

# REPORT ON THE ASSESSMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS IN SOMALIA

Towards an Early Warning, Monitoring and Response  
Platform to Prevent Violence against Women in Elections





# CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>iv</b>
<hr/>	
<b>1.0. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Somalia’s political context	1
1.2. Somali women’s political participation in parliaments and ministerial positions	2
1.3. Electoral violence overview	2
1.4. Background to this report	4
1.5. Objectives of the study	4
1.6. Discerning violence against women in elections	5
<hr/>	
<b>2.0. Methodology of the assessment</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. Methods for data collection, unit of analysis and population	6
2.1.1. Consultations for support for the assignment	6
2.1.2. Literature review	6
2.1.3. Key informant interviews and online discussions	7
2.2. Sampling	7
2.3. Challenges	7
<hr/>	
<b>3.0. Findings</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1. Evidence of violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections and existence of early warning systems in Somalia	8
3.1.1. Violence against women in the public sphere	8
3.1.2. Violence against women in elections within the family	9
3.2. Potential risks of violence against women in elections, opportunities for response and key actors	9
3.2.1. Potential risks of violence against women in elections	11
3.2.2. Opportunities for responding to violence against women in elections	13
3.3. Key actors in early warning and response platforms to violence against women in elections in Somalia	17

<b>3.4.</b>	<b>Relevant examples and lessons learned from similar countries that have previously had an electoral system that focused on the monitoring and prevention of violence against women in elections</b>	<b>20</b>
3.4.1.	Raising awareness of violence against women in elections through campaigns	21
3.4.2.	Election day and polling arrangements to prevent family voting	21
3.4.3.	Working with police and security forces on training initiatives to combat violence against women in elections	22
3.4.4.	Women's situation room	23
<hr/>		
<b>4.0.</b>	<b>Suggested way forward in setting up a platform that will work with key stakeholders to address all forms of electoral violence in the upcoming elections</b>	<b>24</b>
<hr/>		
<b>5.0.</b>	<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>29</b>

# ABBREVIATIONS

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
ASWJ	Ahlu Sunna WalJama'a
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil society organization
EMB	Election management body
FGM	Female genital mutilation
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal member state
GBV	Gender-based violence
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIEC	National Independent Electoral Commission
SIEIT	State-level Indirect Electoral Implementation Team
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSOM	United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against women
VAWE	Violence against women in elections
VAWP	Violence against women in politics
WSR	Women's Situation Room

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This assessment of violence against women in elections was supported by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) Somalia Programme and funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The main objectives were to assess the relevance and applicability of the development of an election-specific mechanism to monitor violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections and to determine if relevant early warning systems exist in Somalia; to draw relevant examples and lessons learned from similar countries that have previously had an electoral system that focused on the monitoring and prevention of election violence, with a focus on women; and to suggest the way forward in setting up a platform that will work with key stakeholders to address all forms of electoral violence in the upcoming elections.

**Methodology:** How women's empowerment is perceived in an assessment context can be highly unpredictable, given the prevailing social, political, security, religious and cultural contexts. The assessment methodology was premised on the fluidity of the issue of violence against women in Somalia and emphasized the study participants' experiences and how they construct their view of the reality of violence against women in elections in Somalia. During the literature review, the research endeavoured as far as possible to obtain anecdotal statistics pertaining to violence against women in Somalia in order to distinguish between violence against women in general and violence against women in elections. Primary information was gathered through interviews with selected individuals with

in-depth knowledge and experience of women, peace and security, and leadership in south and central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland.

**Political context:** Somalia continues to tackle both governance and political leadership challenges, which reflect a political situation characterized by major upheavals and a deepening rift between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states (FMSs). At the same time, political developments offer opportunities to continue advocating for the promotion of women's political rights in this context. For example, there is hope that the passing of National Electoral Bill in February 2020 will lead to one-person, one-vote elections in Somalia, despite failure to achieve this to date. Leaders from the international community have observed that such elections could represent a historic milestone on the country's long road back to security, stability and prosperity,<sup>1</sup> although progress is constantly being thwarted by political stakeholders at FGS and FMS levels.

Although the passing of the National Electoral Bill, which is yet to be implemented, is an important step, it does not guarantee that 30 per cent of parliamentary seats will be set aside for women. Article 23.4 of the bill obligates political parties to ensure that 30 per cent of nominated candidates are women, but this is not sufficient to guarantee adequate 30% representation of women in parliament. According to experts in the Integrated Electoral Support Group of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),<sup>2</sup> it is very unlikely that women's representation will reach even the current level of 24 per cent that followed the general

1 Remarks by James Swan, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), during a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) meeting in February 2020. United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. "Somalia's 2020 Elections Will Be Historic Milestone on Long Journey Back to Security, Stability, Special Representative Tells Security Council." Accessed 4 August 2020. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sc14120.doc.htm>.

2 UNDP. n.d. *Initial Assessment of the 2016 Electoral Process for the Somali Parliament*. Report in preparation

election of 2016 if measures are not put in place to achieve the 30% quota for women. In the experts' opinion, the only way to secure a quota of 30 per cent of women in parliament is to set out in law which seats will be reserved for women and to obligate parties to nominate women for those constituencies.

The National Electoral Bill stipulates that political parties must ensure that at least 30 per cent of their parliamentary candidates are women.<sup>3</sup> However, it remains the responsibility of the parliament of the Federal Republic of Somalia to determine the most appropriate mechanism by which to ensure that the quota of women parliamentarians set out in the New Electoral Bill is achieved, and to implement such a mechanism by issuing a regulation.<sup>4</sup> Following basic guiding principles agreed on by political parties participating in national elections, candidates and electoral stakeholders must respect the requirement to meet the quota for women.<sup>5</sup> Article 12(1) of the electoral bill relates to elections to the two houses of the federal parliament and guarantees that the results of the election process of both houses shall reflect the balance of different communities in the country (women, youth, minorities, people with special needs and Somali clans) in accordance with Articles 64(3) and (72)(c) of the constitution.<sup>6</sup>

**Discerning violence against women in elections:** Violence against women in elections is a threat to the integrity of the electoral process. Such violence “prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights, both in public and private spaces. It is driven by gender-specific motivations and discrimination, especially as women challenge traditional roles

and engage in politics.”<sup>7</sup> Somali women leaders believe that perpetrators of violence against women in elections in Somalia could be reacting to women’s deviation from traditional gender roles, which is perceived as threatening male-dominated and clan-based power structures. Women are subjected to violence in an attempt to deter them from standing as candidates, occupying political office, advocating for the 30 per cent women’s quota and exercising freely the adult franchise.

**Evidence of violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections:** This assessment established, through interviews with study participants, that violence against women in elections is prevalent in Somalia. Furthermore, the study found no evidence of the existence of any early warning systems or strategies to respond specifically to violence against women in elections in Somalia.

However, the assessment confirmed, from a review of the literature and interviews, that violence against women in elections is widespread in Somalia and that women participating in politics were victims of various acts and forms of election violence in the 2012 and 2016/17 elections. Violence against women in elections in Somalia is embedded in a social, economic and political context that does not favour the free participation of women in an electoral process.

**Potential risks of violence against women in elections, opportunities for response and key actors:** There are already signs that women participating in the 2021 elections are at risk of violence of various forms, as well as discrimination, and the increasing

3 See Article 23(4) of the electoral bill (version sent to the Upper House (English translation) and approved on 8 February 2020). Federal Republic of Somalia. n.d. National Electoral Law at Federal Level.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 UN Women and UNDP. 2017. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide*, p. 41. Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/preventing-vaw-in-elections-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3742>.

political participation of women resulting from the anticipated one-person, one-vote system, to be implemented in the near future, means that this risk is likely to increase.

Women are exposed to violence of various forms including but not limited to intimidation and harassment intended to suppress women's political participation, threats against those women who are perceived to be working against the clan system and the character assassination of women seeking political legitimacy. These forms of violence are meted out through gangs and militias allegedly used by some male politicians to target women and through social media channels, which are used to spread hatred against women who pursue political leadership.

The potential risks of violence against women in the upcoming elections notwithstanding, the current electoral context also provides opportunities to respond to violence against women in elections and for the involvement of key actors. Opportunities for response include normative frameworks, the provisional constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia, and policies, legislation and actions. Key actors are individuals or institutions whose roles or functions either have a positive impact on the electoral context, for example by implementing early response actions to prevent electoral violence against women or may negatively affect the electoral context and cause electoral violence.

**Relevant examples and lessons learned from similar countries:** Relevant examples and lessons learned from similar countries that have previously had an electoral system that focused on the monitoring and prevention of election violence, with a focus on women, include the following:

**Awareness-raising on the issue of violence against women in elections:**

It is important that all stakeholders involved in the electoral process are included in awareness-raising: aspirants, candidates, party members, elected leaders and those involved in administering elections, such as the election management body (EMB) and its staff.<sup>8</sup> Women's civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in peace and security work in the same electoral context may also integrate awareness-raising on the issue of violence against women in elections into their activities.

**Election day and polling arrangements to prevent family voting:**

A woman is often intimidated and threatened if she takes the political decision to vote for a candidate different from the one supported by her husband or his clan. Studies elsewhere have revealed that women voters are more likely than their male counterparts to experience intimidation and violence on voting day.<sup>9</sup> We also obtained anecdotal evidence of women being raped in voting queues or when travelling from their homes to voting stations.<sup>10</sup> The National Independent Electoral Commission and regional states' EMBs must consider the needs of women when determining polling station placement and should deploy women security guards and provide training for polling station staff to enable them to identify potential risks and prevent VAWE. If necessary, separate polling venues for men and women should be provided.

**Working with police and security forces on training initiatives to prevent violence against women in elections:**

The police and security forces may play a key role in assuring public safety

8 Ibid., 100.

9 Bardall, G. 2011. *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence*. Washington, D.C.: International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Accessed 12 July 2012. [http://ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender\\_and\\_electoral\\_violence\\_2011.pdf](http://ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender_and_electoral_violence_2011.pdf).

10 Interview with a representative of the NAGAAD women's network based in Somaliland.



during the electoral cycle; in relation to VAWE, this role is necessary to assess and respond to any security risks that may impede the full participation of female voters and candidates in electoral processes. These forces should also consider implementing gender-specific security for women in rural areas.<sup>11</sup>

**Women's Situation Room:** The Women's Situation Room (WSR) is a women-led, non-partisan platform that aims to promote peaceful and transparent elections that are free of violence and to increase democratic participation.<sup>12</sup> The WSR arose out of the realization that violence has become a norm during elections and that it was imperative that women develop a mechanism to counter this pattern, through dialogue, advocacy, mobilization, mediation, coordination and election observation.

**Way forward in setting up a platform to address violence against women in elections:** In setting up a platform that will work with key stakeholders to address all

forms of electoral violence against women in the upcoming Somalia elections, UN Women and partners should consider supporting a mechanism that emphasizes a comprehensive approach to research, analysis and monitoring, and early response options to prevent violence against women in the electoral process. Such a mechanism should inform effective programming involving state and non-state actors to enhance women's participation in the electoral process.

Given the current political tensions at the FGS and FMS levels, and because some systems for electoral collaboration already exist at those levels, there is no need to recreate new nationwide collaborative systems specifically for addressing violence against women in elections. Instead, VAWE early warning and response platforms can be placed at FMS and at FGS levels and serve as focal points for monitoring and understanding violence against women in elections and collaborating on responses, including prevention.

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<sup>11</sup> UN Women and UNDP. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of the Women's Situation Room was first introduced by the Angie Brooks International Centre.

# 1.0. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Somalia's political context

Somalia gained independence in 1960 after 80 years of colonial rule by Italians in the south and the British in the north.<sup>13</sup> The first president of Somalia was Aden Abdullah Osman Daar, who ruled from 1960 to 1967, when he handed over power to Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. Shermarke was assassinated in 1969 and, following a coup d'état, succeeded by Mohamed Siad Barre. Siad Barre established a regime that lasted until his rule ended with the collapse of the state in January 1991.<sup>14</sup> During his rule, Barre invested heavily in social development, prioritizing public works programmes and literacy campaigns and banning clannism. During this period, he upheld women's rights and roles in society, and promoted Somali women's emancipation and empowerment.

Somalia struggled with civil war and unrest for over three decades, during which time the political context remained complex and fragile.<sup>15</sup> During the wars of the 1970s and 1980s, which led to the downfall of Siad Barre's regime and to the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, Somalia was torn by conflicts between warring factions of clans, sub-clans, religious groups, government armies and international troops. "In May 1991, Somaliland declared its independence (although it was not recognised by the international community), later followed by the declaration of autonomy of the north-western province of Puntland in 1998, and the Bay and Bakool regions in southern and central Somalia in 1999."<sup>16</sup> Following this, conflicts emerged between clans,

resulting in civil war in the remaining part of southern Somalia involving the United Somali Congress of the Hawiye clan and the Somali Patriotic Movement of Siad Barre's clan, Darod — "and within clans, such as the Abgaal and the Habar Gidir factions within the Hawiye, mainly in the regions of Lower Shabelle and Juba."<sup>17</sup>

The prolonged armed conflict in Somalia, in combination with droughts throughout the country, created a humanitarian disaster, and, until the establishment of the first Transitional Government in 2000, Somalia was without any form of internationally recognized public authority.<sup>18</sup>

In a desperate attempt to stop the bloodshed and restore law and order, Somali leaders — with backing from the United Nations (UN) — agreed on a clan-based form of governance known as the '4.5 system', in which parliamentary seats and most government positions were divided equally among four major clans (Hawiye, Darod, Dir and Digil-Mirifle), with the remainder allocated to a cluster of minority clans.<sup>19</sup> In a society in which clans are led and represented by men, this governance system meant that women were further alienated from political leadership positions.

The clan-based power-sharing model was meant to be a temporary measure to mitigate clan conflict, but it remains in force today. It became a major issue in the campaign for electoral law reforms in the

13 United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW). 2008. *Women, Peace and Security in Somalia: Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325*. A UN-INSTRAW Background Paper. Santo Domingo: UN-INSTRAW.

14 Bryden, M. and M. I. Steiner. 1998. *Somalia Between Peace and War: Somali Women on the Eve of the 21st Century*. African Women for Peace Series. Nairobi: UNIFEM.

15 *Draft Country Gender Profile: Somalia – Trends of Change in A Fragile and Fragmented Context?* May 2019.

16 UN-INSTRAW. *Women, Peace and Security in Somalia*, p. 13.

17 Ibid.

18 UN-INSTRAW. 2006. *Drafting the Action Plan III: 'How to Create a WPS Action Plan'*. Santo Domingo: UN-INSTRAW.

19 Ibid.

country, which culminated in the recent signing of the electoral bill into law. The law is expected to pave the way for the country to hold its first popular election in

half a century and to replace the existing clan-based, power-sharing model.

## 1.2. Somali women’s political participation in parliaments and ministerial positions

In practice, women seeking political leadership positions in Somalia face significant cultural and social barriers. The target of 30 per cent female political representation during the 2016/17 elections was not met, although the election results were an improvement on the previous parliament. Women now make up 24 per cent of the Lower House, the House of the People (66 seats out of a total of 275) (compared with 14 per cent in the previous parliament), and 24 per cent of the newly created Upper House (13 seats out of a total of 54 seats), which placed Somalia in the global ranking at 73 out of the 192 countries assessed.<sup>20</sup> The increase

has been lauded as a major achievement for women’s rights activists and an important step towards realizing the goal of 30 per cent representation of women in legislature.

In parliamentary elections held in Somalia in October and November 2016, 66 women were elected to the House of the People, out of 275 seats (Table 1.1), and 13 women were elected to the Upper House, out of 54 seats.<sup>21</sup> “Despite both Houses falling short of the 30% quota, the proportion of women elected in demonstrates a 47% increase from 2012–16.”<sup>22</sup>

**Table 1.1 – House of the People, 2016**

Region	Re-elected women MPs	Newly elected women MPs	Total number of elected women MPs
<b>Somalia</b>			
Southwest State	4	10	14
Jubaland	4	6	10
Galmudug	4	5	9
Benadir	2	2	4
Hirshabelle	4	4	8
Puntland	1	5	6
Somaliland	8	7	15
<b>Total</b>			<b>66</b>

MP, member of parliament.

Source: Parke et al., 2017, p. 10.

20 United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). 2018. *UN Somalia: Country Results Report 2018*. Accessed 14 March 2021. [https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/un\\_somalia\\_country\\_results\\_report\\_2018.pdf](https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/un_somalia_country_results_report_2018.pdf). See also Inter-Parliamentary Union. “Women in National Parliaments” <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

21 Parke, A., S. Stevens, M. Walls, S. Gaid, S. Ali, S. Butterfield, C. Elder and D. Le Déaut. 2017. *Somali Women’s Political Participation and Leadership – Evidence and Opportunities*. Produced for UK Department for International Development. London: Social Development Direct and Forcier Consulting. Accessed 14 March 2021. [https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/somali\\_women\\_s\\_political\\_participation\\_and\\_leadership\\_evidence\\_29\\_sept.pdf](https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/somali_women_s_political_participation_and_leadership_evidence_29_sept.pdf).

22 Ibid., p. 10.

### 1.3. Electoral violence overview

Somalia continues to tackle both governance and political leadership challenges, resulting in a political situation characterized by upheavals and a deepening rift between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and some federal member states (FMSs). In 2012, the country held its first elections after decades of statelessness. Since 2012, and particularly in the run-up to the 2016 election and the forthcoming 2021 elections, the political discourse has been dominated by discussion of which election model is best for the country and reforms around electoral institutions and political parties.

After failing to agree on the implementation of a new electoral law on universal suffrage, passed in early 2020, the FGS and FMSs held discussions on 17 September 2020 and introduced a new electoral model for the country to circumvent electoral impasse. The indirect election model, in which 101 clan delegates elect legislators to the Lower House, also aims to increase female representation in both houses of parliament to at least 30 per cent.<sup>23</sup> However, the model has yet to gain the political consensus necessary for Somalia to hold elections.

Although the indirect election model incorporated a quota for women's representation, some male political leaders have not fully acknowledged women's political and leadership rights or abilities.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, women leaders fear that the clan elders will make it extremely difficult for women candidates to get the votes of the majority of the delegates, or that it will be costly for them to do so.<sup>25</sup> The implementation of

the ideal electoral model of one-person, one-vote elections will be a milestone in Somalia's journey to peaceful democratic elections in which women can compete fairly. There are, however, concerns that the implementation of a universal suffrage election model may increase the risk of violence, which will need to be addressed through dialogue and consensus-building involving the FGS, FMSs and major opposition leaders.<sup>26</sup>

Electoral reform is also under way amid a fragile security landscape marred by terrorist attacks and a drought that has left more than 2 million people facing acute food insecurity in Somalia.<sup>27</sup> According to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), political progress may be delayed unless there is renewed dialogue and cooperation among all stakeholders. He has since called for consensus and compromise among Somalia's leaders at the national level, particularly between the FGS and the FMSs.

The new electoral code is an important step, but it fails to address some important issues, including the location of constituencies, modalities for voter participation and guarantees that 30 per cent of parliamentary seats will be set aside for women. The voices of women, young people and minorities must be part of an open debate on Somalia's future,<sup>28</sup> and there is a need for greater efforts to reduce the risk of electoral violence and to promote reconciliation.

23 Sheikh Nor, M. 2021. "Somalia's Delayed Presidential Elections: Top 7 Issues to Follow." *The Africa Report*. 4 February. Accessed 14 March 2021. <https://www.theafricareport.com/62733/somalias-delayed-presidential-elections-top-7-issues-to-follow/>.

24 Interview with a National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) consultant.

25 Saferworld. 2020. "Women's Rights and Participation in Somalia's 2021 Elections." Blog. 10 December. Accessed 14 March 2021. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/news-and-analysis/post/923-womenas-rights-and-participation-in-somaliaas-2021-elections->

26 Hujale, M. 2020. "Somalia Edges Closer to First Democratic Election in Half a Century." *The Guardian*. 24 February. Accessed 24 June 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/feb/24/somalia-edges-closer-to-first-democratic-election-in-half-a-century>.

27 United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. "Inclusive Elections, Combating Terrorism Critical to Stabilizing Somalia, Speakers Underline in Security Council." Accessed 24 June 2020. <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13925.doc.htm>.

28 Ibid.

Nevertheless, some elite women are hopeful that the one-person, one-vote electoral method will augment the space for women to compete for elected political positions. What is needed is for both women and men to advocate for critical political connections

#### 1.4. Background to this report

The priorities of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) for Somalia include increasing opportunities for women's leadership by tracking the representation and participation of women in political parties and political decision-making. UN Women Somalia also enhances the capacity of Somali women and gender advocates to influence peace talks, recovery/peacebuilding planning processes and election processes.<sup>29</sup> Such capacity-building targets Somali women political candidates and aspirants and equips women with the tools and skills to ensure their political participation. UN Women Somalia also provides capacity development to gender activists and civil society organizations (CSOs) in Somalia.

As Somalia prepares for the long-overdue federal elections, there is a critical lack of data and analysis that would provide information on occurrences of electoral

and financial resources that would enable women to secure the initial nomination from their political parties, while also addressing potential clan-driven irregularities and violence against women in political party primaries, which could lock women out.

violence. Similarly, there is a lack of early warning mechanisms to properly monitor and identify election-specific violence against women. Although incidents of violence in Somalia are increasing in frequency, with violence against women manifesting as sexual harassment, assault and exploitation,<sup>30</sup> there are limited data that specifically highlight the link between violence and elections in Somalia, as elections in the country are infrequent.

In this regard, the development of mechanism specifically to monitor violence against women in elections would provide the opportunity to understand and, as a result, better prevent all forms of electoral violence and discrimination. Therefore, in the context of future Somalia elections, there is a unique opportunity for developing a sustainable approach that will enhance the prevention of violence against women before, during and after the election.

#### 1.5. Objectives of the study

The main objectives of this assessment were to:

- assess the relevance and applicability of the development of an election-specific mechanism to monitor violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections and to determine if relevant early warning systems exist in Somalia;
- draw relevant examples and lessons learned from other countries where

29 UN Women. "Africa: Somalia." Accessed 14 September 2020. <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/somalia>.

30 Home Office. 2018. *Country Policy and Information Note. Somalia: Women Fearing Gender-Based Violence*. Version 4.0. London: Home Office, p. 10. Accessed 14 March 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1051701/download>.  
Upper Tribunal (Immigration and Asylum Chamber). 2011. "AMM and Others (Conflict; Humanitarian Crisis; Returnees; FGM) Somalia v. Secretary of State for the Home Department, CG [2011] UKUT 00445 (IAC)." 28 November. Accessed 14 September 2020. [https://www.refworld.org/cases,GBR\\_UTIAC,4ed37a692.html](https://www.refworld.org/cases,GBR_UTIAC,4ed37a692.html).  
Human Rights Watch. 2018. "World Report 2018. Somalia: Events of 2017." Accessed 10 September 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/somalia>.  
Social Institutions and Gender Index. "Somalia." Accessed 14 September 2020. <http://www.genderindex.org/country/somalia/>.  
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2017. "Puntland Enforces Sexual Offences Law." 31 January. Accessed 14 September 2020. <http://somalia.unfpa.org/news/puntland-enforces-sexual-offences-law>.

election violence has been monitored with the goal of prevention and with a particular focus on women;

- map women's political participation, and the legislation and policy frameworks

that affect women

- suggest the way forward in setting up a platform that will enable key stakeholders to address all forms of electoral violence in the upcoming elections.

### 1.6. Discerning violence against women in elections

Somali women leaders believe that perpetrators of violence against women in elections in Somalia could be reacting to women's deviation from traditional gender roles, perceiving this as a threat to male-dominated and clan-based power structures.<sup>31</sup> Women are subjected to violence with the aim of deterring them from standing as candidates, occupying political office, participating in political parties and advocating for the 30 per cent women's quota.

In Somalia, as in many other countries, violence against women in elections "has been used to discourage, suppress or prevent women from exercising their

electoral rights as voters, candidates, party supporters, election workers, observers, journalists, or public officials."<sup>32</sup> According to the stakeholders we interviewed for this assessment, acts of violence against women in elections can be psychological, physical or sexual in nature and include assault, intimidation, harassment and even murder. These acts of violence are sometimes committed in the home, by family members, but may also take place in the community or in public places such as election centres. The perpetrators were said to be mainly men and they reportedly claimed to have acted in order to punish women who were perceived to be behaving contrary to their clan customs and/or religion.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with a NIEC consultant.

<sup>32</sup> UN Women and UNDP. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, p. 49.

## 2.0. METHODOLOGY OF THE ASSESSMENT

This assessment used an exploratory design that provides an analytical framework for examining the causes and effects of violence against women in elections, in order to gain a deeper understanding and identify ways of intervening. The methodology placed particular emphasis on the study participants' experiences and how they construct their view of the reality about violence against women in elections in Somalia.

Issues of importance to respondents emerged as they narrated their experiences of political participation, elections and violence against women. Thus, the design of this assessment was shaped by socially constructed knowledge claims. The goal was, as far as possible, to base the assessment on respondents' views of election violence against women as they have experienced it and to determine violence how negatively impacts women's political rights.

### 2.1. Methods for data collection, unit of analysis and population

#### 2.1.1. Consultations for support for the assignment

The research was carried out by a consultant under the overall supervision and guidance of the Joint United Nations Programme on Women's Political Leadership, Participation and Empowerment (JP WPE) Programme Specialist and the UN Women Programme Office in Somalia. With the support of UN Women's Somalia office, virtual meetings were held with the following stakeholders:

- federal level: the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, the National Independent Electoral Commission, security sectors actors;
- Women-led civil society organizations

(CSOs), women leaders and non-state actors;

- federal member state level: the Ministry of Women Development and Family Affairs, Puntland; the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family, Somaliland; the National Electoral Commission in Somaliland; security sectors actors; CSOs and non-state actors;
- UN Women and other UN entities (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)).

#### 2.1.2. Literature review

The literature review entailed a comprehensive review of relevant documents and reports from UN agencies, women's networks, non-governmental organizations, other development partners and online sources. This provided a deeper understanding of the key aspects of violence against women in elections, and of the challenges of, and possible collective actions for, ending violence against women in elections in Somalia. Other key documents reviewed related to the experiences of other countries and

lessons on responses to violence against women in elections.

During the literature review, the consultant endeavoured, as far as possible, to obtain anecdotal accounts pertaining to violence against women (VAW) in Somalia in order to identify violence against women in elections (VAWE) by consulting reports on the subject published by stakeholders or by as UN agencies and other national and international non-governmental

organizations (NGOs). The consultant also investigated mechanisms to prevent election violence in other African countries, particularly those that have applied specific

models to prevent violence against women in elections, to inform recommendations for a VAWE response in Somalia.

### 2.1.3. Key informant interviews and online discussions

Primary information was gathered through online interviews with selected individuals with in-depth knowledge and experience of women, peace and security in south and central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland.

The online discussions were intended to elicit interviewees' general views, opinions and perceptions about women's political rights and violence against women in past elections, as well as general suggestions

on how issues can be addressed in the forthcoming 2020/21 elections and beyond. Interviewees were also asked their opinions on the relevance and applicability of the development of an election-specific mechanism to monitor violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections, and if they were aware of the existence of any early warning systems in Somalia.

## 2.2. Sampling

For this assessment, a sample size was not predefined. Instead, a purposive sample of 13 respondents were interviewed, which, based on UN Women's and the consultant's knowledge and perceptions of the Somalia electoral context, was considered sufficient

for credibility and to achieve data saturation. Those interviewed were selected because they allowed for in-depth inquiry, that is they were considered to be 'information rich' and were familiar with elections, women, peace and security trends in Somalia.

## 2.3. Challenges

Arranging online interviews with stakeholders was challenging, as the time frame for the completion of the study was short. In addition, some stakeholders declined

to expound on their responses for fear of reprisals should it become known that they had divulged sensitive information on gender-based violence.



## 3.0. FINDINGS

### 3.1 Evidence of violence and discriminatory practices against women in elections and existence of early warning systems in Somalia

In a guide to preventing violence against women in elections, UN Women and the UNDP observe that “Standard datasets on electoral violence are largely gender-blind and are therefore not able to provide much data on VAWE.” This means, according to the publication, that “a large portion of the election-related violence that women experience has not been documented. In addition, the absence of a widely agreed definition of VAWE and indicators to measure it, means that there is no systematic data collected on a national, regional or global scale.”<sup>33</sup>

Findings from this study confirm that reports on election violence shed little light on the extent to which this affects women. For example, the stakeholders interviewed pointed out that much reported violence against women may indeed occur during elections, but this is not emphasized for fear of deterring women from participating in the electoral process.

The review of the literature on violence in the political sphere in Somalia carried out for this study revealed that there is little recognition of the fact that electoral violence impacts men and women differently. However, interviewees reported not only that violence against women is widespread in Somalia, but also that women participating in politics were victims of the various acts and forms of violence linked to limited electoral processes<sup>34</sup> during the elections of 2012 and 2016/17.

Interviews with representatives of women’s CSOs, officials from relevant ministries of the FMSs, UN agencies and those who had experience working for the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC) revealed that violence against women in elections in Somalia is embedded in social, economic and political contexts that have not favoured the free participation of women in previous election processes. The ensuing violence against women in elections is perpetrated both publicly and privately.

#### 3.1.1 Violence against women in the public sphere

It is not clear how many of the incidents of violence against women that occurred during the 2012 and 2016/17 selection processes are directly attributable to the elections, but the representatives of women’s networks interviewed contend that the increased violence seen at that time could have been related to elections. In Somaliland, for instance, violence against women is prevalent, but reportedly more intense during elections. According to a Somaliland-based women’s

network, NAGAAD,<sup>35</sup> this manifested in rape of women queuing to vote at night and in women candidates being intimidated by their male opponents, who despised the women’s candidature.<sup>36</sup>

Violations by militias and security forces are another type of election violence, with the most egregious case occurring in Jowhar on 18 November 2016 when a government minister’s bodyguards opened fire inside

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>34</sup> The participation of both women and men in these electoral processes was very limited. In 2012, the elders nominated the members of parliament (MPs) directly whereas, 2016, the elders appointed 14,000 delegates to elect 275 MPs.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with a NAGAAD representative.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the parliamentary election hall and injured a young man.<sup>37</sup> Only two days previously, a similar incident had occurred in Galmudug, when security forces shot and killed a civilian man in front of the Adado election. The victim was reportedly a delegate appointed to vote for a seat allocated to one sub-clan, and he was later replaced by someone else. Between August and November 2016, six clan elders involved in the electoral process were reportedly killed.

According to some participants in the round-table discussion among Somali journalists

organized by UNSOM on 22 December 2016, election-related violence increased in 2016, compared with 2012, with at least four journalists said to have been killed for reporting electoral irregularities, corruption and intimidation. The anonymous report did not, however, gender disaggregate the information. In an incident of VAWE, the only female minister remaining in cabinet, the Minister of Women, Human Rights and Social Development, received several death threats from extremist Islamic groups, who accused her of pushing for women's representation in government.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.1.2 Violence against women in elections within the family

In Puntland in 2016, one victim of electoral violence was found to have expressed a different political opinion to that of her husband's clan. Another interviewee reported the case of a young woman in Banadir who was prevented by her parents from continuing her studies and pursuing a career in political leadership. The parents instead urged their son to study political leadership, as they were of the view that a political career is appropriate only for men and were apparently disappointed by women's push for political rights during elections at the time. This demonstrates how violence against women in elections

can take the form of psychological acts and affect even girls in Somalia.

In Somaliland, families often do not allow women to participate in elections, despite the existing election law. When family members support different political parties, the result is often gender-based violence (GBV) at home. A representative of a women's network based in Somaliland also observed that girls are also at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM during elections) because the schools remain closed and girls who are in boarding schools return to their communities.

### 3.2 Potential risks of violence against women in elections, opportunities for response and key actors

The upcoming elections in Somalia and discourses around increasing women's political participation are already leading to increased violence against women in various forms, including discrimination, intimidation and threats. At the same time, however, the current electoral context provides opportunities to respond to VAWE

and for key actors to become involved. Opportunities for response include normative frameworks, policies, legislation and actions. Key actors are individuals or institutions whose roles or functions can have a positive impact on the electoral context and may provide early response actions to prevent electoral violence against women, or who

<sup>37</sup> UNDP. n.d. *Initial Assessment of the 2016 Electoral Process for the Somali Parliament*. Report in preparation

<sup>38</sup> Home Office. 2018. "Country Policy and Information Note Somalia: Women Fearing Gender-based Violence." Version 4.0, April, p. 10. Accessed 20 September 2021. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1051701/download>.

may negatively affect the electoral context and cause electoral violence. Table 3.1 summarizes the potential risks of violence

against women in elections, opportunities for response and the key actors present in the current electoral context.

**Table 3.1 – Summary of potential risks of VAWE, opportunities for response and key actors**

Potential risks of VAWE	Women's political participation, leadership and empowerment	Opportunities for response	Key actors related to VAWE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Threat of different forms of violence against women</li> <li>• Clan leaders' perceptions of women</li> <li>• Undue influence on the process, intimidation and harassment</li> <li>• Violation of the rules regarding women's enhanced participation</li> <li>• Threats to women perceived to be working against the clan system</li> <li>• Perceived failure by women to secure political legitimacy</li> <li>• Heightened political tensions</li> <li>• Gangs and militias being used by some politicians</li> <li>• Technology, social media mobilization for hatred</li> <li>• Exploitation of vulnerable youth</li> <li>• Somali Islamic Scholars Union</li> <li>• Al-Shabaab</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parliamentary women's caucus</li> <li>• Women's CSOs advancing women's political rights</li> <li>• International normative frameworks</li> <li>• Federal constitution</li> <li>• Existing relevant policy strategies and legislations</li> <li>• Goodwill Ambassadors platform</li> <li>• Media and communications work</li> <li>• Supporting youth networks and women's peace initiatives</li> <li>• Technology, social media mobilization to respond to VAWE</li> <li>• The role of culture</li> </ul>	<p><b>Political actors:</b><sup>39</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political party leaders</li> <li>• Election candidates</li> <li>• Political party members</li> <li>•</li> <li>• State actors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Government of Somalia (FGS)</li> <li>• FMSs</li> <li>• Police, security forces</li> <li>• Government institutions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Election management bodies (EMBs)</li> <li>• Societal actors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters</li> <li>• Family members</li> <li>• Intimate partners, spouses</li> <li>• Community members</li> <li>• Religious leaders</li> <li>• Clan elders and influential individuals</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Other actors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)</li> <li>• Private sector/business community</li> <li>• The media</li> <li>• Somali diaspora communities</li> <li>• Donors and the international community</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>UN agencies (UN Women, UNSOM, UNDP)</p>

39 UN Women and UNDP. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, p. 49.

### 3.2.1 Potential risks of violence against women in elections

The potential risks of violence against women discussed in this section are typically the triggers for GBV against women in elections: the incidents and trends of violence against women that occur within the context of the electoral cycle<sup>40</sup> in Somalia.

**Sexual and gender-based violence:** The threat of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence against women in elections in Somalia, contributes to the restrictions of the women's movement in Somalia<sup>41</sup> and, by inference, women's right to political participation. Women's and girls' ability to participate in public life, including their regular activities, has been adversely affected.<sup>42</sup> If not addressed, these limitations and sexual violence can negatively affect the political rights and participation of women in elections.

**Clan leaders' perceptions of women:** Clans in Somalia are culturally consensual identities inherited from patriarchal ancestors and within which power is differentiated along gender lines, with women subordinate to men, making it one of the biggest 'stumbling blocks' to women's advancement in politics. Women are formally excluded from clan discussions and decision-making structures, yet clans continue to underpin distributive politics and remain the main vehicles through which one can access political power in Somalia.<sup>43</sup> Women going against such practices to seek political representation may face risks of violence.

**Undue influence on the electoral process, including through intimidation and harassment:** This category of abuses includes tampering with delegates' lists, subjecting candidates and their supporters, including

women, to intimidation and threats of violence, arbitrary arrests and detentions, and denying candidates access to polling locations. EMBs may be subject to undue pressure from candidates, or their relatives, to choose delegates who will support the candidate. In the 2016 elections, there were allegations of kidnapping of delegates and candidates in some areas, including a widely reported case in Galmudug. Several female candidates in different regions dropped their candidacies, citing intimidation and threats by some electoral college members.<sup>44</sup>

**Violation of the rules regarding women's enhanced representation:** Women secured 24 per cent of the seats in parliament in 2016. While this is a significant increase on 2012, the agreed goal of 30 per cent could not be achieved because some clans failed to abide by the rule to set aside a sufficient number of women-only seats in the Lower House. There was strong resistance from some religious and traditional leaders to the women-exclusive seats, which required the intervention of the State-level Indirect Electoral Implementation Teams (SIEITs) and the regional presidents. At other times, the SIEITs and regional authorities (mainly the regional presidents) did not intervene to prevent women-only seats from being taken over by men, in violation of the rules.

**Threats to women perceived to be working against the clan system:** In more extreme cases, to be perceived to be working against the clan system may pose significant threats to women's safety and protection; they may encounter intimidation in the form of text messages or phone calls telling them to withdraw their candidacy or face the consequences.<sup>45</sup>

40 Huber, J. and L. Kammerud. 2016. *Violence against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response*. Arlington, VA: International Foundation for Electoral Systems.

41 Social Institutions and Gender Index. "Somalia." Accessed 14 September 2020. <http://www.genderindex.org/country/somalia/>.

42 Ibid.

43 Rayale, S., E. Pomfret, D. Wright. 2015. *Somali Solutions: Creating Conditions for a Gender-Just Peace*. Oxford: Oxfam.

44 Personal communication.

45 Parke et al. *Somali Women's Political Participation and Leadership*, p. 14.

### **Perceived failure by women to secure political legitimacy:**

Failure to secure the support of their communities has a direct adverse effect legitimacy and safety of female politicians, A currently serving female MP has previously reported<sup>46</sup> being unable to go home for any substantial period or to move freely because of her role in politics and the perception people have of her.

### **Heightened political tensions due to lack of consensus on election model:**

Some are concerned that the failure to achieve consensus on the model to be used in the upcoming elections will lead to outbreaks of violence. It is feared that FMS-level politicians could deftly deflect their existing political differences with the FGS in an ethnic-based, scapegoating strategy and revert to the previous, clan-based, 4.5 electoral system, rather than, as hoped and intended, the one person, one vote system. Women leaders are concerned that, if this comes to pass, the 2020/21 electoral process will discriminate against women, as happened in the 2012 and 2016 elections.

### **Technology, social media and mobilization for hatred and violence against women in elections:**

<sup>47</sup> The use of social media and mobile devices is now prevalent in Somalia. These technological advances provide new media platforms that are greatly useful in countering economic disempowerment. On the flip side is the reality that the platform provided by technology is being used for the mobilization of hatred, ethnic polarization and violence against women in elections, for example the case cited above.

**Al-Shabaab:** Al-Shabaab “has now become one of the most powerful internal actors seeking to overthrow the Somali Federal

Government and its allies, seeking to establish a society based on its inflexible interpretation of Sharia law. ... Over the years, local Somali elites have turned against their fellow anti-al-Shabaab militias and made strategic alliances with al-Shabaab groups when this suited their political and economic aims. This has puzzled Western governments and their allies in the fight against al-Shabaab.”<sup>48</sup> “In areas controlled by al-Shabaab, freedom of association is fully restricted and civil society organisations, aid workers and journalists continue to suffer targeted and indiscriminate attacks. ... Al-Shabaab additionally poses a large threat to political activists and leaders outside their territory of control. Its violence frequently targets locations where Somalia’s political or economic elites meet, such as restaurants or hotels.”<sup>49</sup>

### **Threats of violence from extremist Islamic groups:**

The Somali Islamic Scholars Union is against any policy pushing for women’s representation in government, terming such policies un-Islamic and calling for punishment of their authors.<sup>50</sup> “In June and July, the minister of women, human rights, and social development, the only woman remaining in the cabinet then, reportedly received several death threats from extremist Islamic groups who accused her of pushing for women’s representation in government. On October 2, the Somali Religious Council also released a press statement that warned the government against advocating for women in politics, calling the 30 per cent quota for women’s seats in parliament ‘dangerous’ and against Islamic religious tenets and predicting the policy would lead to disintegration of the family.”<sup>51</sup>

46 Ibid.

47 Huber and Kammerud. *Violence against Women in Elections*.

48 Webersik, C., S. J. Hansen and A. Egal. 2018. *Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis*. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. Accessed 12 July 2021. [https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2503735/NUPI\\_rapport\\_Somalia\\_Webersik\\_Hansen\\_Egal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2503735/NUPI_rapport_Somalia_Webersik_Hansen_Egal.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

49 Bertelsmann Stiftung. 2020. *BTI 2020 Country Report — Somalia*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung. Accessed 14 March 2021. <https://www.bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report-SOM-2020.html>.

50 Home Office. *Country Policy and Information Note. Somalia*, p. 10.

51 Ibid., 10.

### 3.2.2 Opportunities for responding to violence against women in elections

The responses to violence against women in elections being implemented by official actors and civil society, including political parties and the media, should be explored. The strategies to be adopted or enhanced should be carefully selected to reduce or prevent violence against women during the upcoming elections.

**Parliamentary women's caucus:** There is a need to strengthen the parliamentary women's caucus in Somalia and establish an equivalent forum in Somaliland. Involving the women's caucus has the advantage of advancing advocacy and consultation on monitoring and responding to violence against women in elections, including prevention violence against women and power-sharing.<sup>52</sup> In 2018, Somali women legislators, supported by the British Embassy through the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM),<sup>53</sup> resolved to work together in parliament to push for laws targeting the protection of the rights of women, children and marginalized groups.

**Goodwill Ambassadors platform:** The Goodwill Ambassadors platform offers space for influential women leaders to advance women's political rights. In 2016, the establishment of a Committee of Goodwill Ambassadors demonstrated the will of the FGS and the National Leadership Forum to support women's enhanced political representation. The combined work of the Goodwill Ambassadors and the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, with support from the UN, enabled women's groups and civil society to engage elders and to cultivate awareness of, and actively campaign for, the 30 per cent agenda, which

resulted in a significant transformation of perceptions about the role of Somali women in politics.<sup>54</sup> The ministry also hosted a hotline for collecting information from ambassadors. This assessment revealed that the minister has plans to establish champions of women, including men.<sup>55</sup>

#### **Women civil society organizations advancing women's political rights:**

Women's CSOs have formed networks around enhancing women's political rights. For example, NAGAAD, a network of women's organizations in Somaliland, "is a leading network representing 46 women organizations in Somaliland and has been working to create an enabling environment for women in Somaliland since its inception in 1997. NAGAAD's programmes on women empowerment manifests in different aspects. Since 2002, NAGAAD has been giving special focus to Women's (quota) and political participation in Somaliland. NAGAAD has been supporting capacity-building projects to enhance women's participation in the leadership positions."<sup>56</sup> According to NAGAAD, women feel inferior and "therefore at NAGAAD we try to build their capacity and confidence in public speaking and also to be able to defend themselves from abuse. We offer psychosocial support, counselling, medical and legal support to women survivors of violence."<sup>57</sup> The network also conducts training of volunteers to monitor incidents of GBV at polling stations throughout the country.

In a draft research report,<sup>58</sup> NAGAAD stated that voter (and civic) education programmes are needed to help women and disadvantaged

52 Parke et al. *Somali Women's Political Participation and Leadership*.

53 See "Somali Women MPs Resolve to Push for Gender-Sensitive Laws in Parliament." *ReliefWeb*. 28 February 2018. Accessed 24 August 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somali-women-mps-resolve-push-gender-sensitive-laws-parliament>.

54 UNDP. n.d. *Initial Assessment of the 2016 Electoral Process for the Somali Parliament*. Report in preparation

55 Interview with Somali Women Leadership representative on 18 August 2020.

56 Interview with representatives of NAGAAD on 21 July 2020.

57 Ibid.

58 NAGAAD. 2016. "The Mapping Women Situation Room in Somaliland" (draft report by Yussuf Ali, 10 November).

groups enter the mainstream of democratic life. The greatest civic education needs are to be found among the most disadvantaged, including those with no primary education, rural women, low-income voters and urban women over 35 years of age.

The Somali Women's Leadership Initiative trained women's groups in conflict prevention, resolution and mediation; these women could also be trained to provide early warning of and to respond to VAWE. A representative from the Somali Women's Leadership Initiative interviewed during this assessment maintained that violence against women in elections can be overcome when stakeholders at all levels have space for dialogue, when donors demonstrate long-term commitment to women's needs and when community needs are placed first. "As the starting for the upcoming elections 2020, young male and female university graduates from the FMSs and Banadir

region should be trained in monitoring and reporting violence against women in elections in their localities and be equipped with the means for communicating and reporting," she emphasized.

**Joint United Nations Programme on Women's Political Leadership, Participation and Empowerment:** Under the overall leadership of, and in collaboration with, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, UN Women leads a joint programme with the UNDP and UNSOM on women's political leadership, participation and empowerment to enable a coherent and consolidated approach towards increasing the participation, and strengthening the role, of women in peacebuilding and state-building processes. The programme focuses on women's leadership, empowerment and enhanced representation, and participation by women in political processes.

## Normative frameworks, national policy strategies and legislation

Since violence against women in elections is a violation of human rights, it requires a comprehensive, multi-tiered legal and policy framework based on human rights conventions, international normative frameworks and national laws.

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325, unanimously adopted in October 2000, stressed the importance of the equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security. Since then, seven additional resolutions on women, peace and security have been adopted,<sup>59</sup> laying a framework for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which reinforces existing global commitments, treaties and conventions on women's rights. The resolution calls on UN entities and Member

States to undertake a range of actions aimed at increasing the representation and participation of women in preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, and to include them at all stages in the process of peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It also aims to advance respect for and protection of women's rights, ensuring that women's security is enhanced in conflict-affected and post-conflict-affected contexts.<sup>60</sup>

- Somalia has so far ratified the following international bills on human rights: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. In 2006, it signed,

59 Resolutions 1820 (in 2008), 1888 (in 2009), 1889 (in 2009), 1960 (in 2010), 2106 (in 2013), 2122 (in 2013), 2242 (in 2015) and 2271 (in 2016).  
60 UN Women. *Tracking Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)*. New York: UN Women.

but to date it has not ratified, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol).

- Somalia has signed (in 2006), but not yet ratified, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the fourth UN international bill on human rights. Adopted by the UN in 1979, CEDAW provides an international standard for protecting and promoting women's rights and is considered a key platform for women's protection.
- The Somaliland constitution (2001) recognizes key international gender

human rights instruments. This includes the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals and CEDAW. Somaliland is also committed to the global Convention on the Rights of the Child. The region of Puntland aligns itself with the FGS. However, there seems to be little appetite to incorporate in the constitution a commitment to a quota of 30 per cent for women's representation — and this is being used by some male MPs to justify failure to include a 30 per cent quota in the electoral law. There remains much work to be done on the Puntland constitution.

## New progressive Federal Government of Somalia constitutional framework in Somalia

The provisional constitution provides the legal foundation for the existence of the Federal Republic and is the central source of legal authority. The constitution has a bill of rights (Article 11), which declares everyone to be equal regardless of clan

or religion. The constitution further states that every citizen shall have the right to free education up to secondary school and has progressive provisions that include political participation for women and prohibits FGM.

## Puntland and Somaliland constitutions

Similarly to the Provisional Constitution of the FGS, the basic equality of rights is included in both the Puntland and Somaliland constitutions. The updated Puntland constitution (2010) incorporates references to human rights, gender equality and the protection of all citizens. For example, Article 41 emphasizes the equality of citizens, and articulates the equality of all with respect to political, social and electoral rights (Article 41.44). It also prohibits all forms of violence

against women, including FGM, and calls for the inclusion of women in all government departments. The constitution of the Republic of Somaliland (2001) specifically emphasizes the equality of rights for both men and women in Article 36, which states that “the rights, freedoms and duties laid down in the Constitution are to be enjoyed equally by men and women save for matters which are specifically ordained in Sharia law.”

## Policy strategies, legislations and national plans

**The National Gender Policy (2013)** opened the door to the inclusion of the issue of violence against women as a key potential priority area.<sup>61</sup> The Ministry of Justice and the

Ministry of Women and Human Rights (on the National Human Rights Commission) are the lead ministries for gender legislation, while the upholding of justice is the remit

61 UNDP. 2014.



of the FGS.<sup>62</sup> Major gender-related bills that have also recently been passed, or are under development, in each region include the National Human Rights Commission Bill, the Sexual Offences Bill and National FGM Bill.<sup>63</sup> Other policies passed or in development include the Disability Act (FGS), a draft Child Protection Policy (Somaliland and FGS) and the draft Family Act (Somaliland and FGS).

### **National development frameworks:**

The Somalia National Development Plan (2017–2019) is considered a critical national framework for country development, with a notable alignment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goals to promote gender equality, in particular SDG 5. VAWE awareness could be considered as a cross-cutting issue in Somalia's National Development Plan. Education on violence against women in elections should also be embedded in the school curriculum currently being developed by the Ministry of Education.

### **Puntland Sexual Offences Law, passed in 2016:**

In Puntland, the Sexual Offences Law, passed in 2016, criminalizes sexual offences including gang rape, sexual exploitation and abuse, sexual harassment, sexual offences involving the Internet and indecent exposure of genital organs in public places. The law also broadens the definition of consent, which is now designed to redress the balance in favour of survivors without prejudicing perpetrators' right to a fair trial to help juries reach just and fair decisions. It is the first law in all of Somalia to criminalize sexual assault. The new act draws on modern Western jurisprudence and is compliant with Islamic sharia law.<sup>64</sup>

### **Efforts to increase the level of women's participation in the justice and security sector:**

There have been some attempts to address the security situation, with evidence of efforts to increase the level of women's participation in the justice and security sector, with implications for ensuring women's and girl's physical safety. One such initiative was the creation of an Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Human Rights, which is led by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights and comprises 14 representatives from key ministries. With UN support,<sup>65</sup> the members were trained in human rights, women's protection, child protection and the rights of persons with disabilities. Representatives of key ministries, including Religious Affairs, Justice, Defence, Internal Security, Planning, Information, and Women and Human Rights Development, and the Office of the Attorney General participated in the training, and should therefore be able to influence the national laws to protect women's and girls' human rights and bring them in line with international standards.

### **Training of security sector personnel:**

Early in 2019, a total of 198 police officers underwent a three-month basic policing course at the Jowhar Police Training Facility in Hirshabelle State. A further 200 recruits started the same training in May 2019. Support for this initiative includes the raising of public awareness of issues such as gender equality in the state's police services.<sup>66</sup> Other support areas are the training of police officers and the construction of training centres.

### **Enhancing legal protection for women and support to women's rights through training:**

In 2013, according to the UNDP,<sup>67</sup> there was an increase in legal support

62 Draft Country Gender Profile.

63 Draft Country Gender Profile.

64 Patinkin, J. 2017. "Somali Rape Law Gets First Test." *Voice of America*. 25 January. Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/somali-rape-law-gets-first-test>.

65 UNSOM. *UN Somalia: Country Results Report 2018*.

66 UNSOM. 2019. "UNSOM Quarterly Newsletter Issue #11, June 2019." Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/un-som-quarterly-newsletter-issue-11-june-2019>.

67 UNDP. 2013. *UNDP Somalia Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Strategy (2011–2015): Progress Report 2013*. New York: UNDP.

provided to women, and also in women's representation in the legal profession. A total of 4,729 women (Puntland, 633, Somaliland, 2,418; and Federal level (FL), 1,678) were provided with legal aid by formal courts, lawyers and paralegals; 542 (Puntland, 140; Somaliland, 402; and FL, 0) were assisted by mobile courts; and 326 survivors of sexual and gender-based violence were assisted by the sexual assault referral centre, Baahikoob, in Somaliland, with 171 cases going to court (there were 54 successful prosecutions and 73 cases are still pending). Authorities in Puntland and CSOs recently stepped up efforts to advocate for the enforcement of the law following a number of new rape

cases reported in the region, including one case of the gang rape of a teenage girl.<sup>68</sup>

### **Reporting, investigating and prosecuting cases of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls:**

Although this assessment could not establish the percentages of referred cases of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls that are reported, investigated and for which a sentence is given, the UNFPA has reported evidence of enforcement in Puntland, where the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 2016.

## **3.3 Key actors in early warning and response platforms to violence against women in elections in Somalia**

### **Federal Government of Somalia and federal member states:**

In both the FGS and FMSs, the mandates of some departments and agencies means that they play an important role in, if not influence, Somalia's electoral context. One such department is the Ministry of Internal Security, which is responsible for all aspects of security and coordination required to support elections. For example, during the 2016 elections, in a Somali-led project, various security stakeholders developed a national plan that detailed a list of tasks that the joint security committees needed to complete in order to have workable security plans their election venues.

### **National Independent Electoral Commission:**

The NIEC may use its authority over party practices and electoral processes to act on violence against women in elections, including involving law enforcement and research institutions in VAWE monitoring and prevention.

### **Somali diaspora communities:**

Somali diaspora communities offer enormous support to the local Somali population and are able to marshal international support for the rights of women in Somalia. Having left Somalia and having been exposed to the culture of other countries, they are able to provide a framework for comparative analysis and exchange ideas and knowledge with those who have never left the country.<sup>69</sup> While it is common for men to allude to friction between the diaspora women and local women, who naturally have different concerns, Somali women involved in women's political rights advocacy suggest that is argument is put forth by men because they are not ready to give up their positions for women.

### **Clan authority:**

Clan structure is a vital element in Somali society. It is a source of solidarity, protection and access to political and economic power. Clans have a significant advantage over other formal actors with regard to conflict resolution and civil protection. Clan elders in Somalia

68 UNFPA. "Puntland Enforces Sexual Offences Law."

69 Gichuru, J. 2014. *Participation of Women in Peace Building in Somalia: A Case Study of Mogadishu*. Occasional Paper, Series 5, No. 6. Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://www.ipstc.org/index.php/downloads-publications/publications/category/48-2014>.

resolve conflict and deal with gender-based violence using traditional legal systems or customary law. When the central government collapsed, clans were solely responsible for maintaining peace in Somalia.<sup>70</sup> Clan elders and influential women are common intermediaries in mitigating the spread of violence and in peacebuilding. In terms of promoting peace, elders are motivated by their inherent responsibility to unite communities, while women have interests in protecting their political leadership rights.

**Religious groups:** The Al-Islah Islamic organization has been politically active since the collapse of the central government in 1991, and works to influence and support the harmonization of Islamic values, indigenous Somali culture and the rule of law in the political system.<sup>71</sup> It is not a political party seeking political power, nor a social organization focusing on purely social issues,<sup>72</sup> but a movement for reviving Islamic faith and encouraging national consciousness in Somali society and is part of the emerging civil society movement in Somalia, with a proven record in promoting civil society values such as the protection of human rights, democratic values and women's political rights.<sup>73</sup>

Ahlu Sunna WalJama'a (ASWJ) is a moderate Islamic group said to have good relations with the FGS, AMISOM and Ethiopia, but not with the Galmudug regional state.<sup>74</sup> It has been active in many peacebuilding conferences in Somalia and resisted al-Shabaab's attempt to capture the central regions of Somalia. Dominated by the Ayr Habargidir sub-clan, ASWJ<sup>75</sup> forces based in

Dhusamareb are responsible for expelling the extremist group al-Shabaab from most parts of the region. In December 2017, ASWJ signed a power-sharing agreement with the state administration.<sup>76</sup> Could these religious groups be engaged to address violence against women in elections as part of their women's political rights advocacy?

**Civil society organizations:** Today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of CSOs working actively in Somalia — for example, supporting social justice; registering human rights violations, including violations of the rights of women and children; providing humanitarian aid; and empowering people by providing education and vocational training.<sup>77</sup> The role of CSOs in addressing electoral violence in Somalia is not explicit, but could be integrated into the CSOs' key mandates undertaken locally with communities and government. It should be noted that not all CSOs are inclusive. A section of CSOs have lost credibility owing to political and ethnic inclinations favouring certain clan affiliations over others.

**The Interpeace Somali Programme** consists of two main, and fundamentally interlinked, programmes: the 'Pillars of Peace' programme and the 'Democratization' programme. The organization has programmes that can incorporate VAWE monitoring, including the Pillars of Peace programme. The Pillars of Peace programme was established in 2009 to build social cohesion in the communities of Somaliland, Puntland and southern and central Somalia, and also aims to strengthen the ability of grassroots communities to connect and provide input

70 Webersik, C. 2004. "Differences That Matter: The Struggle of the Marginalised in Somalia." *Africa* 74(4), pp. 516–533.

71 Webersik, C., S. J. Hansen and A. Egal. *Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis*.

72 Abdullahi, A. M. 2008. *The Islah movement: Islamic Moderation in War-torn Somalia*. Paper presented at the Second Nordic Horn of Africa Conference. Oslo. 31 October–1 November.

73 Ibid.

74 Gebremeskel H. 2015. "Somalia: The Emergence of Ahlu-Sunna Leader as a Regional Political Actor." *Geeska Afrika Online*. 23 May. Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://www.geeskaafrika.com/somalia-the-emergence-of-ahlu-sunna-leader-as-a-regional-political-actor/>.

75 Webersik, C., S. J. Hansen and A. Egal. *Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis*.

76 AMISOM. 2019. "Somalia Starts Process to Integrate Ahlu Sunna Forces into the Somali Security Forces." *AMISOM Online*. 5 July. Accessed 12 July 2021. <https://amisom-au.org/2019/07/somalia-starts-process-to-integrate-ahlu-sunna-forces-into-the-somali-security-forces/>.

77 European Consultants Organisation (ECO3). 2012. *Strengthening Civil Society in Somalia: Developing a Comprehensive Strategy*. Accessed 12 July 2021. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20130612\\_cs\\_strategy.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/20130612_cs_strategy.pdf).

Webersik, C., S. J. Hansen and A. Egal. *Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis*.

to their evolving governance structures. The Democratization programme builds on the work of the Pillars of Peace programme and approaches state reconstruction and governance processes in the region from a peacebuilding perspective.<sup>78</sup>

**Saferworld** plays a significant role in supporting democratization and improving governance in both Somalia and Somaliland and has done so since 2004.<sup>79</sup> To promote fair and transparent elections in several political regions across Somalia and Somaliland, Saferworld has helped with civic and voter education and formed working partnerships with EMBs. The organization trains and deploys local observers to monitor electoral processes throughout election cycles, empowers political party officials at the regional and district levels to effectively carry out their duties, builds the skills of the women's and youth wings of political parties to participate in decision-making, convenes consultation meetings on the constitutional review process, and trains and deploys local mediators to help resolve election disputes.

**Business community and the private sector:** The business community and the private sector are inherently linked to national politics and may contribute to conflict and peace at the same time. The private sector in Somalia today is one of the most powerful informal actors, as a result of its economic and military power. It can operate in an unregulated business environment. Some entrepreneurs employ their own private militia.<sup>80</sup> Those who work as contractors for international aid and humanitarian agencies, hotel businesses and transportation businesses can charge premiums for guaranteeing the safety of aid workers in terms of accommodation or the safe passage of humanitarian aid. The private sector can be mobilized to support

women's political rights and VAWE responses as women are key to their business clientele.

**The media:** In Somalia, most media organizations are privately owned, largely by men and/or members of the political elite, who, as a result, have huge influence over the way in which events and news are reported, often in alignment with the views of certain political parties or clans. Radio stations, television stations, print media and social media are influential in information dissemination and shaping inter-ethnic attitudes.

**Political leaders:** Political leaders are motivated by the desire for popularity, visibility and power within and outside the country. They are key actors with the potential to influence the ending of violence against women in future elections in the country.

**The role culture plays in propagating and curbing violence against women in elections:** Women in Somalia are subjected to all forms of gender-based violence as a result of an embedded clan-based culture that promotes strict male hierarchy and authority, and subordination of women. This is further exacerbated by religious misinterpretations and cultural limitations on the role and status of women in Somali society. As a result, deeply rooted gender inequality prevails. Women continue to be marginalized in almost all spheres of society, including political leadership, despite their considerable contribution to everyday life. Nevertheless, women's role in peacebuilding has been visible, and women are now playing an important role in the democratization of the electoral process.

Culture plays a vital role in Somalia, and cultural values can be explored in tackling violence against women in elections. Trust and personal relationships carry significant

<sup>78</sup> Webersik, C., S. J. Hansen and A. Egal. *Somalia: A Political Economy Analysis*.

<sup>79</sup> Saferworld. 2018. "Saferworld in Somalia and Somaliland." Accessed 6 August 2020. <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1176-saferworld-in-somalia-and-somaliland->

<sup>80</sup> Menkhaus, 2016.

weight in Somali culture and may provide a foundation for clan leaders to help identify opportunities for women to potentially engage in local clan meetings and other forums that could provide the transformation that is necessary to address violence against women in elections.

**Adolescents and youth:** United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) recognizes young people's leadership and roles in preventing and resolving conflict, violence and extremism, and that young people are a rich resource that is essential to achieving sustainable peace. Young people are valuable innovators and agents of change, and their contributions should be actively supported, solicited and regarded as essential to building peaceful communities and supporting democratic governance and transition.

**United Nations agencies and donors:** UN agencies and donors have played an important role in providing financial, technical and logistical support to Somalia's selection

processes. Strong coordination between these international partners in the 2016 elections was instrumental in ensuring coherent and effective support to the electoral process. Key international partners met regularly under the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's leadership to share information about the process, set priorities and agree on common advocacy initiatives. The international partners also met jointly on a regular basis, and as needed, with the members of the National Leadership Forum, as well as with the ad hoc EMBs and other concerned stakeholders, to help overcome challenges in, and advance the implementation of, the electoral process. A number of joint public statements were issued by international partners, through UNSOM's Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group, on a wide range of issues affecting the electoral process, and similar statements in future could prioritize responses to violence against women in elections.

### **3.4 relevant examples and lessons learned from similar countries that have previously had an electoral system that focused on the monitoring and prevention of violence against women in elections**

Factors that could trigger violence against women in the upcoming elections include the full implementation of gender quota legislation, which gave rise to violence against women during the 2016 electoral process and remains a sensitive issue, opposed by many groups and individuals. Women politicians advocating for the quota and female electoral officials and government officers enforcing the legislation may face the risk of violence. Advocates of gender equality and women's political rights are likely to be targeted as they continue to push for the implementation of the expected one-person, one-vote system, even though political tensions and a lack of consensus between the key actors at the FGS and FMS levels cast doubt on its

implementation. Stakeholders in VAWE prevention will need to pay keen attention to and monitor the pre-electoral cycle period; point out tensions arising because of these and other issues, and how such threats impact women running for office or women who want to register to vote; and offer appropriate responses.

This section draws relevant examples and lessons learned from other countries with experience of monitoring and preventing of election violence, with a focus on women. The selected relevant examples include raising awareness of violence against women in elections through campaigns, election day and polling arrangements to prevent people fraudulently influencing members of

their family to vote for a particular individual, working with police and security forces on training initiatives to combat violence against women in elections and the WSR platform.

These examples are some of those listed in the UN Women and UNDP publication to inform the prevention of violence against women in elections.<sup>81</sup>

### 3.4.1 Raising awareness of violence against women in elections through campaigns

It is important to include all stakeholders involved in the electoral process in raising awareness of violence against women in elections, from aspirants and candidates, party members and elected leaders to those involved in administering elections, such as the EMB and its staff.<sup>82</sup> Women's CSOs and NGOs involved in peace and security work may also integrate raising awareness of violence against women in elections into their activities. It is also important for women who have experienced electoral violence

to speak out about their experiences as a means of raising awareness among other women leaders and candidates. Various organizations have been instrumental in spearheading campaigns and convening workshops to promote awareness of violence against women in elections. The work of CSOs can be particularly important. There are several examples of both national and international organizations supporting campaigns against electoral violence.<sup>83</sup>

**Kenya:** “In Kenya in 2012, UN Women worked to enhance awareness through multi-stakeholder initiatives such as a programme with the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the media, and two local civil society platforms (the Uwiano Platform for Peace and the Usalama Platform) to educate and integrate mechanisms for responding to electoral-related VAW issues.”<sup>84</sup>

**Sierra Leone:** “In Sierra Leone, in 2007, women's CSOs launched a violence-free election advocacy campaign, supported by UN Women, targeting political parties in response to the rise in political violence. The campaign was launched in the southern town of Bo amid violent outbreaks between rival political groups. The women's groups, accompanied by brass bands, marched through the town with peace messages and were addressed by the mayor of the town. Peace messages were subsequently delivered to political party headquarters in the four provinces of Sierra Leone. In the capital, Freetown, political party leaders or their representatives committed to violence-free elections. This initiative was taken up by other stakeholders and upscaled by the UNDP and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone.”<sup>85</sup>

### 3.4.2 Election day and polling arrangements to prevent family voting

As stated elsewhere in this report, women are frequently intimidated and threatened with violence if they decide to vote for a candidate different from the one supported

by their husbands or the clan of their husbands. Studies elsewhere have shown that women voters are more likely than their male counterparts to experience

81 UN Women and UNDP. *Prevention of Violence against Women in Elections*.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 49.

84 Ibid., 101.

85 Ibid.

intimidation and violence on voting day.<sup>86</sup> The research undertaken for this assessment also elicited anecdotal evidence of women being raped while in voting queues or when travelling to vote. There were reports of similar occurrences in Somaliland during the previous elections.<sup>87</sup> The NIEC and regional state-level EMBs must pay careful attention to polling station placement, security and training of station employees in order to prevent acts of violence against women in elections. If need be, the polling venues for men and women can be separated.

**Papua New Guinea:** In Papua New Guinea, the Electoral Commission found that women were disadvantaged by 'family' and 'community' voting practices: the male head of the household or a community leader would instruct the women on how to vote. It was determined that these practices compromised voter secrecy. In 2012, the Electoral Commission "instituted separate voting booths for men and women under the assumption that women would vote freely if their male counterparts were not present."<sup>88</sup>

### 3.4.3 Working with police and security forces on training initiatives to combat violence against women in elections

The police and security forces have a legal obligation to ensure public safety during the electoral cycle and should ensure that this role, especially in relation to VAWE, is visible not only during the elections but also before them.<sup>89</sup> "Operational planning for electoral security is necessary to assess

and respond to any security risks that may impede the full participation of women in electoral processes, whether as voters or candidates."<sup>90</sup> Police and military planning should endeavour to include assessing gender-specific security risks for women, including in rural areas.<sup>91</sup>

**Kenya:** UN Women Kenya, with support from the UNDP, has developed a training facilitators' manual to enhance the capacity of those having the obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realize human rights to support survivors of VAWE using existing protocols and measures for reporting, responding, investigating and prosecuting VAW. Although the implementation of capacity development came as a response to the GBV experienced by women and girls during Kenya's post-election violence in 2007, it is part of broader EVAW initiatives in the country. It has a survivor-centred approach that covers complex issues such as how to handle disclosures of VAWE and how to provide direct support to those affected.

**Tanzania:** In Tanzania, the police officers participating in the Democratic Empowerment Project have a training manual on gender, human rights and the role of the police during elections, which was developed ahead of the country's 2015 elections. The curriculum included components on the different forms of violence that may occur during electoral campaigns and identifies how these affect men and women, and various social groups, differently. Using this manual following a training of trainers' approach equipped 103 police officers with the required knowledge, who in turn trained another 6,000 police officers throughout the country.

86 Bardall, G. *Breaking the Mold*.

87 Personal communication and interview with a representative of NAGAAD, the women's network.

88 UN Women and UNDP. *Preventing Violence against Women in Elections*, p. 90.

89 *Ibid.*, 91.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*

### 3.4.4 Women's situation room

The WSR is a women-led, non-partisan platform that aims to promote peaceful and transparent elections that are free of violence and increase democratic participation.<sup>92</sup> The WSR arose out of the realization that violence has become a norm during elections and that it was imperative that women develop a mechanism to counter this pattern, through dialogue, advocacy, mobilization, mediation, coordination and election observation. Now recognized as best practice, the WSR has been replicated in Senegal (2012), Sierra Leone (2012), Kenya (2013), Zimbabwe (2013), Mali (2013), Guinea-Bissau (2014), Nigeria (2015) and Uganda (2016). There is, however, scant evidence that the WSR has been proactively modelled specifically to monitor and respond to violence against women in elections during the pre-electoral period. In 2013 in Kenya, for instance, the WSR did not benefit from in-depth contextual analysis, best achieved during the pre-electoral period. A lot of the response was reactionary during the electoral and post-election periods. Early mapping of pre-existing structures should be carried out, in order to ensure that the WSR intervention process is effective and collaborates with key stakeholders.

The WSR process is structured around three forms of organization, which are good practices that other models can learn from:

**Team of eminent persons:** Such a team, like the Goodwill Ambassadors in Somalia, serves as a pressure/contact group that provides advisory services, high-level mediation and liaison with key stakeholders in order to promote a peaceful election

and guarantee rapid responses to reported incidents (before, during and after elections). Eminent men and women of long-standing integrity, neutrality and credibility undertake mediation, dialogue and liaison with key stakeholders to guarantee effective and prompt responses.

**Mobilization/observation:** This is a monitoring component composed of observers who are deployed to monitor the electoral processes and relay real-time information to the WSR. Women and youth groups, trained observers and journalists carry out peace advocacy and mobilization, monitoring elections and reporting.

**Situation room:** This is a well-equipped control room in terms of leadership, technical competence, logistical supplies and communications equipment. It serves as a watch room that receives, analyses and responds to election-related incidents. The secretariat, analysts (gender, legal and political), communication officers and volunteers undertake documentation, analysis and early warning.

The experience of Somaliland with a WSR is relevant here. During the election in Somaliland in 2017, NAGAAD, supported by UN Women, established a WSR with a call centre to monitor electoral violence through a toll-free telephone line. The centre, according to a NAGAAD source,<sup>93</sup> submitted reports to police and coordinated to reduce the risk of women experiencing GBV. The WSR faced financial challenges and fell dormant after the elections.

<sup>92</sup> The concept of the Women's Situation Room was first introduced by the Angie Brooks International Centre.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with a NAGAAD official.



## 4.0. SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD IN SETTING UP A PLATFORM THAT WILL WORK WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ADDRESS ALL FORMS OF ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS

In setting up a platform that will work with key stakeholders to address all forms of electoral violence against women in the upcoming Somalia elections, UN Women and its partners should consider supporting a mechanism that emphasizes a comprehensive approach to research, analysis and monitoring and offers early response options to deal with violence against women in the electoral process. Such a mechanism should inform effective programming involving state and non-state actors in order to enhance women's participation in the electoral process by reducing or preventing incidents of violence against women in elections.

The mechanism suggested here, a VAWE platform, incorporates the key lessons identified in this assessment and responds to the key dynamics that characterize violence against women in elections in Somalia. The VAWE platform activities will therefore include broader issues related to violence against women in Somali society and also customize responses to identified potential threats of violence against women in elections.

**Setting up a violence against women in elections platform:** This would be a broad-based VAWE monitoring and response partnerships platform with key actors representing similar interests in electoral processes, such as organizations focused on women's issues, politicians, youth, research institutions, community leaders, faith-based

organizations, civil society, etc. The idea is to converge within the VAWE platform to strengthen the broader gender equality and women's empowerment impact nationally. By coordinating multiple initiatives from a multiplicity of actors, working together, and by utilizing the strategic strengths of each VAWE platform partner, a sustainable response to violence against women in elections can be developed.

Since some systems for electoral collaboration already exist at the FGS and FMS levels, and given the current political tensions at those levels, there is no need to create new nationwide collaborative systems specifically for addressing violence against women in elections. Instead, VAWE early warning and response platforms can be placed at FMS and at FGS levels and serve as focal points for understanding, monitoring and collaborating on responses to violence against women in elections, up to and including prevention.

While a possible mix of short-, medium- and long-term platform activities is listed below, this study recommends a long-term view and investment in addressing violence against women in elections by identifying and responding to both observable direct incidents with potential for violence and the hidden issues at structural and cultural violence levels in order to promote relationship- and trust-building as the prerequisite for advancing women's political rights in Somalia.

Key to the VAWE platform will be the development of a handbook for early warning, monitoring and responses to violence against women in elections. The handbook will provide VAWE monitoring tools and guide assessment, analysis, training, awareness and education on electoral violence in general and on VAWE prevention in particular. The platform should put in place a number of context-specific interventions, including, but not limited to, radio programmes, a VAWE 24-hour toll-free helpline and social media platforms such as online chat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and email. Some activities of the platform could include:

- establish a multisectoral mechanism with inclusion of NIEC, law enforcement agencies, CSOs and other relevant actors to effectively monitor and take measures to prevent and respond to violence against women in elections;
- support women's advocacy groups to include VAWE issues while engaging elders, religious leaders and political parties/associations to improve women's rights in their internal mechanisms.

- implement experience-sharing forums on VAWE prevention with traditional, religious and political party leaders from other countries with similar contexts;
- implement training on early warning and response to violence against women in elections for political leaders, MPs, elders, religious leaders, political party leaders, women's CSOs, youth and members of the media;
- mobilize established networks and platforms of women aspirants and leaders to set up a platform for collective action on violence against women in elections;
- include the issue of violence against women in elections in community advocacy and in civic education on women's political participation (community conversations).

**Suggested steps in setting up a violence against women in elections platform:** It may take the following six steps to set up a platform that will work with key stakeholders to address all forms of electoral violence in the upcoming elections:

**Step 1: Assessing the VAWE context** — analysis of the potential risks of violence against women in elections, opportunities for response and identification of key actors.

**Step 2: VAWE response planning** — capture electoral issues with implications for violence against women in elections, response capacities and key actors.

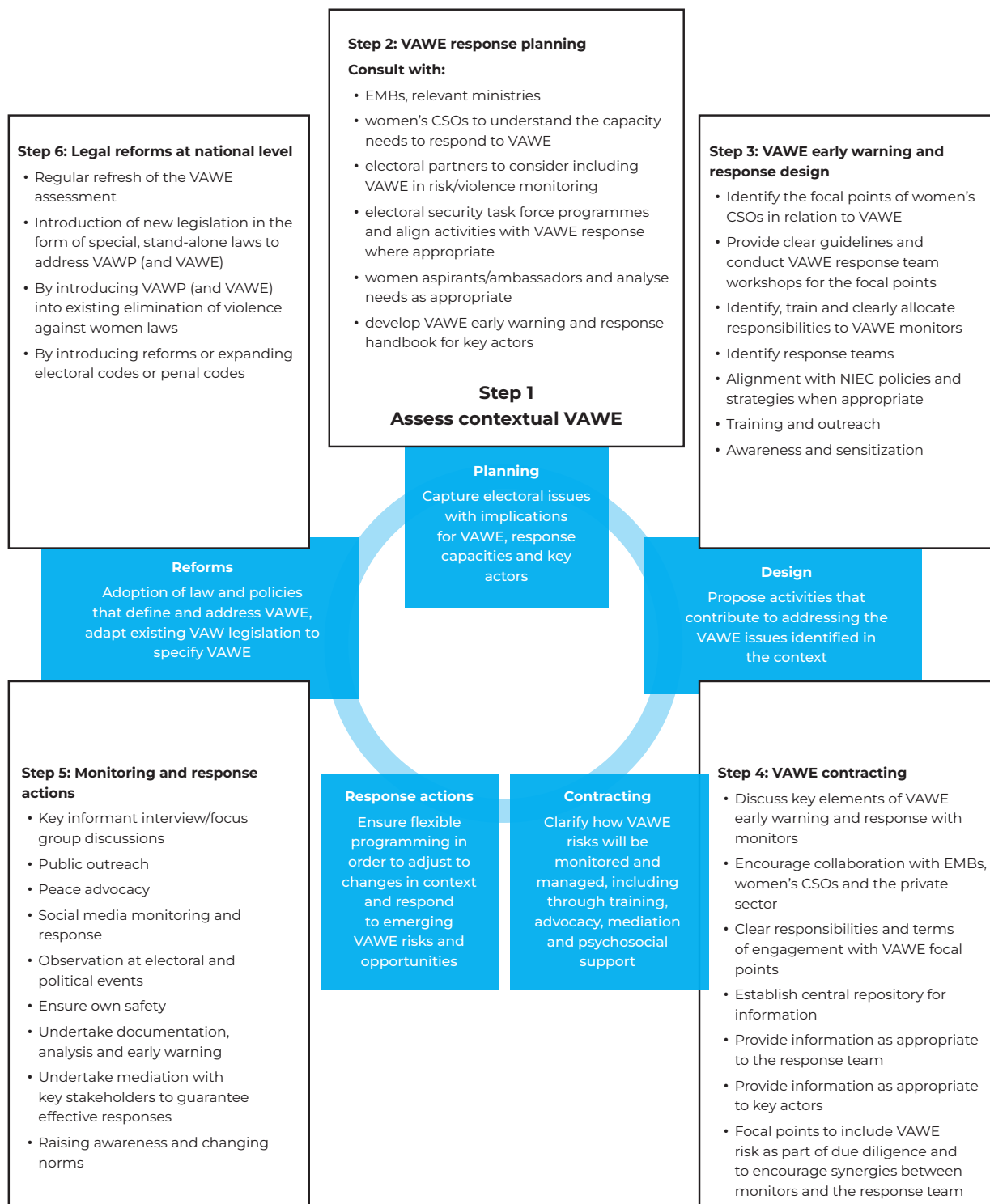
**Step 3: VAWE early warning and response design** — propose activities that contribute to addressing the VAWE issues identified in the context.

**Step 4: VAWE contracting** — clarify how VAWE risks will be monitored and managed, including through establishing a multisectoral response mechanism, training, advocacy, mediation and psychosocial support.

**Step 5: Monitoring and response actions** — ensure flexible programming in order to adjust to changes in context and respond to emerging VAWE risks and opportunities.

**Step 6: Legal reforms at national level** — adoption of law and policies that define and address violence against women in elections; adapt existing VAW legislation to specify violence against women in elections.

**Figure 4.1** – Summary of steps in setting up a VAWE early warning and response platform



## **Violence against women in elections**

**assessment:** An assessment of violence against women in elections is the first step in setting up a VAWE early warning and response platform. The assessment will identify potential VAWE risks, opportunities for response and the key actors. The assessment may need support from conflict and violence experts for further advice on methodology.

**Planning:** During planning, NIEC, with the support of UN Women and other partners, will capture the electoral process issues that have implications for violence against women in elections, early warning, monitoring and response, and the key actors. Training experts will develop a VAWE handbook for early warning, monitoring and response by adapting the UN Women VAWE prevention guide to the Somalia country context, as well as create interview protocols and stakeholder lists. Consultations will be with, but not limited to, the following:

- election management bodies (EMBs), relevant ministries
- women's CSOs to understand VAWE response capacity needs
- electoral partners to consider including violence against women in elections in risk/violence monitoring
- electoral security task force programmes, and activities aligned with the VAWE response when appropriate
- women aspirants/ambassadors, and their needs analysed as appropriate
- experts to develop a VAWE early warning and response handbook for key actors.
- **Design:** During the design phase of the VAWE early warning and response mechanism, information about the existence of violence against women in elections, and actions to mitigate it, can be integrated into ongoing

training programmes during the electoral cycle, in particular prior to the elections. VAWE key actors attending design workshops will propose response activities that contribute to reducing the risk of violence against women in elections, especially activities with the direct possibility to increase women's participation such as mediation, medical provision and legal provision. This will involve:

- identifying the focal points of women's CSOs in relation to violence against women in elections
- providing clear guidelines and conduct VAWE response team workshops for the focal points
- identifying, training and allocating clearly responsibilities to VAWE monitors
- identifying response team for mediation, legal and medical needs
- aligning with National Independent Electoral Commission policies and strategies when relevant
- training and outreach
- awareness and sensitization.

**Contracting:** During contracting phase, clarification needs to be made in the contracting document as to how specific VAWE risks will be monitored and managed, including through adjustments to monitoring tools. VAWE monitors will communicate on the focal point to further refine the monitoring tools and guide that are annexed in the handbook, ensuring that the data collected meet the needs for an appropriate response. In addition, the VAWE focal point will lead to communication with VAWE stakeholders including EMBs, women's CSOs, media and the private sector to ensure buy-in and transparency regarding the objectives of the VAWE early warning and response mechanism.

There will be a need:

- to discuss key elements of the VAWE early warning and response with monitors and the response team
- to encourage collaboration with EMBs, women's CSOs and the private sector
- for clear responsibilities and terms of engagement relating to the VAWE focal point
- to provide information and induction as appropriate to the response team
- to provide information as appropriate to key actors
- for the focal point to include VAWE risk as part of due diligence and to encourage synergies between the monitors and the response team.

**Monitoring and response actions:** Trained VAWE monitors, aided by officials of the EMBs at regional state level and equipped with monitoring checklists and targeted questionnaires, will be encouraged to attend election-related events (e.g. campaign rallies, internal party meetings and public discussion forums) to observe people's behaviour, VAWE occurrence and women's political participation, and will also be encouraged to consult/hold structured

interviews with gender-based violence service providers, women candidates and party activists, and leaders from all parties in the local community. Other monitoring, early warning and response actions to include are:

- meetings/key informant interviews/ focus group discussions
- public outreach
- peace advocacy
- social media monitoring, or use of social media to provide survivors with alternative ways of reporting violence against women in elections and seeking assistance
- observation at electoral and political events leading up to election day and immediately after elections
- ensuring own safety from first-hand incidents of violence against women in elections
- undertaking documentation, analysis and early warning
- undertaking mediation, dialogue and liaison with key stakeholders to guarantee effective and prompt responses.
- Legal reforms at the national level

## 5.0. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Violence against women in elections is an urgent concern in Somalia's upcoming elections given the already prevalent cases of violence against women in general, the discrimination against women pursuing political rights and the noted increase in rape cases and sexual violence perpetrated against women in the previous elections.

While it is not clear whether some violence against women (VAW) incidents witnessed during the electioneering periods in 2012 and 2016/17 were related to the elections, electoral stakeholders from women's networks active in fighting violence against women contend that the increase in VAW incidents during elections could have been related to the elections. In Somaliland, for instance, violence against women is prevalent, but is reportedly more intense during elections and is linked to the night queues for voting and intimidation by male counterparts.

Women in Somalia face significant cultural and social barriers. Somali women leaders believe that perpetrators of violence against women in elections in Somalia could be reacting to women's deviation from traditional gender roles, which is perceived as threatening male-dominated and clan-based power structures. Violence is perpetrated against women to deter them from standing as candidates, occupying political office and advocating for a 30 per cent women's quota. Such acts of violence against women in elections are psychological, physical or sexual in nature and manifest as assaults, intimidation, harassment and rape. Violence against women in elections (VAWE) acts take place within the family, in the community or in election centres.

The implementation of the new electoral law remains contentious; if not realized, women may continue to face hostile clan elders' attitudes and threats from a section

of religious groups, posing barriers for them to participate fairly in the critical role of the democratization of the country. Even in Somaliland, where universal suffrage elections take place, women are still targeted for violence to stop them from winning political seats, hence the need for the continued intervention by development partners.

There are opportunities to address violence against women in elections in Somaliland, where democratic elections are not new, and in the rest of Somalia, where universal suffrage elections are expected for the first time since the 1970s. Opportunities for VAWE responses include normative frameworks, policies, legislations and actions. Key actors also exist, as individuals or institutions, whose roles or functions have a positive impact on the electoral context and may provide early response actions to prevent violence against women in elections. The following actions are recommended as being pertinent to key actors and stakeholders.

- Clan elders and religious leaders should strive to obtain the confidence of local populations in their willingness to seriously support women's political empowerment and address VAWE issues. Clan elders and religious leaders may benefit from training on the role of women in peace and security, and in VAWE responses.
- Civic and voter awareness campaigns, targeting the local populations, should be implemented. These should focus on promoting secret ballots and the importance of voting. Zero tolerance for election violence and violence against women in elections will further protect women's participation.
- The creation of interparty women's coalitions and women ambassadors, such as those spearheaded by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development,

with support from the United Nations (UN), is helpful in promoting solidarity and generating solutions to cross-cutting issues affecting women's participation within party structures, in enabling women's active campaigning and in cultivating awareness among the elders to support women's participation in political leadership.

- Numerous women's civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations operating around peacebuilding and humanitarian themes may wish to consider including the issue of violence against women in elections in their interventions. This will require outreach and training actions. Similarly, women's unions at district level, which are more active than those at the national level, can launch campaigns to raise awareness of violence against women in elections.
- UN Women, with the support of donors and relevant institutions, may wish to consider supporting the establishment of a VAWE early warning and response platform to serve as a focal point for understanding violence against women in elections and recommend measures for the prevention of and response to violence against women during elections. As explained in the previous section of this report, key to the platform will be the development of a handbook for VAWE early warning, monitoring and response to enable assessment of awareness of and sensitization to electoral violence in general and violence against women in elections in particular.
- UN Women and partners should consider supporting research to document anecdotal VAWE data and to understand the make-up and frequency of violence against women in elections in various regions in Somalia. Such data would be invaluable to inform VAWE programming and the broader electoral process in general.







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