



## **The Political Calculus Behind Minister Farah Sh. Abdulkadir's Education Agenda: *Personal Branding Over Educational Reform.***

### ***Part (1)***

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### **1. Introduction:**

Somalia's education sector has reached a critical inflection point. The nation's most consequential portfolio is sliding into accelerated decline—not due to transitional challenges or capacity gaps, but because political interests are being placed above systemic development. While leadership weaknesses exist across the government, education stands apart: it is not merely another portfolio but the backbone of Somalia's future identity, shaping the destiny of its children. When leadership in education collapses, its consequences are not episodic; they are generational.

Minister Farah Sh. Abdulkadir assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education with broad public confidence. His long-standing political role and historical involvement in the country's development led many to expect transformative institutional reform and expanded opportunities for Somali children. Instead, his administration has been defined by structural decay, prioritizing image management, political positioning, and centralized control, rather than measurable progress and tangible outcomes. Treating this ministry as such political platform risks inflicting damage that no future administration can easily reverse.

This assessment does not come from the margins. Over the past three years, extensive efforts were made to engage the Minister directly and indirectly—through advisory guidance, policy inputs, internal communications, and professional mediation. All attempts were constructive and non-confrontational. All were dismissed. Such persistent refusal to consider those efforts is not accidental mismanagement—it reflects a deliberate strategy to consolidate political capital at the expense of institutional integrity. When a leadership pattern persists despite repeated appeals, the issue is no longer operational—it is systemic.

This article is therefore written with clear intent: to expose the governance practices that undermine a national institution and to generate public, professional, and policy-driven pressure to prevent further deterioration. It is also a call to young educators, reform advocates, and intellectuals to recognize their shared responsibility. The fate of Somalia's education cannot be surrendered to patronage and personal agendas; it requires collective action, intellectual courage, and principled civic engagement.

Finally, this is only the first publication in a broader analytical series examining leadership failures within Somalia's education sector. The arguments presented here introduce the core patterns of mismanagement that stem from prioritizing political positioning over pressing sectoral reforms. Subsequent articles will provide more evidence-based examinations on the operational and strategic failures confronting the sector, drawing from documented policy reviews, institutional correspondences, projects implementation records, and partner reports, to empirically substantiate the claims outlined in this paper.

## **2. Reform Overshadowed by Political Positioning**

Despite overseeing the nation's most strategic social development portfolio, the current administration of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education has exhibited a clear pattern of prioritizing political positioning over genuine systemic reform. The Ministry's direction has been driven more by personal branding than by institutional needs, resulting in stalled progress and weakened sectoral foundation.

The appointment of Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir to this Ministry was widely perceived as a calculated political maneuver rather than a reform-driven decision. Evidence suggests that the minister's primary objective was not to address systemic issues within the education sector but to leverage the education portfolio as a platform to elevate his public profile and political

capital, with the aim of transitioning to the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs. Securing such a post would have allowed him to claim credit for finalizing Somalia's constitutional reform—an achievement with significant historical importance.

From the outset, the Minister adopted an approach rooted in narrative-building rather than institutional strengthening. Promises, ambitious statements, and highly publicized agendas were frequently announced without adequate operational planning, technical frameworks, or the implementation capacity required for their realization. Operationalizing this approach, media communication became a central tool strategically employed to manufacture narratives of progress and shape public perception.

These were not merely policy oversights; they reflected a deliberate political strategy aimed at cultivating public approval, with transitional hidden agenda, while shifting accountability for non-delivery to his successors. Within this design, according to multiple individuals within the minister's close professional circle, future ministers would inherit the burden of unrealistic expectations and incomplete initiatives, positioning the current leadership as one of “vision without opportunity,” rather than one defined by limited execution. Although referenced in private discussions and not formally documented, accounts from long-standing associates reinforce the view that this strategy was consciously crafted – aligned with his anticipated ministerial transition plan, which, however, remained unrealized – to cement his image and be remembered as the most ambitious leader to have presided over the ministry.

Public messaging has been marked by bold promises and high-profile initiatives. However, the gap between rhetoric and tangible outcomes remains stark. Key operational capacities, including project management and technical expertise, have either failed to materialize or have not been sustained, hindering meaningful progress.<sup>1</sup>

This is not a mere bureaucratic failure. It reflects a leadership style where image management and political loyalty take precedence over substantive reform, leaving the ministry compromised in its core mandate: delivering quality education to Somalia's children and youth.

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<sup>1</sup> A full evidence-packed analysis of these operational failures – and verifiable foundations of associated practices, including internal correspondence, project implementation reports, Sectoral data, and practitioner testimonies – will be examined in the next part of this article to empirically substantiate the claims advanced here.

### **3. Governance of Centralization and Patronage**

The governance model under Minister Farah has gravitated toward centralized control and patronage politics, sidelining meritocracy and technical competence. Following repeated attempts to secure a transfer to the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs—efforts that were ultimately blocked by the presidency and thwarting his exit plan—the Minister shifted his focus toward a mode of governance driven by political patronage and transactional influence. This approach is not unique within Somalia’s public sector, yet the scale and implications of its use within the education ministry were unprecedented.

The minister progressively transformed the Ministry into a personalized administrative ecosystem. Recruitment decisions prioritized personal connections, clan affiliations, and loyalty, often at the expense of technical competence and institutional experience. Individuals with the expertise necessary to advance educational reforms were sidelined or excluded entirely.

All of this unfolded while carefully staged public narrative was being intensively constructed. Through speeches, ceremonial events, and coordinated social media campaigns, the minister vigorously projected himself as a reformist leader and champion of educational transformation, yet the internal reality stood in stark contradiction to these claims, rendering his highly curated public narratives untenable. Behind the polished public façade, governance decisions were exclusionary, politically prioritized, and structurally corrosive.

Senior technical administrators—such as the Director General and other key directors, who traditionally served as the ministry’s institutional memory and operational backbone—were effectively stripped of most of their technical decision-making authority and operational mandates. Their roles were largely reduced to chairing routine structural meetings on donor-government progress updates and organizing public mobilization events. Meanwhile, parallel technical administrations were established, operating outside formal institutional frameworks and aligned closely with the minister’s personal agenda.

This pattern was not accidental but purposeful; it served a clear political agenda. By limiting the ministry’s pool of independent, high-capacity professionals, the minister ensured that decision-making authority and operational direction remained concentrated under his control. The State Minister was frequently positioned as a public-facing intermediary, absorbing

operational responsibilities and public criticism while strategic decisions remained tightly managed from behind the scenes. The result: institutional fragmentation, declining staff morale, and a diminished capacity for reform.

### **3.1 Hollowing Out Institutional Capacity**

Instead of strengthening ministerial departments, the Minister increasingly relied on NGO-affiliated technocrats and consultants, many of whom were described by ministry staff as close personal associates. Their role was not capacity-building, but rather project execution aligned with the minister's preferred agenda. This practice undermined institutional operations, eroded bureaucratic ownership, and created parallel networks accountable to individuals—not the state. Consequently, the approach not only compromises oversight but also entrenches a patronage network that operates beyond the institutional accountability framework.

The pattern of external dependency masks an alarming truth: the ministerial agenda is designed less to fortify Somalia's educational foundations and more to amplify the minister's personal influence through informal gatekeeping arrangements.

### **3.2 Use of Public Funds to Bolster Personal Image**

Under the current leadership, a significant—and concerning—portion of the ministry's financial resources was redirected toward managing and amplifying the minister's personal image through social media campaigns and public relations efforts. A sizable cohort of media influencers and young recruits—brought in outside the ministry's institutional mandate—was tasked primarily with protecting the minister's image and circulating laudatory narratives across digital platforms. Instead of investing in critical priorities such as educational infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum development, or service delivery improvements, funds were channeled into crafting polished narratives meant to convey an appearance of progress and achievement.

[ *Shape public perception, Shield leadership from criticism, Project a narrative of success* ]

This strategic deployment of resources served multiple political purposes: it helped shape public perception, insulating the minister from criticism and bolstering his political capital domestically and internationally. Yet the emphasis on image-building diverted scarce resources away from frontline educational needs, further widening the gap between public messaging

and the realities on the ground within Somalia's education system. Such practices risk institutionalizing a culture of performative governance—one in which optics replace outcomes—ultimately undermining long-term sectoral development and eroding stakeholder trust.

### **3.3 Lack of Engagement with Education Experts**

Despite repeated efforts by education professionals, sector experts, and ministry technocrats to engage the Minister with reform initiatives, raise critical concerns, highlight operational challenges, and provide practical recommendations, these inputs were largely disregarded or marginalized. The minister's reluctance to incorporate expert advice curtailed opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and hindered the formulation of contextually appropriate, sustainable policies.

This disengagement exposed a deeper leadership flaw that the education community had not anticipated from a figure in whom many had placed significant expectations: a resistance to inclusive consultation and constructive feedback, both of which are fundamental to effective public-sector leadership. By dismissing expert perspectives, the Ministry forfeited crucial opportunities to identify systemic bottlenecks, recalibrate reform strategies, and adopt an inclusive, reform-oriented policymaking. As a result, reform efforts stalled, and the education system's ability to respond to emerging challenges has been markedly diminished.

## **4. The Need for Inclusivity Versus Centralized, Ego-Driven Leadership**

Education systems flourish in environments that promote collaboration, shared decision-making, and collective ownership. Under Minister Farah, the governance model inverted these fundamentals. His leadership style has been marked by a highly centralized, ego-driven approach, where decision-making authority was tightly held and collaboration was conditional on adherence to the minister's agenda. This autocratic mode of governance inhibited the development of an inclusive institutional culture, effectively marginalizing stakeholders who sought to contribute constructively but did not fully align with the minister's political objectives.

In a country with Somalia's demographic complexity, fragmented federal dynamics, and chronic institutional fragility, such an exclusive leadership model is not simply ineffective—it

is damaging. It undermines the principles of shared governance and collective accountability that are foundational to sustainable educational reform, and replaces them with personalism, gatekeeping, and transactional politics. The minister's centralized control and limited tolerance for dissent curtailed these collaborative dynamics, ultimately restricting the ministry's effectiveness and the sector's potential to deliver equitable, high-quality education across Somalia.

## **5. Regional Politicization: Undermining Inclusivity and Federal Cooperation**

Education policy under the education Minister has been deeply politicized, contributing to increased regional disparities and strained federal–regional relations. Rather than serving as a neutral instrument for equitable development, education governance became a vehicle for political maneuvering, where certain regions were favored while others faced marginalization. This politicization has distorted policy implementation and laid the groundwork for systemic inequalities within Somalia's education sector.

### **5.1 Uneven Policy Application and Regional Marginalization**

A particularly concerning aspect—and one of the most damaging legacies—of the current education leadership has been the inconsistent and discretionary enforcement of education policies across Somalia's federal member states, driven by political animosities and patronage networks. Regions perceived as politically aligned received preferential treatment, while those asserting administrative independence or political resistance—most notably Puntland and South West State—experienced neglect or obstruction.

Where resistance existed to his political influence in the South-West State, where both the Minister of Education and his Deputy demonstrated technical competence and assertiveness, the Minister adopted indirect strategies. After their refusal to accommodate his agenda, political and economic alignments were cultivated with the Member State President and regional executive leadership.

The situation in Puntland was more complex and consequential. Puntland's semi-autonomous status and historically tense relationship with the Federal Government created vulnerabilities that the Minister exploited. His leadership has seen the imposition of an approach that reflects an authoritarian centralization, which disregarded regional education priorities and bypassed

established local education authorities and federal-regional functional decentralization structures of service delivery. Decisions on policy, resource allocation, and project implementation were made unilaterally with little consultation, fracturing the relationship between federal and regional education institutions. This breakdown resulted in stalled initiatives, inconsistent resource flows, and weakened coordination—directly impacting education quality and access.

## **5.2 Governance Implications: Fragmentation and Institutional Paralysis**

The regional politicization and biases in education policy are symptomatic of a broader governance failure. Rather than fostering inclusive, decentralized management suitable for Somalia's federal system, the ministry under the current leadership actively undermined regional autonomy and institutional capacity.

Development projects and essential reform activities across the regions have been significantly disrupted or prematurely halted due to these political tensions. Furthermore, several crucial pipeline programs—vital for sectoral growth and development—have been systematically obstructed, not due to genuine capacity constraints, but because they conflicted with the minister's political agenda, further deepening the stagnation and depriving communities of essential educational improvements.

A more detailed, in-depth analysis of these issues will be presented separately in the upcoming article, drawing on specific case studies, policy documents, and firsthand accounts to critically assess and reveal the extensive damage inflicted by the current leadership's politicization of Education policies and development projects.

## **6. Public Perception and Accountability**

Minister Farah's political strategy reflects an outdated model of public engagement, rooted in symbolic gestures, rhetorical flourish, and manufactured praise. In earlier decades of Somali politics, reputation could be established or maintained through controlled narratives and superficial mobilization. Today, however, this approach is increasingly ineffective.

Somalia's emerging generation of educated citizens evaluates leadership not through slogans, but via performance indicators, visible outcomes, transparency, and institutional resilience.

They are data-driven, policy-literate, and accustomed to global standards of governance. They do not interpret eloquent declarations as evidence of achievements.

### **6.1. Narrative Construction vs. Structural Realities**

A pronounced gap exists between the narratives surrounding the Minister's leadership and the structural realities of the education sector's performance. While media portrayals emphasize ambition, dynamism, and reform, the sector itself suffers from stagnation, deep politicization, and weakened institutional capacity. The minister's carefully curated leadership brand—projected through public speeches, ceremonies, and media engagements—conveys momentum, yet tangible indicators of sectoral development tell a very different story.

Internal stakeholders and partners report stalled reforms, disrupted initiatives, and persistent bureaucratic dysfunction. Education sector professionals—including policy experts, ministry technocrats, higher education leadership, reform advocates, and development partners—consistently highlight tangible structural damage: delayed institutional processes, fragmented coordination, politicized and opaque decision-making, lack of inclusive consultation, weakened accountability mechanisms, and diminished technical autonomy. Their assessments present a sobering contrast to the public leadership narrative.

### **6.2. Crafted Perception vs. Sectoral Outcomes: Need for Accountability**

This divergence between narrative and the harsh reality of the institutional performance is not just troubling; it's a glaring failure of leadership. Glossy speeches and media stunts are being used to cover up a deep rot that's killing any real chance of reform. Without honesty oversight and real accountability, these superficial narratives will continue to mask the true extent of dysfunction, and this broken system will keep spinning in circles, obstructing genuine reform. Public discourse must be informed by empirical sectoral realities rather than shaped by rhetorical narratives or personality-driven politics. Only through grounded assessment and institutional integrity can meaningful reform take precedence over public relations.

The absence of robust accountability mechanisms has contributed to the entrenchment of these issues. While segments of the general public, less exposed to institutional realities, may interpret the minister's media presence as proactive leadership, those with operational visibility see the erosion of reform capacity. The Prime Minister's reluctance to intervene, despite

awareness of pressing concerns, underscores the political insulation surrounding the minister. Development partners, similarly aware of these systemic obstacles, have struggled to navigate opaque accountability channels or counteract politicized policymaking.

## **7. Conclusion**

Somalia's education sector stands at a pivotal crossroads. The current administration's approach reflects a leadership model centered more on personal political capital and public image than on meaningful reform or long-term sectoral development. The consequences are already evident: weakened institutions, politicized obstruction of functional decentralization, stalled projects, and a widening gulf between political rhetoric and tangible progress.

This critique is not incidental or personal; it is a call to recognize the strategic importance of education governance. However, the analysis presented here is not merely commentary critique – it serves as a preliminary foundation intended to open a comprehensive series of critical assessments grounded in verifiable evidences and empirical data. These examinations will further substantiate the patterns of governance failure and institutional erosion outlined in this paper.

The next installment will present more evidence-driven assessment, delving deeper into specific case studies, policy controversies, and their broader implications for Somalia's future governance and education outcomes. The aim is to deliver a rigorous, transparent evaluation that supports informed public dialogue, strengthens accountability, and drive the urgent reform required to restore the fragmented education system.

As Somalia's citizens, educators, and policymakers seek to reclaim their education sector, it is imperative to decisively move beyond image-driven leadership toward transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance—one that genuinely prioritizes the needs of Somali children and youth.