

## Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Somali Women in the Post Conflict Socio-Political Arena



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Attribute to: Somali Institute for Development Research and Analysis

### Conflicts

The main drivers of conflict in Somalia include:

- Clan-based divisions
- Inter-communal tensions
- Radicalization and terrorist threats
- Poor governance

Competition for natural resources and

- External conflicts and relations with other countries

### Peace Building

Women have made many sacrifices in pursuit for peace including marrying off to other clans for peace.

### 1: Summary

Somalia is one of the post conflict societies in the horn of Africa. It has been and still characterized by conflicts occurring at inter-state, intra-state and inter-communal levels. The main drivers of conflict in Somalia include:

- Clan-based divisions
- Inter-communal tensions
- Radicalization and terrorist threats
- Poor governance
- Competition for natural resources and
- External conflicts and relations with other countries

Although conflicts in Somalia affected both men and women, women were more vulnerable and highly victimized. For decades, Somali women have been caught in conflict as clans rise against each other or fight for political supremacy. To date, many Somali women and children still live as refugees in neighboring countries such as Kenya and Yemen. One of the main consequences of these decades of conflict is sexual and gender-based violence that takes many forms: domestic violence, early and forced marriages, attempted rape, rape, sexual harassment, Female Genital Mutilation, discrimination and denial of access to resources including inheritance.

Research shows that women in Somalia have made progress economically over the last years, but their right to self-determination has been slow. Somali women continue to be marginalized in all aspects of decision-making and governance in Somalia. Women are few

in the parliament and even fewer in the cabinet. Often women who are dismissed or are forced to resign are replaced by men. Women's lives in post conflict Somalia are confronted with obstacles such as: cultural and traditional practices that limit women's empowerment, poor implementation of gender equality policies and laws, and a civil society with limited financial support, weak capacity, and insecurity settings.

Women have made many sacrifices in pursuit for peace including marrying off to other clans for peace. For the last two decades, there have been 14 attempts to bring security and stability in Somalia. In most of these attempts, women have been conspicuously missing, for example, they have little if any representation in post-conflict efforts such as judicial reforms, land and property rights and settlement of displaced persons.

The biggest challenge for women's empowerment in Somalia is the implementation of the laws that already exist and the monitoring of their performance. The problem is therefore not a lack of policy and legislation, but weak implementation mechanisms nationally and within the regions. Lack of access to education and economic empowerment, together with cultural and traditional barriers and weak government's commitment conspire to deny women's rights and voice in Somalia.

## 2: Methodology

Between March and June (2018) SIDRA Institute, in partnership with the Swedish organization Kvinna till Kvinna, undertook a study that gathered up to date data regarding women, peace and security in Somalia. The study - whose main results are summarized in this Policy Brief - developed a series of data collection tools and methodology to collect information from secondary sources (i.e. literature review) and primary data (using qualitative methods).

The study was informed by the review of policy and legislative documents of the governments, international and local development partners and other key stakeholders. Primary information was collected through focus groups discussions and key informant interviews in five cities (Garowe, Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Adado and Galkacyo) and from other stakeholders in Nairobi.

### Geographical Scope

Primary data was collected from Garowe, Mogadishu, Hargeisa, Adado, Galkacyo and Nairobi through Key Informants Interview and Focus Group Discussions.

## 3: Women's Lives in Somalia

Women and children account for more than three-quarters of the 40 million persons displaced because of violent conflicts around the world. In most war-torn countries in Africa, women and children are the biggest casualties of war related deaths and often bear the brunt of gender-based violence and other conflict related crimes such as displacement. In spite of this, women barely sit at negotiating peace and reconciliation tables. There were 4275 females out of 92,682 UN Peace Keepers making a less

than 5% by December 2017.

In the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), only 1.49% of the total military personnel are women. Societal barriers obstructing women from participating in the peace process vary from country to country but in most instances, patriarchal cultural norms strengthen these barriers creating a difficult environment for women to engage at any level within the public and political arenas.

**UN Resolution 1325**  
Somalia is yet to develop a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan, though the government is keen on the resolution and its implementation.

**Limiting Factors**  
the traditional structure of the community and the clan system limits the effective implementation of the UN resolution 1325

### Box 1: UN Resolution 1325

The adoption of the UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security by the Security Council in 2000 acknowledged the key role women play in conflict prevention and resolution, peace building, negotiations and peace keeping, humanitarian response and conflict resolution. It also calls on all parties to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.

In all regions of Somalia, most of the respondents in the study -from organizations/governments- were aware of UNSCR 1325 and its potential in increasing the participation of women in decision-making and peace building. Somalia is yet to develop a UNSCR 1325 National Action Plan, though the government is keen on the resolution and its implementation. The study concluded that the traditional structure of the community and the clan system limits the effective implementation of the resolution.

Research has shown that women are not passive in peace efforts, which are inevitably tied to the wellbeing and progress of their communities. The history of conflict resolution in Somalia is full of examples of women making selfless sacrifices to bring peace or keeping peace with whatever resources available to them -including their lives. For example, some of them do not hesitate to become wives to a warring clan as a blood price through Godobtiir (an arranged (sometimes forced) marriage of a girl into an aggrieved clan to ensure a peace deal with another clan).

Ultimately, socio-cultural stereotypes of women as victims and uncritical advocates for peace, combined with a strict division of labor in the public and private spheres, prevent women from entering official peace processes.

Across Somalia, the effects of conflict on women can be grouped into economic, social and political: displacement of family members, family breakdown, sexual harassment, rape and increase in sexually transmitted diseases, food insecurity and malnutrition, social and cultural discrimination, and poverty.

#### Box 2: Violence Against Women and Girls

Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is very common in Somalia, though its extent is not completely clear due to the lack of proper recording and information systems -especially at Mogadishu. Violence is perpetrated by people close or near to the victim including people who are supposed to protect the victim. Incidence is higher among vulnerable persons such as young girls in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps where the violence is committed by members of the host community.

Usually, SGBV is dealt with at the community level by the traditional elders and religious leaders without going to the court. In most cases, the perpetrators of the violence are not punished while the victim does not receive justice. Where the cases are reported to the police and taken through the legal systems, the victim still rarely receives justice because of inefficient service provision.

#### Constitution

The Somali Constitution adopted in 2012 explicitly entrenches the key role that women should play in nation building, including being at the decision-making table.

## 4: Women's Role in Politics

In principle, the Somali Government supports Resolution 1325 and other obligations such as Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960, which identify concrete areas of focus and additional measures aimed at promoting peace and conflict resolution. However, there is no National Action Plan, which makes enforcement difficult.

Coupled with the factor that Somalia is still finding its footing after years of instability, political push to include women as informal local mediators or build capacities as negotiators is still low. Sadly, international, regional and national organizations have not been

forceful on the need for gender sensitive mediations. Often, resettlement deals do not take into considerations less obvious issues such as gender equality.

The Somali Constitution adopted in 2012 explicitly entrenches the key role that women should play in nation building, including being at the decision-making table. A research by SIDRA has shown lack of clear policy and legal frameworks that support and promote women's political participation and involvement in peace building. It is also appreciated that Somali women are making various inroads especially in elective politics.

**24%**

Out of the total 329 elected MPs, 80 were women, a 24% women representation, which can be perceived as progress towards the mandatory 30% of representation in future.

**Box 3: Women and Politics**

Years of lobbying saw Somali women make history in the latest election in 2016/7. Out of the total 329 elected MPs, 80 were women, a 24% women representation, which can be perceived as progress towards the mandatory 30% of representation in future.

Besides local activism, the social media has elevated the voice of women to speak on various issues affecting Somalia. Noteworthy is the Somali Gender Equity Movement (SGEM) whose objective is to advocate for equal political representation for women in Somalia's government. Founded by Somali Women Activists, SGEM's vision is to achieve equitable power sharing for women and to mainstream gender into policies and procedures.

**International Instruments**

There is hope that instruments like CEDAW, ICCPR and UDHR combined could help Somali women gain recognition and equality.

Politically, and in the local civil society, there is an acknowledgement that international human rights and gender equality principles and agreements should play a key role in women's empowerment in Somalia. The country is yet to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of

Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). There is hope that these international instruments combined could help Somali women gain recognition and equality.

**5: Working for Women's Rights in Somalia**

The role and involvement of Somali women in peace and security has exponentially grown in past few years mainly influenced by changing global cultural trends that are more gender inclusive and a shift in political and ideological views. This drive has been led by local and international NGOs in Somalia.

lack of governmental support contributes to the high instability of their work. In fact, the analysis shows that most of the organizations implement interventions in several focus areas, since participating in only one single theme would limit their chances of being financially sustainable. The limited sustainable funding leads to retrenchment of staff as well as reducing the activities carried out periodically to cope up with the scarcity of funds.

A total of 36 women organizations working in women, peace and security were profiled by SIDRA team for this study from Garowe (Puntland), Hargeisa (Somaliland) and Mogadishu (South and Central). The recent positive developments on increasing the visibility of women in public spheres together with donor's programmes and government's offices might be behind the fact that about a third of the organizations is focusing on women's rights and gender equality.

The high level of insecurity in certain locations hinder the smooth running of the activities as staff work under tension and stress -especially due to fear of abductions and terrorist attacks. This has been worsened by lack of government support especially in terms of finance and security. Consequently, there is a high staff turnover which have threaten the sustainability of projects/ organizations.

The main challenge facing these organizations is the lack of sustainable funding, which given the difficulties of working in these regions together with the

Administratively, the main challenge of working in Somalia is that all the regional states of Somalia have different process for NGO registration and each

**36**

The total of women organizations working in women, peace and security profiled by SIDRA for this study from Garowe, Hargeisa and Mogadishu

### Organizational Challenges

The main challenge facing women organizations is the lack of sustainable funding.

region requires approval through its own process before an organization can be allowed to work.

The need around training is key in the development of the Somali civil society -particularly for women's NGOs workers who might have not had access to formal graduate/post graduate education studies due to the on-going security situation and traditional gender norms. Furthermore, several organizations argued that they needed improved

skills on developing networks and partnerships that would enable them to share knowledge more effectively.

Women's rights organizations have continued pushing for their cause, but at times, they are seen to be representing western interests for example, women's rights issues such as FGM and age of consent evoke traditional norms and become a challenging and complex theme to run interventions.

## 6: Key Policy Recommendations

1. Government and society need to recognize the extent of violations of human rights of women and girls during the past armed conflicts in Somalia. Measures to prevent such violations happening again and the provision of services in support to victims should be part of the implementation of all peace and humanitarian operations, and reconstruction efforts. Related to this, is the recognition of the impact of armed conflict and displacement on family relations and the development of awareness of the risks for increased domestic violence, especially in the families of ex-fighters/warriors' clan members.

2. Different actors of society and government need to develop the capacity to take appropriate steps to ensure that individual women and girls are not subject to intimidation because of accessing formal justice system on cases of domestic or sexual violence. International humanitarian and human rights law information should be accessible in local languages and for women's groups and NGOs.

3. Civil society, including local and regional women's groups, should identify women's informal peace-building initiatives and provide training for women on formal peace processes, while ensuring that mechanisms to channel the outcomes of these initiatives into more formal peace

processes are established.

4. Peacekeeping operations in Somalia must have adequate capacity for reporting on gender-specific violations of rights of women and girls. This includes the provision of training on culturally appropriate interview techniques and trauma counselling, and the use of female personnel (such as protection officers, medical personnel, and interpreters) during peacekeeping interventions.

5. The principles of gender equality and non-discrimination must be considered during all legal reforms, particularly on the areas of nationality, property and inheritance, and specific legislation should be developed for addressing criminalization of violence against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence in IDP camps.

6. Governments need to ensure the equitable participation of women, using quotas where relevant, in all electoral processes in order to strengthen women's role in the Parliaments. Government and civil society should ensure that a dialogue is sustained with clan leaders and elders on promoting women's participation in political and social spheres. Further, there is a need to complement normative and institutional measures with campaigns to change social norms that violates women's rights in terms of participation



**About SIDRA**

SIDRA is a registered independent, non-profit Research and Policy Analysis Think Tank based in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia.

**Our Vision**

Somalia in which social justice prevails and inclusive economic growth benefits all and improves the well being of all people.

**Our Mission**

A centre of development and research that generates relevant and original knowledge for dynamic policy environment support, institutional capacity development and alliance.

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and body integrity.

7. There is a need for stronger integration of gender equality measures into wider sector policies while at the same time strengthening gender ministries to fulfil its mandate. The government should ensure the existence of dedicated funds for the implementation of programs, plans, and policies on gender equality. The design and full implementation of a nationwide National Action Plan for UNSR 1325 should be a priority; and it needs to be integrated into broader development planning processes – supported by public funding and framed under policy coherence

between sectorial policies.

8. The civil society is a key actor in post-conflict and in peacebuilding, sustainable financing for women’s rights organizations needs to be secured from multiple sources. Develop predictable, accessible, and flexible funding mechanisms and instruments for local women’s organizations and networks is an urgent need for rebuilding the country. All donors (bilateral and multilateral) should mainstream gender across all their interventions and ensure full resourcing for gender expertise, building capacity of staff, and funding for grass-root projects.

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