

# ASSESSMENT OF SOMALIA WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (1980-2018)





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The women's movement in Somalia has grown in leaps and bounds since the colonial period. President Siad Barre's military regime, which came into power in 1969, is credited with early policy changes in the advancement of women's rights. The military government's socialist experiments led it to support the establishment of the Somali Women's Democratic Organization (SWDO) to underscore its commitment to women's emancipation.

The regime introduced various progressive laws and policies for women, but gender disparities remained, particularly in the context of the contentious and conservative Islamic traditions. The enactment of the Family Law in 1975 partially guaranteed equal rights to inheritance in contradiction to the Sharia'h and customary laws. This prompted outrage among the

religious community. Unfortunately, following the execution of ten religious leaders involved in a protest against the law, the SWDO became tainted by an increasingly dictatorial regime. The regime widened the gender gap, resulting in a more conservative society that associated the women's movement with the increasingly ruthless president.

There is a notable absence of women in the higher levels of government. This is exacerbated by religious and cultural limitations on the role and status of women in Somali society. These challenges undermine their potential for political participation and leadership. Somali Women look into the future with hope as they assert feminine authority and control to win respect and equal rights as men, albeit gradually.

## Key Points

- The Women's empowerment movement in Somalia is related to the post-independence socialist policies adopted by the Siad Barre regime that collapsed in the early 1990s
- The recurrent political conflicts in Somalia have impeded women's free and structural participation in Somalia's development, while the statist feminist changes also ended with the Barre years.
- Somali diaspora women have, in particular, been at the forefront of remodeling women's empowerment strategies and resources.
- International stakeholders and the UN-backed AMISOM mission in Somalia are critical to the country's future stability and governance framework, including women's empowerment.

# BACKGROUND

Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO) was founded in 1977 by the government as the women's branch of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party (at its formation in 1976, it had a female membership of 66 per cent) to promote and initiate progressive policies and programs for the advancement of the Somali women. Thus the SWDO was the earliest national vehicle for policy change concerning women, such as participation in public office and the campaign to abolish female circumcision. The credibility of SWDO grew increasingly tarnished by the late 1980s as, along with the rest of the heavily centralized government structure, it was infected by clan patronage, corruption, and inefficiency.

Despite tremendous changes, the situation of women changed only minimally. Some authors have argued that women enjoyed even less independence during the Siadd Barre revolutionary government from the 1960s to 1991 and that gender equality was only tackled rhetori-

cally. In the years of the tragedy of civil war and state collapse, Somali women had to bear the brunt of the fighting after the Barre regime's exit. They became actively involved in armed conflict as combatants, supporters of their men, and peacemakers. Ironically, as women also took over more economic responsibilities, they fought their way into more equitable gender relations, including politics.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the state in 1991, women continued to be absent from the country's political leadership and public decision-making processes and lacked access to formal justice mechanisms. According to the UNDP, the inequalities suffered by Somali women and girls, who comprise more than 50 per cent of the population, are key factors contributing to Somalia's extremely poor human development index. But the women, through their various efforts, are determined to change this state of affairs.

# PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study is part of the UN Women's efforts to re-energize the women's movement. As such, assessing the women's movement situation in a select number of countries will enable the UN Women to target its investments more effectively in realizing the objective of strengthening women organizing and other measures to build independent women's solidarity efforts. Therefore, this study helps identify opportunities for UN Women to leverage existing work and undertake interventions based on practical and more impactful cost-benefit analysis.

The Study was launched to assess factors affecting the performance and operations of the Women's Movement and how the African experience measures up against current global and national practices on regulatory requirements, good CSO governance, and citizen participation models. It covered information

regarding capacity development requirements of the women's movement; core costs; performance management, including monitoring and evaluation systems; beneficiary satisfaction; institutional management; overall design and operational features; and any internal governance risks. It was also to review the relational dynamics, including power dynamics within the women's movement in the select countries and between women's organizations and feminist organizations in particular. Finally, the assessment was also required to examine the national political economy and CSO enabling environment, accessibility of state and policy structures, and overall coordination and partnership between women's rights organizations, feminist platforms, and the broader civil society working on women's rights.

# METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out using a desk review of available literature on the women's movement in Somalia. The consultant reviewed various literature compiled in recent years by independent researchers and academicians on the subject. Indeed, as a country struggling out of conflicts and socio-political instability, there has been some good interest in scholarship on the experience of Somalia and its citizens in rebuilding the country.

Other institutions, including development aid organizations and bilateral donors, humanitarian support agencies, and democracy-minded support programs focused on Somalia, have contributed to building a

knowledge platform with project research information and publications on Somalia. Usefully, some of the available publications touched on the situation of women and gender interventions in the country as stakeholders come together to put the country on the path of sustainable development, in which women's participation in development is recognized and encouraged. Literature emanating from such development efforts has formed part of the materials reviewed for the study.

# FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## County Context

Since the events of 1991/92 break out of violence in Somalia with the overthrow of President Siadd Barre's regime, the country has remained fragmented. Besides the breakaway Republic of Somaliland in the northwest, several de facto independent areas exist. Nevertheless, a Federal government in Mogadishu is headed by a democratically elected president. The AU-backed government has instituted new security apparatus –the Somali National Army and the Police – with the support of AMISOM. Still, the country remains threatened by numerous Al Shaabab terrorist attacks<sup>1</sup>. Autonomous Somaliland has its capital city in Hargeisa and is more peaceful. It also boasts an army, its currency, and its legal system.

The fact that Somalia has not had an effective central government since the fall of the Siad Barre itself continues to present insurmountable challenges to the women's movement in the country. The planned exit of the AMISOM force will further weaken the Mogadishu-based government. Under AU/Resolution 2372, AMISOM was set to withdraw 1,000 troops by 31 December 2017 but increase its police component by 500. More uniformed personnel are assigned to leave by 30 October 2018, although details will depend on conditions in Somalia<sup>2</sup>. As a result of the conflict,

around 1.4 million people, primarily women, and children, are currently displaced within the country after being forced to flee their homes<sup>3</sup>.

Somalis are nearly 100 per cent Sunni Muslims and overwhelmingly belong to Sunni Islam. Patriarchy is deeply entrenched in Somalia, endorsed by the Islamic teachings on women as subjects of male dominion. In Somali society, women not only belong to their father's clans but also form close ties with their husband's clans since their children belong to the clan of their husbands. This brings them to complex and sometimes fluid clan alliances and political dynamics. Indeed, the women of Somalia bear an unequal brunt of the hardships occasioned by the years of conflict, poverty, and clan-based culture, which promotes an overbearing male hierarchy and authority.

According to the UN Women, there is a notable absence of women at the higher levels of government. This is exacerbated by religious and cultural limitations on the role and status of women in Somali society. The women are either excluded from formal decision-making and asset ownership or operate through the patriarchal lens. These challenges undermine their potential for political participation and leadership.

# OVERVIEW OF THE MOVEMENT

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*“We still get men walking up to us and telling us that it’s against our culture and religion to try and be men. But we are not trying to be men, you see. We are simply standing up for ourselves as women and asking to be allowed rights which already rightfully belong to us,”*  
- Zainab, Somali Gender Empowerment Movement, in a media interview with New Vision, Uganda, November 2016

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As seen already, the Siadd Barre regime had its own version of the priorities in women’s empowerment and attempted to give women equal protection on personal rights. Today’s overview of the women’s movement in Somalia draws its reference from the baseline under the Barre years<sup>1</sup>. In the current political configuration, Somali women remain marginalized. The women would simply be seen as caregivers in the family. They would also naturally form numbers of public members in the country’s educational institutions, businesses, and NGOs. However, their representation in government - both at federal and local levels - is still low.

Operating within very different political environments, Somali women have attempted to articulate their sense of women’s agenda based on the social and political reality. In part, the women fight for the rights guaranteed to them under the Islam faith, countering the male monopoly of the interpretation of Islam. Women’s Movements, like the Sixth Clan, have been fighting to consolidate women’s rights collectively and independently, regardless of clan affiliation.

The Somali election model is based on the delegates system but has long since promised universal suffrage for women. In the first stage, the House of traditional leaders (135) selects delegates to conduct the elections in which 275 MPs and 54 senators are elected to sit in the lower and upper houses. In the 2017 Somali elections, the 30 per cent quota reserved for female candidates was not achieved in the long run. After the elections, female representation only increased to 25 per cent<sup>4</sup>, although the figure is still 10 per cent higher than the 14 per cent achieved in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Outside the political

arena, women have also collectively organized to tackle war-related community-based problems and, in the process, laid the foundations for a new women’s rights movement.

Many women are involved in social activities supporting their empowerment activities. They have advocated for equity in education, peace and conflict resolution, healthcare, and fighting against harmful cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriages. Also, the women take children to school and involve themselves in income-generating activities to fight poverty and financial dependence. The prominent Somali women in the diaspora have also made significant contributions in holding the country together financially through remittance and other middle-sized businesses<sup>6</sup>.

In Somalia, women are distinct peacemakers. Somali women have been at the forefront of actions to assist vulnerable groups affected by the war, including the wounded, the starving, and the displaced. In clan-based forums, they have brought together different groups to resolve differences in the search for peace. Inspired by their involvement in the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, Somali women built on their growing experience cooperating for peace to establish the Coalition for Grassroots Women Organizations (COGWO) as a peacebuilding platform that united women’s voices and efforts. This strengthened the cross-clan dialogues by the women. By linking gender-specific roles in clan systems, they could influence the structural base of power relations and link it to institutional peace-making initiatives.

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1 Acknowledging women’s role in national independence and the revolution, on International Women’s Day, 8th March 1972, Siad Barre publicly declared that women “should attain full emancipation in all aspects of life,” and that the “Revolution guarantees such rights and decrees laws to this effect.”



Peace is a continuing challenge in Somalia, but the different women's organizations also work to support victims of violence, making significant contributions to the peacebuilding process. The range of peacebuilding activities that Somali women are involved in can be illustrated by the following examples:

- i). Mariam Hussein, the widow of the human rights lawyer Ismail Jumale, founded the Ismail Jumale Centre for Human Rights to monitor and record human rights violations so that perpetrators could be brought to justice once proper institutions were in place.
- ii). The IIDA Women Development Organization of Merca, founded by Halima Abdi Arush, a former teacher, headmistress, and education inspector who lost her husband and many family members in the Somali conflict, initially supported internally displaced populations from the disputes. In the mid-1990s, it started initiatives to disarm and retrain young militiamen. In a direct challenge to the warlords, the programme required militiamen to commit to refrain from violent acts and to hand over their weapons. In return, they were given tools, training, and start-up capital. Some 156 militiamen were demobilized, and their rifles melted down.

In 2007, it initiated the Somali Women's Agenda (SWA), linking Somali women in the diaspora with those in the country. Based in Mogadishu and with branches in several Somali regions, its members promote peace and advocate for women's appointment in local councils and regional administrations.

- i). Another organization, the network Women Pioneers for Peace and Life, known as HINNA (Haweenka Horseedka Nabadda), was formed in 2003 by former women fighters. They became 'peace pioneers', organizing peace campaigns and using the respect they earned as fighters to intervene with militia and warlords to diffuse tensions at critical times in Mogadishu.

Many women were involved in mediating between the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and some of the warlords. Such initiatives have attracted support from international donors who have seen civil society pressure groups as an essential counterweight to the faction leaders, warlords, and clan elders filling seats at internationally-sponsored peace talks.

# HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

In pre-independence history, women contributed substantially to the struggles for Somalia's freedom through fighter movements in the 1940s and 50s. Organizations such as the Somali Youth League (SYL) had women members. As a result, Women were also imprisoned, tortured, or killed<sup>7</sup>. Women mobilized and recruited new members for these movements, promoted and raised awareness, collected funds and membership fees, and secured housing for movement members.

The Somali women's movements emerged out of humanitarian necessity during the prolonged civil war, during which women provided shelter and medical care to the combatants, supplied clean water in war-affected communities, and restored destroyed schools. According to Nakaya (2003), women's representation at the peace table in Somalia resulted in the expression of political commitment to women's empowerment in the Transitional National Councils (TNC) and the institutional framework of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), which provided a 12 per cent quota for women.

Women's groups also initiated an inter-clan dialogue for peace, mobilizing their access to the political elite through humanitarian and community work. Women delegates participated in the May 2000 Somali National Conference in Arta, Djibouti, which ended the early phase of the post-Barre conflicts. A woman was even appointed a Vice Chair of the conference! Subsequently, women vigorously pursued a 12 per cent quota in the

245-member Transitional National Assembly (TNA), calling themselves the "sixth clan". They were granted twenty-five seats in the TNA to be equally divided among the four major clans and the Clan Alliance.

In subsequent peace agreement meetings, women made more gains in formal participation in the talks since they also got international support for inclusion. In the Transitional Federal Charter, the quota of parliamentary seats allocated to women in the larger Transitional Federal Government (TFG) parliament became 12 per cent. Unfortunately, political leaders have since failed to uphold this number, and wherever a woman vacates her seat, the respective clans have filled them with a male candidate.

In the decentralized state model of the transitional government, most decision-making authority remains local within each clan. Clans use a mix of traditional and Islamic dispute resolution discourse. Women are usually excluded from these decision-making mechanisms, and the TNC does not stipulate gender equality in clan systems or regional councils. In judicial cases, elders and religious specialists are called upon to mediate negotiations between conflicting parties. Negotiations often involve references to existing customary law and legal precedent, all forums that continue to devalue women. The kinship system is principally patrilineal and thereby favors the male. For instance, when inter-communal ties are at stake, a woman may be offered as a spouse to the offended party.

These events show that women were equal partners in getting Somalia back on its feet after the war. According to Faiza Jama (2008) ;

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***"The war against Siyad Barre's regime in the 1980s was seen as a just cause by many Somalis, and many women participated in the struggle to end the dictatorship. Those who earned respect from participation later used this to demand concessions from warlords and militias. Several became leading members of civil society and the women's movement and became engaged in peacebuilding".***

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The political history of Somalia also demonstrates that women have not been allowed to play high-profile roles in Somalia politics. No Somali woman has ever held the position of President or Prime Minister. However, they had held ministerial positions occasionally and even a position as high as deputy Prime Minister. In those instances, wherever women held relatively prominent roles in politics, they faced intimidation, ostracism, and even threats, as in the case of Fawzia Yusuf Adam, who became the first Somali woman to hold the position of Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister<sup>8</sup>.

The African Union backs the current Federal government in Somalia. The UN has also sent a special political assistance mission to Somalia known as UNSOM. Mandated by the [Security Council Resolution 2102](#) to support the Federal Government of Somalia and AMISOM as appropriate, UNSOM is to provide strategic policy advice on peacebuilding and state building in Somalia, including governance, security sector reform, and the rule of law. It should specifically help build the capacity of the Federal Government of Somalia to promote respect for human rights and women's empowerment, as well as prevent conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The latter responsibilities of UNSOM go a long way to demonstrate that the plight of women in Somalia is getting positive attention globally<sup>9</sup>.

Women organizations such as Somali Women's Development Organization (SWDO) which had contributed to many advancements at the public and political level, had many of their achievements quickly reversed when the civil war erupted. The different forms of

administration that emerged in other parts of Somalia since 1991 were almost clan-based and male-dominated<sup>10</sup>. Generally, women's rights have, for the most part, been a non-existent or marginal item. However, across the country, women have maintained the struggle for their rights to be recognized and respected.

Despite a requirement of 30 per cent women representation in all political institutions, the Somali Parliament's two Chambers have been unable to attain this goal. Not being included in the decision-making process reinforces the belief on the part of some that women have no place in politics. It means their agenda is often not on the table. As a result, insufficient resources are allocated to issues that affect women specifically despite women carrying the burden of post-conflict transformation in the protracted civil war in Somalia. Consequently, according to UNDP, Somali women lag behind men in almost all the human development indicators.

The electoral model in Somalia has ensured a system that places women's elections at the mercy of male clan elders. During the 2017 elections, the Minister for Women and Human Rights Development, in response to the powerlessness of women to implement the 30 per cent gender policy of the federal government, was reported to say, 'All that women have is a promise that the quota will be filled. They have no one to hold accountable if they are overlooked<sup>11</sup>. Inevitably if Somali women are to overcome the barriers that impede their advancement, issues of clan structure, lack of resources, and societal and cultural beliefs must be addressed.

# ACTORS

To secure women's rights in Somalia, a list of constituencies must be brought into focus. They include civil society, militia warlords and their supporters, business people, elders, and the media. Some of these actors are analyzed in detail below;

Women's quest for inclusion, good governance, and justice in Somalia is supported by NGO groups and initiatives by the large diaspora of Somali women. One diaspora group, the Somali Women Circle Network (SWCN), a Canadian online network, supports equality and women's constitutional rights in Somalia's national priorities. It supports the emancipation of Somali women and promotes gender equality and constitutional rights for the future of Somalia. This adds to the ongoing social movements among women inside and outside Somalia. Through these efforts, many debates about gender equality percolate the minds of all Somali women, especially those in the Diaspora.

Somali NGO groups have worked with women on diverse subjects such as peacebuilding and conflict transformation, capacity building, and humanitarian services. Examples of NGOs include the African Centre for Transformative Leadership (ACTIL).

The situation of women in Somalia has attracted international attention from development agencies and think tank groups to facilitate spaces for women's organizing and gender planning. Some main approaches have been supporting women's initiatives

with relevant capacity-building support to design homemade solutions for their under-development. For instance, the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), with support from the Research Council of Norway and Somalia Stability Fund, founded the 'Gender in Politics in Somalia: Access and Influence in a post-conflict state' (GENSOM) project aimed to bring together women and men interested in the Somali women's civic and political engagement.

With the project, an increasing number of Somalis, mainly in the diaspora, can learn and contribute to the reconstruction of Somalia using the knowledge about the contribution of the women's movements in Somalia on the reconstruction.

Finally, the initiatives have attracted support from international donors who have seen civil society pressure groups as an essential counterweight against local institutions that drag down the women's agenda. One of these, the EU Somali Stability Fund, continues to support the strengthening of women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes in Somalia through strengthening the role of women's organizations, supporting women in the private sector, and a job placement scheme for female graduates across Somalia. The contributing EU partner states such as Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, and Italy are essential actors in shaping the role of Somali women in the future. Other players are UN Women, the AMSOM partners, IRI, etc.

## Constituents

- Aid and humanitarian agencies
- Women as peacemakers
- Women and the family

# OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Women's leadership and organizing in Somalia face many hurdles, including opposition from clan elders and community members. Society is perverse to the cultural belief that women cannot take up key leadership roles. In some instances, The views are inspired by specific Islamic religious interpretations. Social stigma attaches to women in political leadership, leading to a lack of women empowerment and low self-esteem. Additionally, women are not allowed to move freely in public places as their rightful place is at home. This is a limitation to their capacity to mobilize.

The unpredictable security situation in Somalia has done little to advance institutional reform and gender equality in rebuilding the Somali state. The prolonged civil conflict has led to the spread of religious fundamentalism. More militant, conservative, and politicized than traditional Somali Muslim beliefs, new versions of Islam are increasingly introduced into local Islamic courts, with harsh punishments and strict standards that govern women's behavior.

The introduction of Islamic Sharia law is also seen as a measure to curtail widespread looting and robbery, throwing into the mix new fears that would endear it to uncritical public support. With the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia, Somali women are also overburdened by family caring roles as they work to care for their families.

In the socio-economic environment, Somalia has exceptionally high maternal mortality rates, rape, female genital mutilation, violence against women, and child marriage. The formal, clan-based and sharia-based legal systems restrict women's access to justice. They face limited access to economic resources and assets. This is compounded by women's low participation in politics and decision-making spheres.

Women have a weak position in the labor market and represent a large proportion of people in vulnerable employment. Although they have made some gains, expanding into employment and livelihood sectors traditionally held by men, as more women assume responsibility for household income generation, this is still low. Financial constraints are a barrier that prevents women from participating in leadership positions. Compared to their male counterparts, many women in Somalia do not own property or businesses. Many women have limited education and few options for income-generating activities. As a result, they are generally economically disadvantaged.

Finally, violence against women and girls remains high in Somalia, with displaced women and girls targeted. Female circumcision or FGM and rape constitute some dominant examples of violence against women in Somalia. These factors describe the prevailing situation facing women in the country.

# WAYS OF OPERATING/METHODS OF WORK

Some groups have organized conferences for Somali activists for women's rights and representatives of policymaking organizations to discuss the future of Somalia. These forums would mainly explore the life, power, and influence of Somali Women, their involvement in women's welfare and politics, and how to make the future better for them. A prominent example of forums on the subject is the Somali Forum held in London, England, in February 2012.

The conferences may be about taking stock of the resilience and strength of Somali women, whether in the Diaspora or in the Horn of Africa as platforms to exchange knowledge, make Somali women's issues visible, and help the Somali women organizations build synergy. In 2016, for example, a Somali Diaspora dialogue forum was held with the Prime Minister of Somalia, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali, in Canada on issues relating to gender equality. The prime minister then assured participants that the government would do its best to make sure that women's equality is addressed.

Recent developments include the Somali Ministry of women Development and Family Welfare opening a Women's Centre in Mogadishu to provide women and young girls with skills and training to better their

lives. The center programs and the ministry's radio broadcast programmes on women's issues are amongst state-backed measures to tackle women's urgent challenges, such as FGM, and to meet other gender concerns, such as health constraints facing mothers in the country. According to the former minister, the government planned to establish a more significant women's center in the city to provide women with primary education, further vocational courses, and counseling services. It also intended to create an emergency shelter for abused women with nowhere to run to<sup>12</sup>.

Some approaches have also encouraged panel discussions on Somali, especially within the diaspora community. Speakers may be prompted to discuss views on Somali women's history and critical contributions, for example, on one occasion and another theme at another meeting, depending on the circumstances of the conveners. In sum, stakeholders see this as a suitable method of harnessing views on rebuilding the country.

Research on the situation of Somali women is variedly articulated as a method of engagement with women in the country. There have been various studies on the role of women in Somalia, their contributions to society, and their success stories.

# MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACTS

Other sections of this report have alluded to some of the barriers. They include opposition from clan leaders, cultural beliefs that women cannot take up key leadership roles, the social stigma associated with women in political leadership, lack of women empowerment leading to low self-esteem and low self-confidence, and lack of support from community members and clan elders. Additionally, women are not allowed to move freely in public places as their rightful place is at home.

Somali society is changing and becoming more tolerant and supportive of women's political leadership. Somali women had contributed to many development activities in the country; their active participation was seen as being against the cultural norms that expect a woman to stay home. Cultural chauvinism seems to ride against their achievements. However, there was also a general perception that compared to men, women are weak and inferior and cannot make independent decisions without the assistance of men. Women in Somalia have

actively participated in national, regional, and local political leadership.

There are cultural challenges that Somali women face, such as society's perception of women- as a lesser sex. Somali women's contribution is unrecognized, under-valued, and under-utilized. Somali women's role has also been downplayed in decision-making, resulting in gender disparity and systematic discrimination against women. Exclusion of women from the national processes directly discriminates against women and deprives them of engagement in leadership roles. This needs to be addressed to increase women's participation and representation in all decision-making processes in Somalia. Many factors, including clan, region, and other factors, will continue to determine these changes.

Below is a profile<sup>2</sup> of notable female political leaders that have effectively made their contribution to Somali society;

Name	Position Held	Impact in Society
<b>Fawzia Yusuf Haji Adan</b>	Was a Foreign Affairs Minister and, simultaneously, Deputy Prime from November 2012 to January 2014.	She made many changes in her ministry. She was the founder of Hargeisa University, the first university in Somaliland.
<b>Dr. Maryam Qassim</b>	Served as the Minister for Human Development and Public Services of Somalia from November 2012 to January 2014	As the minister, she assisted many young children through her initiative 'Go to School,' after leaving the government, she became a health advocate for women against Fistula.
<b>Mrs. Halima Yarey</b>	Human rights crusader and the elected Chairperson of the Technical Selection Committee (TSC) – Somalia's Independent Electoral Commission. since July 2015.	She has been a role model and inspired many young women and girls in Somalia.
<b>Hawa Adan</b>	Anti-Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and education activist	A vocal campaigner for education and women's rights, particularly opposing female genital mutilation (FGM)
<b>Hawa Tako</b>	Freedom fighter and a prominent early 20th-century Somali nationalist.	Her life influenced many people in Somalia, particularly the nationalist Somali Youth League (SYL) political party, which has produced key politicians in Somalia.
<b>Late Saado Ali Warsame (b. 1950– d. 23 July 2014)</b>	Politician and renowned musician	She used her music to criticize the government and social injustices.
<b>Asha Gelle Dirie</b>	Founder of the Asha Gelle Foundation (TAG Foundation), current Puntland Minister of Women Development and Family Affairs, and former Chairperson of the National Independent Constitutional Review Commission	She is an education advocate and has created opportunities for students to access scholarships to further their studies.
<b>Mama Halima</b>	Puntland Politician and Poet	She has successfully used her music to influence society and injustices
<b>Edna Adan</b>	Was a Foreign Affairs Minister in the Somaliland region from 2003 to 2006	She was known for her activism against female genital mutilation. She built hospitals and trained a lot of nurses.

At the international level, some of the activities of the women's movement have also won traction. For example, the Federal Government of Somalia signed a Joint Communiqué with the UN to end the widespread sexual violence in Conflict in Somalia in London in May 2013.

A year later, in advance of the End Sexual Violence Summit in London in June 2014, with the support of the UN and the UK, it developed the National Action Plan on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict (NAP/SVC)<sup>13</sup>.



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Somali women play culturally critical economic roles in farming, herding, and business but within the men's strict cultural dominance. It can also be noted that Somali society is changing and becoming more tolerant and supportive of women's political leadership. Somali women have contributed to many development activities in the country, and their active participation benefits society as opposed to the cultural norms that expect a woman to stay home. In recent years, women's contribution to other public roles is slowly getting attention, although they remained downplayed.

Women continue to struggle for fundamental rights and political recognition. They have demonstrated their quest for equality in all aspects of their lives, even though they have also shown resilience in the face of the numerous challenges they face in gender mainstreaming. The collapse of the state in Somalia has been accompanied by the rise of women's assertion of mandates in rebuilding the new country's social, economic and even political spheres. This can be said to be a revolution borne out of necessity, but at best, whether it will eventually lead to more just gender relations remains to be seen in the long run.

Women are capable leaders and can deliver as expected. In building the women's movement in Somalia, it is critical to pay attention to the following recommendations;

- i). lobby/advocacy targeting decision-makers and those in power to mainstream gender issues in Somalia
- ii). Create affirmative programmes targeting the entrepreneurial potential of women to build their assets base, skills, and even access to financial services. Strategic partnership with the local private sector may help with the activity.
- iii). Enhance the capacity of Somali women and gender advocates to influence peacebuilding and reconstruction in the county.
- iv). Education is vital to a better society. There is a need to educate Somali girls to give them a better chance to participate in political leadership in the future.
- v). Recognize the influential contributions of Somali women in the country's leadership within both public and political organizations, and promote women's broad participation in public and private enterprises.
- vi). More is required for the implementation and accountability of gender equality.
- vii). Accept Somali women's involvement in all leadership roles within the Somali government without cultural or gender biases that render their contributions to the country's affairs.
- viii). Engage in social, political, and cultural awareness campaigns to recognize Somali women's practical and potential contributions in all aspects of their country's political, social and cultural development.
- ix). Develop a legal framework to regulate the implementation of customary law.
- x). Build the capacity of Somali women political leaders and equip women with tools and skills to ensure their political participation.
- xi). Reform the Somali's indirect electoral model to ensure universal suffrage for women.

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# ENDNOTES

1. According to reports, Al Shabaab aim to overthrow the Somali government and impose its own harsh interpretation of Islamic law. It has killed thousands of Somali civilians in a decade-long insurgency. In October, 2017 more than 500 people were killed in twin bomb blasts in Mogadishu. Those attacks were the deadliest since al Shabaab began an insurgency in 2007. See <http://www.africanews.com/2018/02/25/death-toll-from-somalia-blasts-rises-to-45-amisom-explains-clash-with-gov-t/>
2. See analysis report by Washington Post, USA, Somalia's African Union mission has a new exit strategy. But can troops actually leave? in [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/30/somalias-african-union-mission-has-a-new-exit-strategy-but-can-troops-actually-exit/?utm\\_term=.a5554e31130c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/30/somalias-african-union-mission-has-a-new-exit-strategy-but-can-troops-actually-exit/?utm_term=.a5554e31130c)
3. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/somalia>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/08/somali-presidential-election-won-mohamed-abdullahi-mohamed>
5. <http://mgafrika.com/article/2016-09-25-somali-elections-much-at-stake-for-gender-representation>
6. Report on International Women's Day Conference: Somali Women: "making the margins livable"- March 08, 2015 Ottawa, Ontario, <http://somalIWomenscircle.org/pr/>
7. <http://somalIWomenscircle.org/pr/>
8. <http://life-peace.org/hab/somalias-recent-election-gives-somali-women-a-glimmer-of-hope/>
9. <https://unsom.unmissions.org/women-protection>
10. <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/womens-movements-somalia/>
11. Quoting Zahra Mohamed Ali Samata, Minister for Women and Human Rights Development in <http://theconversation.com/somali-elections-how-women-still-fight-for-political-space-in-african-polls-73213>
12. See article by [Maryam Qasim](#), Somalia's women's minister, (17/6/2011) [The women of Somalia are living in hell](#) in <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/jun/17/women-somalia-hell-worst-world>
13. See <http://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/somalia> and <https://unsom.unmissions.org/women-protection>



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