

QUEENS WITHOUT CROWNS



Somaliland women's
changing roles
and peace building

Amina Mohamoud Warsame

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By

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FOREWORD

Somaliland women's changing roles and peace building

As I am reading this brief report on the changing roles of women in Somaliland, three important aspects come to my mind. They are closely linked to each other and overall related to the issue of how we can learn from the specific situation and apply it in a more general context.

– What is the specific social, political and economic context of Somaliland?

– Why is this book on the situation of women in a pastoralist society of relevance to others than the women of Somaliland?

– Why are the findings in this book of importance to the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) as a peace research institute, and to the wider development constituency as well? What is it that we can learn?

At the beginning of the 1990s “Somalia” came to be a synonym for anarchy and chaos, a disastrous mixture of natural and manmade catastrophe, an unprecedented breakdown of the so-called modern state. Starting as a civil war against a severely corrupt dictator, Siad Barre, the fighting soon degenerated into a vicious war where the conquerors turned on each other in the fight for power. Somalia became the prototype for the “new” type of war that the world community would see erupt at an alarming rate, i.e. civil wars led by warlords whose guiding force would be greed and power. This type of war is taking place inside the countries, pitting clans, tribes, families against each other, disrupts the very social fabric of the communities; and deliberately targets the civilian population, thus producing enormous refugee movements with a majority of women and children. In this situation the women have been primarily victims, but they have also emerged as a tremendous human resource, often engaging themselves in peace and development work on the local levels.

Little has it been noticed and discussed the fact that Somalia already in 1991 split up and developed in two different directions. The South went down the slope to full-scale “war-lordism”, whereas, in isolation, virtually without help from the international community, the former north-west region of Somalia, the Somaliland Republic, chose another way. By relying on its own cultural and traditional resources – in particular the institution of the elders – in how to solve its problems and conflicts, how to rebuild its society and govern the people, Somaliland managed to a large extent to escape the worst excesses of anarchy, violence and corruption that have over the years plagued the rest of Somalia. Through the remarkable so called Boroma peace process, the elders of all the clans agreed to stay out of the power-struggle for a government in Mogadishu and formed a separate country the Republic of Somaliland. Although unacknowledged by the international community yet, this peace process is remarkable also in the way that it is a participatory process, a “bottom-up process” that started at local levels in the councils of clan elders and ended in Boroma where all clans were represented. However, although the Boroma process is supported by most people in Somaliland, it has a clear weakness in that it excluded half the population – the women – from direct participation. Although community based and participatory, the process was an exclusively male business, and the women of Somaliland were not included. As far as I know, the lack of women participating in the decision making process for the country has never been seen as an issue worth discussing officially. However, as this report points out, unofficially among the women, there is an ongoing discussion.

Nevertheless the women in Somaliland, like women in many other war and conflict ridden societies, have had to shoulder many new and unaccustomed burdens outside their traditional role in the family and household. The war has drastically changed society, as many men were killed or have left the country for exile. Young boys were sent abroad for schools or other means of making a living. Left are the old, the women and the young children. In the case of Somaliland men’s increased and widespread use of the drug *qat* has added to the complexity of the situation.

Although there are no reliable statistics for Somaliland there are estimates that today the women constitute the majority of the population, or around 60%. The women are trying by all means to make ends meet through various income-generating activities. They are also organizing themselves as best they can in local Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and active networking. The women organize for economic survival, education, health and cleaning up the communities and they are today a very noticeable and vital part of the economic backbone of Somaliland. High on their agenda is also the issue of how to work for peace. However, the fact that they are effectively barred from participating in decision making and therefore also lacking experience of how to participate – as well as other cultural bias – constitute severe obstacles for them in their struggle. Nevertheless, as also this book points out, there is a strong awareness among the women of the important contribution that they are making to society and that it is just and fair that they should have access to and participate in making decisions that concern them, their families, their communities and country.

The women of Somaliland are not alone in this predicament. According to the UN, women are the world's most marginalized category of people, being barred from the full participation in all spheres of society including participation in decision making processes and the promotion of their basic human rights. Further, UN statistics show that although women contribute 67% of the world's working hours, they earn less than 10% of the world's income. They own less than 1% of the world's property. They make up 66% of the world's illiterates, and 86 million girls (twice the number of boys) have no access to primary schooling. 70% of the world's poor are women.

Thus the situation of the women in Somaliland – although specific and unique in many ways – has relevance, and helps us to see the situation of women in many complex conflict scenarios of today. Equality between men and women is often presented as an issue that western women promote and can indulge in. In conflicting undemocratic societies where human rights are not respected, the most important task is first and foremost identified as working for full human and democratic rights and for

peace. When that goal has been reached there will eventually be time for the issue of women's role and rights in society. However, this reasoning has an inherent flaw, as women's rights are nothing more than basic human rights. We cannot claim to strive for a democratic and just society and at the same time neglect the rights of 50% of the members of society - the women. And the figure of 50% is far too conservative, as women - more often than men - tend to include the views of the children and the elderly.

This small report on women in Somaliland and their changing roles thus touches on some of the most vital values and principles that are emerging in the international peace and development discourse, in which LPI takes an active role.

The importance of building peace work on a holistic concept of peace, where peace is not seen as a theoretical concept, but seen as closely related to development, and translates itself into working for a democratic society built on equity, justice and peace for all its members, men, women and children alike; a society where emerging conflicts are dealt with in a democratic and non-violent way; and a society where women's rights are acknowledged as human rights and women are equally included in all participatory processes. As the UN Security Council stated on 8 March 2000: "Peace is inextricably linked with equality between men and women."

The work for peace needs to be a broadly conceived process and involve the entire society. A true bottom up process means that much work for peace must take place in the communities. To assure genuine ownership of the peace processes by the people in the communities, they should be the ones to define the needs and the key issues to be addressed, as well as the processes on how to address them. This should be so as they are the ones who will have to live with the solutions.

The process that led to this report was a genuine community-based approach. It was conceived and started by women from all walks of life in Somaliland; they determined what research was needed, what issues and questions needed to be studied. A Somali women's research organization carried out the research i.e. collected and analysed data and subsequently made recommendations.

The study focus on the roles of women, but in order to make the picture complete, it equally included the views of men. True to their culture and religion, the women incorporated into their inquiry Islamic values and Islamic rights for women and looked for answers that are appropriate for them as women of Islam.

Women all over the world in conflict societies are – in spite of tremendous hardship – involved in development work and increasingly emerging as peace makers and peace workers. There is a need to acknowledge the roles that they are already playing and to enable them to become more visible, to listen to them and to consult with them, not least to be able to give them the support and training that they themselves would find useful.

For the LPI and any other international actor supporting a process from a culture of war to a culture of peace and development, it should then be vital to listen to the voices of the people in the conflict – not least the women – how they define the situation and what recommendations they make.

This report is a first step along these lines, and will be useful as a basis for further discussion and analysis for the people of Somaliland, but also in a wider context where it can serve as a point of departure for new and important research on how to approach peace work in today's war and conflict situations. Equally important, this report can be used as a tool for the peace and development community in their efforts to support positive developments in Somaliland or other post-conflict societies. It is a first and healthy move in the right direction, and will hopefully serve as a basis for further initiatives of the same nature.

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June 2002

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*By Amina M. Warsame,
Hargeisa, Somaliland, October 2001*

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1.0

INTRODUCTION

The roles of women in Somaliland seem to be changing. The eruption of the civil war in Somalia in 1988 marked a new beginning in the history of the Somali People.¹ The war set into motion quite a number of processes, which have had a far-reaching effect on the country and its people. The war precipitated immense destruction, both human and material. Also, there have been unprecedented exodus, disintegration of institutions and a breakdown of the very fabric of the Somali society. Amongst these changes, there is an apparent on-going transformation of some gender relations within the Somaliland society, and Somali women are rediscovering their potentials and their rights.

In the aftermath of war and amidst the ongoing changes, the internationally unrecognised country of the Republic of Somaliland is rebuilding itself from the devastation and is making a slow but remarkable social and economic progress. At a higher level, new outlooks on the path to recovery and reconstruction are being discussed and debated in many circles. Parallel with these discussions, although invisible for the most part, there is an “inner women’s” discourse on a variety of issues that seems to have evaded the policy makers - who are exclusively male. Among the issues discussed are women’s absence from all public decision-making levels, women’s increased economic responsibilities coupled with unchanging gender-based domestic responsibilities, and oppressive cultural practices that discriminate against women. Most of these discussions take place within the emerging urban women groups/organisations under their consortiums. Ordinary women whose awareness has been sharpened by the

¹ The civil war referred to here is the one between the troops of Siad Barre and the Northern opposition of the Somali National Movement (SNM), 1988-91. All the subsequent conflicts within Somaliland will be referred to as internal conflicts.

events of the last decade are also starting to raise questions regarding their role in society and discuss some of these issues among themselves.

As part of the reconstruction process and to contribute to these ongoing discussions, The Somaliland Women's Research and Action Group (SOWRAG) held a two-day workshop in Hargeisa in 1998 to come up with practical research priority areas for Somaliland women. Among the recommendations that came up during the workshop, was the need to collect and analyse data on women's roles and position and how the civil strife of the last decade has affected these different gender relations.

During the workshop discussions, the participants - who represented all walks of life - observed that due to the war many changes were taking place in the lives of women. The participants expressed the view that these changes should be documented, thoroughly analysed and understood. It was acknowledged that without first laying the foundations for an adequate baseline data it would be almost impossible to come up with meaningful programmes to advance women's overall position within the society. It was further noted that without such basic data as well as an understanding of the processes and mechanisms working against women's advancement, certain interventions could do more harm than good. As a result, SOWRAG started the initial step to create a women's baseline data.

It is against this background that SOWRAG and the Life and Peace Institute in Uppsala and, later, the regional office in Nairobi, held a series of discussions on the possibility of working together to conduct a study on the changing roles of women in Somaliland and its relevance to peace building.

It is hoped that the study contributes to the on-going efforts of collecting the crucial database for peace and development purposes. It is also hoped that the study assists Somali women to better understand their situation so as to help them in their struggle for equality, justice and democratic participation in the decision-making process of their country. Furthermore, it is hoped that the study lays a basis for further action-oriented research as new questions arise from the findings of this study.

The purpose of this study was, therefore, to identify and document the changing roles of women in Somaliland and to analyse its implications for

family dynamics and peace building. Specifically, the study aims to explore how changes in women's roles have impacted on their participation in decision-making and peace building as well as the implications of these changes for the wider Somali society in general. As such, the study sought to collect and analyse data related to women's changing social, economic, political and legal roles within the Somali society.²

The major questions the study sought to answer were:

- What changes, if any, have there been in women's traditional roles and positions within the society in Somaliland?
- What factors are responsible for any such changes in women's roles in Somaliland?
- In which aspects of women's roles are the changes most evident and why?
- How does the existence of cultural attitudes and ideologies reflect on the different aspects of women's changing roles?
- How have those changes in women's roles impacted on women's decision-making and participation in peace building?

Following this introduction, this research report presents the methodology used for the study. Thereafter, Somaliland women's traditional and modern day roles are discussed, in each case drawing in a synthetic fashion, from both literature and data from the field. The findings are then discussed, whereby attempts are made to compare the traditional and contemporary roles of women in Somaliland, highlighting the changing and the relatively unchanging aspects, and suggesting the implications of all these for family dynamics and the participation of Somaliland women in peace building. Finally, some recommendations are made, primarily in response to the basic conclusions of the study.

² The study looked specifically at the changing roles of women in the self declared Republic of Somaliland which came into being on 18 May 1991 after it reaffirmed its pre-unification status with Somalia in 1960. However, the changes are also true in other parts of the Somali inhabited areas of proper Somalia and Puntland, as confirmed by other studies. See, for example Mohamed (1996), Warsame (1999).

2.0

METHODOLOGY

Since the study sought to establish women's changing role in Somaliland it was deemed imperative to establish the women's roles in both traditional and contemporary Somaliland society. Towards this end data were collected in a two-pronged methodology, namely, literature study and field work.

2.1

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The literature study was mainly intended to be a source of information on the roles of women in traditional Somaliland society, although information in this regard was also collected from fieldwork.

Whatever available secondary sources on Somali women were therefore collected from wherever that source could be found, reviewed and used. In addition, some information on statistics was collected from the different ministries and agencies as well as from local and international organisations.

In the field, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data for the study. For the quantitative method a structured questionnaire composed of 47 questions was developed and administered to 650 respondents sampled on a fifty/fifty basis between males and females. However, as a representative sample, only 329 questionnaires were randomly selected from the original number of 650 and analysed. For the qualitative method, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews with individual men and women were used. Fourteen interviewers participated in collecting the data - three of them from the Life and Peace Institute women resource group, three from Somaliland Women's Research and Action Group and the rest (six men and two women) from local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Taking into consideration the main economic activities in Somaliland, that is, pastoralism, agro-pastoralism, fishing, and pure commercial activities, the sample of interviewees was selected from among areas with these economic activities. From the first group two villages were targeted for data collection, namely Balli Gubadley from the western part of Somaliland and Caynabo from the eastern part.

From the agro-pastoralist communities, the village of Dayaxa from the eastern part of the country and Dilla from the western part were chosen.

The third category of respondents was that of people in urban centres who were engaged in pure commercial activities. The urban centres of Hargeisa in the west, and Ceerigaabo in the east, were the other study areas. A small coastal village in the east, Maydh, was also added to the sample to include all the economic activities of Somaliland. However, as was to be discovered later on, very few of the people in the village were involved in fishing as an occupation.

The information sought was:

- Background information of respondents such as age, sex, marital status, number of children, dependents, educational background, area of residence, occupation and sources of income.
- Changes in women's economic situation and the society's attitude to women's new economic role.
- The rights of women under the existing legal systems (customary and Shari'a) in the areas of marriage, divorce custody of children, polygamy, ownership of property and participation in public decision-making as well as the major factors that could affect women's rights in the future.
- Forms of existing violence, their prevalence and how the war has contributed to the prevalence of violence against women.
- Changes in women's decision-making powers, their role in the peace process, and peace building skills.
- Common views on the social position of women within the society.

2.2

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to the massive destruction of the country by the war, whatever literature available that may have existed before the war was lost and not many sources of secondary data were available for review either. Even before the civil war, the northern regions of the former Somali Republic did not have many libraries compared to the South, where all higher institutions of learning and documentation centres existed. Furthermore, literature on Somaliland women is generally scanty and where it exists most aspects of women's lives are not documented.

The problem of limited availability of written sources on Somali women is further compounded by the fact that the Somali language did not have a written script before 1972. The Somali society transmitted its history and how people lived through their rich oral traditions. Just as they memorize their genealogies, so do they transmit past knowledge and experience orally from generation to generation. In view of the above, oral history techniques are extensively used in the report.

Regarding the fieldwork, the peace situation in Somaliland permitted a smooth collection of data. However, like all studies, some problems were encountered in the field during the data-gathering period. The main problems encountered and which may have affected the work are summarised below:

- In some areas, especially the pastoralist areas, the anticipated number of respondents in the sample could not be found due to the mobility of pastoralists.
- The questionnaire might have been too comprehensive, and Somali respondents are not used to answering formal questionnaires.
- It is generally understood that people tend to associate answering questionnaires with getting material rewards. This is a general tendency among the Somali. As local NGOs are a new phenomenon in Somaliland, most people do not have a clear idea of their activities. And people, in most cases, look upon them

with suspicion. There is therefore a widely held belief that when NGOs or, for that matter anybody, ask people for information, convene a meeting of some kind to gather information or take photographs, The assumption is that money meant for the respondents is being cunningly manipulated away from them.

- The nature of some of the questions may have made some male respondents suspicious of the intentions of the interviewers, or possibly made the respondents feel threatened. However, after sufficient explanation and making extra efforts to create trust, the respondents felt at ease and answered the questions.
- During the data collection at Caynabo village, some people spread rumours that the whole aim of such research and women NGOs in general is to make women become big-headed and talk about rights imported by outsiders. This created some resentment among the respondents.
- Some questions seemed to be perceived as sensitive or funny. For example, respondents were reluctant to say their true age. Also, the question on the number of times a respondent ever married was also sensitive for women. Apparently, there was a kind of stigma associated with numerous divorces for women. So although the question was framed in a way that was culturally acceptable, admitting to several marriages was difficult for most female respondents. Similarly, respondents (mostly in urban areas) would not admit that they could not read or write, therefore, they may have made untrue claims regarding their level of education.
- For some questions there was a linguistic difficulty. For example, respondents had difficulty understanding violence against people. A direct Somali equivalent was not readily available, and so the interviewers had to give a long explanation for it. However, some uniformity was maintained in filling the questionnaire by using the same kind of explanations to respondents by the different enumerators.

3.0

ROLES OF WOMEN IN TRADITIONAL SOMALILAND SOCIETY

To appreciate the nature of the changing roles of women in Somaliland and its implications for family dynamics and peace building, it seems necessary to examine a number of key areas of literature, with a view to building a theoretical framework for interpreting the findings. Towards that end, this section seeks to provide basic background information on the different aspects of Somali women's traditional roles within society, examines the areas of possible changes in women's roles, the factors that would contribute to those changes, and the scope of the changes. In order to construct a basis for appropriating the changing roles of women and the associated perceptions, inquiry is made of how the Somali people view the roles of women, specifically, the commonly held perceptions and beliefs about women's social standing and the rationalisation for these views.

Moreover, the relationship between these internalised beliefs and women's unfavourable social, economical, legal and political position within society are examined. An important aspect of the roles of women in Somaliland is the nature, quality, and manner of women's participation in decision-making and peace building. This too is examined, paying particular attention to how the existing legal systems affect their rights, the prevalence of violence in general and the forms of violence directed against women.

In the area of women and decision-making, historical factors that led to women's absence from decision-making as well as the reasons behind their lack of assertiveness in demanding their right to participate in decision-making are explored. Aspects of women's rights that are critical to the day-to-day realities of Somaliland women are also examined.

Since violence against women stems from many causes most of which are related to the political, social, and economic disparity and injustices

prevailing in the society, an overview of the existing forms of gender-based violence in Somaliland is made and the prevalence and the avenues open to victims of such violence are also investigated.

3.1

WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL ROLES WITHIN PASTORALIST SOMALILAND COMMUNITIES

Since the pastoralist mode of production (which is still predominant in today's Somaliland) was the major determining factor that moulded the different gender roles and responsibilities of the members of the traditional Somali society, this section will focus on women in pastoralist communities in Somaliland. Specifically, the pastoralist women's economic, social and decision-making roles within their families and community are examined.

In the pastoralist setting every member had clear rights and responsibilities within his/her immediate family (qoys) and the various levels of the clan mosaic according to age, sex and social standing. The kind of status that was awarded to individual members, therefore, depended on how these prescribed roles and responsibilities were perceived by the society. When Islam came to the Somalis, it affected their way of life and added new aspects to their belief systems.

Somali women had a strong economic role within this pastoralist way of life. Since nomads primarily depended on their livestock for food, women's role in production was appreciated and seen as crucial to the very survival of the nomadic family. Women not only took a central role in tending and looking after smaller stock such as goats and sheep, they also prepared and processed the main pastoralist food, namely milk and meat. In addition to these tasks women were alone responsible for preparing the material for the make-shift nomadic hut known as aqal, building it and eventually transporting it on the back of burden camels during their constant movements.

Although women had a central role in production, they had no ownership rights over livestock – the very essence of production. However, as

wives, women had full use rights over animal products such as milk and *ghee* (locally purified butter). They also enjoyed limited access to meat³. Since there were no vehicles and markets close by, pastoralists did not depend as much on urban markets as they do today. Meat and milk were therefore the major subsistence food especially during the rainy season of plenty - the *gu'* (March to May). Only during the dry season - *Jillaal* (December to February) would families complement their pastoralist diet with cereals bought in town markets and wild fruits and nuts gathered during the *gu* season and stored.

As long as women remained married, their use rights were ensured. The vulnerability of women's economic position became a reality after divorce. For although a number of livestock were always specified for women in the marriage contract, women were almost never paid. If a woman was paid at all, she was paid after the death of her husband. Besides, unlike today, women in pastoralist communities had limited economic options and did not have access to cash.

According to Somali customs, children are regarded as belonging to their father's clan. In the past, in most cases where divorce took place, the father's wish regarding what to do with the children was followed. It was a well-known fact that a father would even take away a baby from the mother when they divorced. Since exogamy (marriage outside the clan) was the rule rather than exception, a divorced woman would go back to her paternal family. Children would therefore stay with their father. In some cases, especially if the divorce occurred while the mother was breast-feeding, the baby would be allowed to go and stay with the mother until he/she was a few years old. He/she would then be returned to the father (Khayre, 1999).

If a mother had grown-up sons, however, she would most probably stay and keep her livestock and children with her. A woman's sons were therefore an insurance against a husband's mistreatment. With his grown-up children around, a father would not dare to send off a woman and take

³ Since men distributed meat to male guests, most of the meat cuts were set aside for them. Special cuts regarded as inferior parts could be left for women to distribute.

the children away from her. That would be one of the reasons that minimised divorce when a woman had grown-up children (Bushaalle, 2000).

Although women had no choice with regard to custody of their children and they would have preferred to keep them, they consoled themselves for three main reasons. First, since livestock legally belonged to the man and they did not have any livestock of their own, divorced women knew that the father was in a better economic position to feed the children. Second, since a woman had to go back to her kin group, who were usually from a different clan than her children, a mother felt that her children would be better off among their own kin. Third, a mother was confident that as soon as the children grow up, they would one day come and join her. A traditional mother lullaby expresses these feelings: “O my child, no matter where you are taken to, deep down in my heart I know that nothing on earth will keep you away from me, for I am your mother”.

The following traditional song sung by women during their exclusive religious gatherings apparently expresses their uncertain future when they are sent away from their matrimonial home after divorce. Appealing to Allah, whom they refer to as their ally, women describe in songs the various injustices they are subjected to and the violation of their rights by men:

*Naago Allahoodow,
Allah Roonohoodow,
Raaxeeyahoodo
Aqalkay dhisteenee
Dhigaha u Asleenbaa
Galab laga dhaqaajoo
Dhaar looga jiidee
Ubadkay dhaleenee
Dharabta u dhigeen baa
Galab laga dhaqaajoo
Daar looga jeedee
Adhigay dhaqeenee
Maqasha u dhigeen baa
Galab laga dhaqaajoo
Dhaar loogaa jiidee*

The song translated reads:

*O, Allah of women,
 Who is good to women,
 And eases their difficulties.
 The hut they (women) fashioned,
 With splendid dyed frames,
 Were they forcibly ejected from,
 Never to set eyes on again.
 The children they brought forth,
 Cared for and nurtured,
 Were forcibly taken from them,
 Never to set eyes on again.
 The sheep and goats they reared,
 Cared for as lambs and kids
 Were forcibly taken away,
 Never to set eyes on again.*

Divorce generally was very rare in traditional Somaliland society. Yet when it happened women took the blame. According to elderly respondents - both men and women - divorce was rare among people and there was shame associated with women divorcees.

One of the reasons why women were not given any property after divorce was that Somali tradition did not allow women to own property. According to a popular Somali custom, women should never come with anything to the matrimonial home. A famous Somali saying shows how men despised women owning anything: "If a woman brings anything, even a pot, break it".

While marriage was universal for both men and women, women almost always married between 16-18 years of age. Men married a little older (between 20-22 years) and some could also marry at a later age without any problem. However, very few women remained single beyond the age of 20. There was a stigma attached to the single status for women after the age of 20.

Traditional Somali marriages were based on forging an alliance between two clans. Hence, a marriage was more than the union between two individuals and the consent of the girl was not necessarily seen as important. The man's clan took the initiative to ask the girl's clan for her hand. As soon as an agreement was reached between the two families, an initial courtesy price was given to the girl's family. Known as *gabati*, this payment was traditionally paid in sheep and goats and, more recently, in money.

But even then, there were certain alternative options that allowed young people in love to circumvent arranged marriages. Eloping was practised and culturally accepted. Although initially the girl's family would get angry at their daughter's "foolishness" to run away with a man, they almost always forgave her. One or more of the girl's male relatives, particularly her brothers or, in their absence, her cousins would visit her at a later date to make peace with their brother-in-law. Their brother-in-law on his part would pay a bride wealth to them even though the bride wealth would be less than he would have had to pay had the marriage been arranged in the normal way.

Polygamy was practised but Somali women had contempt for it. Oral history has it that women reacted strongly to polygamy. Women's traditional work songs, child lullabies and other forms of poetry are a testimony to the disdain that women felt towards polygamy. One such song recited by nomadic women goes like this:

Sadex bay golcobi taal

Gabadanada dayreed

Gucundhada Garloogubay

Iyo godadlay golcob taal

Gabadano dab laga shiday

Gocondhana kab laga tolal

Ee godadlay golcobi taal

Misery resides in three things

The stinging cold of the dayr season (one of the four seasons)

*The treacherous thorn of Garloogubay (a place)
 And the polygamous man
 Against the cold, fire is lit
 Against the thorn, shoes are made
 For the polygamous man, there is no remedy.*

Another song sung while women were tying lamps and kids goes as follows:

*Godadle godagleeyay godadle
 Soo gelyoo guuxyey godadle
 Gelinba reer gaadhyey godadle
 Gaari caar caarshow godadle
 Gabadh yar ceebeeyow godadle
 Gabadh yar oon gabin buu
 Way gabtaa yadhyyay godadle*

*O' polygamous man, polygamous man,
 Here comes the polygamous man grumbling,
 Each night goes he to a different hole (house),
 Polygamous one, who makes a gaari (a clan woman) miserable,
 Polygamous one, who dishonours a young wife,
 A young wife who has never failed him,
 She is not good enough! Says he of her,
 To justify his multiple marriages.*

Since life was subsistence-oriented in the traditional pastoralist context, there was no specific breadwinner as every member of the family contributed to the survival of the family unit and shared the resources from their livestock. Nevertheless, since the man was regarded as legally owning the means of production, namely livestock, customary laws dealing with family maintenance were always based on this fact. It was the responsibility of the husband to provide *masruuf* and *marriin* (daily expenses and clothing) and the main focus of this responsibility was his wife/wives and children. In the traditional pastoralist context, *masruuf*

came from livestock products in the form of milk, meat and ghee as well as from cereals and dates brought from urban centres.

As far as working outside the home is concerned, there was no tradition of confining women to the home nor was there a tradition of segregating people on the basis of gender. The nomadic life that the Somalis led, to a large extent, necessitated that all members of the household contribute their share of labour for sustenance. In urban areas, a small number of women worked outside the home as traders and these were mostly widows, divorcees or very poor women. There were not large numbers of women of all age groups working outside the home as traders and market vendors. After independence in 1960, when the first women living in urban areas went out to work in the public sector, the few job opportunities available to women were mostly teaching and nursing.

With regard to decision-making at the community level all male members of the clan who were above sixteen years of age were eligible to participate and had a say in any meetings. Most of the decisions to be made at this level included regulations regarding the use of resources; dealing with new-comers coming to share resources with the host clan associated with the territory; resolving conflicts; discussing imminent threats from hostile clans e.g. when and if to go to war; and payment of *dia* (blood money) to settle disputes.

As a pastoralist society that had to share the most needed resources of pasture and water, almost naturally there were frequent conflicts over these resources, especially during seasons and years of unusual scarcity. The numerical strength of a clan, which was based on the number of its men, was therefore an asset. This meant that the more male clan members, the better position had that clan with respect to securing pasture and water.

Due to these frequent conflicts over resources on the one hand and the need to live together in harmony on the other, Somalis developed mechanisms to deal with conflicts and ensure peaceful co-existence. Both functions of conflict resolution and regulating people's lives were entrusted to clan elders. The clan elders would arrange an ad-hoc assembly composed

only of men whenever a matter needing serious decision had to be discussed.

In these meetings, which were held under a shady tree referred to as the *geedka* (tree of justice), women had no say. However, they had an indirect role through their unique situation of belonging to both their own clan (their father's clan) and the clan to which they later married. A woman's kinsmen, therefore, saw a young woman who married into a numerically large clan as an asset. By establishing marriage ties (*xidid*) with a strong clan, access to grazing resources and water during periods of crisis would be ensured.

Since all decision-making at the lineage, sub-clan and clan level was regarded as the domain of men, women were never called to give their opinions publicly. However, there are indications that women were consulted privately on the matters under discussion. But in order not to undermine men's decision-making powers, women's "invisible" role of contributing to decision-making was never publicly acknowledged. Whatever knowledge we have on women's hidden roles comes to us through anecdotes. One famous anecdote regarding this point is illustrated in the following folk story:

Wilwaal, a Somali clan leader, summoned the male members of his clan and asked them to bring him the part of lamb meat, which makes people either enemies or friends. Next day the men came, each carrying the meat cut which each deemed meant enmity or friendship between people. One came with a leg, another with the ribs, another with a shoulder etc. At the end of the line stood an old man who seemed to be nervous and hesitating because his daughter advised him to take a gullet, which is not, according to Somali tradition, regarded as proper meat to be eaten. When his turn came, the old man reluctantly brought the gullet forward to show it to Wilwaal. Wilwaal took the gullet and raised it up in the air for all to see. This is the part which can make all the difference; it can make peace or cause war between people (Warsame, 1998).

Apart from illustrating how resources, symbolised here by the gullet, can cause conflicts, the above story also indicates that Somali men sought the advice of their female relatives whenever some important decision was to be made. "Only a fool will not consult his wife and seek her opinion", they would say.

Thus, women had some decision-making power at the level of the household. Although decision-making at this level was seen as less significant compared to that at the clan level, Somali women could exercise their only decision-making power in this domain. Due to their strong role in production, the major decisions women could make involved the use and disposal of livestock products, especially milk and ghee. According to Somali tradition, men who interfered with domestic affairs and especially with anything to do with food were seen as lowly and were despised. Hence women enjoyed a complete autonomy in controlling and disposing of these products (Warsame, 1987).

Women's important role in production, as well as their labour input, did not confer on them a social status equal to that of men. Men were generally seen as socially superior to women folk, especially by virtue of their maintaining the clan name, in the patrilineal system. Respect for men grew with age due to their decision-making role. Women did not enjoy similar respect and their importance diminished with age as their productive and reproductive roles, which particularly defined their social worth, decreased. However, women's status became stronger with age and by being mothers to children and especially male offspring (ibid).

Despite the women's perceived lower status, there was a distinctive paradox in women's place in the Somali society. On the one hand, their role was looked upon as important, and on the other, what women did was seen as inferior to and less significant than men's prescribed roles. The socialisation process, traditional sayings and oral history reflect these contradictions. Girls are socialised to be weak and docile while at the same time they are taught to be strong and smart. Women are told that they hold the strings of the society and that without them life would be a misery. But also, girls and women are led to believe that they are the inferior sex and they are there merely to serve men and should not hold positions

viewed as important. Obviously, they would internalise and perceive their role as less important than that of men.

One famous saying indicates women's supposedly natural inferiority and lack of intelligence. "Breast milk and intelligence cannot co-exist" (Abokor, 1991). On the other hand, there are many folk stories that portray women as intelligent and wise. Intelligence was a major factor that was considered by young men who wanted to get married. Many Somali folk stories give ample evidence of how young men who wanted to choose girls for wives could test the intelligence and wit of the potential brides by asking them complicated riddles before they asked for their hand in marriage.

As Hange (1988) points out, most Somali folk stories have females as their principal character which, according to him, suggests a stronger position and role of women than the women enjoy today. According to Hange:

The predominance of female characters in Somali lore is perhaps due to the theory that in earlier centuries the matriarchal lineage was the base upon which the Somali family life rested in earlier periods of the nation's history. The matriarchal lineage did not lose its historical identity entirely in modern Somalia. For there are clans still bearing the names of their ancestral mothers, for instance, reer-Canbaro, reer-Maryam, etc. The "reer" stands for clan or family, and it is prefixed to the ancestral mother's name: Canbaro, Maryan, etc.

In Somaliland, such clan labels are not used. However, those who share the same mother might be grouped as bah (where bah refers to the mother). Such alliances happened when other parallel clans outnumbered the numerically weak ones. Whether it indicates a former matriarchal lineage or not is open to debate, but that female characters abound in Somali folklore is indisputable.

Throughout their lives women receive these conflicting signals, hence a contradictory picture is manifested in Somali women's roles and their social position in the society. Both images are true to a certain extent and

co-exist. This can sometimes cause confusion to an outsider who sees Somali women as having a strong role within the society and project an independent character, while at the same time there is no corresponding economic and political power held by them.

3.2

VIEWS ABOUT AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE SOCIETY

As a patriarchal and patrilineal society, the Somali people in general value the male above the female. This ideology of assigning a superior/inferior place to people according to gender has become ingrained in the minds of both men and women in Somaliland and has become part of life. Most people rarely question the assumption that the social status of women is inferior to that of men and this is passed on from parents to their daughters and sons without much thought. The children in turn, from a tender age, internalise and accept the respective status given to them by society.

There has been, and still is to some extent, diverse mechanisms that reinforce the attitudes towards the place of men and women within the society. One of the mechanisms contributing to the idea of the inferior female is the festivity with which male children were welcomed into this world. The news of a mother giving birth to a son was in itself something worth celebrating. The well-to-do families showed their gratitude to Allah by slaughtering an animal, while less fortunate fathers gave something away to mark the event. Baby girls, on the other hand, were welcomed less enthusiastically than were boys and no corresponding feasts were held for them, despite their "potential worth" of bringing bride wealth to their families.

This apparent discrimination against girls as early as their first day in life has stimulated diverse reactions from women. Somali women, as they always do when confronted with a situation that stirs their emotions, composed poems and songs to show their feelings about the society's glorification of boys and undervaluing of girls. An anonymous mother, frus-

trated at the attitude of the society regarding the worth of female children, and regretting the birth of her daughter, composed the following poem:

*Why were you born?
 Why did you arrive at dusk?
 In your place a boy
 Would have been welcome
 Sweet dates would have
 Been my reward.
 The clan would be rejoicing
 A lamb would have
 Been slaughtered
 For the occasion,
 And I would have
 Been glorified (Hassan et al., 1995:176).*

Not all mothers reacted in the same way to society's negative attitude towards women's social position. Another mother, equally sad about the low status ascribed for the female lot, composed the following song. Unlike the above mother, however, this mother is sympathising with her newly born daughter and expressing the unjustified treatment of women in general:

*Hooyo way inoo gefeene
 Ardaa aan gabadhi joogin
 Maandhay geel laguma maalo
 Oo gamaan lagu fuuli maayo*

Translated it reads thus:

*O, my daughter, men have
 Wronged us
 For in a dwelling where women
 Are not present
 No camels are milked⁴
 Nor saddled horses mounted (ibid).*

However, one thing must be mentioned here regarding the physical treatment of children. Despite parents' preference for boys, there was no apparent sex-based discrimination with regard to either the love shown to children or the food and other gifts given to them. Once the euphoria of getting a baby boy was over, girls and boys were shown equal love although each was socialised for a different roles.

In general several reasons are used to justify women's supposedly inferior status vis-à-vis that of men. Among the major tools used to justify that notion are tradition, religion, and biological differences between the sexes.

Nevertheless, the continuous socio-economic changes occurring within the Somaliland society have also had an impact on women's different roles within the society and how they are perceived by the society.

⁴Since bride wealth was always paid in camels and sometimes in horses, the mother feels that it is wrong to discriminate against girls since girls are the ones who bring in wealth to their families.

4.0

ROLES OF WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY SOMALILAND SOCIETY

4.1

TRENDS IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ROLES

The following section focuses upon the socio-economic realities prevailing in rural and urban areas and the new economic trends. Specifically I shall examine changes in Somaliland women's economic role, the factors contributing to these changes and their implications for peace and social harmony. The people's reaction to women's income-earning activities outside the home as well as women's ownership of property is examined.

If there is an area where the change in women's roles in Somaliland are most visible, it is their involvement in economic activities and their role as breadwinners. This fact has become increasingly noticeable, especially during the years of the civil war and subsequent conflicts when women, in the absence of men, unavoidably assumed a major role in maintaining their families economically. Everywhere in the rural area as well as in urban centres, Somali women's contribution to the survival of their families became evident.

4.1.1

Pastoralist communities

Due to the arid nature of the land, a large percentage of the people of Somaliland are pastoralists. The major portion of the land is suited to animal husbandry while few areas, mainly close to dry riverbeds, are crop production areas. Even in the areas where people practice dry land farming, they combine it with livestock rearing. Thus, the importance of livestock to the economy of the country at every level is indisputable.

For the most part people raise sheep, goats and camels. However, pastoralists are shifting to cattle, especially in wetter areas in the west of the

country as well as in traditionally dry areas where permanent man-made water reservoirs (*berked*) are available. Of the four species of livestock that Somaliland pastoralists rear, camels are probably the only animals where men still contribute labour input. Women and children almost always take care of the rest of the livestock including transport camels, although recent trends of women's involvement in camel rearing and care have been reported by some pastoralist respondents.

Even though the pastoralist economy is becoming increasingly market oriented, still most pastoralist families primarily rear livestock for subsistence. Every month or so a pastoralist family takes some livestock to the urban markets and exchange the money from the sale of livestock for basic consumer items such as cereals, sugar, human medicines and clothes. In some rural areas, especially those close to urban centres or main roads, people also sell milk on a daily basis. The number of livestock that are periodically taken to the market for sale depends on each individual family's needs. While a rich pastoralist family⁵ is able to sell several sheep and goats per trip, a less well-off family might sell two sheep or two goats per month. The size of a family is also a determining factor of the number of animals and the frequency of the trips to the urban markets.

Besides these items, rural people market *ghee*, hides and honey. The sale of milk and *ghee* is predominantly done by women, since both items are traditionally regarded as a woman's domain.

Women still play a significant role in the pastoralist economy, although there have been some changes in pastoralist women's economic role and position. The first change mentioned by women and men in pastoralist communities, and which the women said was a positive one, pertains to ownership of property. While men still legally own livestock, there is a greater possibility now for women also to own livestock in their own right and to get access to some cash.

⁵ During our field trip, pastoralist respondents told us that according to Somali standards, a rich pastoralist family owns from 200-300 sheep and goats, 50-100 camels, a *berked* (cement-lined water reservoir) and possibly some other assets in the urban areas. While a poor pastoralist family owns less than 60 sheep and goats and one transport camel.

First, more and more men pay the *meher*⁶, at least partially, to their wives especially when the women demand it. Furthermore, a husband cannot take any of the *meher* livestock from his wife, unless of course the wife herself agrees to give him some. What this means is that the woman alone has the right to dispose of the livestock as she pleases. This change is believed to have occurred due to better understanding of religion on the part of pastoralists. As one pastoralist man put it: “people know more about their religion and the rights it gives women now than they did before. In the past people were relatively *juhala* (ignorant) and did not question anything”.

Secondly, women in pastoralist communities have more opportunities now to engage in small-scale trade, and the money acquired from these trading activities is at their disposal. Such trading activities include selling livestock and livestock products such as milk and *ghee*, and assorted items used by pastoralists. While women in pastoralist communities could at times sell milk and *ghee* in the past, the market for these commodities was limited and not many women were involved anyway.

Most of the women in pastoralist communities who do the trading are those in their 50s and who have sons who are married. The wives of the sons of these women take over the burden of rearing livestock, which gives the elderly women the time to pursue other activities. These women normally move to villages near their family’s habitual grazing area. Since these villages serve both as a water source and a market, these women traders become a useful base which pastoralist relatives can use as an address and where they do their marketing (Muse, 2000).

Thirdly, unlike in the past, nowadays, more and more pastoralists have some of their family members living in the urban centres. These family members assist their pastoralist families economically if they are in a position to do so. Also, because of the war, many Somalilanders have fled abroad and send remittance to their families. Some of these people living overseas have pastoralist families back home to whom they send money. Of those respondents who named remittance as a major source of income,

⁶ According to Shar’ia, men must pay a specified amount of livestock, gold or other assets agreed on by the couple to the wife at the marriage.

only 4.5% were pastoralists against 36% who came from urban areas. Nevertheless, the remittance women receive from their relatives is believed to contribute to their decision-making powers within their families, reduce their poverty and the burden associated with it and increase their options.

Another change in the economic role of women in pastoralist communities is their involvement in the marketing of livestock and exchanging the cash earned for the basics. Very few women participated in livestock marketing in the past, as this was regarded as a male activity. During the war years, however, it became safer for women to travel to urban centres to sell their animals. Women evaded government soldiers who were fighting with the opposition by making use of their dual identity, that is, their clan by birth and their husband's clan (Warsame, 1997). Others simply assumed a clan identity they thought would give them a safe passage. According to Warsame (*ibid.*), "by making the trips (*safar*) to urban centres to exchange livestock for consumption goods, women in pastoralist communities gained more experience. They learned how to conduct livestock sales as well as how to go about in the town markets".

Despite the above changes, the large majority of women in pastoralist communities are still denied ownership of livestock. Men are *de jure* owners and if divorced, women have no right to the livestock although they contributed to its production, nor to the dwellings they built themselves. Unlike in the past, however, when only an insignificant number of people lived in the urban areas, women in pastoralist communities who are divorced today settle in towns, as there are more options to sustain their lives there. The options open to these former pastoralist women who choose to settle in urban areas include involvement in a variety of petty trading activities and domestic services, the latter being mainly for younger women.

4.1.2

Agro-pastoralist communities

Farming is believed to have spread from neighbouring Ethiopia to what is now Somaliland around the turn of the century (Samater, 1989). Before

that, the large majority of the Somalis were pastoralists who looked down on all other forms of economic production.

In Somaliland there are several places where agro-pastoralism is practised. A variety of crops are grown depending on, among other things, the availability of water and the type of land in the respective areas. The major crops grown in rain-fed farms are sorghum and maize, while vegetables and fruits are mostly grown in areas where irrigation is practised. Real agro-pastoralism, where pastoralism and animal farming are combined, is practised in the areas where sorghum and maize are grown. In areas where fruits and vegetables are grown as a rule, people do not keep livestock.

Usually cattle, sheep and goats as well as some donkeys are kept on the farms, but some families are also beginning to keep camels. When it becomes very dry and especially during the *Jilaal* season, agro-pastoralists move with their livestock and lead a typical pastoralist lifestyle, leaving some of their family members behind.

Both women and men work on the farms, each with a specific task. Men sow, weed and do the harvesting. Women look after the crops and scare away birds, monkeys and other wild animals that destroy crops. However, agro-pastoralist women nowadays do tasks which men used to do and are now apparently overburdened, compared to past periods.

As regards access to land, women are not allowed to own land. Only if they purchase land with their money could they own that land. According to a young agro-pastoralist woman: “When my father died, my brothers refused me my share of land. They told me that if I want [sic] to be given my share, I should marry a man from the same lineage. In that way, the land would always remain with the lineage”.

4.1.3

Urban centres

Most of the changes in women’s roles are occurring in the major towns and especially in the capital city Hargeisa. General observations reveal that the populations of the main towns have increased tremendously since the end of the first civil war and the subsequent internal conflicts. This means that the need for services and markets has been revived and more economic

opportunities are gradually becoming available to people as life returns to normal. Moreover, each year the number of the Somali people in Diaspora who are returning to Somaliland to start their life again is increasing. All these factors are contributing positively to the revival of the economy.

The majority of the urban populations, as noted earlier, derive their income from the private sector. The trade and service sectors are currently the major income providers for the majority of Somaliland households. Within these sectors also, new small companies that provide critical services such as banking, communication and electricity supply are emerging all over the country. The government formerly provided all these services. However, due to the vacuum created by the collapse of government institutions during the war, Somali entrepreneurs quickly seized this opportunity and began to serve the Somaliland public.

At the time of data collection, about five local companies were providing banking services, mostly money transfers, to the Somali population living inside and outside the country. Six establishments were involved in telephone services and an uncountable number of small enterprises provided electricity services to the town dwellers of Somaliland. None of these enterprises were, however, owned by women, and except for the telephone companies, women were not included among the staff of these companies. In some of these companies, especially the major money transfer establishments, there was even a tendency of not recruiting women among their staff.

Likewise a number of hotels, some of them aimed at catering for people coming from abroad, were springing up all over the urban centres. In some of these hotels, single women find it difficult to be accepted as clients. The main reason behind this reluctance of owners to allow women into their hotels is the fear they have of independent Somali women who have disrupted the image of the “good” Somali women. An image that reinforces the notion that “good” women are those who:

- Keep away from the areas thought of as men’s domains.
- Would rather stay in the homes of relatives and friends during their temporary stay in another town.

- Would not dare to intermingle freely with unrelated men.
- Are bashful and unassertive.

While more and more women do not fear that label due to their business and professional dictates and movements, there might be women who would like to confine to this socially constructed image in order not to be seen as “unSomali” or “bad”. The former group is becoming increasingly frustrated at these restrictions when confronted with unreasonable owners who will only let them into these hotels if they are accompanied by a supposed husband.

4.2

WOMEN AND DECISION MAKING

The role of women in decision making in Somaliland can be seen in three spheres: Women’s decision-making power at the family level; women’s decision-making power at the public domain; and women’s participation in conflict resolution and peace building. Each of these spheres is discussed briefly.

4.2.1

Women’s decision-making power at the family level

In the past, women could make certain decisions at the family level. Nowadays, the scope of their decision-making powers is believed to have widened. One reason cited by most respondents is the increase in the level of women’s involvement in income-earning activities. When women earn their own income as confirmed by women themselves, their decision-making powers within their families become stronger. This could be the major reason behind the women’s determination to be economically independent.

Other factors which are believed to have had an impact on women’s decision-making powers at this level are the widespread unemployment among men, the increasing financial responsibility that has fallen on the shoulders of women and the spreading habit of *qat* (the stimulant leaves of *Catus Edulius*) chewing among men. All these new trends can be attributed to the war and the circumstances that prevailed after it.

What is perhaps more significant regarding women's strong role in decision-making at the level of the household is their control over the income from their own efforts. Women have full control of whatever income they produce. If any of their income is passed to their spouses, in most cases it is done voluntarily. Their husbands are well aware of this power and very few men may try to coerce their wives into giving them their earnings.

4.2.2

Women's decision-making power at the public domain

Just as Somali women were generally absent from decision-making at the public domain in the past, so are they now. Women are not represented in any of the formal and informal institutions of decision-making whether at the village, district, regional or national levels of Somaliland. They are also absent from top economic leadership positions in the private sector.

The complete absence of women from the public decision-making processes of their country can be attributed to a number of factors. In a limited survey conducted by SOWRAG in collaboration with the International Co-operation for Development (ICD), a number of reasons were identified for the exclusion or absence of women from public decision-making. Among the cited factors are:

- Opposition and resistance by the majority of the male decision makers to women sharing power with them.
- Misinterpretation of the teachings of Islam, to exclude women from public decision-making.
- Clan-based system of governance, which does not give room for women's participation in decisions above the family level.
- Cultural perceptions held by people that women are incapable of leading and are created only to bear children and do household work.
- Women's lack of, or low levels of education.
- Time constraint as women shoulder all household responsibilities as well as increasing economic responsibilities.

- Low self-esteem of women regarding their role in politics and other public decision-making which comes from years of socialisation (SOWRAG, 2000:12).

Despite the above obstacles that hinder women's participation in public decision-making, Somali women are for the first time beginning to get involved in decision-making outside their families. They are doing this through their women groups. Throughout the towns of Somaliland, one can witness various women NGOs working for the improvement of women's lives. During the last couple of years, a new trend to form coalitions of women groups has started with the aim of promoting the rights of women and uniting their voices.

Since women are excluded from important public leadership positions, women umbrella organisations are beginning to rally around this issue. Negaad Umbrella Organisation, a coalition of thirty-two women organisations operating in Hargeisa is, for example, working towards women's political empowerment. Negaad is doing this through much awareness raising and lobbying work on women's rights, especially their political rights, and organising leadership and conflict resolution training for women. SOWRAG, a member of Negaad, is also contributing towards these efforts by collecting crucial data on women and decision-making for Negaad to base their strategies on.

4.2.3

Women, conflict resolution and peace building

Women's direct involvement in all forms of conflict resolution and peace building processes was minimal in the past. In the specific area of conflict resolution, women had an indirect role to forge peace between conflicting parties. Sealing final agreements between the warring parties with the exchange of brides was one way of doing this. The logic behind this strategy was the sowing of trust between the two warring clans because the exchange of brides was a gesture of good will and a genuine wish to let bygones be bygones and start a peaceful relationship. The Somali saying, "*meel xinijir lagu bururiyay xab baa lagu bururiya*", translated as "a baby

should be born in the spot where blood has been spilt”, indicates the rationale for exchanging brides.

Since exogamy was widely practised among the Somali people, the very fact of a woman marrying into another clan was in itself a precaution against future disputes developing into violent confrontations. It was much easier for the elders of the two clans who had already forged an alliance through the marriage relationship (*xidid*) to reach an agreement when conflicts arose. Moreover, in some cases, women themselves acted as peace envoys to their respective clans and were sometimes the first messengers sent between the disputing clans to break the ice. Sending a woman was safer during the initial stages of resolving a conflict when peace agreements had not been reached, for women belonged to both clans either by marriage or by birth.

Women’s role in conflict resolution and peace building came to the forefront during the internal conflicts within Somaliland that occurred after the end of the civil war. After experiencing the carnage of the war and living in refugee camps in Ethiopia for several years, the people were finally happy to come back home and begin a new life. However, it soon became clear that the legacy of a decade of wars and destruction would not vanish so smoothly. Conflict after conflict plagued the already war-weary population and fresh waves of refugees streamed back to the camps they left only a short time before.

These unfortunate incidents of power struggle between former friends more than anything else, acted as a catalyst to find meaningful solutions to end these internal conflicts. Although women did not participate directly in the negotiations and peace conferences that took place throughout the country, they nevertheless, contributed a great deal to the exploitation of the prevailing anti-war sentiments. The main contributions of women towards the peace building processes were:

- They mobilised people for demonstrations against war.
- They composed emotion-charged songs and poems in support of peace.

- They chose envoys from among themselves and sent them to participate in peace conferences without receiving any formal invitations from the organisers and made touching speeches there.
- They made a lot of awareness raising on peace through their organisations.
- They persuaded their husbands and sons to stop the fighting.
- They gave logistical support to peace conferences, such as contributing money and preparing food for the delegates.
- And they submitted peace declarations to warring parties.

Women carried out these activities individually and through their respective organisations. The women's overwhelming opposition to the conflicts and their enthusiasm for peace are believed to have resulted from the suffering they experienced as a result of the civil war. Although everybody suffered immensely, women and children received the major brunt of the war. The common feelings of women towards the war was summed up by one of the respondents from Hargeisa:

What happened to us was terrible. First the troops of Siad Barre terrorised us by killing innocent people, raping the women and taking people's property. Then we had to flee and experience all kinds of unexplainable hardships. We women suffered most, with the children and all the work. After the dictator was defeated and we returned to our devastated homes with the dream of leading a normal life again, our own fighters started to turn their arms against each other. Women were confused and could not understand why these men were fighting. If their aim was to liberate the country, why didn't they put down their weapons? We wondered. If our elders had not checked their madness in time, Allah knows where we would have been by now (Mohamoud, 1999).

The peace poems women composed had the same message and were intended to raise the consciousness of the masses to the importance of peaceful co-existence between the different clans. One of the most famous peace poems, composed by Saado Abdi Amare, moved many people when

it was first recited by the composer publicly in 1994. The following lines are excerpts from that poem. The poem expresses the sadness of the composer and her wonder and surprise at the fresh conflicts after the people thought the civil war was finally over. Addressing a fellow woman friend, by the name of Deeqa, the poetess says:

*Hadaba Deeqay dagaalkanu muxuu ahaa?
 Degelba degelkuu ku xigay daabcad kula kacayey,
 Shisheeye haduu is dilo waaba kala durkaa,
 Marada labadeeda dacal buu dab ii qabsaday.
 Hadaba Deeqay, dagaalkanu muxuu ahaa?
 muxuu daankani daankaa ku diidanyahay?
 Intaan dacar leefay waabay durduurtayey,
 Dabaasha anoon aqoon daad I qaadayey,
 Agoonkii daalanaa dib uga caymadyey,
 Hooyadii weerku daashaday diboydayey,
 Dadkii iyo Hargeysaba is diidnayey,
 Berberadaan soo day idhi dib uga roorayey,
 Hadabaa Deeqay, Dagaalkanu muxuu ahaa?
 Maxaa daankani daankaa ku diidanyahay?*

Translated as:

*O, Deeqa, I am truly at a loss
 Of the real intentions of this war.
 Unlike unrelated people who can drift apart.
 My own people are fighting one another,
 Neighbours are fierce at each other's throat,
 My plight has no match.
 On both ends have my cloth caught fire
 (an expression used when one is related to both warring parties)
 Knowing nothing of swimming,
 Was I taken away by a current.
 From the bitter da'ar tree (aloe),
 And of fatal poison had I my fill.*

*Why do people from this bank,⁷
 Despise people on the other?
 Why must weary orphans flee again?
 Must grieving mothers suffer afresh?
 Out of desperation, rejected I
 Hargeisa and my own people
 Only to flee hastily from newly visited Berbera.
 Deeqa I am truly at loss.*

The following poem was also composed when conflicts started among the Somali National Movement (SNM) fighters who were initially united against the military regime. It is addressing the armed militias and drawing their attention to the reality of the dispute among them. A dispute that does not serve any purpose, but only adds to the suffering of the already war-weary returnees who were keen only on one thing - rebuild their lives.

*Hayga dumin qalbiga,
 Durba ii bugsaday.
 Hay saarin debedii,
 Diilaalyadii ka raystoo,
 Dugsi baaban seexdee.
 Hayga dilin halyey,
 Dabkii hore ka hadhay.
 Ha duqaynin naafada ,
 Dirqii bay ku kabantee.
 Dabka wiilka ridayow,
 Cidi kuma duljoogtee,
 Maanaad I dilaysaa?
 Aaway danabyadeenii?
 Daarihii maxaa helay?*

⁷The city of Hargeisa is divided by a dry river-bed. The two sides are referred to as the two banks and are roughly divided on clan basis.

Translated it reads thus:

*Shatter not, my newly mended heart,
Force me not to the refugee life,
Where cold, hunger, and misery reside
For I have just tasted the comfort of home
Kill not the surviving heroes,
Who miraculously escaped death.
Crush not the handicapped ones,
For they have barely recovered.
Young man with the gun,
Whom are you shooting? Me?
For, there is no enemy in sight.
Have you ever seriously wondered?
What became of our brave fighters?
Whatever happened to all our buildings?*

4.3

ISLAMIC AND CUSTOMARY LAWS AND THEIR POSITION IN SOME AREAS CRITICAL TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Before the advent of Islam, traditional laws (*xeer*) governed the Somalis. Although these laws were not written, they were very elaborate and well respected by people. When the Somalis later embraced Islam, Islamic laws were introduced into their lives and blended with their existing customary laws. During the British rule in what is now Somaliland, some aspects of the Indian Penal Code were also introduced in the areas outside family laws. Today one can still witness Islamic and customary laws in function in family law cases, sometimes with no clear distinction.

It is also clear that many of the people do not have a clear understanding of what is tradition and what is Islamic. Unless somebody is well versed in the Qur'an and the Prophet's sayings (pbuh), the two are most likely to be mixed. Even when somebody, such as a judge, is well aware of the position of Islam on a specific issue, he does not execute it and might allow traditional elders to deal with it in their customary way.

In the following pages I will look into how some central issues are dealt with under customary and Islamic laws: custody of children; ownership

over property and women's work outside the home; family maintenance; marriage and divorce and polygamy. I will also attempt to examine the implications of how these rights are executed, or not executed, for women's decision-making roles. Lastly, the discrepancies between what the laws prescribe and what is actually done in reality shall be explored.

4.3.1

Custody of children

Due to changes in lifestyle and because more and more people are settling in towns, many aspects regarding custody of children have also changed. Children of divorced parents have higher chances of staying with their mother in the urban setting than they formerly had. One reason for this could be that today many mothers are able to maintain their children economically. However, the father's decision on what to do with the children in the event of a divorce still counts, as people believe that fathers have exclusive Islamic right over the custody of children after a divorce.

In general, there are no uniform custody regulations when elders take up the matter. How the custody of children of divorced parents is arranged and the basis upon which the arrangement is made vary from case to case depending on the specific circumstances of each family. One thing must be mentioned here, and that is the correlation between the situation in which divorce takes place and which parent takes over the custody of children. In instances where it is the husband's decision to get divorced from his wife, it is most probable that he agrees to grant custody of the children to their mother. On the other hand, women who insist on getting divorced are not only vulnerable to losing their children but also to losing their entitled *meher* payment. Even in such cases, however, women have their own ways of coping with the situation. Such was the case of Marian, a young woman in her 30s, who said:

When I decided to leave my husband, he was reluctant to grant me divorce. When I insisted, he agreed to the divorce on one condition - that I leave my two year-old son [with him]. I did not know what to do. But then I thought of a plan to take my son later and went along

with his wish. After the divorce I hid myself in the house of a relative for three days so that my ex-husband could think that I left the town. Later, I learned through friends that he took my son to his old mother who lived in a small village close to where I stayed. Early one morning, I went to the village where my son was and without anybody seeing me, I went to an old lady who was a relative of my mother and told her of my intentions of taking my son. The old lady assisted me by finding out when my ex-husband left the village. As soon as he left, I hurried to the house where my son was and took him with me. My former mother-in-law was a good woman and she did not try to prevent me from taking my son. I tied my son on my back and started off towards a village that lay ten hours walk away. People from my clan inhabited this specific village and when I told them my story, they assured me that nobody would take the child from me. The next morning I took a car bound for the town where my mother lived. After three days, my ex-husband came to our home and discussed the matter with my brother and mother. He left without taking my son from me. Now another woman and I sell food near the livestock market and my mother takes care of my son while I am away.

Although Islam is clear on the issue of the custody of children, in many cases the Islamic traditions are not followed. According to Islamic law, the mother has the first right to keep the children when divorce occurs. This is evidenced by the following Hadith said by the Prophet (pbuh) while addressing a certain woman who asked him which of them (her husband or herself) had the first right to custody of their children: “You have the first right until you remarry”. The father, however, has the responsibility of maintaining the children economically. Islam further teaches that a child has the right to be with his/her mother up to the age of seven. After that age, children may choose which of their parents they wish to stay with. A mother can, however, as the Prophet (pbuh) said, lose the custody of her children if she remarries a man other than her former husband, or if she is involved in activities that could harm the children such as prostitution.

When divorce occurs in the district courts where cases pertaining to family matters are dealt with, the above Islamic procedures are not always followed. If a father says that he will keep the children, the court goes along with this wish even if the children would have been better off with their mother. However, judges do not admit this fact, as a judge in the Hargeisa District Court explains: “We look into the prevailing circumstances and give custody to the parent we think is most suitable for the children, economically and emotionally. We also tell the parents to discuss the issue among themselves and reach an agreement on which one of them can stay with the children”. The judge admitted that “unless the father is willing to give financial support to the children, there is no way we can enforce him to pay as, due to the prevailing circumstances, we cannot verify his income. Most of the time, therefore, the mother says that she will not demand any financial responsibility from the father to avoid any problems such as the husband’s insistence to take custody of the children”.

Since mothers have been socialised to assume the nurturing role in the Somali society, it might be emotionally and psychologically good for the children to be taken care of by the mother. This is because the mother’s nurturing role from birth normally means that a strong bond has developed between her and the children. However, taking that responsibility alone with the father out of the scene, as happens in many cases, can have a drastic effect on the child and the mother. In such cases the mother is forced to fend for both herself and the children. Taking full responsibility for the children, emotionally and financially, leaves little room for women to take an active role in other equally important matters such as participating in decisions that will affect their lives.

Moreover, as alternative caretakers are not always available, children of divorced parents may lose the care and guidance that are crucial for a healthy society. The social effects caused by these developments are already being felt by the Somaliland society. Although no systematic studies have been made on problems related to the custody of children and the effects of any such problems on the children, it is generally believed that the increased use of drugs by the youth, teenage delinquency, increased violence and other social ills may be related to how custody cases are handled.

4.3.2

*Ownership of property and
women's work outside the home*

Traditional and Islamic laws are on opposite ends when it comes to women's right to own property. According to the teachings of Islam, women can own property in their own right and dispose of it as they see fit. *Surat al Nissa* verse 32 states that "Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned". On the contrary, Somali tradition does not allow women to own property.

Somali women have gone a long way and can own property now. Also, the attitudes, perceptions and understanding of the general Somali public regarding the right of women to own property seem to have changed.

As far as working outside the home is concerned, it was never an issue until the early 1980s. It all began in the late 1970s when the Somali economy was in a crisis and more and more women got involved in income earning activities outside the home to make ends meet. There were strong reactions from many men who saw women's trading activities outside their homes as leading to social disruptions. This also coincided with the promulgation of the family law, which made certain reforms, some of which directly contradicted the Shari'a⁸. There was a public outcry against the move, which resulted in the execution of ten religious men.

The same sentiments of fear are prevalent among many men in Somaliland. Women's increased economic activities tend to provoke opposition from such men. As more and more women earn and control their income, such men perceive their spheres of influence as shrinking and, consequently, feel threatened. Often, people who are opposed to women's income earning activities outside the home use religious justifications even though Islam does not prohibit the involvement of women in economic activities. There is no verse in the Qur'an which directly bars

⁸The Somali family law, which was promulgated in 1975, made inheritance equal for men and women. In the Qur'an, the share of inheritance that a woman gets is half of what the man gets since the responsibility of maintenance falls on the man.

women from earning income as long as they follow the Islamic conduct of wearing clothes that do not expose their bodies, avoid close contacts with men and are not involved in illegal economic activities. A 50-year old man expressed the common feelings among men who are opposed to women's economic activities: "If we let women go out to work, everything will become *jaantaa roggan* (chaos). A woman should stay at home and be satisfied with what her man (husband) brings her. This is how it was meant to be."

But there are those people – both men and women - who view women's economic activities outside the home as commendable. These people further see the income women earn as crucial to both the survival of their families and the reconstruction of the economy of Somaliland.

Even though most women appear to be unaware of many of the rights that Islam has given them, it seems that the awareness level of this specific right to be gainfully employed is high. Many women, especially the ones whose income is relatively high, are exercising that right and are getting more chances to take part in community activities. Besides, women's income is used to solve problems that could otherwise escalate into conflicts. A case in point is the payment of blood money, which used to be paid by men in the past. When women are the sole breadwinners, they pay their family's (male members) share of that money.

4.3.3

Family maintenance

Islam teaches that family maintenance is a man's role and responsibility. Therefore, according to the teachings of Islam, a woman's contribution to her family economically is an option, not an obligation. *Surat al Nissa* verse 34 states: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property [for the support of women]". That could be one reason why a husband feels that he has a right to keep his wife from working outside the home if he so wishes. In fact, some husbands prevent their wives from taking up income earning activities outside the home, especially if they (the husbands) are economically well off.

The expressed fear of women getting out of hand seems to be evident among many Somaliland men. Comments such as: “Women become arrogant and high-headed when they earn their own income” and “when women get involved in income earning activities, they will not need us any longer and become independent” are not uncommon.

4.3.4

Marriage and divorce

Marriage is encouraged for both women and men in Islam. Somali tradition also coincides with Islamic teachings on its view on the importance and the universality of marriage. However, women can now marry much later. The attitudes regarding the age at which one may or should marry have changed to a certain extent and it is becoming much more common for Somali women to stay single into their 30s. This is especially true for women who are busy studying. However, for most Somali women, getting married and becoming a mother at an early age is still the most preferred option.

According to Islamic tradition, when a girl wants to marry, she should inform her *weli* (guardian)⁹ about her intention to marry and whom she wants to marry. Her guardian must then marry her to the person whom she chooses, on condition that the person is a Muslim and does not have an intolerably bad character. A girl’s guardian can also choose somebody for her to marry but he has first to seek her consent. If the girl refuses the man that her guardian chooses for her, that marriage ought not to take place. For a marriage to become valid, therefore, the consent of the girl, the knowledge of the guardian, the presence of two witnesses and the specification of the *meher* are four conditions that must be met. However, people rarely follow the procedure that has been prescribed by Islam.

⁹ That is, her father, or in his absence, her brother; in his absence her parental uncle, or in his absence her paternal male cousins.

Nowadays, it is very rare to see arranged marriages being concluded without the consent of the girl. In cases where a man goes to the girl's guardian to ask her hand in marriage without first speaking to her, the guardian would first ensure his daughter's willingness before he gives his word. The large majority of Somali women therefore have no problem marrying the person of their choice, and most marriages are based on individual choice even in the rural areas. However, couples to be are expected to inform their parents so that they (the parents) would give them their blessing. This is a development which will have a positive impact on women's choices in life and their decision-making powers in Somaliland.

In Islam, the power to terminate a marriage is entrusted to men. Divorce, while allowed, is the last resort when all avenues to reconcile spouses fail and is regarded as "the most hated *xalaal* (sanction) by Allah". Men should divorce their wives when there is a "reasonable" justification and women are discouraged from asking for divorce unless certain conditions are met. According to a Hadith by the Prophet (pbuh) told by Ahmed and Abu Daud and Tarmady, "for any woman who asks her husband to grant her divorce without a 'solid' reason, is the smell of heaven forbidden".

In Somaliland the rate of divorce is believed to have increased compared to, say, twenty years ago. Both elderly men and elderly women say that in Somaliland divorce was rare among people and there was shame associated with women divorcees. Today divorce is a common occurrence. Although according to the law divorces should be registered with the district courts, there is no such systematic recording of divorce cases. A young male secretary in the district court of Hargeisa (the only district court in the capital currently dealing with family matters) went through the divorce files on my request. According to him, there were 50 divorce cases recorded during the last six months of the year 2000.

Even though a husband has been entrusted the right of terminating a marriage as a last resort, men in Somaliland have been known to divorce their wives whenever they so please. All a man has to do is pronounce the *talaq*¹⁰ in front of two witnesses. However, in order for the divorce to become legal, a divorce certificate is needed if, for example, the woman wants to remarry.

Women are entitled to get *meher* after divorce. Unfortunately, there are indications that a lot of times urban women do not receive any *meher* at all. Whenever women initiate a divorce, they are not entitled to any *meher*. Therefore, in many cases, even when the women do not initiate the divorce, many men who want to divorce, make it difficult for their wives, in order to avoid paying anything. Eventually the wives become fed up and agree to relinquish their due *meher* to get their freedom. This fact of stretching wives into surrendering their right has become a problem for many women who do not have any other financial security after divorce.

4.3.5

Polygamy

Islam allows polygamy. A man can marry a maximum of four wives on condition that he treats his wives equally and justly. This is evidenced in *Surah al Nissa* (women), verse 3, which states that: "...marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four; and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only)". Jurists are divided on the interpretation of this verse. Some argue that since it is practically impossible to treat co-wives equally in every respect, the real intention of the verse was to permit polygamy under "exceptional circumstances". Others consider it as an "unlimited license" (el Din Osman, 1985:124). Some countries such as the Democratic Republic of Yemen have used the former argument and "the disruptive social effects" of polygamy to limit it (ibid).

Usually however, most Muslims maintain that since polygamy is not forbidden outright, it is their right to marry the allowed number, and they choose to ignore the second clause of the verse. The equal treatment of their wives is therefore left to men's conscience. Most Somali men seem to be of the opinion that polygamy is a divine right and should not be

¹⁰ Divorce proceedings provided by Sharia: a unilateral renunciation of the marriage by the husband.

questioned by women. This will no doubt have a direct influence on the way family laws are handled. Moreover, that position coupled with the views of most religious men in Somaliland has discouraged Somali women from pushing for reforms on an issue they feel strongly about.

Among the cases taken to court, there is hardly one on polygamy. That means there are no recorded cases of women who have made a formal complaint about their spouses taking a second wife. Nor do women readily complain to their elders if their husbands take another wife, as they complain from desertation, failure of the husband to pay maintenance or wife battering. The major reason preventing them from doing this is the reaction they are most likely to get from those to whom they complain. A reaction that was confirmed by many women whose husbands took a second wife was: “So what! Don’t you know that your husband can marry up to four wives? If you have other complaints, say them and we will assist you”.

An exception to this reaction is towards men who take second wives when they are economically unable to provide for their first wives and children. These women might get sympathy for their complaints. However, even then, no man whether an elder or a judge dare prevent a man from taking a second wife as long as there is no provision in the law to restrict polygamy.

Since most girls do not go to school and have limited marketable skills, they see marriage as the best alternative. This also includes marrying men with other wives. A young woman who married a man who had another wife said:

I was tired of taking care of four small siblings plus my father and my two older brothers. My father is unemployed so my mother became pre-occupied with bringing us income. There was nobody to assist me with all the chores. I just wanted to escape from it all. So when this man approached me, I saw it as a way out and accepted to be his wife even though he told me that he had another wife.

Despite the tendency of serial monogamy among people in Somaliland, many people think that polygamy has increased. Moreover, the age at which a man takes a second wife is believed to have become lower. According to a 70-year-old woman:

Although polygamy was practised in the past, it was not common for young men under their 40s to take other wives. Besides, since people were pastoralists, each wife had a separate herd. Today young men below 30 years of age are taking second wives while they cannot even maintain the first one. What is even worse is the willingness of young girls to marry polygamous men.

Although women who enter into polygamous marriages have their own varied motives for becoming the second, third or fourth wife, one thing which most of these young women may have in common is their lack of other better options. For sooner or later, the problems associated with polygamous marriages become a reality.

Of all the areas related to women's rights, polygamy is perhaps the most discussed issue among individual women in their private conversations. Recognised as a major plight by most women in Somaliland, polygamy is regarded as humiliating and degrading. Not only that, polygamy is a major cause of psychological trauma and a sense of deficiency to those women whose husbands take another wife. Even when a woman does not live in a polygamous marriage, it does not exempt her from living in insecurity. The possibility of other women in her husband's life hangs over her head.

The psychological effects of polygamy on women are enormous and tend to erode women's self-confidence and their ability to realise and apply their full potential in life. This will, of course, have a negative impact on many aspects of women's lives such as their decision-making roles, participation in the peace building processes as well as in useful community activities. Furthermore, polygamy is associated with a lot of family breakdown and disruptions of family life, which undermines and adds up to the problems of the post-war era.

What could perhaps lead to some action and clear policies on family law cases is for women to break the trend of individualising their legal problems and making them a collective concern and more political. Otherwise, each and every woman will suffer in isolation personalising her problems.

There is an apparent need to investigate the effects of polygamy and serial monogamy, especially in relation to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Women are in a more vulnerable situation than men when it comes to how their rights are defined and the lack of law enforcing mechanisms as well as any collective actions and strategies on their part. This vulnerability will contribute to women becoming victims of violence in ways different from men.

4.4

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, THEIR PREVALENCE AND JUSTICE SEEKING

Like in other societies in other parts of the world, different forms of violence exist in Somaliland. While some of this violence is acknowledged by the society, many Somalis do not see certain behaviours or practices as violence at all. A case in point is female genital cutting, which is widespread in the country. The large majority of girls undergo the most severe form of female genital mutilation (FGM) - infibulations. The rest undergo the so-called Sunna type of female genital cutting, which ranges from cutting the tip of the clitoris to cutting the whole clitoris plus the labia minore and parts of the labia majore.

Many forms of violence apparently exist in Somaliland. While some of this violence is directed to both men and women, others are specifically directed to women. As we said earlier, most people do not recognize FGM as violence, therefore respondents did not mention it among the forms of violence that they claim to have witnessed. The forms of violence that were listed by respondents include physical, psychological, verbal, ostracism and rape.

4.4.1

Physical violence

The majority of physical violence recorded occurred during the oppressive regime of Siad Barre and the civil war. The forms of violence that were prevalent during this period were many and varied. According to the majority of respondents, mass killings, imprisonment, rape, forced migrations, torture and executions were the most current forms of physical violence that were inflicted on the people.

Nearly four in every five (78%) respondents said that they had witnessed physical violence being done to people. The forms of physical violence seen included murder, beating with severe injuries, beating with minor injuries and dispossession of property or belongings. The two pastoralist areas surveyed had the least recorded physical violence. It is interesting to note that although there is a huge number of light arms, the crime rate among the Somaliland population is low.

Moreover, there is an increase in *qat* chewing among the male population and a high unemployment rate. Also, the number of schools is not enough and this contributes to widespread delinquencies among the male youth - who roam the streets at night and harass women and girls. These problems have been precipitated by the civil war.

The civil war with its accompanying physical violence was one of the major reasons behind the huge mass movement of the population of Somaliland across the border into Ethiopia to seek protection. Almost all major towns and villages inhabited by the Isaaq clan, a major clan in Somaliland, were abandoned and had few inhabitants throughout the war years.¹¹ The violence witnessed under Siad Barre was the first one of its kind in many generations. In the words of Ma'alin Qasim H. Mohamed, "I never imagined that a fellow Somali could ever behave in such a way to another Somali. The violence I witnessed before and during the war had no parallel in my 100 years of existence".

Several conflicts occurred after the defeat of Siad Barre's troops and the declaration of independence by the former northern regions of the former Somali Republic. However, the violence that resulted from these conflicts in no way matched those that occurred under the toppled military regime. There are relatively low levels of violence nowadays. Even the various forms of major violence that could still be are mostly attributed to the legacies of the civil war. Such violence includes revenge killings among men, where someone kills another to avenge the death of a kinsman, and violence connected to conflict over resources, especially disputes over land.

¹¹ Siad Barre's troops were targeting the *Isaaq* clan since most of the fighters of the Somali National Movement (SNM) who were opposing the regime, were members of the *Isaaq* clan.

Hargeisa, which is the most populated town in Somaliland¹² and where most incidences of violence are expected to occur, has in 1999 recorded three different forms of physical violence for one year (See Table 1). Since all kinds of physical violence are reported to the nearest police station, the possibility of physical violence being unrecorded is minimal. The reason for this is to get a legal document from the police asking medical doctors to verify the magnitude and degree of injury. The certificate of injury thus becomes a base on which the court or the elders can reach a judgement.

Table 1

Recorded number of physical violence by region for the year 2000

| Type of physical violence | Hargeisa | Togdheer | Sanag | Awdal | Sahil | Sool |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Murder | 22 | 44 | 05 | 03 | 04 | 08 |
| Rape | 13 | 02 | 01 | 03 | 01 | NIL |
| Major injury | 20 | 23 | 05 | 13 | NIL | NIL |
| Minor injury | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |

Source: Department of Planning and Research, Police, Hargeisa, Somaliland

4.4.2

Psychological violence

Psychological violence is not as obvious as other forms of violence. Nevertheless 36% of the interview respondents said that they had witnessed it being done to somebody in their neighbourhood or somebody they knew. Since there is no professional counselling practised in

¹² No exact figures are available but estimates put the current population of Hargeisa at 400,000–450,000.

Somaliland, victims of psychological violence turn to somebody they know and trust for advice and support. That could be a relative, a friend or even a neighbour. This could be one reason explaining the high incidence of psychological violence reported by the respondents.

The victims of psychological violence were mostly women. This could indicate a greater vulnerability of women to such a kind of violence compared to men. The fact that most victims of psychological violence were women could be attributed to the unequal power relationship between men and women. Some men also acknowledged the greater risk of women experiencing violence, and specifically psychological violence. As put by one man in Hargeisa:

Women do experience violence much more than men due to their prescribed roles and position in the society. Both men and women are socialised to understand that women are subservient to men. Men also internalise the ideology that they (men) have the right to subjugate women.

The specific forms of psychological violence included *cadaadis* (suppression), *cagajuglayn* (talk in an aggressive tone), *hadidaad* (threats) and *bahdil* (hampering on their self confidence). There were also instances in which the victims of such violence were the minority groups known as *Gabooye* whom the other clans discriminate against. A female respondent recalled how her neighbours, members of this minority group, were terrorised by another neighbouring family who accused them of sorcery when their child became sick. Although violence of this nature is rare it is nonetheless likely to cause much psychological harm when it occurs, especially when the victims do not have strong protection within the prevailing clan structure.

4.4.3 *Verbal violence*

Verbal violence was not as widely witnessed. According to Somali custom, there are certain forms of verbal violence that are regarded too serious to be tolerated, such as insults that are addressed to one's clan or one's ancestors. Special significance is attached to verbal violence when it is directed

to a wife from her husband. When women become victims of verbal violence of this nature, compensation is paid in the form of livestock, gold or money, depending on whether the violence has occurred in an urban area or a rural setting.

The common forms of verbal violence included personal insults, family and clan insults, and false accusation. Women especially get offended when their husbands insult them in front of other people. This is seen as disrespect not only towards the woman but also to her kin and could lead to divorce if it recurs.

4.4.4

Ostracism

In the past ostracism was an effective mechanism of persuading somebody to comply with the norms of society. Thus, it was an accepted method of punishment and was not seen as violence. Since it was difficult for a person to exist outside the society, no person would risk to be ostracised and so he/she would think twice before deciding to continue with the act that brought about the punishment.

One method of ostracising women who refused to stay within a marriage was to declare them *nashuusad* or, as was known in Somali, *naakirad*. Such a declaration meant that divorce would not be granted and, consequently, she would never be allowed to remarry. This practice, which is supposedly based on a religious assumption, was legalised during the colonial British rule. Some women who were ostracised on these grounds had no alternative but to leave their communities. On certain occasions, some of these women, out of desperation, became prostitutes (Bile, 2000). Women are not subjected to a state of *nashuusad* any longer.

Nowadays ostracism is apparently rare compared to the other forms of violence. Only a few of the people interviewed said they had witnessed somebody who was a victim of ostracism and almost all these victims were women.

A number of things would lead to ostracising women. First, due to the practice of segregating certain minority groups with regard to intermarriage, families ostracise their female members who marry members of these clans. Second, if a woman gets pregnant outside wedlock, she will most probably be ostracised. The increasing number of abandoned newly

born babies (See Table 2) could be an indication of the strong stigma attached to getting pregnant outside marriage.

Table 2

Incidence of abandoned babies by district for the months of July, August, September, October, November and December, 2000.

| Region | No. of abandoned children | No. of children who survived |
|----------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Hargeisa | 38 | 24 |
| Togdheer | 08 | 03 |
| Sanag | 03 | 02 |
| Awdal | 09 | 05 |
| Sahil | 04 | 02 |
| Total | 62 | 36 |

4.5

Source: Department of Research and Planning, Police, Hargeisa, Somaliland

Rape

Rape was probably the most recurrent form of violence against women. During the period just before the eruption of the war in 1988, rape was a common occurrence. Siad Barre’s soldiers had the habit of forcing themselves into people’s houses in the middle of the night. They would then loot these homes, take away any man they found and rape the women. All this was done in the pretext of punishing what they called the enemies of the revolution and those people fighting Siad Barre’s regime.

In the pastoralist areas also, soldiers had the habit of raping rural women and especially nomadic women who were tending livestock (*Africa Watch*, 1988). The situation with regard to the violence inflicted on people worsened during the war years, between 1988-1991. Looting, indiscriminate bombing, gang rape, poisoning of water wells and destruction of water sources, burning of entire villages, massacre, and forced ejection of people from their homes were all common.

Although rape cases are much fewer than they were during the civil war, rape is once again increasingly becoming a serious problem in Somaliland, especially in the major towns. Due to the stigma attached to rape victims, many rape cases are never disclosed or reported to the relevant government authorities.

4.5

WAYS OF SEEKING JUSTICE

When people experience any form of violence, they seek justice through private Islamic courts, the police, clan elders, the family of the violator, or government courts of law. Although the choice of the victim of where to seek justice depends on such factors as severity of the violence, the injury involved and accessibility of the place where the victim seeks justice, there are other reasons why the victim would prefer to seek justice through one place rather than another.

The establishment of private Islamic courts is a new phenomenon in Somaliland; therefore seeking justice through private Islamic courts is a new practice. Before the civil war, certain individuals authorised by government courts could deal with minor cases such as those concerning marriages and charge some fees for the services they provided in that regard. Today there are private offices whereby family cases and minor conflicts are resolved according to Islamic laws. These Islamic courts also charge fees for the services they provide. One factor behind the emergence of these Islamic courts is believed to be the breakdown of governmental legal institutions during the civil war and the years immediately following it.

As government institutions were gradually re-established, these Islamic courts continued to function alongside. However, only 4% of the respondents said they would go to an Islamic court if they experience violence. Since district courts also follow Islamic laws, some people found these private institutions an alternative to government courts (whose reputation among the public is not good). People preferred to seek justice through the private Islamic courts for three reasons:

- The personnel in these courts are versed in Islamic laws.

- Religious men who are in these courts are well respected by the community. They are neutral, fear Allah and judge according to Islamic law.
- The time it takes for the Islamic courts to look into cases and reach a verdict is much shorter than the time government courts would take to deal with the same or similar cases.

More than one-third (36%) of the respondents said that in the event of violence being done to them, they would seek justice from the police. Although the police could not give justice and their job is to investigate, the fact that they can keep the violator in police custody for one or two nights is seen by the victim as a punishment. Respondents preferred to seek the help of the police to other places because:

- The police are the organ of the government responsible for law, order and security.
- Unlike the elders who can only use persuasion, the police have the power and authority to take the culprit to court.
- The police have the power to lock up a culprit at the police station until the case is either resolved or taken to court.
- The police act quickly, as soon as a victim informs them of the violence.
- The time the police keep a culprit under custody teaches the culprit a lesson to avoid similar violations.

The next higher preference for seeking justice was the clan elders, 34% of the respondents said they would opt for the council of elders if violated. The reasons behind their choice of elders as the means to get justice are:

- Elders are experienced to mediate and resolve conflicts justly.
- Elders are effective in bringing livestock/money from the culprit's clan to compensate for their injury and loss of honour.
- Seeking justice from clan elders is the traditional way even before other means were established and, therefore, is part of the socio-cultural orientation of the people.

- Due to the legacy of the war and the weakening of government institutions, the clan system has gained new importance and has become stronger.

In cases of verbal violence, the matter is usually referred to the family of the violator. One in every five (20%) respondents would seek justice from the family of the violator. However, respondents maintained that if the violence involved serious insults that could affect their honour, they would not hesitate to take the matter further to the culprit's elders. The family of the violator also resolves all minor injuries.

Very few of the respondents (6%) said they would go to the government courts of law. The reasons for their dissatisfaction with the government judicial mechanism were that going to the government courts involved a lot of bureaucracy and would take very long time before anything is resolved. Moreover, the reputation of the government courts was not good and people associated them with corruption and inefficiency.

Those who would go to government courts if someone committed an offence against them gave the following reasons for their preference:

- The court is the government body, and as such it has the authority to truly bring a culprit to justice.
- At a court of law appropriate judgement could be made, since there are personnel who are well versed in legal matters.
- The court has the authority to carry out sentences reached in courts compared to family and elders who do not have similar powers.

This might have some implications for women who can spare little time due to their multiple responsibilities. However, no differences have been observed in men and women's preference for the place where they would seek justice.

*Table 3***Preferred place to seek justice by gender**

| Where justice would be sought | Gender | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|-------|
| | Men | Women |
| Council of elders | 17% | 17% |
| Family of violator | 10% | 10.2% |
| Government court of law | 3% | 3% |
| Police | 17.6% | 18% |
| Islamic court | 2.2% | 2% |

Although people have more choices of seeking justice from several sources compared to the war years, there is a need to improve the courts and police stations with regard to the time taken to provide the services. Women are even more disadvantaged when it comes to spending a lot of time on seeking justice as they are overburdened with multiple responsibilities.

5.0

DISCUSSION

The scores from the questionnaire were keyed in a computer using the Student Edition of Statistics programme and analysed in terms of totals and percentages. The information from the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews was analysed in terms of themes. The results of the data analysis were as follows:

5.1

CHANGING ROLES

Nearly six in every ten (59%) men and a slightly higher percentage for women (62%) thought that there were obvious changes in Somali women's economic roles and activities, while 41% of the men and 38% of the women believe that there have been no significant changes in that regard. Out of these who believed that changes occurred in women's economic roles, 45% came from the urban areas, 22% from agro-pastoralist communities, 27% from pastoralist communities and 9% from fishing communities.

The major changes identified by respondents from both rural and urban backgrounds were:

- Women's contribution to the family income has increased tremendously.
- Due to the war and the prevailing economic circumstances, more women are now involved in income-earning activities outside the home.
- The financial burden of the family has fallen on women because many men have forfeited their role as breadwinners.
- More than ever before, women have attained some form of economic independence.

- Due to the experience gained from assuming family responsibility during the civil war years and their increased economic roles, a good percentage of women have become more aware of their potentials.

Moreover, the majority of the respondents (61% of the men and 84% of the women) were positive towards women's ownership of property and said that there was a need to support women's initiatives to own property. As expected, proportionately far more women held this view than men did. The respondents who said that they would rather see women owning property in their own right defended their stand by saying that:

- Women have a right to ownership of property.
- In contrast to men's resources, whatever resources women own are more beneficial for the society in general and for the family welfare in particular.
- Having property in their own right helps women to be autonomous and make decisions. This is good both for the women themselves and for the Somaliland society.
- Oppression from men against women will decrease if and when women own property. It was worth noting that only women respondents gave this response.

On the other hand there were those who vehemently maintained that women should not own any property. This group comprised mostly of male respondents. In their view, owning property was mostly a male prerogative. The respondents who were of the opinion that women should not own any property gave the following reasons for their position:

- If women own anything, they will become arrogant and would be freer to do whatever they want to do.
- Allah has made men responsible for the family's economy so there is no need for women to own any property.
- If women own resources in their own right, there will be a lot of conflicts with their husbands and the family will disintegrate.

- Women will neglect their children and family in their drive to own property.
- Women cannot administer and manage resources as well as men.
- Owning property will lead to the women taking over men's role and, subsequently, undermining them.

In the towns, women traders are mostly involved in the informal sector where the majority of urban people derive their income. About 57% of the trade activities in the major towns of Somaliland are conducted by women (Save the Children, 1993). Women are even beginning to venture into areas of trade that were previously regarded as exclusive male areas such as livestock trade and the selling of *qat*.

Women's participation in livestock production has also increased. Although the income-earning opportunities available to rural women might be fewer compared to those of their urban counterparts, rural women are nevertheless also beginning to get involved in small-scale trading activities and taking livestock to rural and urban markets to exchange for the basic consumption items.

5.1.1

Occupation

The occupation of the respondents was analysed by gender (See Table 1). Very few women have their own or joint small-scale businesses (See Table 4). Businesswomen mostly own restaurants, cloth shops and beauty salons. However, there is a trend now of more and more women starting their own small businesses in the bigger towns. There are also many women involved in the import business of household items (*bagaash*) unlike men who dominate large-scale import business of foodstuff, hardware and household goods. However, there are no policies that support women in this sector.

The majority of women are involved in small trade and farming while men are predominantly in skilled labour and white collar jobs. It is interesting to note that the highest number of respondents in terms of occupa-

tion was farmers. One would have expected that they would be pastoralists or petty traders.

Table 4
Occupation of respondents by gender

| | M | % | M % of total | F | % | F % of total | Total | % |
|--------------------|-----|------|-----------------|-----|------|-----------------|-------|------|
| Business | 7 | 4.3 | 2.2 | 6 | 3.8 | 1.8 | 13 | 4 |
| Skilled labourer | 17 | 10.4 | 5.3 | 3 | 1.9 | 0.9 | 20 | 6.2 |
| Professional | 13 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 3.8 | 1.9 | 19 | 5.9 |
| Herdsmen/ woman | 20 | 12.3 | 6.2 | 9 | 5.6 | 2.8 | 29 | 9 |
| Farmer | 45 | 27.6 | 13.9 | 49 | 30.6 | 15.2 | 94 | 29.1 |
| Small trader | 8 | 4.9 | 2.5 | 30 | 18.4 | 9.3 | 38 | 11.8 |
| White collar | 28 | 17.2 | 8.7 | 13 | 8 | 4 | 41 | 12.7 |
| Unskilled labourer | 4 | 2.5 | 1.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 1.2 |
| Casual labourer | 11 | 6.7 | 3.4 | 7 | 4.4 | 2.2 | 18 | 5.6 |
| Housewife | 0 | N/A | N/A | 28 | 17.5 | 8.7 | 28 | 8.7 |
| Unemployed | 10 | 6.1 | 3.1 | 9 | 5.6 | 2.8 | 19 | 5.9 |
| Total | 163 | | | 160 | | | 323 | |

5.1.2

Main sources of income

The main sources of income of the respondents were analysed by gender and district (See Tables 4 & 5).

Table 5
Main sources of income by gender

| Main sources of income | Men | Women |
|------------------------|-----|-------|
| Farming | 29% | 34% |
| Sale of livestock | 30% | 25% |
| Sale of assets | 4% | 8% |
| Remittance | 19% | 37% |
| Salary | 29% | 28% |
| Trade and business | 20% | 30% |

The three main sources of income reported by male respondents were

sale of livestock (30%), farming (29%) and salary (29%). In contrast, the predominant sources of income for women were remittance from outside (37%), farming (34%) and trade and business (30%). It is interesting to note the difference between men and women regarding the remittance they receive. One factor for this difference mentioned by respondents is the preference of relatives outside to address remittance to women members of the family rather than men members. The major reason for the reluctance of relatives to send money to men is women's relative restraint from chewing *qat* and other lavish habits.

Although many women are involved in a variety of income-earning activities, the majority predominating in petty trading activities (see Table 5), and they do not rise beyond the survival stage. This preoccupation with feeding their families leaves most women little room and time for seeking skills training, education improvement and active participation in community decision-making and peace building activities.

5.2

PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN STATUS

With regard to the perception of the status of women in Somaliland, respondents seem to have reflected two broad categories of views. There are those who perceive the social status of women in Somaliland to be lower than that of men, though the respondents do not necessarily agree with that view, and there are those who in fact believe that the social status of women in Somaliland is lower than the social status of men. About three in every four respondents (74%) perceive that in Somaliland women's status is regarded as socially inferior to that of men. Although more than half (41% of total) of those who had this perception were men, a large proportion of women (33% of all respondents) also had this perception. A relatively much smaller percentage (31%) of the respondents from urban areas believed that women are regarded as inferior to men, 22% came from pastoralist communities, 19% came from the agro-pastoralist communities while 2% came from the fishing community. Only 9% of the men and 17% of the women had the perception that women were regarded as socially superior to men.

The reasons given by respondents why they think the Somaliland society views women as inferior to men were:

- Allah has made women inferior to men/their inferiority is natural.
- Women are legally assigned to be men's wards.
- Women do not have sufficient knowledge of the Qur'an.
- Women do not become leaders.
- Women get half of what men get in inheritance and their blood money is worth half of that of men.

Among this group there were those who, in fact, strongly believed that women were indeed inferior to men, arguing that women are made to be subordinate to men. They further argued that women's inferiority comes from their biological make-up. This could be one reason why many people associate some biological female traits with inferiority. Thus, perhaps the famous Somali proverb mentioned earlier that *breast milk and intelligence cannot co-exist* is based on this assumption.

Respondents who thought that women are beginning to be regarded socially superior to men gave the following reasons:

- The role of women as mothers raising children is crucial for the sustenance of a stable society.
- Women are making the all-important economic contribution to their families.
- Women have taken over the crucial role of providing income for the family.
- Women are working very hard to make things better for the society.

One thing clearly came out from the research: the emphasis of respondents on the importance of women's economic contribution to their families. There was a feeling among most of the respondents that due to the widespread habit of qat chewing and the high unemployment rate that exists, women's capabilities as breadwinners had given them some importance and respect.

This fact has raised the social status of women in the society. Women can make decisions at the family level now since they hold the economic strings and, unlike men who use most of their income on extravagant habits such as qat and cigarettes, women spend every penny they earn on the welfare of their families. Nowadays it is becoming much more common to hear expressions such as "if I had only one girl instead of my many boys" and "families with more girls than boys are better off". These expressions indicate that public attitudes towards women and perceptions regarding the place of men in society are gradually changing for the better, except for the unfortunate fact that these changes of attitudes and perceptions are based on women's economic worth. Despite the acknowledgment of women's economic importance, most Somali men and women still think that women are naturally inferior to men.

The perceptions and attitudes regarding women's social position within the society and the consequent prescribed gender roles have a lot of negative effects on other aspects of women's lives. A case in point is the Somali people's view regarding division of labour. Certain tasks are seen within the

Somali society as “women’s” tasks and are strictly assigned to them while others are regarded as men’s responsibilities. Domestic chores such as cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, taking care of children and fetching water are, supposedly, to be done by women. Tasks such as looking after camels, watering animals, making animal pen and sowing are regarded as “male” tasks and are, supposedly, to be done by men. Some functions can be done by both men and women, such as looking after sheep and goats.

5.3

LEVELS OF SATISFACTION WITH DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE FAMILY

It is worth noting that functions regarded as typical “female” tasks and which men are reluctant to do in their homes are readily done by men when done outside the home for money. Somaliland men have been known to cook, clean, wash clothes and perform all kinds of similar jobs if and when they are paid for doing so. Another point worth mentioning here is the thin line separating sex roles and gender roles in the eyes of Somali people. Most people, both men and women, strongly believe that women are made for certain chores due to their sex. That could be the reason why the majority of the respondents were satisfied with the arrangement of the different responsibilities within the family.

Among the reasons given by the respondents for their satisfaction with the gender divisions of labour were:

- The economic responsibility of the family rests with men, therefore women should do housework.
- Women themselves feel that doing domestic chores is their responsibility.
- Women are created to do domestic tasks.
- Women are physically weaker than men and are suited to do housework.
- It is according to Somali tradition that women do domestic tasks.

In terms of the level of satisfaction with division of labour in the family by gender, 83% of the male respondents were satisfied, compared to 70% of female respondents who were also satisfied. In contrast, relatively far fewer male respondents (17%) were not satisfied by the labour arrangement in the society, than female respondents who were not satisfied (30%).

Those respondents who were not satisfied with the division of labour in the family thought that:

- It is not fair for women to shoulder all of the family's domestic tasks especially when they are also involved in income-earning activities. All members of the household should contribute to housework.
- Leaving all the house chores to women and girls is a bad cultural practice wrongly believed to be based on religion.
- Men who are unemployed are not doing anything except chewing *qat*.

Thus, although a majority of the women respondents (70%) said they were satisfied with how division of labour is organised within the household, more women than men showed their dissatisfaction. This could mean that since women are the ones on which the domestic burden falls, they are feeling the sting of it more than the men.

5.4

VIEWS ABOUT EQUAL EDUCATION LEVELS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

The assigning of certain roles to women tends to have a negative impact on their position in the society in a number of areas. With regard to education, preference is given to the education of boys. Unlike girls, however, boys are exempted from doing housework. That is, perhaps, one of the reasons for the persistent disparity in levels of education between boys and girls from the same socio-economic background. Since domestic responsibilities, as we have seen, are believed to be the responsibility of girls and women, it is possible that this has translated into an educational disadvantage for the girl.

Even though a significant proportion of the respondents - 71% of the women and 63% of the men - believed that boys and girls should reach the same levels of education, in reality this does not happen. Girls do not get the same educational opportunities as boys of the same socio-economic status. The view that girls will be married anyway and stay at home, and the assigning of all domestic chores to women, among other things, restrict the chances of a girl's participation in education on an equal footing with boys. The reasons given by those who were of the opinion that it is proper for men to reach higher levels of education than women were based on the aforementioned women's "rightful" place in the society. The reasons given included:

- That women will be housewives anyway.
- That men are more intelligent than women.
- That women do not have enough time to spare for education.
- That women will take over men's roles if they reach high levels of education.
- That women (have to) marry earlier than men and they drop out of school most of the time.
- Women do not take part in public decision making and, therefore, do not need high levels of education, as men do.

Table 6 shows that only very few of the respondents thought girls should reach higher levels of education than men. These respondents said that first, since girls have been discriminated against for a long time it is only fair that they should, in compensation, reach higher levels of education than men. Second, women contribute more to the family. Thus, acquiring higher levels of education than men would both reward them for their contribution to the family and boost their ability to contribute to the family and society even more.

When it comes to women's limited participation in other public activities, such as their role in decision-making and conflict resolution, the same restricting mechanisms of prescribing certain roles to women are detrimental. Some of the typical responses from those respondents who strongly believed that women were made for the home and should not

meddle with ‘men’s public activities’ were: “Women are created for taking care of the home and children” and “they should not get involved in ‘men’s public activities’”.

Table 6

Comparison of opinions about education for women and men by gender

| Opinion about level of education | Gender | |
|--|--------|-------|
| | Men | Women |
| Men should reach higher levels of education than women | 22% | 12% |
| Women should reach higher levels of education than men | 3% | 5% |
| Men and women should reach the same level of education | 63% | 71% |

A question arises whether these attitudes really translate into actions and whether Somali women are excluded from decision making, including peace building activities, on the above grounds. Another relevant question is how women themselves feel about their role in decision-making. The next section attempts to answer these questions.

5.5

WOMEN’S DECISION-MAKING ROLES AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE BUILDING

More than half of the respondents were of the opinion that there had been some changes in the decision-making powers of Somaliland women. A large percentage (43%) of those who thought that there were changes in women’s political roles and decision-making came from the urban areas

compared to 28%, 24% and 4% from pastoralist, agro-pastoralist and fishing communities, respectively. The main changes in women's decision-making roles were:

- That women's acquisition of income through their own efforts has given them more decision-making powers.
- That women are increasingly making decisions in the public arena through women organisations.
- That women were increasingly having more say now in decisions involving their own families.

Despite the gains that women have made in the area of decision-making at the family level, they have yet to utilise these powers at the community and national levels. However, the fact that women have acquired some basic skills through the process of making income and reaching decisions on a wide range of matters within their families will have a facilitating effect on making decisions at the next level. The negotiation skills needed for business transactions, women's interactions with different actors, the self-confidence associated with the income they provide to their families and their exposure to reaching decisions are crucial and relevant for their long-term strategic needs.

The immense destruction caused by the civil war and the subsequent economic collapse resulted in unprecedented unemployment among the Somaliland population. Although both men and women were affected by the high rate of unemployment that existed especially during the first years after the war, more women than men started to eke out a living from all kinds of sources. This has more to do with men's tendency to select what economic activities to get involved in. While a woman, for example, will not hesitate to trade in all kinds of items without fearing any loss of pride, a man will be reluctant to engage in economic activities he sees as "degrading" and "unmanly". This fact, more than anything else, has contributed to more women than men earning income from a wide range of sources.

A large number of women have become the sole breadwinners of their families. Nearly four in ten (38%) women in the six major towns of Somaliland are *de facto* household heads (Save the Children, 1993). It is

this role of providing income to their families that has contributed positively to Somali women's stronger decision-making role.

The chewing of *qat*, which has also increased tremendously among men after the war, also contributed to women's decision-making powers. Since *qat* chewing involves a lot of expenses, men have started to let their wives keep the income they (men) earn. These men, well aware of the thrifty nature of women who do not chew *qat* as much as men do, know that their wives will only spend money on the basic necessities. Recent studies have also revealed this trend¹³. A 40-year-old garage mechanic who claimed that he lets his wife decide how to spend the income he earns expressed this fact in the following words:

Since I started chewing qat a few years ago, money disappears from my hands within a short time. You cannot keep any money in your pockets. My male friends and relatives who chew are always asking for money to buy a bundle of qat. You know all about the shaxaad (asking for money from friends and relatives) that is becoming widespread in our society. Now I decided to hand every penny I earn to my wife. I only ask her to give me some of the money when I desperately need it. I know she will spend it wisely and on what is best for the whole family.

More than one-fifth (23%) of the respondents thought that the potential role of women in conflict resolution and peace building processes is not exploited due to the society's view that conflict resolution and peace building are a male domain. More than three-quarters (77%) of the respondents, however, believed that women were already playing a key role in these processes. A good 40% of the respondents knew of women who contributed to the peace building process in the country. There were those respondents, though, who strongly believed that women should not try to meddle with peace building and conflict resolution as these are not "their

¹³ See, for example, VetAid report on Sedentarisation in Waqoyi Galbeed region, 1997.

areas”. In spite of those views, the majority were of the opinion that women’s roles in conflict resolution should be strengthened by including them in the wider decision-making process of the country. According to observations by many respondents some women have, through training in their respective organisations, for the first time learned certain peace building skills. These skills include conflict management, conflict resolution and conflict prevention.

Moreover, those respondents who felt that the role of women in peace building is essential gave the following suggestions on how to strengthen that role:

- Greater awareness should be created among women about the specific benefits of peace for them, and women should be discouraged from promoting conflicts.
- When war or conflict is looming, women should send peace delegates to the conflicting parties.
- Women should be encouraged to participate in decision-making on peace building.
- Women peace associations and networks specifically for peace promotion should be created.
- There should be quotas for women in both parliament and the house of elders.
- Women should start peace education with their husbands and sons and inculcate a culture of peace within their families.
- The education of women should be actively promoted.
- The self-confidence of women should be boosted.
- Women should be taught their Islamic rights.

Maintenance of the family is increasingly becoming a problem in Somaliland due to high unemployment and the trend of negligence on the part of some men towards their families. Apparently, there is a widespread general feeling that men are indifferent with regard to their financial responsibility. Men’s failure to provide maintenance for their families is generally attributed to qat chewing and lack of legal control mechanisms to punish men who neglect their economic responsibility towards their

families. Ugaaso, a 40-year-old urban resident, expressed her views on the new tendency of a lot of men to neglect their duty of maintaining their families and the overwhelming burden faced by today's women in Somaliland:

I do not know how many men do not take the responsibility of feeding their families, but all around me I see women struggling to make ends meet. I always tell my women friends that such women are like widows only that their husbands are well and alive. I do not condemn all men, for many are also struggling to maintain their families. However, there is something wrong with the way things are now. Women are assuming both the roles of the father and the mother and this is a big burden for them.

As Ugaaso notes, the burden of assuming both parents' responsibilities is overwhelming for women, especially those with small children. Considering the economic situation of the country, such women become mentally and physically exhausted by the multiple roles they play. This clearly undermines women's role in peace building and decision-making. Many women were not thinking of participating in community activities including peace building and decision-making, because "they were too preoccupied with their breadwinning and other family responsibilities and had no time for politics" (SOWRAG, 2000).

5.6

SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS

The study reveals that today the majority of Somaliland women are overburdened and struggle for the day-to-day survival for themselves and their families. The income they derive from their economic activities goes to the purchase of crucial commodities and services with ever-rising prices. The legacy of the war is still evident in many areas. Unemployment is at its worst in the country's history. The wasteful habit of *qat* consumption has become widespread and the existing social services are poor, over-stretched and inaccessible to many. Despite all these problems, however, most of these women have managed to sustain their

families with the meagre income derived from their economic activities. Moreover, for some, the very process of struggling to survive and the enduring sacrifices for their families have provided them with the resilience and creativity to make meaningful improvements in their lives and those of their families. It has also been clearly shown by the findings that due to a combination of factors, not least the upheavals of the war, several trends with an impact on women's roles have emerged. Kowsar, one of the interviewees, sums up the changes that have occurred in Somali women's lives in these words: "*haweenka dhib iyo dheefiba way u korodhay*", that is, women have gained both benefits and problems.

The negative aspects of the changes having a detrimental effect of women's potential role in decision making, peace building and family dynamics and which have emerged from the material presented include:

- An increased work burden for both rural and urban women.
- A growing hostility towards women from different circles due to the fear of the perceived changes and especially what these people see as women's neglect of their "primary" duties and taking over men's economic responsibility.
- Increased incidence of violence against women and infringement of their human rights resulting from, inter alia, the breakdown of social norms and values, lack of clear policies/laws aimed at protecting them and lack of law enforcement mechanisms.
- There is a general trend of unstable marriages and increasingly high divorce rates. These could be attributed to lack of discussions and interactions between husbands and wives, and unplanned marriages that are hurriedly entered into without weighing the consequences.
- There is an apparent lack of understanding of women's rights among both men and women in Somaliland.
- There is a general trend of family disintegration as a result of the civil war. There is lack of adequate child upbringing. There is a growing distance between parents and their children; there is lack of proper parental guidance to children; there is lack of adequate educational facilities and proper recreations for the youth; there

is poor interaction between old and young people; and there is a breakdown of family and society values. As mothers assume the role of breadwinner for their families, their role of mothering is not replaced.

The positive trends in women's roles and position within the society and which would promote their decision-making roles are:

- There is an increased income due to their economic activities and ownership of property.
- There are some changes in the perception of women in terms of their social standing and a certain degree of acknowledgement and appreciation of their role in mitigating the effects of the war.
- There seems to be a growing self-realisation and self-assurance among women, possibly resulting from their emergence and survival from the crisis of the past years.
- Women are going out to earn income and assume the role of the breadwinner because of high unemployment among the men and the aftermath of the civil war. This women's economic independence has benefited them but has also caused family conflicts and family breakdown.
- As women become economically independent, some men feel that they do not listen to their husbands which causes family problems. However, husbands who see their wives' income as contributing to the well-being of their families have no problems with their wives. Some husbands even voluntarily leave decision-making at the family level to their wives.

6.0

NEW WOMEN'S ROLES: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF SOMALILAND

6.1

CONCLUSION

In both the traditional and current settings, Somali women, like most women in other parts of the world, are known to be hardworking and consistent in putting all their efforts in keeping their families and communities going. Their unconditional sacrifice and efforts to put the interests and needs of others before their own have been taken for granted for so long, with little critical afterthought. Most Somali women continue to toil under heavy domestic responsibilities, maintain their families economically and have little time for leisure and self-improvement. Moreover, despite their important productive and reproductive roles, Somali women continue to be marginalised in nearly all spheres of social life and are viewed as socially inferior to men. The resources at women's disposal are meagre and much less than those accessible to men, they are absent from all levels of public decision-making and they get very little encouragement from the community to exercise their rights and potentialities.

Centuries-old ingrained attitudes, which are difficult to change, lack of goodwill from male decision-makers and misinterpretation of Islamic teachings in relation to men and women, to mention just a few, are some of the factors responsible for the persistent gender inequity that prevails in Somaliland. Until recently women themselves rarely questioned their prescribed roles within the society. As the Somaliland society underwent political, social and economic changes, sex-based and gender-based roles and responsibilities were also affected.

Although there are some changes that are negative, a lot of positive elements also are on the horizon. Many women are no longer content to accept the infringement of their Islamic rights or to be treated as lesser

human beings.

There are indications that Somali women, with the assistance of their few male allies, are for the first time making conscious efforts to improve their position within the society and to make their presence in society felt.

As rightfully put by Zeremariam Fre¹⁴ in his poem, *Queens Without Crowns* (1999), it is high time that Somali women demand the crowns that they deserve.

Queens Without Crowns

You are the bank managers¹⁵, who said you can't be trusted?

*You are the Mother of all masters, but how come you
deprived yourself of taking the crown yourself?*

You are told to be weak but how come you cope against all odds?

*O, Somaal you are beautiful, trustworthy and true source of life. All
you have to do is take the crown yourself and lead the world to sanity.*

The Somaliland society on its part should wake up to recognise the women – as people, as human beings, and as key players in the country's welfare – and bestow them with honour due to them. Even if the women choose to be silent, rather than demand their rights, the Somaliland society should see the need to play its part in this regard. It is good for the women, for the Somaliland society, for the Somali people all over, for the Muslim world, and indeed, for the world in general. In this way the women in Somaliland can finally have a say in peace building and other decisions that affect their lives and their children and can begin to participate more fully in changing the course of the country's development.

In the search to facilitate a fuller change in women's role in Somaliland, a few recommendations are made here below – for further reflection or research, and for specific action by various interested parties.

¹⁴ Written from inspiration by Nagaad, a Somaliland Women Umbrella organisation, at Hargeisa, Somaliland on 17/7/99.

¹⁵ Referring to women who exchange foreign money in the streets of Hargeisa and Djibouti. The writer asked a taxi driver to take him to an exchange bureau but was led instead to the women vendors.

6.2

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and the group discussions at the workshop, the following recommendations are made. These recommendations pertain to political, social, economic and religious aspects, and are presented in that sequence. But these recommendations also apply more directly to some bodies than to others. These bodies include the Government of Somaliland, the donor community, researchers and research institutions, and local and international NGOs. These recommendations are made in that light.

1. So far the priority of the government of Somaliland has been to consolidate peace and stability in the country. However, there is need now to address the gender inequality and injustice that exist in Somaliland. Towards this end, the government of Somaliland should establish a national commission composed of relevant ministries and representatives from the civil societies to look into women's priority issues and come up with action programmes to address these issues. Also, the government should come up with affirmative action plans and quota systems to ensure women representation in the parliament and other important decision-making bodies.

2. Women organisations should develop ways of reaching grassroots women. One method would be to assist the communities in establishing women neighbourhood committees (in line with the Islamic neighbourhood concept of cooperation between adjacent houses of up to 40 homes to discuss and address common problems). Possible activities for these neighbourhood solidarity committees include: awareness-raising on a wide range of issues such as the responsibility of sharing family roles, women's rights, importance of education for girls, and environmental issues.

3. Research institutions should conduct further action-oriented studies on a number of issues:

What problems face the youth and their aspirations in life. The options available for breaking the vicious circle of delinquencies, hopelessness and

indulging in dangerous habits such as qat chewing (boys) and marrying early (boys and girls).

How do women and men spend their time? What are the implications for health, economic and social consequences of the heavy work burden that falls on women?

How are aspects of Islam and Somaliland culture manipulated to suppress or oppress women and deny them their rights, and how could these aspects be addressed?

What are the underlying reasons for the continuation of poverty among women and what are the possible ways and methods of alleviating it?

4. There is a need to train the staff responsible for recording and keeping crucial data in government ministries and other institutions, such as the police, the law courts and health. Specifically, these staffs should be trained to systematically document information such as teenage suicide cases, rape cases, maternal and infant mortality and divorce cases, separating these data also on the basis of gender.

5. Donors have an important role to play in improving the lives of women and their families, and they have indeed done quite a lot in this regard. However, due to the prevailing attitudes in some circles that donors are the ones pushing for changes in women's issues, donors should rather play a facilitating role, especially when dealing with sensitive issues such as women's rights and FGM.

6. Donors should use trainers from the region whenever possible, assist in giving capacity – building training to women in the areas that they (Somali women) identify and see as essential. There are, however, some training needs that are not so obvious to women and which need to be worked out by using the experience and expertise of donor organisations.

7. Donors should make available the funds needed for women's different programmes.

8. There is a need to develop a comprehensive strategy to create and sustain awareness about women's rights at all levels in Somaliland communities.

9. There is a need to develop long-term, comprehensive family-focused education programmes, targeting all members of the family (wife, husband, sisters, brothers) to help them learn their responsibilities and rights and to help men in Somaliland to understand and adopt democratic decision-making practices within the family.

10. Organisations should develop educational programmes that seek to equip parents on more effective ways of parenting in this age of globalisation. Social and economic support mechanisms should be put in place to make it possible for mothers to stay at home when children are still very young, including enabling fathers to take the responsibility of providing for the family.

11. Most women are overburdened with income-earning activities on the one hand and doing domestic chores on the other and, consequently, have little time to spare for community activities. To harmonise the new roles of women with men's responsibilities, programmes should be put in place to enable and encourage men to engage in trading activities that are often associated with women. They should be involved in income-earning activities of all sorts just as women are. In addition, husbands have to be encouraged to consider it both acceptable and expected for them to do daily household activities and to look after children. Women should be encouraged to accept the changing roles and let their husbands and sons also do household tasks.

12. Family support programmes should be put in place to help husbands and wives to be able to communicate, discuss their problems and face their challenges of life together in effective ways.

13. With the help of the international community, the Government of Somaliland should set up human development programmes that would lead to the creation of more employment opportunities.

14. Organisations working in, or seeking to help the people of, Somaliland should include in their objectives the encouragement and support of equal educational opportunities for men and women. The

Government of Somaliland should be encouraged to formulate appropriate education and social policies and laws to facilitate this.

15. Organisations and the Government of Somaliland should help articulate, promote and facilitate understanding and adoption of a new role of elders that encompasses the new realities and demands of life in the Somaliland society. This new role could include elders going beyond resolving conflicts when they occur or reaching temporary solutions, to include the developing of mechanisms to prevent conflicts before they erupt as well as finding permanent conflict resolution. Also, women leaders should be consulted and encouraged to participate in addressing family problems and counselling the youth.

16. In order to help women demand and enjoy the rights given to them by Islam, the following should be done:

- The society must be taught and updated on women's decision-making rights in Islam.
- Public awareness campaigns to eradicate non-Islamic practices that deprive women of their rights must be launched through the media, mosques and religious gatherings, general public meetings in the Khayria Square and in workshops.
- To achieve a cadre of women religious leaders, women who would like to take up religious studies must be encouraged and assisted.
- Religious debates on gender and development issues, women's rights and women's human equality with men must be initiated and promoted. These should involve both men and women.
- All family members should be socialised and taught to treat boys and girls equally and to give them equal rights and respect so that negative attitudes regarding women's social place in society are countered.
- Encourage and assist women to take part in the general decision-making processes and in the coming elections on equal footing with men.

17. Despite the changes in women's different roles within the society, women's decision-making role beyond the household level is still minimal

and weak. This could be attributed to the fact that the poverty levels among women are much higher than those among men. Many women would be unable to participate in the candidacy for public offices during the coming national elections due to lack of self-confidence and misinterpretation of some teachings in Islam. For women to be able to participate effectively in the country's decision-making and peace building processes, the following need to be done:

- The economic opportunities and qualifications of women should be promoted.
- Advocacy should be conducted for women's participation in the decision-making institutions at lower and higher levels of the state.
- Women should be encouraged and given their share of power in the constituencies of the various national institutions.
- Women's involvement and participation in peace building should be encouraged.
- All necessary assistance and support available should be given to women organisations, which are involved in the development and peace building interventions.
- Both rural and urban communities should be mobilized to acknowledge women's changing roles and responsibilities, and to counter negative perceptions on their changing roles.

18. Although women in Somaliland are involved in a wide range of economic activities, the majority do not rise beyond the survival stage. This is due to lack of business skill training, lack of investment capital and the fact that women shoulder too many responsibilities. In order to multiply the economic productivity of women so that the vicious circle of poverty is broken, programmes should be put in place to provide women with basic business training and micro enterprise interventions. Also, the revolving loan fund projects should be spread out throughout the country.

19. Women are not enjoying their rights in Islam. Research institutions should research on the Islamic rights of women, teach these rights to people and create awareness among men and women on these rights.

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After serving as a teacher for several years, I joined the Somali Academy of Sciences and Art (SOMAC) in Mogadishu in 1983 where I worked as the head of the women's research & Documentation unit. While working there, I went to Holland for my MA studies which I took at the Institute of Social Studies in the Hague (ISS). Upon completing my MA with a specialization in women and development, I went back to resume my work at SOMAC. In late 1989, I fled Mogadishu and came to Sweden. I returned back to live in Somaliland and established the Somaliland Women's Research and Action Group (SOWRAG). Since my return to Somaliland, I carried out field work in many parts of Somaliland as part of SOWRAG's research Programs. Some of the studies that I conducted were: Pastoral women, urban women's economic roles, women and politics and women's poetry on war & peace. Apart from my research activities, I am also an active member of the Women's movement in Somaliland, a member of the Somali Natural Resource Management team (SRMT), member of the National council of Hargeisa University and member of Somali Women's political Forum.

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