

Women's Perceptions of Governance and Democratization in the Benadir Region: Challenges and Opportunities



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Contents

1	Executive Summary	4
2	Introduction	8
3	Methodology	9
4	The Role of Women in Post-Conflict Governance and State-Building	11
5	Women's Role in Conflict Prevention in Africa	13
6	Women's Participation in Peacebuilding in Somalia and the Challenges of Inclusion	14
7	Survey Findings	16
8	Defining Governance in the Benadir Region	18
9	Defining State-Building in Benadir	24
10	Defining Conflict and How to Prevent Conflict in Benadir	29
11	Conclusion	34
12	Recommendations	35

1. Executive summary

In recent decades, Somalia has made progress toward rebuilding its government since the collapse of the state in 1991. However, many segments of the population remain disenfranchised from the peacebuilding process. Women make up half of the population, but are underrepresented in governance, state-building, and conflict resolution efforts. Studies on women's participation in post-conflict societies show that they play an important role in ending conflicts and in the transition to democracy. Women in Somalia have made considerable contributions to the reconstruction of their society after the civil war, but there are many obstacles that make it difficult for them to participate in formal institutions. This report examines women's perspectives on governance, state-building, and conflict resolution in Somalia's Benadir region.

In pursuit of the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies' vision of a stable and peaceful Somalia guided by evidence-based policies and inclusive discussions, the Talo Wadaag II (TWII) program aims to enable youth, women, marginalized groups, and civil society in general to effectively participate in governance, peace, and state-building processes. By partnering with these groups and conducting interactive and participatory action research, the program seeks to identify barriers to their participation from their own perspectives and experiences, and develop context-specific solutions. Building on the success of Talo Wadaag I in Somaliland and Puntland in 2021-2022, TWII aims to apply the lessons learned and expand to other parts of Somalia, including the Benadir region and Galmudug state.

The methodology of this study is based on analyzing data from a WhatsApp survey and three focus group discussions with women living in the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA). The WhatsApp survey was posted on 19 March 2023 to a sample of women in Benadir. Twenty women out of a target of 32 completed the survey, which is not a representative sample of women in Benadir. It consisted of a mix of open-ended questions and multiple-choice questions. To analyze the open-ended questions, the responses of the survey participants were recoded and categorized into discrete response items. Participants were asked to respond open-endedly to what elections mean to them and what they perceive to be the challenges of the one-person-one-vote (OPOV) electoral system. Lastly, they were asked in a multiple-choice question format to indicate their support for the OPOV model, for the 4.5 clan formula election model, and the type of electoral system that they believe would help women participate in governance in Benadir.

The focus group discussions were conducted on 23 February 2023. Two of the focus groups consisted of 11 participants, and one consisted of 10, for a total of 32 women. All focus group discussions were conducted in Somali. The scripts from the focus groups were translated and transcribed into English, and a strict attempt was made to provide the exact translation of the responses.

The anonymity of all focus group participants' identities was guaranteed throughout this report through the use of numbers as pseudonyms. On the topics of governance, state-building, and conflict resolution, focus group participants were asked to define what these concepts mean to them, what they view as women's roles in these processes, the obstacles that women face in participating, and possible solutions to overcoming these obstacles.

The following is a summary of the results from the WhatsApp survey and the focus groups discussions:

- The results from the WhatsApp survey showed that 30% of the women surveyed believe that elections mean selecting leaders, and 26% believe it means voting. The overwhelming majority of women (90%) supported a OPOV system, and only 10% did not support this electoral system. On the other hand, 95% of women rejected the 4.5 electoral system.
- When asked which type of election they think will specifically help women participate in governance in Benadir, 90% of women in the WhatsApp survey chose the OPOV electoral model. Only 10% believe in the continued use of the 4.5 system.
- 21% of women think that gender bias or gender discrimination is the main challenge facing women if OPOV elections are introduced. 13% of respondents said that the lack of support for women seeking to run for office is the main challenge. 13% said that gendered expectations about a women's proper role in society creates barriers for women running for office.
- In the focus groups, while women in Benadir defined governance as the process in which someone is selected or elected to lead a country, they also believed that the quality of a leader matters, and leaders should embody good characteristics such as justice, legitimacy and representation.
- In discussing women's role in governance in Benadir, focus group participants recalled the role that women have played historically in Somalia's reconstruction. However, many women across all focus groups now see the role of women in Benadir as being largely symbolic and believe that they are not meaningfully included in governance. While there is a great deal of pessimism about women's inclusion in governance, several women saw potential opportunities, specifically in the security sector and as peacemakers between warring communities.
- Women viewed the 4.5 clan formula and the influence of clan elders in politics as one of the largest obstacles they face in participating in governance in Benadir. Clan elders were seen as biased gatekeepers who overlook qualified women.

- Another barrier to women's inclusion in governance is the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexism that they face as they seek positions in politics or in the workplace. Focus group participants condemned the practice of *aan is fahanno*, which is when male bosses or co-workers proposition women for a sexual quid-pro-quo. This practice, along with the sexist attitudes of men in gatekeeping positions, were identified as major roadblocks to women's representation in government positions.
- A commonly proposed solution to the challenges posed by the 4.5 electoral model is the adoption of a OPOV election system. Holding fully democratized local elections where representatives are directly elected was seen by participants as crucial condition to getting more women into government. The women also believed that a binding gender quota policy should be implemented, and political parties should be cited for not reserving seats for women.
- If the current 4.5 electoral model is maintained in the future, some women believed that clan elders should be educated about women's rights and the necessity of including women in the political process.
- As a solution to the barrier created by sexual harassment, women believed that perpetrators of sexual harassment should be punished, and that managers who engage in sexual quid-pro-quos should be fired. They also believed that men should be trained about why it is inappropriate to sexually harass women, and how this behavior harms women's careers in governance.
- In the context of Benadir, women defined state-building as a process that involves overcoming the harmful legacies of state collapse. They discussed how leaders should do this by abiding by the constitution, without regard to clan.
- Focus group participants viewed women's role in state-building as largely consigned to symbolic positions. Women are also overrepresented in low-status positions such as street cleaning. Despite the present marginalization of women in peacebuilding efforts, there was a widespread view that they are best positioned to contribute to peacebuilding because of the unique societal role they occupy. Because mothers tend to be closely attuned to the activities of their family members, they can raise an alarm when someone close to them engages in dangerous activities.
- Clan politics, clan elders, and the 4.5 formula were identified as one of the major obstacles that women face in getting opportunities to participate in state-building efforts. Clan politics and corrupt practices in hiring and employment were also viewed as obstacles to women gaining experience in this field.
- Women's lack of access to resources and skills such as educational opportunities and lack of access to capacity building training were identified as other barriers to women's participation in state-building initiatives.

- Focus group participants identified several solutions to increasing women's participation in state-building efforts in Benadir. Given the fact the 4.5 electoral system is widely believed to marginalize women, the top solutions offered by the women were: the need to raise awareness about how the 4.5 system affects women and women's political agency; requiring gender balance in the clan-based candidate selection formula; and educating clan elders about the importance of including women in politics and replacing the 4.5 electoral system with a OPOV system.
- To address barriers that women face in gaining employment in state-building opportunities, women in the focus group suggested the creation of merit-based hiring practices. They also believed that the judicial system in Benadir should be strengthened so that individuals who engage in unfair hiring practices were penalized after thorough legal investigations.
- When defining conflict, the women in the focus group provided both micro- and macro-level definitions of the term. Micro forms of conflict included interpersonal conflict, clan-based conflict, and youth turning to violence especially in the form of ciyaal weero (violent street gangs). Macro forms of conflict included conflict over land, conflict between the government and al-Shabaab, and political assassinations.
- In discussing how conflict in Benadir can be prevented, focus group participants believed that more security forces should be deployed in Benadir neighborhoods to deal with thieves, kidnappings, and violence from ciyaal weero. They also believed that government should do more to address youth unemployment so that young people stop turning to a life of crime.
- The focus group participants considered women to have an important role in preventing conflict in Benadir. They believed that many women are well positioned to be aware of potential violence that could be perpetrated by their relatives and the members of their communities. They also believed that women should actively intervene to stop violence by notifying officials if they see something odd, and by getting involved in the security sector.
- Some of the obstacles limiting women's involvement in conflict prevention are the role of clans and clan elders in discouraging or blocking women's participation in these efforts. When women do come across information about possible violent plots, there is no guarantee from security services that the sensitive information shared with them will be kept confidential. Thus, there is a fear of reprisals from al-Shabaab or vigilante groups if women share information that can aid in preventing conflict or crimes.
- The main solutions offered to increase women's participation in conflict prevention were to give women more opportunities to serve in decision-making roles in government and to improve educational opportunities.

2. Introduction



Despite their noteworthy contributions, women in Somalia are marginalized in governance, state-building, and formal conflict resolution. Much has been written on these topics in the context of Somalia, however, it is rare to hear directly from women

Women in Somalia play an important role in the country's past and present. In particular, women were pivotal in the recovery and rebuilding process after the civil war. Despite their noteworthy contributions, women in Somalia are marginalized in governance, state-building, and formal conflict resolution. Much has been written on these topics in the context of Somalia, however, it is rare to hear directly from women. This report studied Benadir women's perceptions of governance, state-building processes, and conflict resolution. It also details how women view their role in these issues, the barriers to participation they face, and their solutions for overcoming these obstacles. The analysis in this report is based on in-depth focus group interviews with women in several different parts of Benadir as well as an original survey.

Governance is a multi-faceted concept, and when asked what it means to them, most women view governance as the process in which a leader is selected or elected. They also focused on the importance of the quality of a leader, and that leaders should embody the characteristics of justice, legitimacy and representation. Focus group participants discussed the historic role women played in rebuilding the country after the war. Yet, today, they view women as largely excluded from important government posts, and they believe that women are largely used in symbolic ways, and are not engaged meaningfully in politics. The most prominent obstacle that women face in participating in governance in Benadir is the use of the 4.5 clan formula in electing candidates and the influence of clan elders in politics. Clan elders are seen as gatekeepers who have gendered preferences about which candidates are suitable to run for office. The overwhelmingly male makeup of the clan elders is viewed by women as the reason why most elected officials are men.



The solutions for how to reform governance in Benadir to be more inclusive of women focused largely on changing the electoral system from the 4.5 clan formula to a OPOV model

The solutions for how to reform governance in Benadir to be more inclusive of women focused largely on changing the electoral system from the 4.5 clan formula to a OPOV model. In addition, women advocated for the implementation of local elections in Benadir where representatives are directly elected. Similar to findings from the survey, the findings from the focus group interviews indicated a widespread belief that the 4.5 election formula has contributed to the marginalization of women, and that a fully democratized electoral process may yield better opportunities in governance for women.

The women in the focus groups connected the concept of state-building to the legacy of war in Somalia, and several viewed state-building as a process for overcoming harmful legacies. They also perceived it as a process that requires leaders to abide by the constitution and to subordinate ethnic affiliations to a national identity. Focus group participants also viewed women's inclusion in state-building to be symbolic, and they believed that women are underrepresented in prominent positions. In terms of barriers to women's inclusion in state-building, focus group participants identified clan politics, clan elders, and the 4.5 clan election system. They also discussed the lack of educational opportunities and capacity building training.

The solutions for how to include more women in the peacebuilding process once again revolved around the need to reform Somalia's electoral system into a OPOV model. There was also a call for implementing a binding gender quota policy that would reserve at least 30% of seats for women. Overall, the analysis showed that there is a widespread consensus that Somalia's current electoral model is the main structural reason why women are left out of decision-making bodies tasked with state-building. The women in the focus groups also brought up the need to make hiring practices based on merit and not on nepotism or clan connections.

In the discussing conflict, the women in the focus group shared many definitions of what conflict means in Benadir. The responses ranged from micro-level types of conflict such as interpersonal disputes to the macro-level, including conflict over land, clan-based conflict, and political conflict between the government and al-Shabaab. They also discussed the persistence of violence from youth gangs known as ciyaal weero. Women viewed their role in preventing conflict as being aware of the violence that emanates from their homes and communities. They also viewed women as crucial to intervening in conflict, and in participating in the security sector. The obstacles that limit the involvement of women in conflict prevention initiatives were seen as the role of clan and clan elders. These barriers ensure that these spaces remain largely inhabited by men. There is also a fear of reprisals from Al-Shabaab or vigilante groups as result of information leaks by security officials. The women in the focus group believed that giving women more opportunities to participate in decision-making roles, and improving educational opportunities will facilitate women's presence in conflict resolution processes.

3. Methodology

This study employed participatory action research (PAR), a method that involves researchers and participants in the research processes in order to understand the condition and challenges facing the target communities in order to make a positive change. PAR is a context-specific approach that aims to address marginalization, gender inequality and social injustice in general in ways that help promote democracy and citizens' participation and involvement in governance and public life. PAR also aims to have a greater awareness of the communities in their situation in order to take a relevant action. PAR employs both qualitative and quantitative methods.¹ Apart from focus group discussions (FGDs), this study was involved in drawing, interactive group discussions, sessions of reflection as well as an individual exercise. However, this report is drawn from focus groups. Before organizing these FGDs, the researchers visited the offices of the two women's organizations that assisted in the recruitment; met their top management and assistants; explained about the Talo Wadaag program to them; and then solicited their input in developing semi-structured questions.

1. <https://www.participatorymethods.org/glossary/participatory-action-research>

3.1 Recruitment

HIPS engaged with two women's organizations based in Mogadishu to help recruit participants: the Somali Women's Development Center, and the Benadir Somali Women's Development and Human Rights Organization. Participants were given a consent form translated into Somali in which all research information was detailed. The researchers also explained the contents of the consent form to the participants. All FGDs were held in a well-protected hotel.

3.2 Transcription

Participants' responses were transcribed except the parts that did not relate to the questions. However, those indirect responses that might have given some useful information for the question were transcribed.

3.3 Language structures

FGDs were conducted in Somali. It is obvious that structural and grammatical systems of languages are different. Word-for-word translation/transcription might distort participant's intended meaning or produce less understandable translation. Therefore, the FGDs were translated/transcribed according to the English language system. However, we attempted to provide the exact translation as accurately as possible. The FGDs were conducted on 23 February and therefore we used that date when saving the transcripts. However, the FGDs were transcribed/translated throughout March 2023. We used numbers as pseudonyms. To account for the instances where some participants offered multiple answers to a question, their number and responses appeared in different places under that particular question.

3.4 Focus group discussions

Three different focus group discussions were held. Two FGDs consisted of 11 participants and the other had 10, totaling 32 participants. Each FGD was conducted twice. The first part (around 1.5 hours) was focused on governance and state-building, while the second part (around 30 minutes) was focused on conflict prevention and management. All discussions were recorded. Each recorded FGD was saved as part 1 and part 2. As is usual in FGDs, some participants preferred not to respond to all questions. Additionally, some participants left for different reasons. Three researchers conducted the FGDs, and each transcript was reviewed by another researcher. All data including recorded discussions and transcripts will be kept and protected for five years in a well-secured HIPS computer.

Coding examples

- W1M23 = Woman1 March 2023
- W5M23 = Woman5 March 2023

3.5 Participants demographics

Researchers collected data on participants' demographics, such as age, education and employment. Twenty-four out of the 32 participants were aged 18-35, and three were 36-45. Only one participant was between 46-56. The rest did not state their age.

In terms of education, 20 were university graduates and four were primary-intermediate graduates. The rest did not state their level of education. Regarding employment, the vast majority were unemployed, 22 out of 24 who stated their employment status. Only two participants who were university graduates had jobs. One was a teacher and the other in an internship. The rest did not mention either their education or employment status. Some participants did not complete the evaluation form, and some left before the forms were distributed.

4. Role of women in post-conflict governance and state-building

Women play an important role in the transition from war to the post-war reconstruction period. In post-conflict societies, women's representation in politics decreases the chance of renewed violence, and is also related to the adoption of gender equality policies.² Women are also more likely to work across political lines to achieve common goals.³ They tend to take a more collaborative approach to decision making⁴ and are more likely to advocate for policies that are gender-conscious and that improve the lives of women and children.⁵

In the literature on women and post-conflict governance, some studies found that war creates opportunities for women's political participation. In *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*, Tripp studied the trend of increasingly larger numbers of women entering into politics after the end of major civil wars in Africa.⁶ She argued that the increased representation of women in politics occurred because the civil wars opened up a wide range of political opportunities for women.

2. O'Reilly, Marie. 2015. "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies." Available at: www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Why-Women-Report-2017.pdf (Accessed August 11th 2023).
3. Tamaru, Nanako, and Marie O'Reilly. 2018. "How Women Influence Constitution Making After Conflict and Unrest." Available at: <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/How-Women-Influence-Constitution-Making.pdf> (Accessed August 11th 2023).
4. Rosenthal, Cindy Simon. 2001. "Gender Styles in Legislative Committees." *Women & Politics* 21 (2): 21-46.
5. United Nations. 2015. "As Women Thrive, So Will We All; Says Secretary-General as Women's Commission Opens Session, Pointing to 'Unacceptably Slow' Progress Since Beijing." Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2015/wom2021.doc.htm> (Accessed August 11th 2023).
6. Tripp, Aili Mari. 2015. *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

In particular, the war hastened the progress of women's inclusion and rights because conflict disrupted traditional notions of gender relations. Women started to take on new responsibilities and replaced roles traditionally held by men. Tripp also argued that the way in which wars end impact women's political inclusion. Women are more likely to have greater political opportunities after civil wars that end with negotiated settlements because they are able to participate in negotiation, mediation, and in the development of post-war reforms. The end of some civil wars in Africa were followed by liberalization and democratization, and the adoption of new constitutions. During these transition periods, gender-focused reforms were embedded in many constitutions as a result of the efforts by indigenous women's groups, transnational women's movements, and international institutions such as the United Nations.



Despite the known benefits of including women in governance structures in post-war societies, the pace of women's representation in formal institutions has been slow.

Despite the known benefits of including women in governance structures in post-war societies, the pace of women's representation in formal institutions has been slow. While women's role in top leadership positions such as heads of state, cabinet ministers, upper houses of parliament and speakers of parliament, is generally low in most countries, their absence in these leadership roles is especially low in post-conflict countries where women hold only 19% of seats in parliament,⁷ compared to 24% globally.⁸



Gender quotas help women to access positions in government, and are especially effective in societies where the persistence of traditional gender roles make it difficult for women to participate in politics

One of the common mechanisms used to promote women's inclusion in post-conflict societies is the adoption of gender quota policies, which mandate that women must make up a certain number of seats in legislative bodies. Gender quota policies vary in their design, ranging from voluntary adoption to legally binding policies that are enshrined in constitutions. Studies show that in both conflict and post-conflict societies, the adoption of legislated quotas is associated with a higher share of women in parliament than in countries without gender quota policies.⁹ Gender quotas help women to access positions in government, and are especially effective in societies where the persistence of traditional gender roles make it difficult for women to participate in politics. However, the adoption of gender quotas does not necessarily translate into having an impact on decision making. For example, Burundi adopted a 30% quota for women in the 2004 constitution, which increased women's representation in parliament from 20% to 32%. Despite the increased presence of women in Burundi's government, women still held fewer leadership positions, and they struggled to bring attention to gender-equality policies in the legislature.¹⁰

7. United Nations. 2015. "As Women Thrive, So Will We All; Says Secretary-General as Women's Commission Opens Session, Pointing to 'Unacceptably Slow' Progress Since Beijing." Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2015/wom2021.doc.htm> (Accessed August 11th 2023).

8. United Nations Security Council. 2019. "Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary General." Available at: http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2019_800.pdf (Accessed: August 11th 2023).

9. United Nations Security Council. 2019.

10. International Alert. 2012. "Women's Political Participation and Economic Empowerment in Post-Conflict Countries: Lessons from the Great Lakes Region in Africa." Available at: <https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Gender-Political-Equality-Great-Lakes-EN-2012.pdf> (Accessed: August 11th 2023).

Although women’s participation in formal politics lags behind in post-conflict societies despite the widespread adoption of gender quota policies, one of the areas in which women have exercised influence is in the constitutional design process. Women’s involvement in constitution building in countries that experienced violent conflict has increased from 13% in 1990 to 15% in 2015, and they participate in various roles, ranging from technical experts to the drafting of the constitution.¹¹ Women are best positioned to make contributions to the constitutional design process when they are included early on in the process.¹² In many countries, women have to mobilize and agitate for their inclusion in constitution building. For example, in South Africa and Tunisia, women-led civil society organizations played a key role in women’s representation in the constitutional design process, and in the adoption of subsequent policies focused on women’s rights.¹³

5. Women’s role in conflict prevention in Africa

Women are often the victims of violence during war and in its aftermath. In the conflicts that have occurred in Africa, women are specifically targeted for sexual violence, forced from their homes as refugees and internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and they often serve as caregivers after the deaths, imprisonment, or disappearance of their relatives. While most of the past literature has focused on the victimization of women in war, recent studies focus on women’s agency during conflict. On one hand, women are active participants in wars or are supporters of rival factions in many conflict zones. On the other hand, women have also shown the capacity to organize for peace advocacy and conflict prevention.

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Women have played a crucial role in organizing to prevent the re-occurrence of conflicts in Africa

Women have played a crucial role in organizing to prevent the re-occurrence of conflicts in Africa. For example, in 1998, women’s peace organizers from Liberia, Niger, Senegal, and Sierra Leone participated in the Workshop on Women in the Aftermath of Civil War. This workshop led to the Declaration of African Women’s Anti-War Coalition, which led to the creation of a network of African women to “put pressure on states, through solidarity with other national and international agencies, to end present conflicts and to prevent future conflicts”.¹⁴ In Somalia, women formed several coalitions for peace in the aftermath of the country’s civil war, such as the Somali Coalition of Grassroots Women’s Organizations.

11. Tamaru, Nanako, and Marie O’Reilly. 2018. “How Women Influence Constitution Making After Conflict and Unrest.” Available at: www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/How-Women-Influence-Constitution-Making.pdf (Accessed August 11th 2023).

12. Tamaru, Nanako, and Marie O’Reilly. 2018.

13. Permanent Mission of the UAE to the UN 2020. 2020. “Advancing Women’s Participation in Post-Conflict Reconstruction.” Available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Advancing-Women%E2%80%99s-Participation-in-Post-conflict-Reconstruction.pdf> (Accessed: August 11th 2023).

14. West African Workshop on Women. 2000. “Declaration of the African Women’s Anti-War Coalition.” *Social Justice/Global Options* 27(4): 154-157.

These women's coalitions held workshops, raised awareness around security issues, and focused on peacebuilding and resolving local conflicts.¹⁵ In Sudan, women from all ethnic and political backgrounds formed the Sudanese Women's Peace Initiative. The goal of this group was to help women cooperate to promote peace and non-violent conflict resolution.¹⁶

In Burundi, women-led conflict prevention initiatives have contributed to maintaining peace. Women's organizations in Burundi have engaged in both diplomatic efforts and grassroots initiatives. For instance, women's groups were involved in the negotiations over the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement, and around half of their recommendations were eventually added in the final draft of the peace agreement.¹⁷ At the grassroots level, Burundian women's organizations such as Dushirehamwe created a "train the trainers" program which coaches thousands of women around the country in conflict prevention and mediation.¹⁸

In Mali, women have been involved in conflict resolution since the early 1990's. In the 2012 crisis in northern Mali, the Women's Movement for Peace and Preservation of National Unity, together with other groups, created initiatives to help people displaced by war, and helped prevent youth from joining rebel movements.¹⁹ Women's organizations in conflict zones in Mali have also been instrumental in the fight against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), which led to campaigns on arms controls, and a moratorium on the importing, exporting, and manufacturing of small arms in West Africa.²⁰ These efforts ultimately led to the ratification and implementation of multiple transnational agreements, such as the adoption and implementation of the United Nations Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.²¹

6. Women's participation in peacebuilding in Somalia and the challenges of inclusion

The peacebuilding initiatives led by women throughout Somalia have contributed to progress in the last two decades. In Kismayo, women are involved in many different activities that promote peace in that region. They persuaded the men in their households to abandon fighting; they promoted dialogue and reconciliation across clan lines; they engaged in conflict prevention by diffusing tensions between clans; and they also worked collectively with other women by setting up committees to promote peace.²²

15. Shoemaker, Jolynn. 2002. "In War and Peace: Women and Conflict Prevention." *Civil Wars* 5(1): 27–54.

16. Shoemaker. 2002.

17. Féron, Élise. 2020. "Reinventing Conflict Prevention? Women and the Prevention of the Reemergence of Conflict in Burundi." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 37(3): 239–52.

18. Féron. 2020.

19. Johnson, Christiane Agboton. 2013. "Peace and Security: Women's Leadership in Conflict Prevention and Resolution in the Sahel Region." Available at: <https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/Peace%20and%20Security%20-%20Women%27s%20leadership%20in%20conflict%20prevention%20and%20resolution%20in%20the%20Sahel%20Region.pdf> (Accessed: August 11th, 2023).

20. Johnson. 2013.

21. Johnson. 2013.

22. Life & Peace Institute. 2018. "Women, Conflict and Peace: Learning from Kismayo." Available at: https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Kismayo_Report_WEB2-April-2018.pdf (Accessed August 10th, 2023).

In Somaliland, during the clan conflicts that occurred in the mid-1990s, women used poetry to encourage rival clans to reconcile.²³ Also, national peace conferences were held in Somaliland during this time, and while women's participation was limited, they would send envoys to attend without formal invitations, and some made speeches.²⁴ Women also mobilized people for demonstrations against war; raised awareness about the war through their organizations; and gave logistical support to peace conferences by raising money and preparing food for delegates.²⁵

In Boosaaso, women created the Women's Association for Social Advancement in 1993 in response to the violence in the aftermath of the civil war.²⁶ At the time, killings, thefts, rapes and harassment were rampant, and women needed humanitarian aid. The women in this district banded together and organized a demonstration to promote peace.²⁷ They also created a police unit and provided it with 12 cars to patrol the district.²⁸ All of these efforts helped to stabilize Boosaaso.

Despite their efforts to create and maintain peace, women in Somalia face many challenges in the struggle to achieve greater participation in governance. One issue that poses a major challenge to women's inclusion in politics in Somalia is the presence of clan elders as gatekeepers in the country's clan-based political system. Based on a 4.5 formula, the elders are tasked with appointing members to the federal parliament. And even though a gender quota policy for women's representation exists, clan elders select few women candidates. During election cycles, female candidates are also disadvantaged by the fact that they have less access to the clan elders.²⁹ In some instances, clan elders refuse to meet with them due to the belief that women cannot represent the clan.³⁰ In other cases, female aspirants for parliament have difficulty meeting with elders who live in remote areas or conflict zones. The lack of opportunities to communicate with crucial gatekeepers dampens the aspirations of women seeking office. In addition, the prevalence of corrupt practices during elections creates a barrier for women's inclusion. Women generally have access to less funding than male candidates, who tend to receive more support from businesses.

As a result, women in Somali politics are consistently underrepresented, and their presence in the legislature is lower than the 30% mandated by the gender quota. The lack of enforcement of the quota policy ensures that the preferences of clan elders override any mechanism designed to introduce more women into the political process. Also, the lack of uniform funding for political campaigns deprives women of the financial resources needed to achieve office in Benadir.



One issue that poses a major challenge to women's inclusion in politics in Somalia is the presence of clan elders as gatekeepers in the country's clan-based political system



The lack of enforcement of the quota policy ensures that the preferences of clan elders override any mechanism designed to introduce more women into the political process

23. Rayale, Siham. 2012. "Narrating Peace: Somaliland Women's Experiences." Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/narrating-peace-somaliland-womens-experiences/> (Accessed August 10th, 2023)

24. Warsame, Amina Mohamoud. 2002. "Queens Without Crowns: Somali Women's Changing Roles and Peacebuilding." Available at: https://assets.ctfassets.net/jzxyrkiixcim/AzXR068nIzoYxvmP3Te8P/50ad879a5756dfc4732badcbb659ab4e/13_Queens_komplett.pdf (Accessed August 10th, 2023).

25. Warsame. 2002.

26. Bryden, Matt and Martina I. Steiner. 1998. *Somalia Between Peace and War: Somali Women on the Eve of the 21st Century*. Nairobi, Kenya: United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

27. Bryden and Steiner. 1998.

28. Bryden and Steiner. 1998.

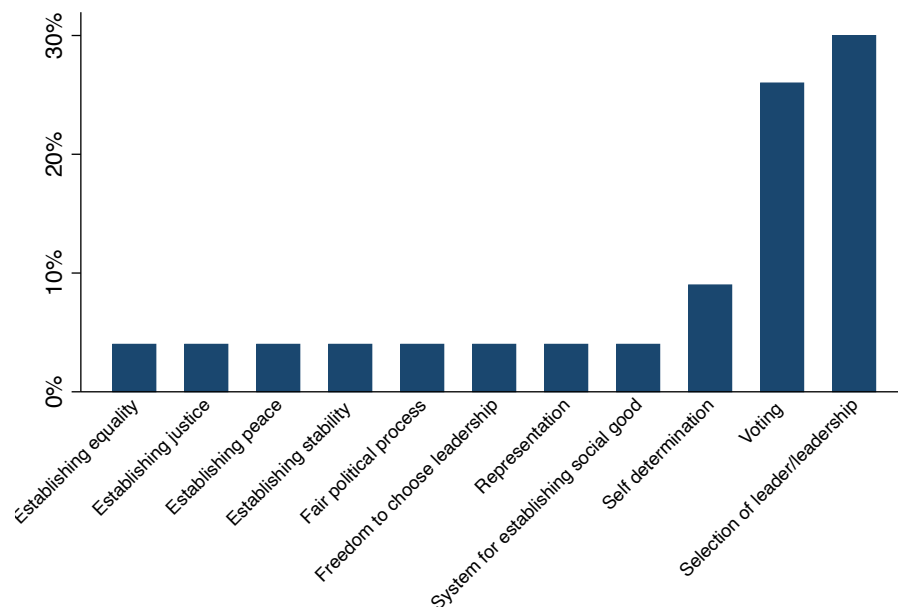
29. Affi, Ladan. 2020. "The Old Men Who Hold Us Back: Clan Elders, Elite Bargaining and Exclusionary Politics." *Journal of Somali Studies* 7(2): 125.

30. Affi. 2020.

7. Survey Findings

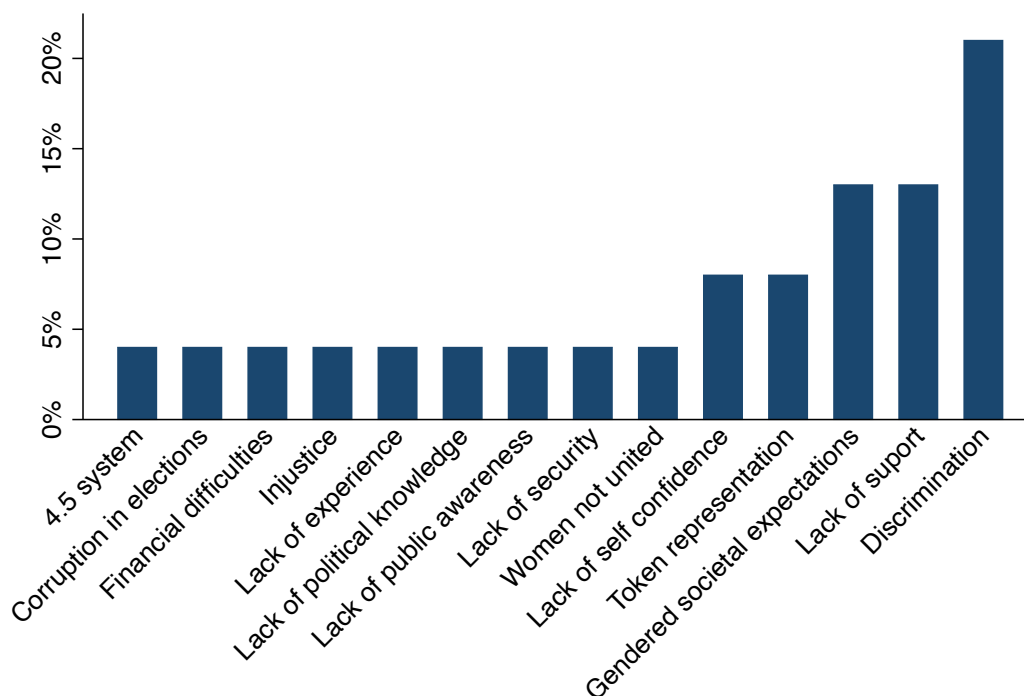
The women who participated in the WhatsApp survey were first asked to describe what elections mean to them. As Figure 1 shows, most answers to this question focused on elections as a means of selecting leaders and voting. In the sample of respondents, 30% believed that elections mean selecting leaders, and 26% believed it means voting. These responses make up 56% of the answers to this question. The third most common response was that elections are about self-determination for countries, meaning that elections represent a way for nations to establish sovereignty over their affairs. The other answers focused on the role of elections for representation, as a system for establishing social good, peace, justice, equality, and stability. Some survey participants also described elections as the freedom to choose leadership and a fair political process.

Figure 1. What do elections mean to you?



The second survey question asked participants about the main challenges facing women if a OPOV election system is adopted. As shown in Figure 2, 21% of respondents said that gender bias or gender discrimination were the main challenges facing women if OPOV elections were to be introduced.

Figure 2. What are the main challenges facing women if one-person-one vote elections are held?



The next four responses also focused on barriers to women’s access to political office as the main challenge if direct elections are adopted. Thirteen percent of respondents said that the lack of support for women seeking to run for office was the main challenge to OPOV. Another 13% of respondents said that gendered expectations about women’s role in society would create barriers to the adoption of direct elections, such as cultural beliefs that women should not be involved in politics. Eight percent of respondents believed that women’s lack of self-confidence decreased their chances of participating in direct elections. Unlike the other explanations, this answer focused on individual agency as a reason why it would be difficult for women to succeed under a OPOV electoral system. A further 8% of respondents stated that a OPOV electoral system would be challenging for women because they are used to token representation and not included in a meaningful way in decision-making roles. The remaining responses to the challenges that women would face if a OPOV system were to be adopted included: the 4.5 clan formula system; injustice; financial difficulties for female candidates; a lack of security; a lack of public awareness of the importance of women’s political engagement; corruption in elections; lack of unity among women; the lack of experience of female candidates; and women’s lack of political knowledge.

Survey participants were also polled about their support for either a OPOV system or the current 4.5 clan formula system. The overwhelming majority of women (90%) supported a OPOV system, and only 10% did not. When asked if they support the 4.5 election model, 95% of women rejected it. Only 5% said they supported the 4.5 system. Next, the participants were asked which type of election system they think will specifically help women participate in governance in Benadir, and 90% of women chose the OPOV electoral model. Only 10% believed that the continued use of the 4.5 election system would help women participate in governance in the region.

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There was overwhelming support for the introduction of direct elections in Benadir, and a strong rejection of the continued use of the 4.5 clan formula system.

Taken together, the results from the WhatsApp survey of women in Benadir showed that they have a strong faith in the power of elections as a means of selecting leaders and allowing voters to have their voice heard. There was overwhelming support for the introduction of direct elections in Benadir, and a strong rejection of the continued use of the 4.5 clan formula system. The women in the survey also understood that there are many different obstacles to women succeeding under a OPOV system, and they identified both structural barriers and resource constraints that they face in achieving representation under direct elections.

8. Defining governance in the Benadir region

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Most of the women who defined governance as leadership focused on leadership as a process in which a someone is selected or elected

When asked to reflect on what governance means to them, the definition that came up most frequently across all focus groups was the concept of leadership. Most of the women who defined governance as leadership focused on leadership as a process in which a someone is selected or elected. One woman in focus group 3 defined leadership as the process of electing someone to lead a society: “[Leadership] is a group of people being led by a person so that they can do tasks. They select or vote for the person who leads them.”³¹ Another woman in focus group 1 said “governance is a system laid down by people in order to lead that specific society. It is an election of someone from two or three people or more than that in order to lead them. For instance, when the Prophet (PBUH) used to send more than two or three people, he used to name one of them as their leader or he used to ask them to choose one of them as their leader.”³² Similarly, a woman in focus group 1 used the example of the Prophet Muhammad’s (PBUH) selection of a leader as a natural mechanism to organize a group, “as the narration of Prophet Muhammad on the importance of leadership ‘if three people are in one place they should have one of them as a leader.’”³³ Lastly, one woman in focus group 3 focused on the managerial aspect of leadership, and said “governance is about a community based in one place and the person who leads them is a manager.”³⁴

31. Focus Group 3, W10.

32. Focus Group 1, W6.

33. Focus Group 2 W7.

34. Focus Group 3, W5.

In discussing leadership, many focus group participants emphasized the importance of leadership quality. For example, in focus group 1, one woman said that leadership should be consultative and it should incorporate the wishes of the masses. “[Leadership] is choosing someone to lead any group of people. However, group members should be consulted with on how to be led.”³⁵ Other women emphasized the traits of justice and equality in good leadership.³⁶ One woman in focus group 3 defined quality leadership as someone who is truthful and not corrupt.³⁷

Another theme that came up consistently as focus group participants defined governance was justice. One woman in focus group 2 said, “a leader is someone who can govern and lead people through [a] strong vision and that person is someone who is just and prioritizes equality.”³⁸ Similarly, another woman in focus group 2 said, “the leader should be just regarding governing people, the governor or the leader should solve the challenges faced by his people in [a] justful way concerning their interests.”³⁹ One woman suggested that leaders establishing justice can occur in a society where ethical leadership is embedded in the society from the bottom up, and she pointed to the example of leadership under the Caliph Omar. “The smallest unit of governance starts from the house, and how someone is raised tells a lot about his leadership capabilities. There is a Somali proverb which says “dariskaaga ku dayo ama ku diin” (either imitate your neighbors’ actions or dislike it). So, there is a need of good ethics when raising children and how they are raised will have collateral effect to the people and neighbors. For instance, when Cumar Bin Khadab was the leader of Muslim ummah he used to prioritize an effective judicial system so that all people can have equal access to justice in the right way, and that resulted in people living in harmony. He delivered justice and therefore, he slept anywhere without fear. Justice starts in oneself by transforming himself and developing just manners. Only someone who is strong can lead people.”⁴⁰ Several others noted that governance is a process that involves the building of society from the bottom up.⁴¹ They noted that good governance starts from the family unit, and transcends to the neighborhood and district. If ethical behavior is adopted at all of these levels, then just leadership will be possible in government.

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It is not enough for leaders to be selected or elected, but the people have to also view them as legitimate”

Other themes about governance that were commonly referenced across focus groups were the issues of legitimacy and representation. It is not enough for leaders to be selected or elected, but the people have to also view them as legitimate. As one woman in focus group 1 noted, “in my understanding, governance is the activity of someone elected by people.”⁴² And that person should be accepted by all people.” Other women focused on how government should be representative of the society that it leads. A woman in focus group 3 said, “governance is about the selection of who will be the leader, so that an institution can have good representation and leadership.”⁴³

35. Focus Group 1, W3.

36. Focus Group 2, W6 and W3.

37. Focus Group 3, W2.

38. Focus Group 2, W6.

39. Focus Group 2, W5.

40. Focus Group 2, W9.

41. Focus Group 2, W10, W2, and W1 and Focus Group 1, W8.

42. Focus Group 1, W4.

43. Focus Group 3, W7.

8.1 Women's role in governance

In discussing women's role in governance in Benadir, focus group participants acknowledged that women have historically played an important role in the country's development, however, today they view women as marginalized in politics. Across different focus groups, participants cited the historic achievements of women, whom they regarded as the backbones of society. A woman in focus group 3 said, "they are the backbone of the society and without them the society would be paralyzed. [Women's] roles include peacebuilding, education, security, awareness raising, cleaning the city, and they participate the politics of Benadir region."⁴⁴ Characterizing women in Benadir as selfless, a woman in focus group 2 said "women have [played a] great role in Somalia, and culturally their efforts are not well documented. Sometimes they sell their belongings and gold to save the people."⁴⁵ Along the same lines, another woman from focus group 2 said, "in the absence of [a] functioning state [in Somalia] [women] were the major bread winners."⁴⁶

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Across different focus groups, participants cited the historic achievements of women, whom they regarded as the backbones of society

Although a few focus group participants noted that some achievements have been made to include women in the governance in the Benadir region,⁴⁷ the majority identified women's participation as lagging behind, and described themselves as a marginalized group. Many viewed women's role as symbolic and said they were not being meaningfully engaged in governance. Some saw the women's role in Benadir as primarily relegated to celebrations. One woman said, "[women's role] is limited to (ululating) and also cleaning the streets of the city of Mogadishu without payment or maybe with very meager payment for some women...80% of Benadir women have no respected role in the Benadir administration."⁴⁸ Another woman said, "women do not hold such important positions in the Benadir region but when there are events, women are asked to assemble, show up and wear traditional dress code without payment. Some women [do all these difficult things to show up] because they want to have a viable government."⁴⁹ Many women in the focus groups complained that their presence is used symbolically and they are ignored when it comes to decision making. When women are included in governance, they are mainly placed in lower-level positions, while men occupy the top positions.⁵⁰ Several participants noted that women are overrepresented in menial positions, such as cleaning the streets.⁵¹

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Many women in the focus groups complained that their presence is used symbolically and they are ignored when it comes to decision making. When women are included in governance, they are mainly placed in lower-level positions, while men occupy the top positions

Several participants saw potential opportunities for women to participate, particularly in the security sector, as they believed women are better positioned to embed themselves in sensitive situations.⁵² Others said women could act as peace makers between warring factions. As one woman said, "when the society fight or different communities fight, women are the central peace makers. Every mother can hold back their sons from fighting each other and women can enforce peace initiatives."⁵³

44. Focus Group 3, W10.

45. Focus Group 2, W9.

46. Focus Group 2, W4.

47. Focus Group 2, W10.

48. Focus Group 1, W9.

49. Focus Group 1, W3.

50. Focus Group 1, W6.

51. Focus Group 3, W3, W8, and W9.

52. Focus Group 2, W5.

53. Focus Group 3, W6.

8.2 Obstacles women face in participating in governance

The participants in the focus groups identified many obstacles that limit women's participation in Benadir. There was a general sense that women lack opportunities in politics, and that they are underrepresented in lower-level positions, such as at the state level.⁵⁴ The most common obstacle identified was the 4.5 clan formula system, and the influence of clan elders in politics. Women believed that the 4.5 clan formula is heavily biased toward the nomination of male candidates for political office. Clan elders were seen as gatekeepers that prevent women from accessing government. As a woman in focus group 1 said, "the top positions in Benadir are nominated through clan elders who refuse women's nomination. Clan elders choose men not women. Therefore, women's role is very limited."⁵⁵ Even if a woman has access to resources to run for office, clan elders will overlook her because she is a woman. One woman said, "[even] if you as a woman have money, your clan may not accept you to be their representative."⁵⁶ The use of the clan formula in politics also leads to the promotion of underqualified men, and the marginalization of qualified women. As one woman said, "there is a lack of consideration of the utility of women's education. For instance, you can see less educated men holding high positions while well educated women who are suitable to these positions are not considered."⁵⁷

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Clan elders
were seen as
gatekeepers that
prevent women
from accessing
government

Another common obstacle that women face in attempting to participate in governance is gendered perceptions about their capability and role in society. Many focus group participants said that traditional societal beliefs about the role of women create limitations and barriers for women who seek to be involved in politics. A woman in focus group 1 observed that the norms about women's proper place in society start in the home and follow her throughout life. "Obstacles against girls start at home. Families send boys to school. For the girl, they say 'she will end up in the kitchen.' Clans do not accept women. When she gets married they say she belongs to her husband's tribe."⁵⁸ Several participants noted that families do not believe it will be to their benefit to invest in women from a young age.⁵⁹ Girls are passed over for educational opportunities and are not supported by their families when they seek employment, as families feel that investing in girls and women will not benefit the family in the long run due to women's marital obligations. One woman cited a new Somali expression to explain this mentality – "waxbarasho naaged jikaa u dambeyso" (women's education is followed by the kitchen, i.e., investing in women's education is pointless because she will end up a housewife) –⁶⁰ and argued that this thinking needs to be abolished in order for women to get ahead.

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Many focus group
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that traditional
societal beliefs
about the role of
women create
limitations and
barriers for women
who seek to be
involved in politics

54. Focus Group 3, W3.

55. Focus Group 1, W6.

56. Focus Group 1, W2.

57. Focus Group 1, W3.

58. Focus Group 1, W9.

59. Focus Group 2, W9 and W4.

60. Focus Group 3, W1.



Women especially noted the effect of sexual harassment in the workplace as limiting their potential

A third factor identified by many women as a barrier that limits women’s participation in governance is the prevalence of sexual harassment and sexism. Women especially noted the effect of sexual harassment in the workplace as limiting their potential. One woman from focus group 1 explained how inappropriate sexual advances harm women’s aspirations. “[A] girl’s [ambition and aspiration] are destroyed early in her life. If I apply [for a] job, the boss may say to me ‘can we have time together (sleep together)?’ Such [a] thing is against our religion. It also demoralizes me and crushes my ambition as a young woman, like a broken mirror.”⁶¹ Another woman said, “when women try to look for jobs, some men see that as an opportunity to exploit them.”⁶² The women characterize these incidents as a concept called “aan is fahanno” in Somali, which is the attempt by male bosses or co-workers to take advantage of women in the workplace. One woman gave a personal example. “I was a volunteer and tutor... when they were hiring some teachers, the director told me to understand him “aan is fahanno” and when I denied such acts, he excluded me from the competitors.”⁶³ A woman in focus group 2 gave a similar example. “A man who was a secretariat in one of the ministries lied to a girl who was looking for a job, telling her that he would give her an opportunity if she sleeps with him. When she did he recorded a video tape of her and always he shows her that video whenever she tries to refuse.”⁶⁴ These examples indicate that sexual harassment in day-to-day life is a real threat to women’s access to employment opportunities in Benadir, and failure to gain job experience may harm their chances when they want to run for office.

Focus group participants also noted sexist attitudes as a barrier to women’s entry into politics. Several participations said that women are often the targets of demeaning attitudes and behavior, which makes the environment unwelcoming. One woman in focus group 3 said, “the challenges include men disqualifying women and being mean to them. They often say women don’t understand anything even if she is educated.”⁶⁵

Other barriers that women face in trying to enter government included lack of support from other women; lack of self-confidence in their own abilities; and lack of access to education.



Participants believed that women would have a good chance of entering politics in sufficient numbers if the electoral system is democratized

8.3 Solutions to women’s participation in governance

Several women in the focus groups advocated for the electoral system to be reformed into a one person one vote system. Participants believed that women would have a good chance of entering politics in sufficient numbers if the electoral system is democratized.

61. Focus Group 1, W4.
 62. Focus Group 2, W4.
 63. Focus Group 2, W10.
 64. Focus Group 2, W11.
 65. Focus Group 3, W7.

Some participants suggested that Benadir should hold local elections, where representatives are directly elected.⁶⁶ Unlike the high-stakes nature of elections for seats in parliament, which require candidates to have a large amount of financial resources, local elections are seen as a lower barrier to entry for women. As one woman said, “governance is not all about aiming for bigger places such as parliament but starting from the district level can also be a good beginning.”⁶⁷

With the central role played by clan elders in the marginalization of women in the 4.5 clan system, one woman suggested that clan elders should be educated about women’s rights. She said, “solutions include public awareness that should be given to clan traditional elders. They should be informed not to belittle women. Instead, they should endorse woman according to her knowledge and ability for the position.”⁶⁸

The women also discussed how to address the issue of sexual harassment that prevents women from accessing jobs that prepare them for positions in government. One said, “those men who harass women or exploit women’s vulnerabilities by utilizing the power of their position should be punished accordingly. The number of men who put a condition for a sexual intercourse to employ women is increasing. It has actually become a normal.”⁶⁹ Similarly, another believed that recruitment managers who engage in sexual quid-pro-quo should be fired.⁷⁰ One woman suggested that a solution for the sexual harassment culture is for men to be trained about why it is inappropriate to sexually harass women and how it harms women. “Men holding public government positions should be trained and taught to respect women’s dignity and rights and not to harass them sexually...So, the solution is that men in public and private sectors should be educated not to demoralize girls and break their lives. Instead, they should support girls.”⁷¹

Several women advocated for the adoption of a binding gender quota policy as a way to improve women’s participation in governance in Benadir. They suggested that quotas be adopted at all levels of government.⁷² Others suggested increasing the existing 30% quota policy to a 50% mandate, where half of candidates or members of parliament should be women.

Participants in the focus groups also discussed the actions that women themselves can take to improve their chances of participating in governance. Many of these solutions focused on improving women’s access to education. Some suggested that raising women’s education levels should start at a young age, and that the quality of girls’ education should be improved.⁷³

66. Focus Group 1, W9.

67. Focus Group 3, W10.

68. Focus Group, 1 W11.

69. Focus Group 1, W7.

70. Focus Group 1, W5.

71. Focus Group 1, W11.

72. Focus Group 1, W6.

73. Focus Group 3, W10, W3, and W9.

One woman focused specifically on improving women’s education about politics and government. “Girls should be offered educational awareness workshops focused on the importance of participating in politics. Most women do not understand the importance of getting involved in politics. Even if they join in politics, women should impose themselves in the decision-making table. Such participation in the decision-making processes will help all women including those in politics or outside politics. This is because they advocate for all women’s rights.”⁷⁴

Other personal development suggestions included the need for women to increase their confidence and belief in their own abilities, as well as improving their public speaking skills.^{75/76}

Lastly, focus group participants suggested that women could increase their chances of accessing government by uniting and forming a coalition. There was a widespread sentiment that sometimes women who secure positions in government do not do enough to help those who seek to join their ranks. One woman in focus group 1 said, “if [women] unite behind one woman, then they will be able to promote and push that woman. No woman wants for another woman to be elected. So, until they unite, their role will remain very minimal.” Several participants suggested that women in Benadir should form a coalition to support those who seek to enter government.

9. Defining state-building in Benadir

Although there was significantly less consensus across focus groups in the definition of state-building, two did emerge: a) overcoming harmful legacies of the civil war; b) and abiding by the constitution and eschewing clan politics. One woman said, “state-building is to rectify something wrong in the state and rebuild it. For example, Somalia was destroyed by civil war. Therefore, state-building is to return the country as it was before...state-building is also to correct the mistakes committed in the past. It is to raise Somalia up again.”⁷⁸ Similarly, other women defined state-building as the process of a state rebuilding itself after its collapse.

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There was a strong sense among the focus group participants that clan politics inhibit the ability of leaders to lead society justly

A second definition of state-building was the idea that leaders should abide by the constitution, with no regard to clan. There was a strong sense among the focus group participants that clan politics inhibit the ability of leaders to lead society justly. One woman described state-building as being about “[an] institution [that] has governance, a constitution, with no clan labelling.”⁷⁹ Another woman from focus group 3 said, “state-building is about [building a] strong foundation just like when building [a] new home. It means to have laws, leadership with no considerations on clan and gender.”⁸⁰

74. Focus Group 1, W6.

75. Focus Group 3, W7.

76. Focus Group 3, W9.

77. Focus Group 1, W6.

78. Focus Group 1, W7.

79. Focus Group 3, W7.

80. Focus Group 3, W1.

Other themes that came up during the process of defining state-building were: leadership; security; and development. Several participants view strong leadership as an important component of state-building. Participants also saw security and development as closely linked, suggesting that development cannot occur in the absence of public safety. A woman from focus group 3 said, “state-building is about people being secure, [having] health facilities, good education, and community protection if in any case there is a dangerous situation.”⁸¹ One woman explained that the absence of a viable state for a protracted time influenced the way she defines state-building. “I am part of the generation who never saw functioning government, so my idea towards state-building is about what the society needs...state-building is a formation of [the] needs [or] wants from the people so that they can have security, clean environment, [and a] health system.”⁸²

9.1 Women’s role in state-building

Focus group participants viewed women in Benadir as playing a limited role in state-building efforts, and saw women as largely consigned to symbolic positions. One woman in focus group 1 observed that they are underrepresented in top positions, and are brought out to serve in a ceremonial capacity during events. “When Benadir leaders get started in new positions, or organize events or welcome officials then women entertain them, ululate and clap for them. Women also dress culturally or dress [in the] Somali flag, and make the event so colorful and attractive. Without such support from women, men’s high positions can become dry and perhaps meaningless.”⁸³

Focus group participants also noted the role of women as street cleaners. While this may be regarded by some as a low-level job, many in the focus groups saw street cleaning as an honorable and vital job that comes with risks. One woman in focus group 1 said street cleaning is her civic duty. “I clean the streets of my district alongside other young women who are university graduates. They come with me to clean the streets. As citizens, these are our responsibilities.”⁸⁴ Another woman characterized street cleaning as a selfless act that women carry out for the sake of rebuilding their country and not for political gain. “Helping your country to recover and go forward should be done without any condition or without bargaining to get a high position from the government...so, the aim of these girls and women who clean Mogadishu’s streets is to help Somalia stand on its feet, not to gain a public position.”⁸⁵

81. Focus Group 3, W3.

82. Focus Group 2, W7.

83. Focus Group 1, W4.

84. Focus Group 1, W6.

85. Focus Group 1, W8.

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Given the well-known security challenges facing Benadir, participants argued that women are best positioned to contribute to peace-building because of the unique societal role they occupy

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Participants noted that women in Benadir occupy crucial sectors of society that make the process of state-building possible

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A major issue that came up in all focus groups was the impact of clan, clan elders, and the 4.5 clan formula

Several women viewed the role of women in state-building in Benadir as peacemakers. Given the well-known security challenges facing Benadir, participants argued that women are best positioned to contribute to peace-building because of the unique societal role they occupy. One woman in focus group 3 said, “giving [women] [a] chance to secure the city... would increase the secureness and safety of the city because women know what happens in neighborhoods. Women keep an eye to what is happening in the neighborhoods.”⁸⁶ Another noted that women know their families much better than fathers, and are better positioned to raise the alarm when someone close to them engages in dangerous activities.⁸⁷ Several participants noted how Benadir women worked to disrupt the activities of troubled youth in the city (referred to as *ciyaal weero*) by uniting them.⁸⁸ This led to a decline in the criminal activities. Lastly, one participant noted that women have also played a role in keeping peace during clan conflict. “Women are the backbone of the developments that are taking place. Earlier, when two clans fought, the girls were switched so that the fighting stopped. If a solution is needed there must be such activities taking place.”⁸⁹

Finally, participants noted that women in Benadir occupy crucial sectors of society that make the process of state-building possible. They are involved in major business; they are nurses and doctors; and they are tax paying citizens.⁹⁰ Women also engage in trauma relief, and their presence in these roles provides a resource for female victims of violence.⁹¹

9.2 Obstacles for women to participating in state-building

Focus group participants identified several different obstacles that women face in participating in the state-building process in Benadir. A major issue that came up in all focus groups was the impact of clan, clan elders, and the 4.5 clan formula. Clan elders were portrayed as gatekeepers who exhibit bias toward male candidates for political office. One woman in focus group 3 said, “women face different obstacles which include the 4.5 formula and for a woman to participate in state-building process firstly she needs to be officially supported by her clan members. And when 4.5 is [used] all the clans write down boys and men to represent them and not women.”⁹² Another stated that the absence of female clan elders means that there is no one to push back against the disproportionate selection of male candidates.⁹³ One woman pointed out that while larger clans have greater representation, being a woman from a small clan creates additional barriers, as smaller clans have fewer positions to offer potential aspirants. She said:

86. Focus Group 3, W10.

87. Focus Group 3, W1.

88. Focus Group 3, W5.

89. Focus Group 2, W9.

90. Focus Group 3, W4.

91. Focus Group 2, W5.

92. Focus Group 3, W5.

93. Focus Group 3, W3.

“Yes there are many obstacles. When it comes to the case of Mogadishu, there are many clans who live inside Mogadishu and don’t have a quota or representation in the parliament because many of them have regional states and are represented but not in Mogadishu. For instance, me as young girl with ambition to join politics doesn’t have clan representation in the parliament. I am not given any chance to participate in the Benadir region as district commissioner or as youth leader. Clan representation is needed, and my clan doesn’t have a quota in Benadir so the only option I have is to reach that ladder through being romantic to men who are in those positions.”⁹⁴

Participants also noted that the practice of clan politics in employment opportunities creates barriers for women. A woman in focus group 3 said, “merit is not considered when it comes to job applications. People always fall for ‘who is my clan’ and don’t consider what [the woman] knows or her quality.”⁹⁵

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Another major factor that focus group participants identified as limiting women’s participation in state-building was their lack of access to resources and skills

Another major factor that focus group participants identified as limiting women’s participation in state-building was their lack of access to resources and skills. Several noted that women have limited job opportunities and occupy lower status employment positions or are not compensated as well as men.⁹⁶ One woman gave the example of women working as street cleaners. “[For] women who volunteer in cleaning the city, what happens is that even when they are given some salaries, they are told they should split their salaries.”⁹⁷

Participants also identified lack of educational opportunities as another resource that women lack.⁹⁸ The lack of access to education and poor job prospects mutually reinforce each other, as the absence of credentials sets women up to occupy lower salaried positions.

Lastly, one woman suggested that the lack of access to capacity building training for women to develop skills is very detrimental to their ability to participate in state-building activities. She gave the example of how the lack of training impacts women who work as street cleaners. “Women who work in cleaning the environment “malaamilleey” are not considered when enrolling capacity building trainings. When you look at it from safety perspective sometimes when they are cleaning there are some explosive substances in the dirt and it might explode.”⁹⁹

Lack of accountability and corruption were also identified as factors limiting women’s participation in state-building. One woman in focus group 1 noted that despite paying taxes, public officials cannot be held accountable by citizens. As there is no accountability, these officials do not provide necessary public services.¹⁰⁰

94. Focus Group 3, W10.

95. Focus Group 3, W9.

96. Focus Group 2, W9.

97. Focus Group 2, W10.

98. Focus Group 1, W9.

99. Focus Group 1, W5.

100. Focus Group 1, W6.

Similarly, the prevalence of corruption and nepotism in hiring were brought up by multiple participants. One woman in focus group 3 gave a personal example. “I was told that I [would] be recruited after [taking an] exam in a place that I was volunteering for three years. After the examination I became the second best, [and] only one person was [in] the first position. I was so happy and had [a lot of hope], but because of unjust nepotism my position under my name was given to someone else...” Corrupt practices in hiring and employment create barriers to women earning the experience that should qualify them for higher positions.

Lastly, participants discussed the lack of support that women receive from other women as they seek to secure positions in government in Benadir and therefore they lack self-confidence to seek out these jobs.

9.3 Solutions to women’s participation in state-building

Participants identified clan politics and the 4.5 clan formula as factors that limit women’s participation in state-building across all focus groups. They suggested raising awareness about how the 4.5 system affects women and women’s political agency. Another participant believed that gender balance in the clan-based candidate selection formula should be required, and that clan elders should be educated about the necessity of including women in the political process. She said, “every clan needs to write down five women and five men to avoid bias....The solution is to pressure the clan leaders to always include women and give them opportunities.”¹⁰¹

Several other women argued that adopting a OPOV system from the bottom to the top levels of government is the best way to increase women’s participation in state-building.¹⁰² One woman in focus group 1 said, “I think OPOV will enable women to overcome the current challenges in gaining their political rights such as public positions. The 4.5 formula is against women. In my view, OPOV should start from the bottom like districts all the way to the president of the federal government.”¹⁰³ The women believed that transitioning away from a clan-based candidate nomination system to a one-person-one-vote system would create an opportunity for greater accountability of elected leaders. They thought that women’s chances of participation would improve under a more transparent system.

Focus group participants also discussed the need to adopt a merit-based structure in employment opportunities, and to abolish clan-based recruitment practices.¹⁰⁴ This would allow women to be given opportunities for work and to participate in politics without needing to get support from clan elders.¹⁰⁵

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Several other women argued that adopting a OPOV system from the bottom to the top levels of government is the best way to increase women’s participation in state-building

101. Focus Group 3, W7.

102. Focus Group 1, W11, W9, and W6.

103. Focus Group 1, W9.

104. Focus Group 3, W3 and W9.

105. Focus Group 2, W9.

Focus group participants also discussed the need for women to support each other in securing positions related to state-building. One participant described women's advancement as contingent upon supporting others who are trying to climb the ladder. "There should be an awareness for women to understand that if they support each other, such support will bring more opportunities for women. For instance, if you, as a woman, endorse another woman, that endorsement will also facilitate you to achieve what you want in the long term. Conversely, if I put her aside or down, both of us may lose."¹⁰⁶ Women's ability to create and sustain support networks was perceived by focus group participants as a way to challenge gender discrimination by political gatekeepers.

Other solutions included implementing effective gender quota policies to allow more women to occupy important political positions.¹⁰⁷ Others suggested that there needs to be educational campaigns designed to inform the broader public about women's role in society. As one woman in focus group 1 said, "the best solution for these obstacles mentioned is a public awareness for all social groups. The wider society should be educated that women's role is not confined to the kitchen."¹⁰⁸ Finally, one woman suggested that one way to address clan discrimination and its effects on women is to strengthen the judicial system.¹⁰⁹ Individuals who engage in unfair hiring practices should be penalized after thorough legal investigations.

10. Defining conflict and how to prevent it in Benadir

There are many types of conflict in Benadir, and the responses of the focus group participants reflected this reality. The most common examples were of conflict between individuals. Focus group 2 participants described their understanding of conflict as between families or districts, or between two parties.¹¹⁰ Another common definition was conflict that occurs between two or more clans.¹¹¹ Land conflict was also identified, referring to disputes over ownership of property.¹¹²

A low-level form of conflict that impacts everyday life is petty crime, and in particular violence from *ciyaal weero*, youth gangs.¹¹³ A related topic is youth unemployment, which a woman in focus group 1 saw as a source of violence in the region, as young people without employment are more likely to turn to crime to get money.¹¹⁴

106. Focus Group 1, W7.

107. Focus Group 3, W7.

108. Focus Group 1, W7.

109. Focus Group 2, W10.

110. Focus Group 2, W10, W4, W5, and W11.

111. Focus Group 2, W3; Focus Group 3, W10 and W8.

112. Focus Group 3, W10 and W8.

113. Focus Group 3, W5 and W1.

114. Focus Group 1, W7.



The responses from focus group participants showed that women consider violence to take on many different forms, ranging from large-scale issues to petty forms of violence

Finally, participants discussed political conflict including conflict between the government and al-Shabaab and political assassinations.¹¹⁵ Substance abuse and the consumption of drugs such as khat were also considered to be causing conflict in Benadir.¹¹⁶ Overall, the responses from focus group participants showed that women consider violence to take on many different forms, ranging from large-scale issues to petty forms of violence.

In discussing how conflict can be prevented, participants proposed various options. The first revolved around improving Benadir’s security and law enforcement environment. Several women believe that more security forces need to be present to deal with thieves, kidnappings, and violence from ciyaal weero. One woman in focus group 1 believed that the best way to prevent conflict is to build strong security forces who can effectively disrupt issues before they arise.¹¹⁷ Another participant believed that the best way to prevent assassinations and violence from ciyaal weero would be to recruit more law enforcement who can engage in intelligence gathering before crimes take place.¹¹⁸ A participant in focus group 3 said that better information gathering would lead to conflict prevention.

Some women believed that traditional elders should be utilized to fight conflict in Benadir. Another suggested depersonalizing conflict by separating individual interests from community interests.¹¹⁹ Another believed that mediators need to play a role in solving disputes. She said, “the solution is to have a mediator between the two conflicting parties who is just and approaches their misunderstandings in a good way.”¹²⁰



One woman believed that a strong legal system would be a deterrent to conflict, and viewed traditional elders as subverting the proper course of justice

A third group of responses focused on the importance of strengthening Benadir’s judicial system. One woman believed that a strong legal system would be a deterrent to conflict, and viewed traditional elders as subverting the proper course of justice. A participant in focus group 3 explained how traditional elders sometimes block a perpetrator from being punished. “The conflict prevention mechanisms in Somalia is not going through the proper process but through community level and traditional elders solving it. For example, in our district, a ciyaal weero member killed one person and when he was arrested at the police station, the traditional elders spared him through going to the central prison and said that both families will negotiate and the role of government is not needed.”¹²¹ Along similar lines, others also believe that a strong judicial system that holds people accountable for their actions will help prevent conflict. Some women said that the judicial system needs to be decentralized, so that there are more local courts available to solve disputes.¹²²

115. Focus Group 1, W9.

116. Focus Group 1, W9.

117. Focus Group 1, W7.

118. Focus Group 1, W9.

119. Focus Group 2, W4.

120. Focus Group 2, W5.

121. Focus Group 2, W10.

122. Focus Group 3, W6.

Some women called for greater political decentralization and for local governments to be empowered to fight crime and violence. Another solution was to create employment opportunities for youth in Benadir to provide an alternative to a life of crime. They argued that this should include free schooling and recreational activities for young people. Lastly, the women who viewed substance abuse as a major source of violence, suggested that clinical help should be provided to those with addiction problems, and that there should be more surveillance of drug traffickers.

10.1 Women's role in preventing conflict

There was widespread consensus among focus group participants that women are uniquely positioned to be aware of potential threats. Many said that women have an awareness of potential violence that could be perpetrated by their relatives and members of their communities. Due to their caregiving roles and the greater likelihood that women are better embedded in social networks, the women believe that they are more in tune with potential acts of violence. One woman from focus group 1 said, “women have [a] unique [capability to gather] intelligence. They read faces accurately. They are better than men in xuuraan (canvassing and gathering information without being felt). Women often talk more about what is happening in their suburbs. Mothers can also easily identify what their children are involved in, what they do, and with who they interact.”¹²³

Another woman in focus group 1 describes the predicament of mothers whose sons are involved in violent organizations such as ciyaal weero or al-Shabaab. She believed that the mothers are aware of what their child is involved in but keep quiet for fear of their sons being reported to law enforcement. She said, “ciyaal weero, al-Shabaab, ill-disciplined soldiers and all these kind of people come out and go back to their houses.... So, women are very aware of the root causes of conflicts...The challenge is that these mothers know what their sons are involved but they keep them at home. They don't inform police because they do not trust police. They are scared that their sons could be imprisoned or executed since there is no reliable court processes. Mothers know where their sons go to and other ciyaal weero they are associated with but do not trust government.”¹²⁴ Overall, these insights indicated that although women are well positioned to know about potential sources of violence, they also face difficult trade-offs in cooperating with law enforcement.



Although women are well positioned to know about potential sources of violence, they also face difficult trade-offs in cooperating with law enforcement

123. Focus Group 1, W9.

124. Focus Group 1, W3.

Participants said that women should actively intervene to stop violence. As a woman in focus group 1 said, “most violent conflicts are committed by men and each of these men has a mother, or wife or daughter or sister...I believe that if they are prepared well, women are the major forces to intervene in violent conflict.”¹²⁵ Another participant in focus group 3 said that conflict resolution starts at home, and that if two communities have a conflict, women should talk to their sons or their husbands to resolve the issue.¹²⁶ Other focus group participants proposed that women could intervene to stop violence by notifying officials.

However, one participant gave an example that demonstrated the dangers women face in notifying authorities. “There is a situation in which a woman who used to be our neighbor saw two young men who did not live in the neighborhood, but wanted to murder a Somali policeman who was around that area. The woman notified the issue to the police and the two men who were al-Shabaab were captured and they had pistols. The mission of al-Shabaab was not successful and later on the woman was killed because of that as revenge.”¹²⁷ This example showed that while informing authorities can help prevent violence, it also comes with immense risk.

Lastly, one of the ways that women can intervene to stop violence is to be involved in the security sector. A woman in in focus group 1 believed that female police officers should be stationed in police stations in the suburbs.¹²⁸ Giving women representation in the security forces means that women will play a more formal role in intelligence gathering and in unraveling threats before they occur.

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The women of Benadir also believed that they have a role to play in leadership positions that deal with conflict prevention

The women of Benadir also believed that they have a role to play in leadership positions that deal with conflict prevention. One participant pointed to the importance of women holding prominent positions in local government, as they are closer to the grassroots. She said, “to prevent violent conflicts, I believe that women should be elected as waax (ward) leaders. They informally discuss about the situation of their waax in their own gatherings. So, they can provide real and reliable information.”¹²⁹ Another participant emphasized that young women in particular should be given prominent roles in conflict prevention efforts.¹³⁰ She criticized the fact that these positions are dominated by older women, and that young women are not given a chance to be decision makers when it comes to issues of conflict prevention in Benadir.

125. Focus Group 1, W4.

126. Focus Group 3, W10.

127. Focus Group 2, W5.

128. Focus Group 1, W9.

129. Focus Group 1, W9.

130. Focus Group 2, W11.

10.2 Limitations to women’s involvement in conflict prevention and suggested solutions

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Gatekeeping by powerful figures such as clan elders prevent women from given a chance to have their voices heard at decision-making tables

Focus group participants identified several obstacles that limit women’s involvement in conflict prevention. As with governance and state-building, women identified clan and clan elders as a challenge to women’s participation. Again, the women portrayed clan elders as gatekeepers who discourage their involvement in issues of conflict prevention by saying things such as, “it is wrong [for] women to talk in the presence of men.”¹³¹ Another woman pointed out that if women try to resolve a conflict, they are undermined or weakened by her clan.¹³² Gatekeeping by powerful figures such as clan elders prevent women from given a chance to have their voices heard at decision-making tables.¹³³

The second factor limiting women’s involvement in conflict prevention is the lack of guarantee from security services that sensitive information shared with them will be kept confidential. Women are uniquely positioned to gather sensitive security information about members of their households or community who are planning violent acts. However, what limits their ability to take an active role in preventing potential conflict is the distrust of security forces who may leak this information. As one woman in focus group 1 said, “lack of trust with security forces is the major obstacle for women to not share the information about ciyaal weero, about al-Shabaab or any other violent group.”¹³⁴ Another woman in the same group said, “it is very hard to trust government forces because they cannot keep the confidentiality and the secret information you are sharing with them....Besides this, the government officers based at police stations have dual cards. He works for the government and also for al-Shabaab. There were several cases where women shared al-Shabaab’s information with government security agencies but these women were assassinated because some security members leaked their information to al-Shabaab. Women also know ciyaal weero (local youth gangs) but if you as [a] woman tell that this boy is ciyaalo, the police will take bribe from the boy and release him, and then as a woman you won’t walk safely on the streets because the ciyaal weero boy you shared his information will harm you. The boy’s family might also work against you.”¹³⁵ As one participant said, “there is fear from the consequences of your action against ciyaal weero. So, you cannot talk about ciyaal weero or al-Shabaab. So, your safety is to keep silent.”¹³⁶

131. Focus Group 1, W9.

132. Focus Group 3, W10.

133. Focus Group 2, W4, W7, and W8.

134. Focus Group 1, W4.

135. Focus Group 1, W9.

136. Focus Group 1, W4.



Focus group participants also focused on women's lack of access to resources that make it difficult to juggle personal responsibilities and participation in conflict prevention

Focus group participants also focused on women's lack of access to resources that make it difficult to juggle personal responsibilities and participation in conflict prevention. Women in Benadir struggle to make ends meet and work jobs that require a lot of time.¹³⁷ As a result, they do not have as much free time to participate in formal government activities. Similarly, some mothers are bogged down by household chores, which leaves little time for engaging in meetings and networking activities.¹³⁸ In addition, women tend to have lower educational levels, and this can create an obstacle for those seeking to participate in conflict prevention roles that require educational expertise.¹³⁹ All of these personal factors create barriers to women achieving prominent decision-making positions in conflict resolution.

Focus group participants overwhelmingly believed that the best course of action is to give women more opportunities to serve in decision-making roles in government. They also said that women should be empowered to make their voices heard in issues related to conflict prevention. Some participants discussed the importance of improving education achievement opportunities for women, as this will help them gain more credentials to qualify for top government positions.

11. Conclusion

Women in the Benadir region have a tremendous potential to participate in and contribute more to governance, state-building, and conflict prevention. The women who participated in the survey and the three focus groups for this study had a sound understanding of what governance, state-building, and conflict prevention mean.

The definitions articulated by the women showed an attention to the nuances and complexities underlying these concepts, and especially how they apply to the context of Benadir. For example, the women not only view governance as the process in which someone is elected to selected to lead a society, but they also view the concept more holistically by focusing on leadership quality.

Likewise, the definitions of conflict ranged from macro-level sources of dispute such as clan-based conflict and land conflict, to more micro forms of everyday violence from youth gangs.

The women also recognize that women in Benadir face many challenges. The picture they painted of women's participation in governance, state-building, and conflict prevention was one where women are used symbolically, and marginalized from meaningful decision-making roles.

137. Focus Group 3, W10.

138. Focus Group 3, W4.

139. Focus Group 3, W3.

A major barrier to greater participation in government was the 4.5 electoral system, and the influence of clan elders in politics. The fact that Somalia's current clan-based institutional design was frequently mentioned as a barrier to women's inclusion suggested that it has for too long marginalized women and stunted their capabilities. Widespread cultural expectations about the proper place of women in society was also frequently cited as a barrier to women's achievements in important political arenas. Although it is challenging to change cultural beliefs and practices, greater prominence for women in decision-making positions in government could help to shift negative perceptions about their capability to contribute to governance.

Data from the survey and focus groups also provided many solutions to the issues that limit women's participation in governance, state-building, and conflict prevention. One of the most common solutions focused on the need to change the 4.5 clan formula system for selecting political candidates. Many women advocated for the electoral system to be reformed into a one-person-one-vote system where candidates are directly elected by the public. Democratizing the electoral process is seen as vital to increasing women's participation in government. In universal suffrage, OPOV elections will give the power of selection to voters, instead of concentrating the power in the hands of un-elected clan elders who are overwhelmingly male. The survey data shows a near universal embrace of the OPOV electoral model, and the belief that direct elections will specifically help women participate in governance in Benadir.

Other solutions focused on the need to reform unfair employment practices, ranging from making hiring practices more meritocratic to punishing bosses and colleagues who create hostile work environments for women. All of the solutions put forth by the participants in this study are actionable, and with political will in alignment, they can be implemented over time.

12. Recommendations

To promote women's participation in governance, state-building, and conflict prevention, the study recommends:

- The implementation of a one-person-one-vote electoral system in Benadir and Somalia more generally, at all levels of government – in federal, state and local elections. The 4.5 electoral model should be abandoned completely. The democratization of elections will allow universal suffrage, instead of the continued empowerment of clan elders as gatekeepers.
- The adoption of a closed-list proportional representation (PR) electoral rule for electing the president, parliamentary, and state officials. Women have a better chance of achieving representation under a closed-list PR system than plurality electoral rules.

- The creation of a government body that is tasked with defining the boundaries of local governments. Local government elections should adopt a mixed-electoral system, with half the council seats elected directly through plurality, and half elected through closed-list PR. Prominent and consequential positions such as mayors should be elected through plurality rules, as this ensures greater accountability.
- Once the switch to a one-person-one-vote electoral system has been made, there should be regulation of the funding sources of political parties. Candidate nominations by political parties should be transparent and follow legal mandates.
- The adoption of a legally binding 30% gender quota policy for all political parties. The quota policy should apply to elections using closed-list PR rules.
- The creation of a pipeline to train young women to become part of government. This should involve holding socialization events that connect girls to female politicians early in childhood. Young women will be able to learn what a career in politics entails, and a formal pipeline program will help to organically grow female political talent in Benadir.
- The raising of awareness for parents to enroll girls in school. This will help address the issue of women's lack of access to educational opportunities by focusing on early childhood.
- The creation of public awareness campaigns about the rights of women to participate in politics and government. This can be done through social media, radio, or television ads.
- The recruitment of more women into the security forces. These women should be positioned as liaisons between women in the communities and the security services.
- The creation of a secure channel for women to share sensitive security information with the police and security services without facing the threat of retaliation.
- Bolstering the presence of police in Benadir districts to deal with violence from youth gangs.
- The adoption and implementation of laws against sexual harassment against women in the workplace. Create stiff penalties for companies and employers who create hostile work environments for women.

HERITAGE

I N S T I T U T E