

# Youth in Peacebuilding in Galmudug:

Challenges, Opportunities and Moving Forward



March 2025

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# **Youth in Peacebuilding in Galmudug:** Challenges, Opportunities and Moving Forward

**March 2025**

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# Executive Summary

This study delves into the perspectives of young people on reconciliation and peacebuilding in Galmudug. In a nation where over 80% of the population is under 35, the perspectives of youth are indispensable, particularly on matters of peace, security, and reconciliation. Given Somalia's prolonged instability, it is crucial to capture the views of youth who have been both the primary victims and, in some cases, used as perpetrators of conflict — particularly in Galmudug which has a long history and recurrence of oscillating between volatility and stability. However, societal norms, particularly those rooted in clan structures, often marginalize youth, viewing them as either too immature to contribute meaningfully to reconciliation or as mere victims rather than active stakeholders.

The study, conducted by the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) under the Talo Wadaag 2 program, focused on Dhuusamarreeb, a historically multi-clan city that has experienced decades of conflict fueled by clan rivalries, ideological differences, and resource-based disputes. Through three gender-balanced focus group discussions (FGDs), participants identified clan-based conflicts, economic deprivation, and political marginalization as primary drivers of violence in Galmudug. Despite these challenges, there was a strong desire among the youth to contribute to peacebuilding, particularly through skills training and inclusive dialogue platforms.

From 2008 to 2019, Dhuusamarreeb was under the control of AhluSunna Waljama'a (ASWJ), a Sufi group. The al-Shabaab (the Youth) insurgents also have a significant presence in the state. However, the reluctance of participants to openly discuss al-Shabaab underscored a pervasive fear of reprisals, reflecting a broader societal hesitation to confront the group's impact openly. This participatory action research also underscored the challenges faced by Galmudug youth in engaging in peacebuilding while also identifying significant opportunities to enhance their involvement.

As one of Somalia's youngest federal member states, Galmudug has faced considerable hurdles in state-building, particularly in integrating youth, women, and marginalized groups into governance and peace efforts. The study examined these gaps and proposed context-specific solutions that could enhance youth participation in peace processes.

Key barriers identified included limited access to education, economic instability, and cultural norms that particularly disempower women. Conversely, the study also identified enabling factors such as the presence of local youth organizations, national and international support for youth initiatives, and the potential for leveraging technology to amplify youth voices. The study reviewed national and international frameworks, including Somalia's National Reconciliation Framework (NRF) and the National Youth Policy (NYP), as well as regional and global strategies for youth engagement in peacebuilding. The alignment between the views of Dhuusamarreeb youth and the objectives outlined in these frameworks suggested that a cohesive approach to youth development and peacebuilding is achievable.

For example, Somalia's NRF, launched in April 2024, aims to address conflict trauma and foster reconciliation by tackling youth-specific challenges like unemployment, insecurity, and limited educational opportunities — concerns that resonate with the aspirations voiced by the youth in this study. Participants emphasized the importance of prioritizing rural areas, where many root causes of conflict originate. They called for comprehensive training programs, particularly from government institutions like the Ministry of Interior and Reconciliation, to equip youth with the necessary skills for effective peacebuilding.

Additionally, financial and political support were deemed essential to empower youth and to demonstrate the government's commitment to their engagement. The study recommends targeted educational programs and vocational training to equip youth with the skills needed for effective peacebuilding. It also suggests creating inclusive platforms, such as youth advisory councils at both national and federal member state levels, to facilitate dialogue between youth, policymakers, and community leaders. Strengthening support for local youth-led peacebuilding initiatives through funding and capacity-building efforts is also crucial. Moreover, developing programs that provide economic opportunities for youth could reduce their involvement in conflict, steering them toward constructive roles in society. Public awareness campaigns are said to be essential to shifting societal perceptions of youth from passive victims to active agents of change in peacebuilding.

By addressing these structural challenges, the study highlights the potential for Galmudug's youth to play a transformative role in reconciliation and peacebuilding. In Galmudug, ensuring that youth are equipped, engaged, and empowered will lead them towards a more peaceful and cohesive communities.

# Findings

The focus group findings strongly aligned with the gaps, challenges, and proposed interventions highlighted in existing peacebuilding literature which suggested that engaging youth meaningfully can lead to more collaborative and sustainable peace efforts, as well as national and global policies and frameworks. The views of Galmudug's youth, particularly their emphasis on inclusive decision making, capacity-building, economic empowerment, local initiatives, and judicial effectiveness, resonated with the calls made by the literature and the directives of Somalia's youth and reconciliation ministries. By considering the voices on the ground and addressing the challenges, opportunities, and gaps they have articulated, stakeholders across the public, private, and civil society sectors can develop targeted strategies to empower Galmudug's youth and foster a more stable and peaceful society. The study's seven core findings are as follows:

**Youth Presence in Decision Making:** The discussions underscored the importance of youth having a visible and active presence in decision-making forums related to peace processes. By participating in these reconciliation and mediation discussions, youth can advocate for peace and significantly contribute to decision making. Providing platforms and opportunities for both existing and emerging youth groups could energize and accelerate peace and reconciliation efforts. Given that the majority of society comprises youth, and that conflicts often involve young people both as perpetrators and victims, it is essential to recognize youth as key stakeholders and actors, rather than mere bystanders.

**Comprehensive Training Programs:** Participants consistently called for empowering youth through training programs focused on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and other essential skills. Such programs would equip youth to contribute effectively to peacebuilding initiatives. The positive contributions of a few existing youth groups illustrated the potential benefits of empowering young people and harnessing their energy and ingenuity for advancing peace and reconciliation in their communities.

**Opportunities and Existing Engagement:** Despite the challenges, participants noted numerous opportunities for youth to engage in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The return of many educated individuals to their hometowns, coupled with the presence of local organizations that encourage youth participation in peace efforts, represent a shift towards recognizing the importance of peace. This shift aligns with the Federal Government of Somalia's (FGS) policies and global best practices in youth engagement.

**Prioritizing Rural Areas:** Participants emphasized the need to focus peacebuilding efforts on rural areas, where many of the state's conflicts originate. The discussants highlighted that engaging closely with rural communities is crucial for addressing their needs and effectively promoting peace. This perspective aligns with expert analyses that suggest rural communities often face more persistent and recurring conflicts, requiring targeted and robust interventions.

**Youth Organizations and Initiatives:** Participants highlighted the positive role of youth-established organizations that advocate for peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Strengthening these organizations and fostering the creation of new ones are necessary avenues for increasing youth engagement in peace processes.

**Government and Institutional Support:** The need for robust support from local and national governments, particularly in the form of resources, funding, and mentorship programs, was emphasized. Participants suggested that the government, especially the Ministry of Interior, should prioritize internal peace efforts and take effective measures to support youth involvement.

**Judicial Effectiveness and Accountability:** Peacebuilding cannot take hold without accountability and justice. Participants highlighted the need for a fair and transparent judicial system that holds perpetrators accountable and restores community trust — a critical element in long-term peacebuilding.

## Introduction

Galmudug, which is one of the youngest Somalia's five federal member states was established in 2015, but it was unified in Dhuusamarreeb in 2018 following a power-sharing agreement between the ASWJ religious Sufi group, which had controlled part of the Galmudug region and its capital for over a decade, and Galmudug President Ahmed Duale Gelle (Xaaf).<sup>1</sup> The region's complex socio-political reality, characterized by its multi-clan composition and status as one of the most militarized areas in Somalia, active insurgency, militarized clans and groups such as ASWJ and al-Shabaab presents unique challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding.<sup>2</sup>

This research explores the role of youth in these processes, with a focus on their perceptions and engagement in Dhuusamarreeb — a city deeply impacted by ongoing conflicts and which is a center of the state's socio-political activities. As in the rest of Somalia, youth in Galmudug represent the largest segment of the population. They are also often both the main victims of insecurity and the instruments of conflict. Despite their significant numbers, youth are frequently marginalized in the state's formal political processes. However, they possess critical insights — as the focus group discussions make abundantly clear — into the sources and persistence of conflict, as well as the potential pathways to peace and reconciliation.<sup>3</sup>

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1. UNSOM, "International Partners Welcome Creation of a Unified Galmudug Administration," January 1, 2018, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/international-partners-welcome-creation-unified-galmudug-administration>

2. On July 2024, clan militia in the Galmudug city of Abudwak took shipments of arms from government security forces; see "Somalia: Clan Militia Seizes Weapons in Trucks Near Abudwak, Central Somalia," All Africa, July 16, 2024, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202407160315.html>; also see "Death Toll of Central Somalia Clan Fight Rises to 50, Authorities Call for Ceasefire," Horn Observer, June 9, 2024, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2792/Death-Toll-of-Central-Somalia-Clan-Fight-Rises-to-50-Authorities-Call-for-Ceasefire>.

3. FGD participant, Focus Group Discussion 3. "The youth are the ones fueling the conflict, yet they are excluded from decision-making processes. The government often deals with the elders, despite it being the youth who face the consequences of the conflict."

This study employs participatory action research methodologies, with data drawn from three focus group discussions conducted in Dhuusamarreeb on 5 February 2024. As the administrative center of Galmudug, Dhuusamarreeb is not only the political and governmental hub but also a focal point for employment opportunities, attracting a diverse population from across the state.<sup>4</sup> The focus groups, which included youth from various socio-economic backgrounds,<sup>5</sup> provided a platform for young people to voice their views on the challenges and opportunities for peace in their region.

This research aims to bridge the gap between traditional, elder-dominated peacebuilding dialogues and the lived realities of the youth who, as the overwhelming majority of Somali society, face daily conflicts, socio-economic barriers, educational challenges, and entrenched socio-political exclusion.<sup>6</sup> In particular, this study integrated gender-specific insights by examining the perspectives of both female and male participants. This approach acknowledged the distinct experiences and contributions of young women in the peacebuilding process, which are often overshadowed by the broader focus on youth as a homogeneous group.<sup>7</sup>

The literature review, coupled with Somalia's national policies on youth and peacebuilding and international frameworks, highlighted that while both young men and women face significant barriers, young women often encounter additional layers of marginalization. Addressing these gendered dimensions is crucial for developing holistic and effective peacebuilding strategies. Furthermore, insights from the focus group discussions emphasized the importance of prioritizing peacebuilding efforts in rural areas, where many conflicts originate. Participants advocated for comprehensive training programs led by government institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and Reconciliation to equip youth with the necessary skills for effective peacebuilding. They also highlighted the need for financial and political support to empower youth and validate their role in these efforts.<sup>8</sup>

## Methodology

This study utilized participatory action research (PAR), a framework that emphasizes the active involvement of community members, especially those whose voices are often marginalized. The approach was selected to capture the perspectives of youth within the peacebuilding context of Galmudug.

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4. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, "Productive and Labor Employment Creation for Somalia: Key Challenges and Strategies," July 2020, <https://www.humancapital.so/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Labor-HCDM-REPORT-.pdf>

5. FGD participants. Industries and sectors represented included civil service, district office, the police force, humanitarian aid, NGOs, community service, the health sector, field monitoring, education, salon services, and blue-collar jobs.

6. Federal Government of Somalia, National Youth Policy (2023): "Somali youth have not been afforded the opportunity to develop to their full potential and access the opportunities that enable them to grow, develop, and prosper as fully engaged, responsive, and productive citizens. During the civil war and stateless decades, the youth didn't get the opportunities to improve their well-being or access quality education, which is applicable to the needs of their country."

7. FGD participants. There were 15 female participants out of 31.

8. FGD participant: "For youth participation in peace efforts to increase, it is crucial for the government institution, particularly the Ministry of Interior, to prioritize internal peace and take effective measures. This includes providing comprehensive training programs for youth, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills for peacebuilding."



The PAR process spanned from September 2023 to August 2024, with focus group discussions conducted in Dhuusamarreeb on 13 February 2024. These discussions were transcribed into English and subsequently reviewed by HIPS researchers to ensure accuracy.

HIPS collaborated closely with local partners, notably the Galmudug Center for Research and Dialogue (GRD), as well as other civil society organizations and governmental bodies, including the vice-president of Galmudug, Ali Dahir Eid, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Women, Children, and Human Rights Development.

This study utilized a variety of participatory activities, including interactive group discussions, reflection sessions, recitations of Gabay (poetry), storytelling, and intergenerational dialogues. However, the primary focus of this paper is on the insights gathered and experiences from focus group discussions conducted in Dhuusamarreeb, the administrative capital of Galmudug state. Dhuusamarreeb was strategically selected for its significant socio-political transformation—shifting from a clan-dominated area before 2008 to a more ideologically driven and government-centered polity in the years that followed.<sup>9</sup>

Since 2008, various political forces, including ASWJ, al-Shabaab, and the federal and state governments (following the creation of Galmudug in 2015), have all vied for power. The federal government strived to consolidate its power and unify the state. This broader transition in Galmudug mirrored a more inclusive socio-political shift within Dhuusamarreeb, making the city an ideal location to explore youth perspectives on peacebuilding and reconciliation.

The three FGDs paid careful attention to ensuring a broad representation of youth from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and clans. This approach aimed to capture the region's demographic diversity. The Galmudug Center for Research and Dialogue (GRD) supported the HIPS team in recruiting participants for these discussions.

All FGDs were conducted in Somali. Given the significant differences in the structural and grammatical systems between the Somali and English languages, direct word-for-word translation could distort the intended meaning or lead to less clear translations. Therefore, the FGDs were transcribed and translated into English while striving to maintain the accuracy and integrity of the participants' responses. We made every effort to provide the closest possible translation, but some nuances may have been adjusted for clarity.

To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used, represented by numbers. It is important to note that some participants answered multiple times within a single question. As a result, their responses may appear in different places within the same question's responses.

Each FGD consisted of 10 to 11 participants, totaling 31 in all. However, some participants left the discussions at different points for various reasons, while others chose not to respond to certain questions.

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9. Following the collapse of the Somali state in January 1991, Galmudug (then Mudug) and the Galmudud region splintered into cities towns, and villages dominated by sub clans who were often at war. Adado was the capital of one clan, and Dhusamareb, and Galkacyo, and Abudwak, and Ceeldheer, and Ceelbuur and Balanbale and Huurshe, Guricel and Herale all even though they are cities and towns became synonymous with clans who call them home and dominate. After 2008, ASWJ, al-Shabaab, the FGS and the Galmudug governments began consolidating power. Today, Galmudug, with the exception of a few districts in the east near the Indian Ocean, is under the control of the Galmudug state backed by the FGS.

## Participant demographics

Researchers collected participants' demographic data such as age, education, employment, and gender. Twenty-three participants out of the 31 filled out the evaluation form. Six of the 23 participants who filled out the evaluation form were 18-25, while 17 were 26-35. Fifteen out of 31 were young women.

Twenty out of the 23 were university graduates, two were secondary school graduates and one was a primary-intermediate school graduate. The rest did not fill out the evaluation form. The vast majority were employed. Seventeen out of the 23 who stated their employment status worked in the following areas: the civil service, a district office, the police force, humanitarian aid, an NGO, community service, the health sector, field monitoring, education, salon, and one had a blue-collar job. Six out of the 23 who filled out the evaluation forms were unemployed.

The discussions were organized around key themes such as the drivers of local violence, the personal impacts of ongoing conflicts on young people, and their potential roles in peace initiatives. This approach was designed not only to gather rich qualitative data but also to engage participants actively, encouraging them to freely express their views and contribute to solution-oriented discussions.

In addition to the primary data collected through FGDs, the study incorporated a limited / targeted review of existing literature and government policies related to youth and peacebuilding. This review consisted of a closer look at regional, continental, and global best practices and trends, providing a broader context for understanding the roles and challenges of youth in peace processes. The integration of these diverse sources ensured that the study was grounded in both local realities and broader theoretical and policy frameworks – at the national and global levels.

By comparing and contrasting the local findings with global perspectives, the study aimed to validate the FGDs' assertions and observations within a wider academic and policy discourse on youth and their societal roles or lack thereof. The literature review of Somali, African Union and United Nation's policies served as a critical tool for contextualizing and validating the findings from the FGDs, enabling the research to not only reflect the specific realities of Galmudug but also to align with and contribute to the broader agenda on youth involvement in peacebuilding globally.

## Research objectives

The main research objective was to understand the role of Galmudug young people in reconciliation and peacebuilding from youth perspectives and experiences perspectives. In detail, the study aimed to:

1. Capture the feelings of young people affected by violence in Galmudug.
2. Understand the role that young people can play in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Galmudug.

3. Identify challenges limiting the role of youth in contributing to reconciliation and peacebuilding in Galmudug and how to address them.
4. Identify local initiatives aimed at promoting the role of youth as peacebuilders in Galmudug.

## Research questions

The key research questions were:

1. What are your feelings about violent conflicts in Galmudug?
2. What is the role of the young people in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Galmudug?
3. What are the challenges limiting young people's contribution to peacebuilding and reconciliation in Galmudug?
4. What are the main local initiatives and activities that enable Galmudug youth to contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation?

# Youth in Peacebuilding: Perspectives

To effectively assess the alignment of Dhuusamarreeb focus group participants' views with broader peacebuilding strategies, it is essential to compare their perspectives not only with Somalia's national youth and peacebuilding vision but also with regional, continental, and global youth agendas. By synthesizing these frameworks, we also aimed to shed some light on how youth-led initiatives in Dhuusamarreeb resonated with, or diverged from, the national, regional, and global plans for youth involvement in peacebuilding.

## National Reconciliation Framework and Somali Youth Agenda

Somalia's National Reconciliation Framework (NRF), launched in April 2024, serves as a cornerstone in guiding the country toward sustainable peace. Developed by the Federal Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs, and Reconciliation, the NRF operates across federal, state, and district levels, addressing the trauma of prolonged conflict and fostering reconciliation, with special emphasis on areas formerly controlled by al-Shabaab.<sup>10</sup>

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10. UNDP Somalia, "Explainer: What is the National Reconciliation Framework of Somalia," May 21, 2024, <https://undpsom.medium.com/explainer-what-is-national-reconciliation-framework-of-somalia-a919d8c57ccf>

The NRF emphasizes inclusive participation, bringing together justice, police, elders, religious leaders, women's groups, and youth organizations to forge consensus and sustainable solutions. This framework highlights the crucial role of youth, whose energy and creativity are seen as vital in driving positive change and healing intergenerational wounds.<sup>11</sup> Complementing the NRF, the FGS's National Youth Policy (NYP) targets the specific challenges faced by Somali youth, such as unemployment, insecurity, and limited educational opportunities, all of which impede their ability to contribute as peacebuilders.<sup>12</sup> The NYP outlines strategic objectives to strengthen education and vocational training, promote employment, enhance security, and increase youth participation in governance, aligning youth development with broader national reconciliation efforts.<sup>13</sup>

## Regional and Continental Frameworks

At the regional level, the African Union's Agenda 2063<sup>14</sup> and the African Youth Charter<sup>15</sup> provide a robust framework for youth empowerment, gender equality, and inclusion in governance and decision-making processes. These documents advocate for youth involvement in peace and development initiatives, recognizing their potential to drive change and addressing socio-economic challenges to mitigate youth involvement in conflicts. Similarly, IGAD's Youth Policy underscores the importance of meaningful youth engagement in peacebuilding, with a focus on education, employment, and inclusive participation. This policy calls for youth leadership, accountability, and gender equality, emphasizing collaboration among member states and various stakeholders to enhance youth contributions to peace processes.<sup>16</sup>

## Global Youth Peace and Security Agenda

Globally, the United Nations' Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda, initiated by UNSCR 2250, emphasizes five pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnerships, and disengagement and reintegration.<sup>17</sup> This agenda advocates for greater youth involvement in peace processes, highlighting the need for structural changes, the protection of human rights, and investment in youth capacities.

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11. Federal Government of Somalia, "National Reconciliation Framework," April 2024, p. 29. "Youth offer a forward-thinking approach to reconciliation, with their energy and creativity driving positive change. Engaging youth in the national reconciliation process, through initiatives in schools, universities, and sports venues, can tap into their active participation and enthusiasm for fostering unity and healing intergenerational wounds."

12. Somali Youth Hub, "Press Statement: The Somali Cabinet Approved the National Youth Policy," May 11, 2023, <https://youthhub.gov.so/press-statement-the-somali-cabinet-approved-the-national-youth-policy/>

13. Federal Government of Somalia, "National Youth Policy," 2023, p. 47. "Key Priority Interventions: 1. Fully involve young women and men in peace and state-building processes from the early planning stages, all the way to its implementation and monitoring."

14. African Union. "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want," January 2015, [https://au.int/Agenda2063/popular\\_version](https://au.int/Agenda2063/popular_version)

15. African Union. "African Youth Charter," 2006, <https://au.int/en/treaties/african-youth-charter>

16. IGAD. "The IGAD Youth Policy," 2023, "Strengthen the capacity of youth and youth organizations in peace building, conflict prevention, management and resolution through the promotion of intercultural learning, civic education, tolerance, human rights education, good governance, democracy, mutual respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, the importance of dialogue and cooperation, responsibility, solidarity and international cooperation," <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IGAD-YOUTH-POLICY-Popular-Version.pdf>

17. Sarah Smith, The United Nations: A champion for youth. Dag Hammarskjöld, 2020, p. 3. Accessed at: [https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/dd-paper\\_no28\\_2250.pdf](https://www.daghammarskjold.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/dd-paper_no28_2250.pdf)

The global framework underscores the importance of creating an enabling environment where young people can contribute meaningfully to peace and security, similar to the objectives outlined in Somalia's national strategies.<sup>18</sup> By aligning the insights from Dhuusamarreeb's youth with these broader frameworks, this study underscored how Somalia's local initiatives could contribute to the global youth peace and security agenda. However, it also revealed gaps and challenges in implementing these frameworks at the grassroots level, particularly in regions like Galmudug,<sup>19</sup> where ongoing conflicts and socio-political complexities present significant barriers to effective youth engagement in peacebuilding.

## Insights from Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions reveal that local youth are acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities within their region. Participants highlighted the urgent need for improved education and employment opportunities, mirroring the priorities outlined in Somalia's National Youth Policy (NYP). There was a strong emphasis on involving youth in decision-making processes and peace initiatives, which aligns with the principles established in UNSCR 2250 and African Union frameworks. One participant noted, "Galmudug's youth can take the lead in raising awareness by organizing peace education workshops in schools, facilitating dialogues between different communities, or creating a youth peace council."<sup>20</sup>

Youth organizations such as Galka'yo Peace and Development, Wakiillada Nabadda, IPN Galmudug, and Elman Peace are actively involved in peace and reconciliation efforts in Galmudug. These groups collaborate with the Ministry of Interior and Reconciliation, along with other government bodies, focusing on raising awareness and conducting peacebuilding programs. However, these organizations face significant challenges, particularly exclusion from decision-making processes by traditional elders and political leaders, which limits their influence and effectiveness.<sup>21</sup>

## Synthesis of Frameworks and Local Insights

By comparing and contrasting global, continental, and regional frameworks with the specific context of Galmudug, several alignment areas and challenges become evident.

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18. United Nations. "The Youth, Peace and Security Agenda," UNSCR 2250, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships/policy/youth>

19. Crisis Group, "Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State," 25 September 2023, [https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/b193-somalia-galmudug-state\\_0.pdf](https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/b193-somalia-galmudug-state_0.pdf). "There is a close connection between political dynamics in Galmudug and those in Mogadishu. With few revenue streams of its own, the state is dependent on subventions from the capital, which retains both an outside interest and great influence in the state. This relationship presents a further obstacle to achieving lasting stability in Galmudug, given Mogadishu's propensity for interventions that exacerbate rather than resolve tensions."

20. FGD 1, a male participant.

21. During the focus group discussions, the terms 'excluded' and 'exclusion' were used more than 10 times in the context of youth and decision making.

Ensuring youth are actively involved in decision-making at all levels resonates with UNSCR 2250 and AU frameworks. Similarly, the youth in Galmudug have called for platforms for dialogue and representation in peace negotiations, highlighting the necessity of legal frameworks that mandate youth inclusion and promote intergenerational dialogue.

Strengthening educational opportunities and vocational training, as outlined in the Somali NYP, is critical. This includes increasing access to quality education and linking educational programs with labor market needs.

Galmudug youth stressed that quality education and vocational training are essential in preventing youth from joining extremist groups. Securing funding from international organizations and regional bodies to support youth-led peacebuilding initiatives aligns with IGAD's strategy for well-resourced and capacitated youth participation.<sup>22</sup>

The youth in Galmudug also pointed out the lack of financial resources as a significant barrier to their involvement in peacebuilding activities.<sup>23</sup> Implementing policies to overcome resistance from traditional structures is essential, including creating an environment where youth can contribute without fear of hindrance. Ensuring gender-sensitive approaches in all youth programs promotes the active participation of young women in peace and security efforts—a need strongly voiced by young women during the focus groups.<sup>24</sup>

Because of the pervasive challenge in the arena of peacebuilding and scarcity of resources available for advancing peace and or empowering youth, establishing practical mechanisms for monitoring the actual implementation of youth policies and ensuring accountability among stakeholders is crucial. This integrated approach reflects the consensus among global, continental, regional, and national frameworks and the specific needs and proposals from the youth in Galmudug. The National Reconciliation Framework should be responsive to the specific needs identified by local youth. This approach, in addition to fostering peace, empowers youth to be active agents of change in their communities. Moreover, the lessons from Somali-led peace processes, with their emphasis on local ownership and traditional practices, provide valuable insights for developing effective youth engagement strategies in peacebuilding efforts. As highlighted in a comprehensive study on what works in Somalia local peace process by Interpeace argue, “Neither peacebuilding nor statebuilding can be effective in the Somali region without the broad and inclusive engagement of the Somali people.”<sup>25</sup>

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22. IGAD, “IGAD Youth Policy 2023: A Resilient, Peaceful and Prosperous Youth,” 2023, <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IGAD-YOUTH-POLICY-Popular-Version.pdf>.

“Certain categories of youth have been identified and singled out for special attention by the Policy Implementers and Actors due to their levels of vulnerability and circumstances of living. These groups, therefore, need special policy-oriented programming, budgeting and resource allocation at continental, regional and national levels.”

23. One male, FGD1 participant, explains, “A major barrier to youth participation in reconciliation efforts is the lack of resources. Young people have the energy and passion to make a difference, but they often lack the financial support to organize events, spread awareness campaigns, or travel to meet with community members. Providing resources and funding opportunities can empower young people to become active agents of peace in their communities.”

24. A female participant in one of the focus groups stated, “To achieve lasting peace in Galmudug, young people need to be empowered to work together. By forming collaborative groups, they can raise awareness about the importance of peacebuilding within their communities. However, government support is essential for long-term success. This could involve providing resources, funding opportunities, and mentorship programs to help youth initiatives flourish.”

25. This could involve providing resources, funding opportunities, and mentorship programs to help youth initiatives flourish. Interpeace, “The Search for Peace: Lessons from Somali-led Peace Processes 1991–2007,” 20 April 2009, <https://www.interpeace.org/2009/04/the-search-for-peace-somali-led-peace-processes-1991-to-2007/>.



The future of Africa, as her youth says the African Union<sup>26</sup>, as according to the World Economic Forum, “by 2035, there will be more young Africans entering the workforce each year than in the rest of the world combined.”<sup>27</sup> Somalia is no exception, as emphasized in the UNDP’s 2012 report, which concluded, “The future of Somalia is in the hands of youth.”<sup>28</sup>

## Al-Shabaab

The focus group discussions provided insights into the factors contributing to conflict in Galmudug, particularly concerning the role of al-Shabaab. The participants’ references to—or lack thereof—al-Shabaab revealed the complex and nuanced perceptions of this militant group’s influence on the region’s peace and security dynamics.

Among the male FGD participants, there was a noticeable tendency to attribute conflicts in the region to al-Shabaab’s activities. For instance, one participant (FGD1YW2) identified both clan conflicts and al-Shabaab as key sources of instability in Galmudug.

Another participant (FGD2YM10) elaborated on the manipulation tactics employed by al-Shabaab, stating that the group coerces clans into conflicts by threatening that they will lose their homes if they do not engage in these disputes. Similarly, a participant (FGD3YM8) highlighted al-Shabaab’s strategy of using clans under their control to perpetuate conflicts, emphasizing the group’s role in maintaining instability through coercion.

The views expressed by female discussants presented a different perspective. A female participant (FGD3YW1) did not directly link al-Shabaab to the conflicts but instead focused on the broader impacts of the ongoing violence, such as the physical and mental toll on the youth, particularly the increase in gender-based violence. This difference in focus suggested that while men might be more aware of, or willing to discuss, al-Shabaab’s direct involvement, women tend to emphasize the humanitarian consequences of the conflict.

Overall, however, out of the 31 participants, only a few directly mentioned al-Shabaab. This could imply that although al-Shabaab’s role in conflict in Somalia and specifically in Galmudug is recognized, participants feared retribution or were concerned about the presence of potential al-Shabaab agents among the FGD participants.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Shabaab’s notorious reputation for punishing dissent seems to have created an atmosphere of self-censorship, where participants might consciously or subconsciously avoid mentioning the group to protect themselves from possible repercussions.

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26. African Union, “Africa’s Future is Youth-Led, the AU Prioritizes Young Voices at the 37th AU Summit,” 18 February 2024, <https://au.int/es/node/43558>

27. World Economic Forum, “How Africa’s Youth Will Drive Global Growth,” 16 August 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/08/africa-youth-global-growth-digital-economy/>

28. UNDP, Somalia Human Development Report 2012: Empowering Youth for Peace and Development, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/HDR-Somalia-2012-E.pdf>

29. SNTV, Sarkaal Danab ahaa oo loo haysto Shirqoollo Halis Argagixisanim ah, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YZEA1NPYl4g> “Al Shabaab has infiltrated many government institutions, including the security sector. For example, even members of the elite Danab commandos were not immune, as a lieutenant was charged with spying for al-Shabaab, leading to the deaths of several colleagues, including the unit’s deputy commander.”

The researchers' decision not to specifically prompt discussions about al-Shabaab could also have contributed to the limited discussion among focus group participants. This choice was intentionally made to avoid causing discomfort or fear among participants, which may have influenced their reluctance to address the elephant in the room.

## Youth Perspectives on Conflict and Peacebuilding

The focus group discussions provided valuable insights into the young people's perspectives on the root causes of local conflicts, their personal experiences, and their potential roles in peacebuilding. Participants noted that most conflicts in their region stemmed from complex inter-clan rivalries, exacerbated by competition over scarce resources such as land and water. They explained that these conflicts were deeply intertwined with their daily lives, significantly impacting their safety, educational opportunities, and economic well-being. This nuanced understanding of how historical grievances, political manipulation, and ineffective governance exacerbate local conflicts and tensions was a common theme. One participant recounted a personal story that underscored the long-standing nature of these disputes: "My grandfather died as a result of clan conflicts, and even his father died the same way."<sup>30</sup>

The Dhuusamarreeb interviewees highlighted a critical gap between the potential contributions of youth in advancing peace and the actual opportunities available to them. Despite a clear willingness to participate in peacebuilding efforts, youth often find themselves excluded from formal decision-making processes, which are dominated by older generations and traditional clan leaders. This exclusion is perceived as a significant impediment to creating inclusive and sustainable peace solutions that are responsive to the needs of Galmudug society, particularly the youth.<sup>31</sup>

The responses from the focus groups indicated that many youths see the importance of prioritizing rural areas over cities for peacebuilding efforts. They believed that many of the region's problems originate in rural areas and advocated for close collaboration with local communities to address their needs and promote peace. One female focus group discussant called for more research beyond cities, emphasizing the need to actively listen to the perspectives of those living in conflict-affected rural areas to incorporate their views into research and analysis for a more comprehensive understanding.<sup>32</sup>

Participants also advocated for a stronger youth presence in decision-making processes related to peace. Providing meaningful roles and platforms for youth to engage in discussions and decisions about peace was repeatedly mentioned as important.<sup>33</sup>

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30. Young man in FGD 2.

31. One young man in the first FGD stated: "A major problem for young people in Galmudug is their exclusion from decision-making processes. Clan elders traditionally hold all the power, leaving youth voiceless and unable to contribute."

32. A female participant stated: "I recommend that the Heritage Institute expands its outreach beyond cities and includes visits to rural areas affected by conflict in Galmudug. By actively listening to the feelings and situations of those living in these areas, their perspectives can be incorporated into research and analysis. This approach will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and realities faced by communities impacted by conflict."

33. One female discussant during FGD 3 stated: "The youth are the ones fueling the conflict, yet they are excluded from decision-making processes. The government often deals with the elders, despite it being the youth who face the consequences of the conflict."



Both young men and women across the focus groups stressed the need for training programs focused on conflict resolution, reconciliation, and other necessary skills to empower youth in peacebuilding initiatives. As one young man from the first focus group discussion noted: “To truly increase the role of youth in Galmudug we need a multi-pronged approach. This could include providing them with training, resources, mentorship opportunities, and a platform to have their voices heard in peacebuilding processes.”<sup>34</sup>

The focus group discussions revealed that several youth organizations are actively working on peace and reconciliation in Galmudug. They include: Galka’yo Peace and Development, Wakiillada Nabadda, Insider Peace Builders Network (IPN), and Elman Peace.<sup>35</sup> These groups collaborate with the Ministry of Interior and Reconciliation and other government bodies, focusing primarily on raising awareness and conducting peacebuilding programs. Their activities include training sessions, awareness campaigns, and panel discussions aimed at promoting peace and strategizing ways to resolve conflicts. However, discussants emphasized the need for financial support for these organizations to function effectively and advance reconciliation efforts. Adequate funding would enable them to organize events, spread awareness, and facilitate dialogue between clans.<sup>36</sup>

Overall, participants emphasized the need for a more inclusive approach that recognizes the contributions of youth in peace and reconciliation processes. Empowering youth with resources, training, and decision-making opportunities can significantly enhance their impact on fostering lasting peace in Galmudug—an approach that aligns with the national reconciliation framework, Somalia’s youth policy, and global frameworks.

Gender-specific insights revealed that young women often face additional layers of marginalization, making their participation in peace efforts even more challenging. As one young woman noted: “Women are also increasingly vulnerable, tragically becoming victims of violence.”<sup>37</sup> Addressing these gendered dimensions is crucial for developing holistic and effective peacebuilding strategies.

Many focus group discussants highlighted the abundance of opportunities currently available for youth in peace development and resolution. They pointed out that many educated youths have returned to their cities, community-based organizations are actively engaging youth, and there is a growing recognition of the importance of peace among young people. These factors could contribute to a positive shift in mindset and increased involvement in peacebuilding efforts. Moreover, the responses suggested that sustainable peace solutions require a functioning judiciary and enforcement mechanisms to resolve inter-clan conflicts effectively. The absence of these elements is seen as a significant barrier to achieving lasting peace.<sup>38</sup>

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34. Young man in FGD 1.

35. FGD participants including FGD1YM8, FGD2YM7, FGD2YM2, FGD2YM3, FGD2YW6, FGD2YM5 mentioned organizations such as Elman Peace, Ururka Wakiilada Galmudug, Madasha Wadahadalka Bulshada, Dhoon Center, Peace Building Network, GRD, Hayaan, and Wakiilada Nabada.

36. One male focus group participant noted: “Young people have the energy and passion to make a difference, but they often lack the financial support to organize events, spread awareness campaigns, or travel to meet with community members. Providing resources and funding opportunities can empower young people to become active agents of peace in their communities.”

37. FGD 1 female participant.

38. A female focus group discussant stated: “Two crucial elements for resolving this conflict are an effective judiciary and a powerful entity to enforce the judgments issued by the judiciary ... Addressing these gaps is vital to create the conditions necessary for successful peace implementation.”

## Accountability and Transitional Justice: Voices from Dhuusamarreeb

The youth of Dhuusamarreeb emphasized the critical role of accountability and justice in the peacebuilding process. Across the focus group discussions and due to demographic realities in Somalia, it is clear that youth are both the primary victims and perpetrators of violence. FGD participants also repeatedly stated a fact echoed by both the national reconciliation framework as well as the NYP – that the involvement in reconciliation processes or holding them to account is frequently neglected. One young woman stressed that, “the current reconciliation process overlooks the perpetrators and fails to hold them accountable. It’s only the clan elders who represent both the perpetrators and the victims.”<sup>39</sup>

This suggested omission contributes to the gap in addressing the root causes of conflict which perpetuates a cycle of violence. Another participant pointed out the need for an effective judiciary and enforcement mechanisms, arguing that “an effective judiciary and a powerful entity to enforce the judgments issued by the judiciary” are essential for resolving conflicts and sustaining peace in Galmudug.<sup>40</sup> This view aligns with global best practices in peacebuilding, which advocate for transitional justice and an effective judicial process as a cornerstone of sustainable peace.<sup>41</sup>

However, the discussions also revealed broader societal challenges where traditional elders dominate decision-making processes, marginalizing youth voices. As one young man observed: “Youth are often excluded from active participation in reconciliation efforts. Their perspectives and voices are not adequately considered, which hinders their ability to contribute effectively to the resolution of conflicts.”<sup>42</sup>

This exclusion not only stifles the potential contributions of youth but also fails to leverage their firsthand experiences and insights into the conflicts. The literature on transitional justice supports this concern, emphasizing that sustainable peace can only be achieved if societies pursue comprehensive reform paths that address root causes and render justice for past violations.<sup>43</sup>

Likewise, the International Centre for Transitional Justice highlights that successful transitional justice mechanisms are those that are context-specific and involve broad public participation, particularly of marginalized groups.<sup>44</sup> The absence of youth in decision-making processes in Galmudug underscores the importance of such inclusive approaches.

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39. FGD3 female participant – 5.

40. FGD3 female participant - 3.

41. United Nations, “Peacebuilding, Sustaining Peace and Transitional Justice,” 2020, UN Thematic Paper, [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/4\\_ohchr\\_thematic\\_paper\\_on\\_transitional\\_justice.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/4_ohchr_thematic_paper_on_transitional_justice.pdf)

42. FGD3 male participant - 9

43. United Nations, Peacebuilding, Sustaining Peace and Transitional Justice, “Transitional justice is vital in helping societies and governments to appropriately address the past. It helps in rebuilding fragmented relationships, transforming and empowering affected societies, and thereby preventing the recurrence of violations. In doing so, it is essential to ensuring sustainable peace. P.4.

44. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Transitional Justice and Human Rights,” accessed December 23, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice>

In her article for the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), *The Role of Justice in Peacebuilding: Lessons from Transitional Justice*, Dr. Laura Davis writes:

**Transitional justice initiatives are often designed and set up quickly. Public participation and consultation over the aims, scope, mandate and design of initiatives are nonetheless critical for public buy-in, credibility and legitimacy. Particular efforts may be necessary to ensure that the perspectives and needs of marginalised groups are taken into account. Processes that fail to address the different experiences of women and men and of particular population groups risk reinforcing rather than reducing structural violence, and may contribute to further division or violence in the future.**<sup>45</sup>

One of the main threats of peace in Dhuusamarreeb is revenge killing and retaliation, even if the victim has no direct or even indirect involvement in past conflicts and violence other than being a member of a clan. One male discussant in FGD 3 explained in detail who the cycle of violence and retribution affects and how it unsettles youth in Dhuusamarreeb:

**The fear of retaliation and revenge is a constant presence in the lives of the youth in the region. Whenever a member of a clan is killed, there is an underlying fear that it could be their turn next. It is the youth who both engage in acts of killing and live in constant fear of being targeted themselves. Tragically, many youths fall victim to targeted killings carried out in the name of clan affiliations, despite their innocence in any specific murder. In larger cities like Mogadishu, people may fear the presence of al-Shabaab. However, in places like Dhuusamarreeb, the fear is more centered around inter-clan conflicts. The youth arm themselves as a means of self-defense, knowing that revenge killings in the name of clan loyalty are a real and immediate threat.**

As the literature corroborates, unless transitional justice that address the atrocities of the past is set up, peacebuilding won't be possible or sustainable, and youth won't feel safe or partake in peacebuilding and community healing in an effective manner.

The focus group discussions in Dhuusamarreeb highlighted a critical need for a more inclusive approach to peacebuilding in Galmudug — one that actively involves youth in accountability processes and leverages transitional justice mechanisms to rebuild trust. One female participant in FGD 3 explained the challenges and opportunities in Galmudug and how young people could become agents of change:

**The youth possess an undeniable power that cannot be silenced. If they come together and form an inclusive organization with a clear vision, their opinions and voices would gain the respect they deserve. Currently, the youth are divided, and as a result, their individual opinions often go unnoticed and unheeded. However, by uniting and presenting a unified front, the youth can significantly contribute to resolving the conflicts in the region.**<sup>46</sup>

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45. ECDPM, "The Role of Justice in Peacebuilding: Lessons from Transitional Justice," accessed December 23, 2024, <https://ecdpm.org/work/peacebuilding-and-statebuilding-volume-4-issue-1-december-2014-january-2015/the-role-of-justice-in-peacebuilding-lessons-from-transitional-justice>

46. Female participant, FGD 3.

## Personal Impact of Clan Conflicts on Youth

The focus group discussions provided a stark look at how clan conflicts in Galmudug deeply affect the youth, burdening them with severe physical and emotional trauma. Youth often find themselves on the front lines. One participant noted: “Youth bear the heaviest burden of conflict, often losing their lives in fighting.”<sup>47</sup> The emotional toll is significant, as friendships and communities are torn apart, and women face increased risks of violence, including rape.<sup>48</sup> Displacement is a common consequence of these conflicts. Many youths are forced to flee their homes, leading to disrupted lives and uncertain futures. They face discrimination based on clan affiliations, even when seeking medical treatment. One youth said: “Youth are forced from their homes, leaving them with nowhere to sleep.”<sup>49</sup> This displacement, compounded by school closures and business shutdowns, further destabilizes their lives. Social structures are also deeply affected.

Clan conflicts can tear apart relationships, with elders disapproving of marriages between different clans. Women take on additional responsibilities as men avoid violence. Economically, many youths cannot pursue jobs or education. “When conflicts occur, the youth had to evacuate from their residence,” noted one participant.<sup>50</sup> The lack of educational opportunities perpetuates the cycle of conflict, as uneducated youth are more likely to become involved in violence.<sup>51</sup> Psychologically, the impact on youth is profound. The constant fear of retaliation and trauma from losing loved ones leave lasting scars. One young discussant also remarked: “The conflicts in Galmudug have severe psychological impacts on the youth.”<sup>52</sup> This trauma is exacerbated by their exclusion from conflict resolution processes, leaving them feeling powerless.

The gender analysis revealed significant differences in how young men and women experience and perceive the impacts of clan conflicts. Young men often discuss their direct involvement in fighting and the physical dangers they face. For example, one participant noted: “First, those who fight are the youth; mostly old people don’t kill each other.”<sup>53</sup> This highlighted the expectation placed on young men to engage in violent confrontations, contributing to their physical and psychological trauma.

Conversely, young women frequently emphasize the indirect but equally severe impacts of conflict.

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47. FGD1: “Youth bear the heaviest burden of conflict, often losing their lives in fighting. While elders may not be directly on the front lines, some believe their actions contribute to the start of these conflicts. Women are also increasingly vulnerable, tragically becoming victims of violence.”

48. A female participant stated: “As a youth, I can attest that these conflicts have profound physical and mental impacts. It is deeply distressing to witness young lives being lost due to disputes over resources like water and land. The conflicts have also led to a disturbing rise in cases of gender-based violence, with many girls falling victim to rape at the hands of armed clan militants who exploit the pretext of clan conflicts.”

49. A female participant from FGD1.

50. A female participant from FGD 2.

51. A discussant noted: “The youth play a significant role in the conflicts, largely due to the lack of access to education in the region. Uneducated individuals often find themselves caught up in conflicts and face difficulties in resolving disputes peacefully.”

52. Male, FGD 3 participant.

53. Male, FGD2 participant.

They describe increased responsibilities and the constant fear for their male relatives' safety. One young woman said: "Women and men are not the same when it comes to how they feel when going through such crises, at the side of women she doesn't have to worry, Oh! Things got worse, and you would get killed, but to make it worse, she worried that those who would take revenge would be going to kill her brother, her father, or her husband."<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the rise in gender-based violence during conflicts exacerbates their vulnerability.

The findings from the focus group discussions align with broader literature on the impacts of conflict on youth. Studies consistently highlight that youth are disproportionately affected by violence, experiencing severe disruptions to their education, economic stability, and psychological well-being. The World Bank report titled Youth as Agents of Peace Somalia reported: "In 2016 alone, there were over 7,200 reported cases of GBV. Given the fact that GBV is consistently underreported globally, and particularly in areas of conflict, this number likely represents a small proportion of GBV in Somalia."<sup>55</sup> UN reports also emphasize the necessity for inclusive peace processes that actively engage youth, recognizing their unique perspectives and experiences. These reports profile Somali youth who, despite witnessing violence, have become champions of peacebuilding, such as Abdiqani Osman Yusuf:

**"Abdiqani Osman Yusuf is a young man who has seen the horrors of war firsthand. Born in a rural area of Puntland, he witnessed violence, displacement, and killings as a child. He moved to Galkayo city for education, but found himself caught up in another conflict between Puntland and Galmudug, which claimed many lives. But Abdiqani did not give up on his dreams or his country. He continued his studies and graduated with a degree in economics from Galkayo Puntland State University. He also decided to dedicate his life to peacebuilding and youth engagement, believing that young people can make a difference for their future. He founded the Peacebuilding and Youth Engagement Center of Mudug, a youth-led organization that promotes dialogue and reconciliation among youth from both sides of the conflict. He also uses his writing skills to spread positive messages about peace on social media platforms."<sup>56</sup>**

## Societal Perceptions of Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

The focus group discussions revealed that societal perceptions of youth participation in peacebuilding efforts in Galmudug are complex, reflecting perceptions of both support and neglect. Both the National Reconciliation Framework and National Youth Policy advocate youth involvement in peacebuilding, and the focus group participants echoed this sentiment. For instance, one young woman observed: "Many in Somalia see the participation of young people in reconciliation efforts as a positive development."<sup>57</sup>

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54. Female, FGD 2 participant.

55. World Bank, Youth as Agents of Peace Somalia, April 2018, P.28, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/463921526414702925/pdf/126251-WP-P152600-PUBLIC-Youth-As-Agents-of-Peace-Somalia.pdf>

56. United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), "Somali Youth: The Voices of Peace and Hope," August 3, 2023, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/somali-youth-voices-peace-and-hope>

57. FGD 1.

Similarly, a young man noted: “The Somali community sees young people as key to stopping the spread of conflict. Their willingness to participate in reconciliation efforts is viewed as a positive step in the right direction.”<sup>58</sup> These statements suggest that some elders acknowledge the potential contributions of youth in mitigating violence and fostering peace.

However, the discussions also exposed significant societal and cultural barriers that hinder meaningful youth participation. Traditional norms and the dominance of elders often exclude youth from peace processes.<sup>59</sup> One young man highlighted this issue, saying: “In our society, our culture decides who is going to participate in the concerns of youth participation in solving clan clashes. Our elders will say to the youth, ‘You’re not capable of solving this, you were given birth during conflicts, therefore, you’ve no clue about participating in anything at all.’”<sup>60</sup> This reflects a broader cultural resistance to youth involvement, where elders are viewed as the primary arbiters of peace,<sup>61</sup> thereby undervaluing the contributions of the younger generation.

Some of the FGD participants indicated that their efforts in peacebuilding are not recognized or appreciated. One female participant said: “It is disheartening to note that the majority of people tend to view the youth working for peace in a negative light. Despite the fact that it is the youth who are actively striving for peace, they are often met with skepticism and resistance.”<sup>62</sup> This skepticism is compounded by the belief that individuals engaged in peacebuilding may be perceived as benefiting from the conflict rather than genuinely working towards resolution. The literature review supported these findings, emphasizing that while youth have the potential to play transformative roles in peacebuilding, they often face systemic barriers that limit their effectiveness. Studies indicated that youth engagement is crucial for sustainable peace, yet their contributions are frequently overshadowed by traditional power structures that prioritize elder authority.

A study conducted by the Horn Centre, a think tank based in Dhuusamarreeb, titled Mapping The Foundations Of Peace In Galmudug State, Somalia, stated: “The current selections and appointments for council memberships failed to include youth, women, and marginalized groups.”<sup>63</sup> Additionally, reports from the World Bank and the United Nations underscored the necessity for inclusive processes that recognize and harness the unique perspectives and energies of young people. To address these challenges, promoting cultural shifts that value the contributions of youth in peacebuilding is essential. This involves not only changing societal perceptions but also creating institutional mechanisms that ensure their inclusion.

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58. Ibid.

59. Abdiaziz Abukar Ahmed. Youth Participation in Peace-building in Somalia: Challenges and Opportunities. Horseed International University. “The Government failures and perceptions of exclusion are considered to be drivers of youth violent extremism in Somalia.” P. 131.

60. FGD 2.

61. One young female participant in FGD1 added these informal agreements between elders, “do not lead to lasting solutions.”

62. FGD 3.

63. Horn Centre, Mapping the Foundations of Peace in Galmudug State, Somalia, June 2023, 74, <https://horncenter.so/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/REPORT-IN-GALMUDUG-STATE-2023-V4-1.pdf>. The report also quotes a focus group discussant in Guriel: “A female participant decried the persistent exclusion of women in local governance structures, noting that women do not have a significant role in the local governance institutions due to the male bias that men should always be given priority and elders always monopolize seats to males. They disregard women’s role in peacebuilding and social cohesion.”



Establishing youth advisory councils at all levels—federal, state, and municipal—and integrating youth representatives into decision-making bodies could provide young people with platforms to voice their perspectives and actively participate in shaping peace and other related governance initiatives and undertakings in their communities.

## Barriers to Youth Participation in Peacebuilding

The focus group discussions revealed a range of barriers that impeded the active participation of youth in peacebuilding processes. These barriers, deeply rooted in socio-cultural and structural dynamics, highlighted the challenges faced by both young men and women in contributing to reconciliation efforts. A predominant theme across the discussions was the economic constraints that young people face. According to a 2022 study titled *Youth Unemployment and Security* by HIPS, “nearly 70 percent of young Somalis surveyed were unemployed. Among the participants of the study, unemployment was more pronounced in young women than men.”<sup>64</sup>

While youth possess the passion and energy to drive initiatives such as peacebuilding, they often lack the necessary funding to organize events, spread awareness campaigns, or travel to engage with their community. One male focus group participant emphasized: “Providing resources and funding opportunities can empower young people to become active agents of peace in their communities.”<sup>65</sup> This underscored the need for economic empowerment programs that provide financial support and vocational training to enable youth to contribute positively to their communities—something the Somali National Youth Policy also advocates.<sup>66</sup>

Traditional governance structures in Galmudug, dominated by elder clan leaders, significantly limit youth participation. Many respondents emphasized that elders hold all the power in decision-making processes, leaving youth voiceless and unable to contribute effectively. This exclusion is compounded by cultural norms that prioritize elder authority and marginalize the contributions of younger community members, particularly women. One young woman highlighted: “Girls are conspicuously absent from these meetings, which is a significant issue.”<sup>67</sup> This gendered exclusion further diminishes the roles of young women in public affairs and perpetuates a cycle of disenfranchisement.

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64. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies. *Youth Unemployment and Security: Prioritizing Jobs for Achieving Stability*. April 2022. Accessed at: <https://heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Final-Final-Youth-Unemployment-Report-April-10-English-Version.pdf>

65. FGD1 participant.

66. UNFPA, *The National Youth Policy of The Federal Government of Somalia*, March 17, 2018, <https://somalia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Somalia%20National%20Youth%20Policy%20Eng%20fa.pdf>.

67. Female participant, FGD 2.

The political landscape in Galmudug often prioritizes funding and support for elder-led initiatives and sidelines youth-led efforts. Additionally, the perception of youth as part of the problem rather than the solution hinders their involvement. One participant noted: “They are often perceived as part of the problem rather than being seen as part of the solution.” This negative perception, coupled with a lack of confidence among youth in their ability to address challenges, further limits their participation.

## Youth Collaboration with Peacebuilding Organizations

Several organizations that actively involve youth in their peace initiatives were identified during the FGDs including Elman Peace and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), which provide training and facilitate youth involvement, particularly in urban areas. Focus groups also highlighted organizations like Ururka Wakiilada Galmudug, Hayaan, Madasha Wadahadalka Bulshada, GRD, and Doon Center, which collaborate with the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Women’s Affairs, and Interior and Reconciliation to conduct awareness campaigns and other initiatives on the importance of peace.<sup>68</sup> These initiatives underscored the pivotal role of youth in disseminating peace messages and promoting reconciliation.

The Hayaan organization, which works exclusively with girls and collaborates with the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, exemplifies gender-focused peace efforts. Its work highlights the necessity of including young women in peacebuilding processes, addressing the unique challenges they face.<sup>69</sup>

Despite these positive examples, several challenges persist. FGDs revealed that many organizations mainly operate in urban areas, leaving rural regions neglected. This urban-rural disparity limits the reach of peace initiatives and leaves significant portions of the youth population underserved – particularly in rural communities where conflicts abound.

## Conclusion

The focus group discussions and analysis of youth involvement in peacebuilding efforts in Galmudug revealed a multifaceted situation with both challenges and opportunities. The insights gleaned from the FGDs and literature review including government policies and international and regional frameworks underscored the significant barriers that impede youth from fully participating in peacebuilding, including economic constraints, traditional governance structures, and societal perceptions that often marginalize young people, particularly women. Despite these challenges, there is a strong desire among the youth to engage in peace and reconciliation processes, as evidenced by their collaboration with various organizations and their advocacy for greater involvement in decision-making processes.

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68. Discussants in all three FGDs mentioned these organizations.

69. Female participant, FGD 2.



The discussions highlighted the complexity of the conflict in Galmudug, with al-Shabaab's influence being recognized yet often unspoken, possibly due to fear of retribution. The differing perspectives between male and female participants also pointed to the need for gender-sensitive approaches in peacebuilding, recognizing the unique challenges faced by young women in conflict-affected areas.

Finally, the findings of this study emphasized the importance of inclusive and widespread youth engagement in peacebuilding. Empowering youth through education, vocational training, financial support, and leveraging technology could significantly enhance their contributions to peace efforts. By addressing the barriers identified and fostering a culture that values the contributions of young people, stakeholders can build a more resilient and peaceful society in Galmudug.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance youth engagement in peacebuilding in Galmudug:

- 1. Economic Empowerment and Vocational Training:** Establish comprehensive economic empowerment programs that provide financial support, grants, and vocational training for youth. These programs should focus on enabling youth to start small businesses, participate in community development projects, and engage in peacebuilding initiatives, especially in rural areas where opportunities are limited. By addressing the economic constraints identified in the study, these programs can help mitigate one of the major barriers to youth participation.
- 2. Inclusion of Youth in Decision-Making Processes:** Create and institutionalize youth advisory councils at both national and federal member state levels, including Galmudug, to ensure that young people's voices are integrated into decision-making processes. These councils should have the authority to influence policy and governance, particularly in areas related to peace and security, ensuring that young people have a meaningful role in shaping the future of their communities.
- 3. Gender-Sensitive Peacebuilding Initiatives:** Develop and support peacebuilding programs that specifically address the unique challenges faced by young women in Galmudug. This includes creating safe spaces for women to participate in dialogue and decision-making, providing gender-specific training on conflict resolution, and ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are inclusive and equitable. These initiatives should also aim to combat gender-based violence, which was highlighted as a significant issue by female participants in the study. Rural youth organizations, conducting outreach programs that address the specific needs of rural communities, and ensuring that peace initiatives are not

4. **Expansion of Peacebuilding Initiatives to Rural Areas:** Strengthen and expand the reach of peacebuilding programs to rural areas, which are often the epicenters of conflict. This can be achieved by mobilizing resources to support confined to urban centers. The study's findings emphasize the importance of focusing on rural areas to address the root causes of conflict.
5. **Leverage Technology for Youth Engagement:** Utilize digital platforms and social media to engage youth in peacebuilding efforts. This includes creating online forums for discussion, launching social media campaigns to raise awareness about peace and reconciliation, and using digital storytelling to amplify the voices of young people. As noted in the study, technology can play a transformative role in reaching a wider audience and fostering a more informed and engaged youth population.
6. **Addressing al-Shabaab's Influence in Peacebuilding Efforts:** Develop strategies to safely address the influence of al-Shabaab in peacebuilding discussions without endangering participants. This could include creating secure environments for dialogue, integrating counter-extremism education into peacebuilding programs, and supporting community-led initiatives that resist al-Shabaab's coercion. The study indicated a reluctance to discuss al-Shabaab openly, highlighting the need for careful, strategic engagement on this issue.
7. **Public Awareness and Cultural Shifts:** Launch public awareness campaigns to shift societal perceptions of youth from being seen as passive victims or problems to active agents of change. These campaigns should focus on the positive contributions that youth can make to peacebuilding and reconciliation, challenging traditional norms that marginalize young people. The study's findings suggested that changing societal attitudes is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for youth participation in peace processes.

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