



Somali women and men discussing gender and livelihoods issues. Photo: WARDI/Oxfam

# SOMALI SOLUTIONS

Creating conditions for a gender-just peace

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**This report looks at Somali women's experiences with conflict, peace, violence, insecurity and state rebuilding. It uses an approach geared towards gender-just peace-building to understand the ways in which Somali women have fulfilled their role as agents of change, while navigating the challenges posed by women's exclusion from many forms of public life (government, civil society, universities, open markets etc). Interviews and focus groups have been used to illustrate diverse perspectives and to demonstrate that Somali women have always been principal agents of change and social transformation. The report's recommendations are an acknowledgement of the role Somali women have played throughout the course of Somali history, and continue to play today, in shaping the pathway towards greater participation for women across Somali regions, and the challenges they face in so doing.**

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# ABBREVIATIONS

**CSO** – civil society organization

**FGDs** – focus-group discussions

**FGS** – Federal Government of Somalia

**IDPs** – internally displaced people

**NGO** – non-government organization

**SGBV** – sexual and gender-based violence

**SNM** – Somali National Movement

**VAW** – violence against women

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks to emphasize the status of Somali women throughout the various transformations of Somali society and culture. Through examining those factors that affect Somali statehood and state building, such as culture and tradition, as well as the impact of historical events from colonial to military rule and ongoing civil war, it is evident that Somali women have not been passive observers to these processes but are, in many cases, active participants and pioneers of change and revolution.

Within this context, the report documents, through numerous interviews with Somali women, the ways in which the civil war and subsequent peace processes have created opportunities for increased participation of Somali women in public spaces. Crucially, the report also assesses the significant challenges that peace processes have posed, and continue to pose, for Somali women, including a lack of visibility in official peace and governance processes, the threat of sexual violence, and limited educational and economic opportunities.

*'There is no such thing as protection in Somalia'*

*Zahra Mohamed Ahmed (Legal Advisor, Somali Women Development Center)*

The levels of violence experienced by women in Somalia present an often insurmountable obstacle to participation in decision-making spaces, and as such constitute an ongoing violation of women's rights. Further exacerbating this structural exclusion is the lack of government and security sector capacity and accountability to address the protection of women.

*'Security is viewed as a male business'*

*Abdi Aynte (Former Director of the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies)*

The lives of men and women are affected by war and conflict in very different ways, with women particularly adversely affected by conflict, and largely excluded from the (formal) decision-making structures that govern peace-building and conflict transformation. These challenges are linked to and compounded by the patriarchal norms represented in community and clan structures.

*'There is resentment among men at the state of society, especially their lack of opportunities. They [men] are seeking to protect their position through clan influence and political positions and see women as competition and resent them for that.'*

*Nafisa Yusuf Mohamed (Executive Director, Nagaad)*

This statement brings to light the importance of incorporating men from a range of positions in society in line with a gender aware peace-building process that brings women's experiences to the forefront. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for a better understanding of how to address traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity in this process.

# 1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

By the mid 1990s Somali society was in the process of assessing the impact of the civil war that ended in 1991. Peace processes, reconciliation and state-building have occurred at a different pace in South-Central Somalia, Puntland (North-East) and Somaliland (North-West). In South-Central Somalia the election of a new president following a series of transitional administrations in 2012 ushered in a sense of optimism not seen in two decades of conflict and violence.

Puntland and Somaliland, acting as semi-autonomous and self-declared independent states respectively, have established peace processes that have resulted in an end to large-scale conflict between warring clans and the emergence of locally led and organized structures of governance.<sup>1</sup> In these processes, the role and experiences of women were distinguished both by the actions they took to build peace in their respective communities, and in their ability to take advantage of the opportunities that became available to them during peace processes. This was possible as a result of their having developed coping strategies to respond to the shifting context of conflict, in order to stabilize their lives and those of their communities.

These examples of Somali women's experiences with peace can help us to understand more coherently the role of women and men as affected parties of, and as agents of change in, conflict and peace-building, and can provide some lessons for ways forward in other peace and reconciliation processes.

The Somali civil war displaced large numbers of families and gave rise to significantly more female-headed households. War changed the reality of men and women's actual roles (for example, leading to more women becoming 'breadwinners'), although 'idealized' gender roles remained strongly reinforced through clan and religion. Traditional perceptions of gender roles correlate to a time prior to conflict and even independence (drawn from pastoralism). For example, according to Somali culture, women were traditionally responsible for tending to small livestock, establishing the home and gathering resources and so forth, while men were responsible for tending to larger herds, and were more mobile as they spent time away from the home.

These are powerful cultural norms, associated by many Somalis with times of peace, and as such, there are deeply held beliefs that traditional gender norms with clearly defined roles for men and women should be re-established. However, as we will see below, conflict has brought with it significant changes to Somali society across a range of socio-cultural practices.

The lives of men and women are affected by war and conflict in very different ways, with women particularly adversely affected by conflict, and largely excluded from the formal decision-making structures that govern peace-building and conflict transformation. Crucially, this serves to reinforce the inequalities that prevent both women and men from benefitting from sustainable peace. For peace to be sustainable, the needs and interests of all stakeholders must be taken into account, so that no social group's grievances remain unaddressed, and for this to happen, the participation of both women and men is paramount.

The term 'conflict transformation' describes violence and conflict in terms of the multidimensional inequalities that are embedded in (formal and informal) structures and cultures which can reduce the prospect of sustainable peace. An important component of conflict transformation is to utilize the potential for positive change that is embedded in every conflict by using a people-centred approach that addresses the key driving factors of conflict. In other words, peace cannot be achieved without overcoming the inequalities that give rise to conflict. A conflict transformation approach aims to create opportunities to resolve those inequalities. Therefore, using a gendered lens and a rights-based approach is an imperative principle in Oxfam's implementation of this concept.<sup>2</sup>

This report aims to contribute to an understanding of how to create conditions for gender-just peace-building that may improve the status of women in Somalia. Peace-building that recognizes that women and men are affected differently by conflict; that women suffer adverse consequences of conflict; and that addresses the needs of both women and men, is integral to sustainable conflict transformation.

Peace processes have the potential to provide a means for changing gender relations, increasing levels of justice and acting as a starting point for women's empowerment. If women are excluded from these processes, the various roles that women play during and after violent conflict are neglected, as are potential opportunities to address socio-cultural gender imbalances as part of a long-term process that prioritizes the right to life, identity and security.

In this context, the report examines the extent to which formal and informal processes have brought a gender-just peace; to what extent women's rights and power relations have been addressed; and how peace processes can be developed to increase gender justice and the status of women as part of sustainable conflict transformation that addresses the root causes of violence.

## 1.1 Objectives of the research

### Overall objective

Given the varied processes of both peace and conflict, this report aims to provide an understanding of the ways that Somali women have worked towards sustainable peace and conflict transformation. The research sets out to utilize Somali women's past and present experiences, in order to inform readers of the complex environment and conditions that exist for promoting and delivering a just peace-building process for Somali women.

The widespread violence, insecurity and displacement caused by two decades of conflict in Somalia have resulted in perilous conditions for Somali women and girls, yet despite this, women and girls have made lasting contributions to peace-building and conflict transformation. This research seeks to help readers better understand the impact of these challenges and to determine ways in which sustainable peace for women can be achieved.

The initial questions that prompted this report included:

- What does 'peace' mean to communities?
- How can peace-building result in outcomes that create greater levels of gender justice?
- How have women's roles and experiences changed during both war and peace in Somalia?
- What are the most effective tools that women use to engage in conflict resolution and does this result in a more sustainable and inclusive peace?

The approach this research took was to recognize:

- any intervention (either as part of or building on the research) should be both gender and conflict sensitive, so as not to create 'backlash',
- the different ways that women participate in formal settings (such as their involvement in institutions/structures delivering peace and security) and through informal processes involving peace and reconciliation.

The research is based on the underlying assumption and acknowledgement that women and girls:

- are impacted differently from men and boys by conflict and violence in society,
- have voices and perspectives that are often marginalized in both formal and informal settings,
- are the target of violence that issues from conflict, and constitute the majority of those that are displaced or extremely vulnerable.

## 1.2 Methodology

The data collected for this report is qualitative, with secondary research providing historic background. Data collection tools included 15 structured/semi-structured interviews with selected high-profile activists, and eight focus-group discussions (FGDs)<sup>3</sup> varying between 10 and 15 individuals. The data also includes oral history testimonies from women who were part of early peace processes.

**Research sites:** Hargeisa and Burco in Somaliland in 2012. Bosaso and Galkacyo in Puntland and Mogadishu in South-Central Somalia in October 2013 and early 2014, with further key informant interviews in South-Central Somalia in early 2015.

**Timeframe and current relevance:** Many of the themes and issues raised in this report are ongoing for Somali women as they continue to seek greater inclusivity and sustainable peace. The campaign for a gender quota in different parliaments in the Somali regions continues to be a potential pathway to increasing representation in government institutions. As of May 2014 the Constitutional Review and Implementation Committee in South-Central Somalia had one woman (Asha Gelle Dirie), and in July 2014 the committee held its first meeting.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the Puntland Women's Councillors Network (PWCN) and Nagaad umbrella organization in Somaliland are actively advocating for greater representation. The report below is a testament not only to how far Somali women have come but the obstacles to achieving greater inclusion and participation in peace processes.

**Target groups:** Young girls, female peace activists, female internally displaced people (IDPs), young men, female lawyers, male elders.

## 1.3 Limitations

- Owing to uneven peace-building between South-Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland, women engaged in peace work in the public sphere experience variable challenges across these regions, which are emphasized by divergent institutions and legal mechanisms and constitutions (e.g., gender quotas appear in two out of three of the polities).
- The voices of members of minority clans proved difficult to access, as they have been, and continue to be, socially and institutionally marginalized.
- Difficult conditions exist in Mogadishu in relation to discussing openly violence against women (VAW) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), especially with continued international media attention focused on rape and its frequency and also ongoing threats of prosecution for survivors. As a result, widespread FGDs or surveys were not conducted and the work was largely limited to partner organizations that work closely with affected communities to collect information.
- The research sites listed above are those in which collection was largely carried out by grassroots women-focused organizations. Owing to security concerns, Mogadishu was the only site visited by researchers in South-Central Somalia. Data was collected in Puntland through partner organizations that were responsible for administering and translating FGDs.
- Since the chosen methodology is qualitative and limited in its geographic scope, this report can only suggest general trends and does not claim to reflect the perceptions and views of all Somalis.

# 2 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

## 2.1 Tradition and culture

Traditional gender norms in Somali society are largely derived from gendered divisions of labour. Clan has played a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of their status within a wider kinship group. The status of women within the Somali clan structure has remained in place, despite broader social/political/economic changes brought on by colonialism, post-independence state-building, and civil war. Somali society is organized around a social structure in which descent and inheritance is traced patrilineally. Women have specific roles based on the communal needs and demands of pastoralist society. Girls and married women tend smaller livestock and build and dismantle the *aqal* (house), taking care of the children and occasionally selling milk or ghee.<sup>5</sup> As Somali society relies on labour as one factor in production, it is debatable whether women's roles can easily be construed as a source of inequality. Those who characterize Somali pastoral society as patriarchal<sup>6</sup> view marriage as the site for which gender roles are cemented and patriarchy is reproduced.

The cultural construction of 'power' and 'authority' is largely based upon the *xeer*<sup>7</sup> (loosely understood as a social contract or customary law). It is, however, not solely contingent upon the *xeer* but also strongly influenced by Islamic principles of gender relations. Although Islamic principles are interpreted by some to deny women access to property, the product of their labour, and power over their decision-making capabilities, this is not always the case, as women interviewees suggested that religion can also be used to assert women's rights. Women's roles are continually negotiated, since Islam neither forbids women from seeking gainful employment outside of the household, nor from maintaining property.<sup>8</sup> Islamic moral principles and practices have evolved with the Somali state and the role that Somalis envision for Islam in society.

## 2.2 Colonial rule

The colonial era instituted several changes that affected gender relations, including the privileging of Islamic law above *xeer*, and interclan marriages above intraclan marriages. There was also a shift in the social value of young men in particular, as urban centres provided opportunities to escape the seeming rigidity of kinship ties in pastoral society. The rise of merchant capitalism under British rule in Somaliland, for example, inaugurated significant changes in economic activity, severely impacting traditional kinship groups.<sup>9</sup> Women were particularly affected through the practice of interclan marriage, whereby brides were exchanged to build consensus between particular clans and reduce the likelihood of interclan conflict, thereby formalizing and extending the bride exchange system.

Pastoral gender roles gave way to capitalist culture, reinforcing men's roles as owners of productive capital and maintaining men's political and domestic authority. These processes were legitimized by a particular understanding of Islamic laws of inheritance and decision-making that provided for greater land ownership and economic assets by men. There were varying degrees of intervention by colonial authorities (British and Italian Somaliland), with the former content with a *laissez faire* approach to colonial rule, and the latter incorporating Italian civil laws. These laws did not, however, always apply to Somali citizens in the South, as sharia/customary courts were established to deal with family and clan matters.<sup>10</sup>

Somali women contested and resisted the increasing infringements of the rights and freedoms afforded to women during colonial rule, lamenting their loss of status through means such as poetry (*buranbuur*<sup>11</sup>), in which women expressed their frustrations with their role in the existing order.<sup>12</sup>

Such activism led to only minor political and legal gains, and women continued to suffer from limited representation in government, despite efforts to secure it. However, certain activists did achieve a degree of cultural significance, such as Hawa Osman Taako, who was killed during a confrontation with Italian colonialists to subdue protests, becoming the first female Somali martyr, and subsequently memorialized with a statue in Mogadishu in the post-independence period.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.3 Military rule

Northern Somaliland gained independence from the UK in June 1960 and joined the former Italian administration in Southern Somalia in July 1960. A transition towards civilian rule was short-lived, and General Siyad Barre took control of the country in 1969.<sup>14</sup> Barre's form of Somali nationalism is embodied within his concept of 'scientific socialism': an ideology that sought to inculcate *Somalinimoo* as a principle of unity among clans which framed the religious entities and their interpretation of Islam as a coercive entity. Barre's attempt to meld Marxist-Leninist socialism with Islamic principles was known as 'wealth-sharing based on wisdom' (*hanti-wadaga 'ilmu ku disan*).<sup>15</sup> The pacification of pastoral nomads was key to positioning the new Somali state as a centralized system of governance aimed at tackling the divisiveness of clan and lineage systems.<sup>16</sup>

Prior to the Barre regime, Somali women (comprising northern and southern clans) established the Somali Women's Association (SWA, 1959) out of a growing frustration over a lack of political representation within the Somali Youth League. The organization, led by middle-class urban women, transformed itself into the Somali Women's Movement (SWM) in 1960. The organization was short-lived, however, as the dictatorship incorporated the SWM as part of the 'Women's Section' within the 'Political Office' in the Presidency of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC). The 'Women's Section' transformed itself in 1977 into the Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO). It drew its members from the SWM and was led by Barre's wife Khadija Ma'alín. Its political and ideological project became less about women's sociopolitical and economic conditions than co-opting women's issues and serving as a monitoring outpost for maintaining the hegemony of state ideology.<sup>17</sup>

The Barre regime advanced the material conditions of women by establishing the Family Law of 1975, guaranteeing women equitable distribution of property through inheritance and divorce.<sup>18</sup> Women were provided with government scholarships to study abroad, and incorporated into the formal labour sector. Opposition to the Family Law largely came from religious leaders, who saw it as an affront to Islamic principles. Barre executed 10 religious leaders who openly opposed the changes, and as a result, women's rights became closely associated with the regime's oppressive practices.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, morality and conceptualizations of 'proper' gender roles were heavily influenced by Islamic principles, as well as by the promotion of modern attitudes by urban elites, such as the wearing of a small thin scarf wrapped around a woman's hair but exposing the neck, which was previously especially popular among urban women. Rural women's dress is seen to conform to the conditions of nomadic life that was a light covering that left parts of the upper body exposed.<sup>20</sup>

The impact of the civil war on modern attitudes and rural lives included adherence by some to a conservative religious identity that also involved wearing wide, full length cloth head coverings. As compared with Barre era ideals of femininity, the aftermath of the civil war saw a marked contrast to the way in which women dressed. This was in response to wider social attitudes that viewed secularism and western influences as detrimental to Somali social life, and enhanced the need to reassert a return to a more traditional and 'pure' form of Islam.<sup>21</sup> The effects of this development on women throughout Somalia/land continues to be compounded by a disregard for women's civic activities, and lack of women's inclusion in formal decision-making, particularly within state institutions.

## 2.4 Civil war

The widespread violence that is associated with conflict changes or suspends gender roles such that men and women are affected quite differently.<sup>22</sup> While the relative absence of women from formal peace processes is widely acknowledged, little attention is paid to the effect that masculinity and post-conflict violence (by and against men on other men and women) has on post-conflict societies. Researchers

agree that oversimplified categories such as ‘men as perpetrators’ and ‘women as victims’ disguises men and women’s agency and participation in violence. ‘Masculine’ traits of aggressiveness, framed by soldiers and police forces in a particular state, remain the focus of much of the work on violence, while notions of femininity continue to be associated with docility and defencelessness.<sup>23</sup>

These identities shape the state and military institutions in countries experiencing conflict or engaging in peace-building. In the Somali context, women are rarely seen as ‘official’ decision-makers in the clan system. Somali women’s contributions to peace-building (i.e. institutions or policy-making) are thereby limited by this reliance on the clan as the conceptual foundation for peace-building.

The common gender-based notion that leads us to view women as peacemakers masks their contributions as combatants during the Somali civil war, or their roles in rallying networks that supported the conflict. This is certainly true of Somaliland women who, during the war against the Barre regime, supported the Somali National Movement (SNM) by providing channels of escape through Southern Somalia and dispensing jewellery and other assets to offer financial support for the war effort.<sup>24</sup>

Throughout the civil war in Somalia, women in some communities enjoyed greater mobility than men, since their decision-making capabilities were not seen as significant, and, as a consequence of their position between clans within the interclan bride-exchange system noted above, they were able to use this role to move more easily between certain conflict areas, even during times when politically motivated executions of their family members were occurring. In one interview in Mogadishu, a female informant spoke about the way that messages would pass between neighbouring towns and villages when warlords controlled much of the South.

## 2.5 Women and peace-building

Research has shown that women are frequently the first to take the risks necessary to promote dialogue across divided communities and instigate moves towards reconciliation.<sup>25</sup> This is also reflected in the contributions to peace-building that Somali women have made throughout the long process of civil war.

The collapse of the central state in 1991 ushered in a period in which a centralized authority no longer existed, and Somaliland (North-West) and Puntland (North-East) declared independence and self-autonomy, respectively, thereby effectively dividing the country into three polities. Building peace and strengthening governance are ongoing processes in Mogadishu, where gains have been made quite recently. Puntland and Somaliland have been relatively peaceful and stable for large parts of the last two decades. The impact of state collapse on women, and their subsequent role in facilitating dialogue and peace among warring factions in each of these areas, has been significant. What follows are historical first-hand accounts of women at the forefront of peace-building in Somalia/land.

### 2.5.1 Somaliland

In 1991 the SNM succeeded in reclaiming territories from the central government in what is now Somaliland. In the aftermath, fighting began between neighbouring clans, and a series of peace conferences (*shiiir*) were held in Borame, Berbera and Burco. During these peace conferences Somaliland women composed poems to express their frustration at the ongoing conflict between related clans, and also gave indications of the exclusion of women in various contexts. An example is given below.<sup>26</sup>

*Of the men I gave birth to  
Of the clans I am caught between  
Of my brothers who have shared my mother’s milk  
Of my father who gave me my lineage  
If they pick up arms against one another  
It is as if they have burned me as well.*

Dudi Ahmed, Somali woman from Allah-Amin

Women were largely granted observer status at the conferences (rather than the right to vote), but while their participation was limited to more traditional roles, including providing food for the conference attendees, they also expressed their political views. Women highlighted the vulnerability of their position in society by referencing gender norms in the *xeer* – providing for men’s protection over women’s personal security – and channelled their accounts through poetry. Annab Omer Eleye, who was among one of the early founders of Somaliland’s largest umbrella organization for women’s civil society organizations (CSOs), Nagaad, attended the Borame conference (1993) and proposed the establishment of a *Guurti* (Upper House–Senate). She also mobilized people to form the Somaliland police force to replace the military. She recounts her experience of changing perceptions at the conference in Box 1.

**Box 1: Testimony from a founder of Somaliland’s largest umbrella organization for women’s CSOs**

*‘Before the conference began, men and women would be outside. I was one of two women from the Somaliland Women’s Organization that sought to take part in the conference. The elders were distraught at seeing us at such a conference, asking: “My God, what is this?” After I spoke at the conference, those same men who were shocked that we came were now asking us to remain with them. They mentioned that they cried at the power of the words we spoke, saying “we wept in our sleep the other night”.’*

Annab Omer Eleye, a founder of Somaliland’s largest umbrella organization for women’s CSOs, Nagaad

During the peace conferences the customary practice of exchanging brides was used to create peace between the Dolbahante and Isaaq clan members.<sup>27</sup> A similar practice occurred with Puntland women,<sup>28</sup> with many women in Somaliland and Puntland expressing their favour of such practices.

### 2.5.2 Puntland

The Galkacyo peace accord of 1993 ended conflict between neighbouring clans in the Galgadud and Mudug regions. Women rallied between the warring clans and their militias to petition them to lay down their arms and come to a peace agreement, utilizing networks with other female peace activists to extend their influence to a larger number of neighbouring clans. The accord was later signed by Abdullahi Yusuf and Mohamed Farah, thus establishing peace and an end to large-scale conflict.

Further effective peace-building efforts initiated by women came in response to the rampant violence in the port city of Bosaso, where the widespread looting of businesses, belonging largely to women, as well as a campaign of rape against women, led to the formation of the Hufan Initiative in 1994. A movement led by Hufan Artan brought together women’s groups to bring this to attention of the political leaders of the city. The women made their demands for greater security for women by staging a day-long protest in which they lay down across the docking areas where ships unloaded their cargo, effectively halting all activity. Consequently, women sought to create an ad-hoc women-led policing service to patrol the streets, despite opposition from young men, who attempted to disarm those that carried weapons. These actions helped to establish a police force in Puntland.<sup>29</sup>

In 1996, Puntland women held the largest peace rallies in the region, calling for continued dialogue and an end to fighting between clans.<sup>30</sup> Again, poetry became an effective tool to convey grievances and rally for peace. The Isimada Peace Conference of 2001 saw women engaged in grassroots mobilization to end fighting between clan militias. The impact of women’s mobilization culminated in the establishment of the We Are Women Activists (WAWA) women’s network in Puntland. It owes its existence to the transformation of community-level organizing by Somali women originating from the Hufan movement, the ‘Bari Women’s Confederation’, and the birth of WAWA.

In both Somaliland and Puntland, women’s mobilization grew out of grassroots community work that developed into collectives, and from individuals to organizations leading the charge for peace. Besides

community action, campaigning by women also built peace, as, between 1993 and 1999, their efforts brought clan leaders to the peace table during the 2001 peace conference.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.5.3 South-Central Somalia

Attempts to establish peace in South-Central Somalia took a different path than in Puntland and Somaliland, with greater engagement by international and regional organizations to attempt to bring about peace accords between warring factions. As with women in Somaliland and Puntland, women in South-Central utilized their cross-clan affiliations to facilitate dialogue and lobby clan elders to agree to establish, continue with, or agree to terms for establishing peace.<sup>32</sup>

Somali women living in the country, and the diaspora beyond its borders, contributed to humanitarian assistance for displaced family members and society in general. Asha Haji Elmi set up one initiative that motivated change. This was the creation of a so-called 'sixth clan', comprising women across various clan backgrounds (Box 2). Peace negotiations were mainly divided along clan lines as a means to facilitate inclusivity for all parties, and women were conspicuously absent from this formulation. Women activists sought to rectify this by providing a platform for women to participate under the 'sixth-clan' banner.

#### Box 2: The establishment of 'the Sixth Clan'

*'In Arta in 2000, we were ready to participate in the conference. Sixty Somali intellectuals from all over came to attend this event. Asha Haji Elmi [Amina's sister] had the opening speech, remarking on the need to build peace from the bottom up. The clans were divided into five and told to rally behind this power-sharing formula. The question was asked, which clan was going to accommodate women? When none stood up for women, the women spoke and said we need our own clan 'the sixth clan'. The president of Djibouti acknowledged the presence of the sixth clan and gave them a quota [...]. Asha sat at the table as a representative of women – the sixth clan. From there we started lobbying for women to fill these seats. If women do not participate in politics, then peace cannot be achieved.'*

Amina Haji Elmi, Director, Save Somali Women & Children (SSWC)

As Box 2 shows, the efforts of the sixth clan brought about a formal quota for women in the transitional parliament. Although the quota was not, and has not yet been reached, it was a large step forward in terms of participation, and raised the profile of women's concerns. The recognition by the Djibouti president enabled the formal participation at the peace conference of significant numbers of women, and thereby influenced the agenda.<sup>33</sup>

While Somalia's history and attempts at peace are more complex than can be summarized in this report, women's experiences referred to above encompass both historic and contemporary issues. Foreign intervention in peace processes in the South and Central Somali regions helped to develop progressive legislation for women in the post-Transitional Federal Government (TFG) constitution-making process. This ensured that the Somali Parliament Technical Selection Committee (TSC) had a woman as its chair, Halimo Ismael Ibrahim, who helped appoint 25 women to the selection committee for the new parliament. Despite women technically being allotted 30 percent of seats, women represented only 6 percent of the 215 members that were sworn in on 20 August 2012. Informants indicated that the reasons for this included the constraining effects of clan and patriarchal attitudes to women's participation in politics.

# 3 PERCEPTIONS ON PEACE AND SECURITY: THE CURRENT SITUATION

This section is based on focus-group discussions (FGDs) and interview reflections.

Throughout FGDs, peace was largely defined as a state of life conducive to normal day-to-day activities without the threat of violence. Security was defined largely in terms of 'protection' from various forms of violence and a 'feeling' of being safe. In their discussions regarding the responsible parties for peace and security, FGD respondents identified the government, police, communities themselves, and clans. The need to engage both women/girls and men/boys in the process, as well as the need to address perceptions of masculinity, were also considered to be important issues.

## 3.1 Negative peace vs just peace

How we understand the presence or absence of peace and conflict or violence cannot be divorced from the institutions or structures that give rise to violence prior, during and after conflict. Negative peace refers to a type of peace that does not address social injustice or structural violence. Although there may be no open conflict, this does not indicate that social tensions are entirely absent. The process of maintaining negative peace can be embedded in institutions like the military, judiciary and police, and can manifest itself through direct and/or psychological violence.<sup>34</sup>

Gender-sensitive peace-building or peace processes must address structural impediments to women's participation in policy spaces, but also draw on successful grassroots and locally driven methods. The dynamic between women's roles prior to the outbreak of conflict and in a post-conflict setting suggests that conflicts can enhance existing power differentials while simultaneously providing women with opportunities to participate. This participation also should be recognized as a potential added burden, in the sense that women's increased participation in the public sphere may also incur a degree of risk as social and gender dynamics are shifted. While participation does contribute to ongoing peace activism and is crucial to gender-just peace-building, it cannot be fully realized without combating violence in all its forms (physical and psychological). The FGDs brought to light the fact that, if structural violence is not tackled, justice cannot be achieved for women, even during peacetime.

Participants identified peace as a far broader concept than the mere absence of direct violence (i.e. through violent conflict, as opposed to indirect violence linked to inequality), with a desire expressed across all groups to see an improvement in security, including physical protection, increased access to employment opportunities for both sexes, and provision of services by authorities responsible.

## 3.2 The impact of violence against women (VAW)

While the impact of violence is extended across all communities, this report examines the impact of VAW on sustainable peace-building and conflict transformation. The topic of VAW came up consistently in FGDs, with a particularly consistent focus on property theft, domestic abuse and SGBV.<sup>35</sup>

During FGDs, when participants were asked to indicate the types of violence that occur most frequently in their communities, they identified theft, murder, rape, torture or harassment. Particularly vulnerable communities include those in IDP camps, where open environments increase susceptibility to violence and create security concerns for many women and girls. Throughout Somalia/land, women and girls suggested that mobility at night should be limited to reduce the threat of violence, demonstrating the level of insecurity they face, suggesting a perception that survivors of violence are responsible. While women indicated that, at the community level, they were responsible for their own security, young men

on the other hand responded that they regarded themselves as the protectors of women and did not associate themselves with perpetrators. As long as attitudes towards VAW and SGBV continue to reflect underlying prejudices that the fault lies primarily with survivors, the patriarchal norms that hamper attempts to tackle these attitudes will remain unchallenged.

Of particular prominence was how widely SGBV was seen as a deterrent to viable peace for Somalia/land. Efforts to combat SGBV are hampered by poor or non-existent reporting mechanisms or lack of coordination between CSOs and institutions to support survivors.<sup>36</sup> High-profile accusations of rape against African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops, Somali police forces, and the imprisonment of women who make rape allegations, has brought the issue to the forefront for the Federal Government.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, high-profile cases in Somaliland also seem to have led to an increase in the number of reported cases, alongside evidence to suggest an increase in gang rape.<sup>38</sup>

Rape within IDP camps has received significant international attention, and media reports often portray Somalia/land as a country in which rape survivors are routinely ignored, and in some cases face punishment for speaking out. During one focus group comprising women from various IDP communities, not a single respondent indicated that rape had ever occurred in their communities to begin with, but when asked a related question about who is responsible for safety and security in communities, one respondent indicated that she has heard of rape cases:

*'Yes, rape happens in our camp, but it has died down and is not as frequent, and I can say that the number of cases is exaggerated. There are women that are immoral and who travel at night with men, what else do you expect if you carry on with this type of behaviour? A concern for why there is insecurity in our camps is because we don't have proper homes, but beyond that it is safe.'*

FGD participant, October 2013, Mogadishu

During the discussions with this focus group, it was at times difficult to undertake an open dialogue on this issue, as it seemed that gatekeepers who were present had significant control over what participants said. Gatekeepers during this particular FGD identified themselves as elected female elders from the participating IDP camps who were given a mandate by the community to relay their concerns and objectives.

Without further investigating the role of gatekeepers in a broader context, it is difficult to provide generalizations on power dynamics in this particular IDP camp. This does not suggest that FGD participants did not speak about contentious or controversial issues regarding VAW in these camps, but their statements should be viewed in light of the obvious presence of gatekeepers. While women participants were keen to counter the perceived unfair misconception of IDP camps as places of rape, it should be noted that violence would be seen as a discredit to the presence of elected female elders, so it is understandable that there was a concerted effort to move the focus away from the identification of IDP camps as places where rape routinely occurs. In informal settings afterwards some participants were more forthcoming.

One activist accused the international community of allowing donor funds to continue to flow into Somalia, while allegations of rape and the poor treatment of those who brought rape claims forward are not properly addressed:

*'There is no such thing as protection in Somalia. We don't have a safe house for girls that are looking for refuge, a place that she will not find stigma and where we can try to find a new school for her and even relocate her entire family. There is nowhere you can go in Somalia where they do not know you. We try to fundraise and build funds for girls so she can try to start afresh somewhere else. They need financial and moral support. The support also needs to be sustainable.'*

Zahra Mohamed Ahmed, Legal Advisor, Somali Women's Development Center

Participants were much more forthcoming in all FGDs about the prevalence of domestic violence throughout society. Young girls in Puntland indicated that rape and torture are forms of VAW that occur alongside female genital mutilation (FGM), inheritance denial and a lack of proper food nutrition provided to girls.<sup>39</sup> One human rights activist from Mogadishu described her struggle in trying to raise awareness about VAW as more than only rape:

*'[Sister Somalia] started as a grassroots initiative. We needed to talk about the extent of female suffering in Somalia. There are very harmful traditional practices. Besides FGM we also consider issues like widow inheritance (women marrying their brother-in-laws); marrying rapists; bride-exchange etc. Now with SGBV as a campaign, it is only used to refer to rape. Nobody talks about domestic abuse or FGM; emotional and psychological abuses are not considered a form of SGBV.'*

Ilwad Elman, Director, Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre

With women-focused organizations working to address various forms of SGBV, examination of the impact that these initiatives have on Somali society offers a good indicator of the condition of women and girls in post-conflict contexts. A Somaliland lawyer who often deals with cases of VAW, including rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence and property theft, commented on whether society is changing for men and women:

*'How men and women in society relate to one another has changed. For example, divorce is normal now for us. But back then, a woman would say, kill me before you divorce me. Can you imagine that? It's changed a lot now. Many things have opened up for women. Before with customary laws, if a woman said she was raped, the elders would come together. But now if she's raped, she has a choice to choose either of these laws [common vs. customary]. There are cases where the community can intervene if the case goes to court. If she receives compensation the community of elders take it from her. This happens, and many women lose their rights over this. The men are released and the compensation is taken out.'*

Dekha Ibrahim, member of Somaliland Women's Lawyers Association (SLWLA)

It is clear that without significant resources to tackle VAW in Somali society, women will struggle to overcome existing attitudes and behaviours, and any claims that a positive peace has been achieved will prove unsubstantiated.

### **3.2.1 Making public spaces safer for women**

The majority of Somaliland households are rural and overwhelmingly engaged in pastoral or agro-pastoral activities, which leave them increasingly marginalized by the rise of urban commercial centres. Rural communities identified rape/sexual assault as a priority issue, along with the inability to travel at night. The extent to which public and private spaces, rural and urban, are considered to be safe for women to navigate is a significant factor in addressing the prevalence of VAW. Negative attitudes towards survivors of VAW were frequently reflected in statements blaming them for the act, and questioning survivors' judgement for bringing the violence on themselves.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, in Mogadishu, many respondents suggested that women ought to be more mindful of their movements in particular spaces that were deemed unsafe to move around in, especially at night.

The largest women's-focused NGO in Somaliland is the Nagaad umbrella organization, which is focused on enhancing decision-making for women and strengthening the women's movement in general. Nagaad's director highlights the necessity of speaking publicly about 'private issues' and the backlash women face as a result of speaking out and working in public spaces:

*'If there are laws that accompany these harmful practices or forms of violence, they [offenders] need to know they will be punished for it [contravening them]. If it stays within our culture as the elders congregate amongst one another, the woman is still marginalized and stigmatized. If she speaks about it publicly, people say: 'there goes that girl that was raped.' Why is group rape happening now? Well, in the past, if a man raped a woman he was forced to marry her. But now with group rapes, the responsibility to marry the girl isn't there because it was a group effort. The young men know this.'*

Nafisa Yusuf Mohamed, Director Nagaad

Among efforts to improve physical security at a community level, one interviewee highlighted some positive initiatives that were echoed by many women's peace activists:

*'We are working on awareness-raising and building the community from the ground up. A Neighbourhood System is a programme we brought together to make people to get to know one another in sets of four households to report on what's happening in their communities and what are the disturbances. We also work to bring out more female police officers to support women who want to report rape. This type of reporting works to by also providing information on who are 'new' members of the community.'*

Interview, 1 October 2013, Mogadishu

With regards to the physical and personal safety of women, FGD responses from male elders in three cities (Kismaayo, Mogadishu, Jowhar) felt that the responsibility largely fell to male family members. While respondents indicated that the best way for women to protect themselves against violence or assault is to remain within their households, it is also acknowledged that women and girls, particularly from IDP communities, remain vulnerable. In addition to the growing number of women in gainful employment (and the resulting increased movement demanded by this), it is difficult to monitor instances of VAW in public spaces, owing to the fact that women who experience violence may not always report it.

The majority of responses from community elders were progressive in nature, with many acknowledging the importance of supporting women's economic empowerment and education. However, the foundation for this was strictly defined in terms of culture or religion, with many respondents returning to the perceived necessity that women avoid walking through communities late at night. Respondents also acknowledged the breakdown of traditional social ties that facilitated distributive justice (i.e. financial compensation for VAW). In this context, the responsibility and concern for preventing VAW and making public spaces safe rests with women to be aware of their surroundings and with their immediate male family members to provide protection. Neither of these provisions can account for instances of VAW in and around their households. Considering the overall difficulty in assessing levels of violence in and around communities and villages, it is paramount to hold perpetrators accountable and to establish a system of justice for women that do experience violence.

In all discussions, respondents noted that communities or neighbourhoods were responsible for their own security and that this was central to building a positive peace. Community level organizing was noted as an effective method for deterring violence against women, girls, men and boys. The importance of civil society (local and global) engaging with communities was identified as an effective approach within wider strategies designed to combat VAW. The engagement with young men to offset the lack of support offered to them in general was also seen as a key aspect of any such programmes.

### 3.2.2 Women's engagement in politics and conflict resolution

Meaningful participation for women in politics is not only hampered by direct violence and insecurity. While participation can act as a source of freedom, it must be contextualized within the structural constraints in place (e.g. clan allegiance, corruption and legitimacy of institutions). Moves have been made in all the Somali territories to increase representation of women in government institutions through quota systems. So far these quotas have not delivered the representation required. There is a need to examine the structural constraints placed on women to participate in formal and informal institutions.

A women's activist suggested that women in general need to gain greater education and awareness in order to take ownership over their decision-making and take advantage of public forums. According to her:

*'Women don't know their rights even within Islam. We have to claim our rights in Islam. Women need education. Women need to have financial literacy and gain experience and skills training at the grassroots level. The international community needs to support civil society groups, otherwise they will disappear. When it comes to female politicians, they need help to coordinate themselves across all levels of government (local, parliament, ministers). Women end up representing their clan they were born into and not women.'*

Amina Haji Elmi, SSWC, interviewed 9 October 2013, Nairobi

The role of clans in fostering competition among women is a less well recognized but significant factor in undermining women's political participation. When asked about her experience running in the 2005 parliamentary elections in Somaliland, one woman responded:

*'One of the biggest obstacles was being among the first women to run for a seat. It was novel and not something that was a part of our culture. When you are the first, since our society is clan-based, the issue is that because you are in between clans, how do you campaign in a region or district where you are not seen as a full member of that clan? Besides, from the issue of clan, the issues I faced were small in comparison.'*

Amina Mahamoud Warsame, interviewed 14 March 2012, Hargeisa

When one activist was asked why the 30 percent quota went unfulfilled in the current parliament in Somalia, she suggested that a competing campaign was underway to undermine the notion that women deserved special consideration above another individual. As a result, in the name of impartiality, a lack of enforcement mechanisms, financial constraints and a systematic sidelining of women as valid participants in the process contributed to Somali women failing to reach 30 percent in Somalia's parliament (Box 3).

#### **Box 3: The 30 percent parliamentary quota for women**

*'The quota is not constitutionally binding. I was among the committee that contributed to the Charter, saying that the parliament cannot open till we fill the 12 percent of seats. We had a female elders conference and as the men were doing their work we had one alongside them. That's how the 30 percent was lost. Membership to represent the clan was necessary to run for politics. You also needed 10,000 to 100,000 shillings just to compete. The women that were brought out by the clan were mainly women who remained in the households. They did not bring women who knew many of the issues. Instead, she [the women that did run] was beginning to learn [the issues relevant to women].'*

Amina Haji Elmi, interview, 9 October 2013, Nairobi

Political participation for women is hindered by the practice of excluding women from decision-making institutions, as in the process by which the parliamentary gender quota was not enforced. Struggles to enforce quotas have so far not been successful. This exclusion is reinforced by the decision-making processes and outcomes of these institutions (including the judiciary), which are informed by patriarchal notions of, and resistance to, women's leadership and decision-making. For example, clan leaders were concerned that having a woman represent the clan would reduce their impact in the elected body. When a clan did accept a woman as a representative, they selected women who were perceived as easily malleable. These two approaches undermine women's engagement, even where quotas exist.

Moreover, the changing economic roles for women over the years have not translated into significantly greater political influence or decision-making. This was addressed in some areas by the introduction of initiatives like quotas for female politicians. International and national actors have favoured institutional mechanisms and laws to entrench women's rights, but in drafting peace settlements and the like, have tended to ignore the structural impediments to participation. Such as the household dynamics that in many instances are ideologically sustained by patriarchal attitudes and maintain the position of women as secondary to men.<sup>41</sup>

A female elder in an IDP community participates frequently in male-dominated spaces for conflict resolution in their community. Asked how men respond to her presence and how she came to be a leading decision-maker in her community she responded:

*'Women have a huge role in decision-making – when men cannot agree they call me. We don't participate in peace processes at the national level or at the clan level, but we do deal with small disputes. For example, men want to overestimate the food aid support from NGOs because of their khat chewing. They estimate what the community needs and then add a little extra for themselves to be able to chew khat. They don't like me because I tell the truth of what we need and no more. The men get scared when I speak.'*

Interview, 30 September 2013, Mogadishu

Women are called to engage in resolution of what are regarded as minor disputes, precisely because interventions at this level do not challenge the fundamental order of society. This narrative was repeated throughout formal and informal conversations. The value of participating in peace committees was seen as useful, but the need for civic education and collective action was also reinforced. Communication and knowledge transfer has to be improved between civil society, government and local communities to reduce duplication of services and better target the needs of communities, with a view to incorporating wider issues such as food security into peace-building programmes.

Attitudes that fail to see women as valuable and legitimate participants in state building need to be addressed through increasing women's participation and leadership in decision-making at all levels from community level up, and through pressure for accountable and effective state and clan governance and leadership. Also through creation of forums for discussion, in conjunction with directly reducing causes of violence. A monthly forum where men and women discuss policy issues facing Somalia is held at the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies.<sup>42</sup> When asked about men's views on women's participation in peace and security, the then director noted:

*'On issues of peace/security, women don't factor in the discussion. They're not part of any structures that make decisions. Their views are not heard; they're not in a place to contribute to making decisions. Security is viewed as a male business. I'd argue that the brunt of insecurity is sustained by women. Almost all of the street vendors are women: that could've been my mother selling vegetables or meat in the most abhorrent conditions. Then there's the issue of responsibility. Where are the men? What are they responsible for? Men need to own up to their traditional responsibilities. Why are all these women selling milk, khat, everything!'*

Abdi Aynte, Former Director, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, interviewed  
29 September 2013, Mogadishu

### 3.3 Responsive and accessible governance

The extent to which governance structures are both responsive and accessible to women and men is central to the construction of just and sustainable peace processes. However, significant challenges exist in the current Somali context.

In Mogadishu, members of 'peace committees' that were formed to foster community-driven solutions to conflict were asked about their usefulness. They suggested that while the committees are informative, female committee members apparently lacked the civic education necessary to foster the confidence to speak at these committees. Whereas men had the confidence to discuss issues publicly, female members knew very little about processes of governance. Women noted that their education focused on issues such as household conflict resolution, which was acknowledged as crucial to peace in communities, yet they felt that they also had a right to know about how political institutions functioned, and what laws governed them.<sup>43</sup>

*'There are three components to how women work – women grassroots organizing, civil society, and through politics as politicians. We need to build coordination between these three. Women need civic education. All women at every level need to know the issues that they face.'*

Amina Haji Elmi, Executive Director, Save Somali Women & Children, interviewed  
9 October 2013

Participants in FGDs highlighted a lack of government capacity to deliver services, despite also regarding government (parliament and ministries) as ultimately responsible for providing peace and security. The failure of governance in this respect is reflected in a situation in which all members of society, not just women and girls, face widespread insecurity in many parts of Somalia. Participants did not have a clear idea of which government agencies or individuals were responsible for addressing their concerns regarding the lack of personal safety and security. However, women were principally concerned with the courts, (rather than legislative bodies such as the parliament) as the judicial system was perceived as the most relevant in terms of providing direct access to justice and bureaucracy (such as obtaining birth certificates, for example). These suggestions were similar to a National Dialogue on Justice Reform that was held in Mogadishu in April 2013, which included recommendations that sought to improve the accountability of, and accreditation for, members of the justice system (police, lawyers, prosecutors, judges), as well as the need to establish independent bodies to monitor human rights violations.<sup>44</sup>

Participants in Mogadishu, however, were quite optimistic about the Federal Government of Somalia and were prepared to grant the authorities time to create effective and functioning institutions that could respond to their concerns. Female lawyers in Somaliland also indicated that specific institutions should be held more accountable than others, particularly the judiciary and legislative bodies, in order to achieve progress in addressing VAW (including SGBV) and broader security concerns.

While uneven peace-building and development continues throughout and between Somali territories, many government institutions largely remain weak, with little in the way of enforcement capabilities. This goes deeper than just government security forces, with FGDs recognizing that an essential part of peace and security is the provision of services, including health services and creation of employment opportunities. Issues such as unemployment among young men in particular were frequently raised, as it was seen that such disenfranchisement can lead to isolation, resentment and in some cases violence aimed at society. A recurring theme throughout FGDs was that young men find themselves trapped between cultural expectations of how 'masculinity' is expressed, and the lack of structures or institutions to support that, indicating failings in systematic responses to the (gendered) needs of both women and men.

Police and security forces, including armies in Somalia/land, were generally viewed by FGDs as corrupt and unwilling to support communities in apprehending or searching for perpetrators of violence. The notion of increasing the number of female police officers was raised in FGDs, with women noting that they felt more comfortable speaking to female police officers about issues relating to VAW/SGBV. The

activity of militias in Somalia represents one of the major difficulties that police and army officials are faced with, which are compounded by the widespread availability of police/army uniforms in markets that can be worn by any individual who wishes to masquerade as a member of the security forces. The development of an organized police and army was viewed as essential to broadening and strengthening peace-building in Somalia.

### 3.4 Communities and clan

Communities and clan are central to the way in which gender roles and attitudes towards VAW and SGBV are contextualized. For example, these patriarchal norms can be seen through the role of clan in mediating or adjudicating issues relating to VAW. Participants in FGDs indicated that clan families also serve as a source of protection and maintainers of peace.

By contrast, IDP women in FGDs in Mogadishu and Galkayo noted that, because they reside in communities where their clan families are not based, they lack physical and financial protection. Clan families are responsible in some instances for providing financial support to less well-off members of communities and deal with disputes. Without the protection of clan families, even young men noted that smaller clans might become susceptible to bullying and lack the capacity to seek justice for their members in instances of violence.

Despite the perceived clan protection, traditional methods of dealing with VAW and SGBV facilitated by the clan can also lead to a lack of justice. If a young woman is raped for example, in some instances, clan families become involved, and the offender is usually issued with nothing more than a fine. This type of behaviour was noted in all FGDs as contributing to a prevailing culture of impunity. One young man noted:

*'[Larger clans] can influence the justice system, so [smaller clans] have to appease the larger and stronger clans. People that get caught in the act with explosions and grenades are not brought to justice. Men and boys almost always get away with rape and domestic violence. The president mandated that anyone who is found guilty of rape would receive capital punishment. But this is not enforced. People in authority commit rape and people with financial means can get away with it. Compensation also plays a role in society: if they can afford to give the victims' family a certain amount [the perpetrator] will be acquitted of the crime.'*

Interviewee, 20 October 2013, Mogadishu

In order to circumvent clan influence, women have begun to create their own networks of influence, developed around their existing occupational connections (i.e. garment wholesalers, milk and meat exporters, journalists, nurses, lawyers associations etc.). Women-only networks have allowed for common interests to translate into broad-based support for less economically well-off women, for example, in micro-finance. These networks provide a fertile ground for grassroots mobilization, civic education and collective action for female members, and create a tiered support network that can incorporate vulnerable and less vulnerable groups of women.

The Somali Women's Entrepreneurs Association (SWEA) based in Mogadishu is one such example that incorporates peace activism with micro-finance and income-generating activities for women. Maryan Ali Obsiye, Executive Director of SWEA, when asked about the impetus for her to start the SWEA, illustrated the need for women to become self-reliant through their own income-generating activities:

*'At the time [in the mid-1990s], in the beginning, we only had five organisations so imagine if we had peace. It's only because of peace that women can get their work done. Even in the hardest period we still had a distribution system getting materials for homes (pots, pans, beddings, etc...) from Malaysia and bringing it to Xamar [Mogadishu]. We brought these products, but without peace you can't grow a business. We contributed to peace-building at the time by trying to maintain a normal life for society. It's important for women to participate in businesses because you never know what can happen to the husband, and the women in the household need to be self-reliant and provide for her family and her children's education.'*

Maryan Ali Obsiye, interviewed 1 October 2013, Mogadishu

Above all issues, community elder responses during FGDs centred on the importance of reviving community-led or traditional forms of social networks to mediate conflict at all levels of society. Indeed, it was mentioned on numerous occasions that the bedrock of a peaceful nation begins with local initiatives from the ground up. Not only did community elders perceive this as their god-given responsibility, the failure of this bottom-up conflict transformation process was perceived as directly related to the breakdown of social networks.

At the heart of this process is the clan elder, whose authority was noted as having severely diminished over time. In this sense, transformations at the societal level are responsible for the gradual shift of social capital away from community elders to administrative authorities (local governors, mayors, judges, prosecutors, lawyers, ministers, etc.). Consequently, a power vacuum has arisen that has easily been abused by officials, identified by women peacemakers as including the police and military.

The influence of clan ties is most evident when it comes to issues such as selecting representatives for political positions, yet in certain other areas, including mediating justice or facilitating dialogue, this influence is less constraining. Women living in camps have been especially affected by this system, as they are more likely to be resident in an area where representatives from their own clan families are non-existent or absent.

To combat this, community elders focused on the need to bolster the role of elders and religious authorities in official spaces (where dialogue or conflict mediation is occurring), but – more importantly – emphasized the obligation of the community as a whole to acquire greater social capital to enact change or distribute justice at the first instance of violence. So while elders consider themselves as playing an important role, the danger still persists that communities and clans view women as primarily in need of protection by male family or community members, thereby disempowering women. If women from all socio-economic backgrounds are not included in dialogues aimed at promoting peace at the local level, there is a distinct danger that power hierarchies that exclude women will be reproduced. This being the case, the factors that underpin the structural causes of conflict, violence or marginalization will not be adequately addressed.

### **3.5 Men, violence and masculinity**

Throughout focus group and other discussions, concepts of traditional masculinity and the challenges these present were repeatedly raised. Young men felt entrapped between cultural expectations of how masculinity 'should' be expressed, and the lack of structures or institutions either to support these traditional expectations or alternatives to authoritarian masculinities.

Young men argued that they are particularly susceptible to harassment and psychological abuse by male authority figures (i.e., elders) for failures to fulfil notions of masculinity that are traditionally associated with maturity and manhood. Young men characterized these expectations in terms of gainful employment, the acquisition of property, marriage and financial independence. Respondents indicated that the inability to fulfil the dictates of masculinity that would allow them to participate in clan dynamics could lead to a sense of alienation from their communities, and even cause mental health problems. Young men and boys are taught to be self-reliant, and in general, are not able to seek sources of emotional support. One FGD sought to highlight this relation between the pressures faced by young men to adopt traditional roles of masculinity, and destructive or abusive behaviour (including khat

chewing) that could potentially lead to violent acts. Respondents in this FGD felt that communities should be made more aware of the negative impact of khat chewing on households and families.

In order to achieve a gender-sensitive approach to peace-building, it is essential that forums are established to facilitate discussion of masculinities and femininities and the difference between 'ideal vs. actual' gender roles.<sup>45</sup> One respondent gave an illuminating example of how perceptions of the roles of men and women affect attitudes towards women's participation in peace-building:

*'We did a study on the type of work a woman does in 24 hours. For men, we said [that] the hours he sits chewing khat was a form of work – we counted towards it in this study. If we took the work they did in total, it amounted to eight hours [men]. When we looked at all the work women do, it totalled nearly 18 hours (cooking, cleaning, child rearing, selling goods at the market). There is resentment among men at the state of society, especially their lack of opportunities. They are seeking to protect their position through clan influence and political positions and see women as competition and resent them for that.'*

Interview, 27 September 2013, Nairobi

As long as peace is defined as a return to normal and 'proper' gender relations, traditional masculine and feminine roles will be seen as essential components of any peace agreement, as was collectively agreed by FGDs across all age groups and between men and women. This attitude is clearly manifested in the way institutions approach VAW, entrenching patriarchal attitudes and excluding women from access to justice. In many instances, respondents spoke of the entitlements embodied in Somali culture that afford Somali men greater status than women.

Among the most central themes that community elders highlighted was the importance of promoting traditional masculine roles and traits to strengthen societal cohesion and reinforce traditional kin networks. This includes the transmission of knowledge from religious elders to communities, from fathers to sons, and husbands to wives. While elder respondents noted that this vertical chain of command is critical to the provision of protection for women and girls in communities, it is important to take into consideration that perpetrators of violence can also be male family members.

Consequently, many of the responses by community elders should be considered in light of the interests they hold in preserving the prevailing system, which privileges a particular social and political class of men who attain a certain level of knowledge derived from experience and age. While this certainly positions elders as important stakeholders in the pursuit of peace, women's inclusion in the peace process is undermined by a framework that could potentially reinforce traditional gendered norms. Only with an understanding of these underlying power dynamics can the challenges deriving from entrenched conceptions of masculinity and femininity be effectively addressed. This is particularly true of the impact of 'unfulfilled masculinity' (in relation to young men) on the wider community and, in particular, on the subordination of women's participation in the pursuit of peace.

# 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research on the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by women in the context of peace-building in Somalia provide lessons that can help inform efforts to ensure that the voices of women are heard. The presence or absence of justice in communities throughout Somalia/land was a notable feature of FGDs and interviews. Participants expressed their view that peace was a long road and that inequalities persist that prevent communities and individuals from benefitting from peace processes or outcomes.

As many of the discussions outlined in this report suggest, changes at all levels of society are required, which demand an approach dealing with the cultural and structural roots of inequality and conflict. Civic education, the provision of services, public spaces for discussion, and the championing of male allies to support men and women's efforts in building a fair and sustainable peace are all crucial elements of any peace process. Women's peace efforts rely on supporting communities as much as supporting women's rights.

These recommendations are aimed at Somali authorities, armed forces, donors, UN Agencies, NGOs and others who make decisions on the structures of peace processes and security in Somalia.

## 4.1 Measures to address structural violence against women

- **Facilitation of open debate about VAW and SGBV**, in order to begin to challenge dominant perceptions and to encourage decision-makers across society to tackle the issue. Engaging men in this discourse – including at grassroots level – is a vital step in order to change attitudes.
- **Engagement with power dynamics and social actors** with roles/responsibilities to enact decision-making at all levels. This is key to transforming social structures for men and women, and should include clan elders and female gatekeepers. Without addressing the presence of structural violence (i.e. patriarchal entitlements that exclude women as decision-makers) that facilitates inequality on the basis of clan or gender, justice cannot be achieved for women during peace times. Engagement on the part of clan and community elders as stakeholders is crucial to this, and should be enacted alongside awareness-raising initiatives that address power and gendered hierarchies that could negatively impact young men and women as meaningful actors.
- **Focus on long-term behavioural change and gender sensitization programming.** While women stand temporarily to benefit from increased mobility, economic independence and household responsibility, sustainable change needs to address social expectations/ perceptions of gender norms. This extends to the presence or absence of violence, both within communities and at the national level. A Sexual Offences Bill currently at draft stage in Somalia outlines the steps being taken by institutional actors to address VAW, although it does not go far enough in addressing violence in all its forms (e.g., domestic abuse, marital rape).<sup>46</sup>
- Building on the above, gender and conflict sensitive programmes should **militate against the re-establishment of gender norms for young men** that privilege dominance and control over household members and finances, and that curtail women's mobility in public spaces and their attempts to seek justice. Men should work in conjunction with female peace activists to achieve this.
- **Bolstering gender-responsive protection services at community level** to tackle structural VAW and improve their safety and their ability to participate in public spaces. For example, local authorities and police could consider supporting 'neighbourhood watch' style systems. Improving civic education, supporting community organising and collective action for community members would also help in developing stronger relationships between security-sector actors and communities. In particular, understanding the experiences of men/boys and women/girls in relation to how each group

views peace and security within communities can help determine gender-sensitive approaches to peace and security at all levels of society.

- **Further research should be undertaken on** rape and torture, FGM, inheritance denial, and denial of proper food and nutrition to girls. There is a need for consistent gender- and conflict-sensitive research to bolster a meaningful discussion on the intersection between health, education, poverty, SGBV/VAW and conflict in Somalia.

## 4.2 The politics of participation: Strengthening women's engagement and leadership

- **Addressing the way that social dynamics, such as those of the clan, are translated into hierarchal power hegemonies** is key to tackling the most harmful effects of exclusion and marginalization of women and men. To achieve this, the devolution of powers through peace committees, and others for example, is an important step in encouraging communities to take ownership of a sustainable peace. In addition, it allows for an ongoing process of collective civic education, identified as a priority by focus group respondents.
- **Programmes in this area should continue to support the existing work to increase quotas of women in parliamentary and other structures. But must go beyond that and aim to support greater and more structured networking among women activists and Somali women in general.** This should build on work that has been undertaken by CSOs to engage with economically disadvantaged women. Such projects have, for example, helped establish political forums in major townships as a space for women to organize themselves politically and strategically in order to effectively represent their interests.
- **Training and networking opportunities for women** are required to facilitate access to political processes and increase women's capacity to engage politically, and as leaders and representatives. Indeed, training should go beyond electioneering to build leadership, knowledge and organization skills more broadly. This could also help women to operate from a stronger platform in cases where political experience is required, such as in policy-making forums.
- **Within NGOs and CSOs, priority should be given to providing spaces for women from different socio-economic backgrounds** to perpetuate diverse perspectives on gender-just peace. Diversification of support away from already well educated urban groups could unleash significant potential, particularly, for example, in areas such as the provision of local security in the aftermath of conflict, and the harnessing of informal and professional networks that can contribute to peace and reconciliation.<sup>47</sup>

## 4.3 Peace-building approaches that address the challenges of traditional gender roles

In order to achieve lasting peace between communities and enable women to participate in a meaningful way, obstacles that play out in private spaces must be removed, methods women use to participate in peace-building and decision-making processes must be leveraged, and male allies in communities, civil society and government must be championed.

- **Peace-building processes need to move beyond simply creating distinct spaces between women and men.** These processes should include and enforce quotas for women's participation but must go further. The extension of leadership training to women, especially those involved in formal peace-building activities, is important in order to provide participants with the confidence not to be undermined by perceptions held by both sexes of women as uneducated and ill-equipped to participate. Without the confidence to participate, the experience of informants in this research shows that, often, women remain sidelined even when given the opportunity to take part.
- **Addressing the situation of men affected by conflict in relation to shifting power dynamics and gender roles** could help to identify leverage points for women's participation in peace-building and peace processes at all levels. Deeper recognition of this, along with targeted measures that

- foster gender-sensitive approaches to peace-building, would bolster the gains made by Somali women, and help them to overcome the constraints of patriarchal barriers supported and enforced by both men and women.
- **Normative values that underscore women and men's accepted roles need to be addressed proactively, rather than retroactively.** The legitimacy of social movements that seek to uproot gender identities that produce social inequality can be difficult to establish if a gendered awareness is not embedded throughout processes aimed at social transformation.
- **Further empirical research needs to be undertaken to study the relationship between unemployment, poverty, violence, masculinity and conflict** in the Somali context, to support critical analysis of the ways in which conflict and violence have shaped or changed notions of masculinity and femininity and how that may lead to positive social transformation.

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# ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Menkhaus, Ken. 'Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building and the Politics of Coping', *International Security* 31.3 (Winter 2006/07): 74–106.
- <sup>2</sup> Oxfam Novib Policy Paper, 'Achieving Conflict Transformation', October 2012, [http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/network/2013/ntwrk2\\_2013\\_8-conflict-transformation\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/network/2013/ntwrk2_2013_8-conflict-transformation_ENG.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> FGDs largely provided a situational analysis of sexual and gender-based violence as a form of insecurity and then asked questions to explore participants' views of peace and the responsible parties for the delivery of peace and security.
- <sup>4</sup> AllAfrica, 'Somalia: Federal Govt Ministers Arrive in Puntland Amid Strained Relations', 25 June 2014, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201406260493.html>
- <sup>5</sup> Gardner and El Bushra 2004, 30.
- <sup>6</sup> See (Kapteijns, 1995; Gardner and El Bushra, 2004; Hasan, Adan and Warsame 1995) .
- <sup>7</sup> *Xeer* is a set of Somali customary laws that are not written down but based upon precedence, specific to each clan.
- <sup>8</sup> Warsame, 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Kapteijns, 1995, 255.
- <sup>10</sup> Le Sage, A. 'Stateless Justice in Somalia Formal and Informal Rule of Law Initiatives', Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, July 2005, p. 17.
- <sup>11</sup> *Buranbuur* is an important means of communication and education in Somali culture. When discussing women's contributions during the civil war and the peace process, for example, poetry was often used to reconcile warring clans, or to encourage Somali National Movement (SNM) soldiers to fight during the civil war in Somaliland.
- <sup>12</sup> See Aidid 2010; Hasan, Adan and Warsame, 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> Hoehne and Ingris, 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> Ahmed and Green 1999; Bradbury et al., 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> Lewis, 2010, 77.
- <sup>16</sup> Ahmed and Green, 1999, 115.
- <sup>17</sup> Gardner and El Bushra 2004, 176.
- <sup>18</sup> Kapteijns 2009, 118; Gardner and El Bushra 2004, 177.
- <sup>19</sup> Kapteijns, 2009.
- <sup>20</sup> Abdi, 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> Walls, 2013.
- <sup>22</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, 2004; El Bushra, 2003; 2007; Shepherd, 2008; Warsame, 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> Enloe, 2000.
- <sup>24</sup> See Gardner and El Bushra, 2004 for examples.
- <sup>25</sup> Anderson, S. (2000) 'Crossing the Lines: Women's Organizations in Conflict Resolutions', *The Society for International Development*, 43(3), pp. 34-39.
- <sup>26</sup> Recited by Dudi Ahmed from Allah-Amin in an interview conducted on 16 January 2012 in Hargeisa, Rayale, Siham. PhD Dissertation. Originally published at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/siham-rayale/narrating-peace-somaliland-women's-experiences>
- <sup>27</sup> Lewis, 2010.
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- <sup>30</sup> Dini, 2009, 35.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Zainab Ayan Ahmed, Nairobi, September 2013.
- <sup>32</sup> Dini, 2009, Ibid
- <sup>33</sup> Hudson, Valerie, et al. *Sex and world peace*. Columbia University Press, 2012. pp. 188.

- <sup>34</sup> Galtung, 1969.
- <sup>35</sup> Sexual and gender-based violence refers to domestic violence, marital rape, honour killings, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), femicide, forced prostitution (sexual slavery) and forced marriage.
- <sup>36</sup> Manjoo and McRaith, 2011.
- <sup>37</sup> Mohamed, Hamza, 'Al Jazeera Somalia arrests woman over rape allegations', 21 November 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/11/somalia-arrests-woman-over-rape-allegations-20131120205317526617.html>
- <sup>38</sup> <http://www.somalicurrent.com/2013/09/29/rape-cases-rise-in-somaliland/>
- <sup>39</sup> Focus group discussion, 20 November 2013, Bosaso.
- <sup>40</sup> Hammond, 2013, 25-32.
- <sup>41</sup> Geisler, 2004; Shepherd, 2008; El Bushra and Mukaburuga, 1995.
- <sup>42</sup> <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/>
- <sup>43</sup> Focus group with female peace activists at Elman Peace Centre, 3 October 2013.
- <sup>44</sup> <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/The%20Somali%20Compact.pdf>
- <sup>45</sup> Questions to explore include to what extent, if any, does two decades of the militarization of men and boys through armed conflict contribute to violence committed by men and boys on women and girls? What roles does masculinity (*raganimoo*) play in marginalizing or creating inclusive spaces for men and women in peace-building?
- <sup>46</sup> The *Guardian*, 'Somalia sexual offences bill hailed as vital step towards lasting change', 11 December 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/dec/11/somalia-sexual-offences-bill-hailed-as-key-step-towards-lasting-change>
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