and also highlighting women role models – from farmers who plant their way through university to businesswomen and politicians.
- ▶ Bilan’s reports bring women’s opinions and perspective to a mass audience, helping to start and influence debates.
- ▶ Bilan’s success is a concrete demonstration of women succeeding in professional life and in a sphere dominated by men. This is more powerful than any advocacy campaign asking people to give women a chance.
- ▶ Bilan’s success opens the door wider not just for women in media but for women in all professions.
- ▶ Anti-harassment work and south-south exchange activities will provide a chance for women journalists in similar environments to mobilise and support each other in demanding change, authority and protections.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS FOR UNDP/ DONORS?

- ▶ In one of the hardest places to make gains for women, Bilan is one of very few projects making a real, demonstrable difference. It’s reports – and therefore its results – are right there for anyone to see, twice a week. Whether you’re interested in women’s economic empowerment, women’s rights, women’s freedom of expression or in changing policy, Bilan is a proven way to advance the gender mandate and demonstrate that UNDP and its donors can achieve results for women even in the most challenging environments.
- ▶ Bilan is loved by journalists and highly visible, generating a stream of positive coverage. It is building up a series of networks and a reservoir of goodwill among some of the most significant media professionals and outlets in the world, bringing useful connections and making it easier to pitch other stories from UNDP and its donors.
- ▶ Such a high-profile project would allow UNDP to establish itself as a leading UN agency in the area of supporting women’s media and freedom of expression and as a key partner to support women’s journalism in crisis and challenging contexts.



“So many of my female colleagues have left the profession because of harassment and a lack of opportunities.”

**FARHIO HASAN
REPORTER**

IS IT SUSTAINABLE?

Yes. The Bilan team costs no more than any other journalism in Somalia but produces better, more popular reporting. There is no reason why Dalsan – or another media house – would not want to keep accessing this quality journalism. The Bilan brand, with its international connections and bylines, also enhances the reputation of whatever media house hosts it. We see the project costs decreasing over five years as Bilan requires less training and support, while a local media house gradually absorbs 100% of the running costs over a similar period.

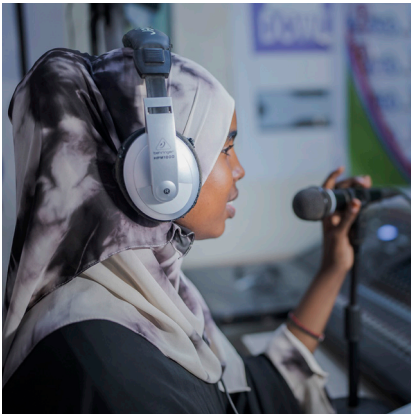
Bilan also generates funds through commissions with international outlets like the Guardian, BBC and El Pais.

NEXT STEPS

The Bilan pilot is clearly a success. Now UNDP is developing a 5-year project that will support Bilan toward full independence. In addition, this new project will include activities to tackle harassment against women online and create mechanisms for Bilan to share experiences and collaborate with women journalists facing similar challenges outside of Mogadishu and in other developing countries.

Toward independence. The new project will initially continue Bilan’s model of providing top-tier trainers and mentors, guaranteed local distribution and content partnerships with international media. From year 3 to 5, the project will reduce its support as Bilan needs less training and manages more of its relations with international media. Over the same period, the local media partner will take on more of the cost of hosting Bilan and distributing its reports until Bilan is fully absorbed into the media house as a commercially viable and self-funding unit.

Fighting harassment online. No one believes this will be easy, but there is a clear need for advocacy campaigns to chip away at long-held prejudices, call out abusive treatment online and demand change from social media companies and policy makers. The project will work to mobilise women journalists and sympathetic allies, including the creation of a charter for women’s rights online and advocacy to promote its calls to action. The project will also provide training to women journalists on how to deal with online harassment and offer psychosocial support in partnership with organisations that have a track record of supporting women journalists to deal with abuse in developing countries.



“We come from the bush, where the concept of being a journalist does not exist.”

**SHUKRI ABDI
REPORTER**

South-south cooperation. The project will create platforms for women journalists in developing countries to share experiences, collaborate on joint projects, mobilise for advocacy campaigns and offer each other mutual support. This will include efforts to lobby for better policies and protections and work jointly on cross-border stories, such as reporting on diaspora and refugee communities in the Horn of Africa.

Support to Federal Member States. The project will also support Bilan to arrange distribution deals with media houses in the Federal Member States and set up mechanisms for the Bilan team to pass their skills on to women journalists in cities outside Mogadishu, including by working together on joint stories. This will also help make sure that women across Somalia are able to access the Bilan platform and have their voices heard.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Laura Rio

ERID Portfolio Head, UNDP Somalia
laura.rio@undp.org

Rob Few

Head of Communications, UNDP Somalia
robert.few@undp.org

