



# CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION SOMALILAND



**HORN AFRICA**  
**CONSULTANTS FIRM**  
Rendering Innovative Solutions

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### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report captures the findings of the study on the 'Women's Political participation in Somaliland, a case study of Somaliland 2021 local and parliamentary elections, carried out in June 2021. In commissioning this study, the Horn of Africa Consultants Firm, HACOF, sought to understand the underlying causes hindering women in various political positions to be elected in Somaliland, to provide practicality of women's political participation and governance. This report is based on the findings from a focus group discussion conducted on the election day in order to understand the causes hindering women from being elected in local and parliamentary government political positions in Somaliland. The findings are based on three focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with women candidates in the just concluded elections, a mixed group of women and men drawn from a wide segment of society including women working in government, women leaders in civil society and business, women in the security sector, religious and clan leaders, and voters drawn from different political affiliations between 11th to 13th June 2021 in Hargeisa, Somaliland. Like other women in the region Somaliland women are faced by variety of challenges when it comes competing for a political office both at local and national level. These includes clannism, financial and religious beliefs.

#### 1.1. Clannism is The Main Barrier to Women's Political Participation and Leadership.

Somalis is patriarchal clan-based society, where lineage is traced through the male parent. Women are considered transient members who belong to neither their father's clan nor that of their husband. These multiple clan connections are an asset in building networks and community connections but have simultaneously made it difficult for them to participate in the clan-based politics of Somaliland - Clan elders have played various roles in Somali politics and governance.

#### 1.2. Religious beliefs

Generally Islam prevents women from ascending to highest political office, the presidency due to religious restrictions. Some of the group participants reported that that Somaliland cannot even have a woman president due to the perceived notion that Islam prohibits women's leadership.

#### 1.3. Gender inequality and stereotype

Many participants felt that due to gender biases of the male leadership in politics, women are rarely elected to positions of power and this also minimizes the chances of women getting into leadership positions. Participants reported that , in Somaliland politic is normally considered as male issues and women are discouraged in political participation. Women are expected to only do the household chores. In Somalia, the political responsibility of taking care of the society and solving the problems of the family and the community at large are generally masculine. Across the contemporary Somaliland society, communities and clans have low expectations that women will offer solutions to society using a political office. They are not adequately prepared to speak before men and force a response. This makes it difficult for women leaders to be elected to top and important political positions.

### 1.4. Inadequate Women Voices in Media and Weak Advocacy

Participants reported that most media favored male candidates because most owners are men and they can easily control the narrative that favors them as well as have the power to sway how people vote through the use of radio and television. The emergence of the social media has not helped much because most of the female aspirants are not trained on how they can leverage social media to help them sell their policies. Additionally, women did not engage in any visible campaigns needed to mobilize voters from different areas.

### 1.5. Lack of Constitutionally and Legally Enforceable Framework on Political Representation and Influence

The absence of legal commitments and special arrangements to promote the representation of women, minorities, and clans from Somaliland's contested regions in the election will reinforce the exclusionary majoritarian voting system. This will clearly produce segments of winners and losers and, ultimately, will lead to less inclusive representation.

### 1.6. Inadequate Financing of Women

Many women simply do not have the private capital to mobilize a large number of voters. Women candidates usually cannot get the same amount of money if they try to fundraise for their campaigns as opposed to male candidates. There are two major reasons that prevents women from accessing private capital. First, the private sector is a male and religious-dominated class. Second, clan-facilitated fundraising is managed by traditional structures, and women are not represented in those informal institutions.

### 1.7. Weak and Poor Networking, Activism and Social Action

Women Organization's and female politicians are not working well together towards a common goal, and at worst, there is a culture of competition between them. There is little networking and connection between women organizations, especially political candidates to the social movement and advocacy groups to enhance the campaign to mainstream the female quota system into the politics and political structures of governance. Women candidates still largely rely on the clans to get the female candidates for them. More often than not, female candidates come into the campaigns late into the day when their male counterparts have already covered tremendous ground.

### 1.8. Political Naivety and Lack Of Capacity in Some Key Areas Including Campaigns Using Social Media Platforms

Even with other existing barriers, participants nonetheless strongly felt that women candidates did not offer stronger bids enough to match male candidates. The candidacy of most female candidates, except one, was often described to be marred by a complexity of inferiority and weak posture that could not win or match male competitors. This is mainly associated with political naivety and inexperience of candidates of female gender as compared to their male counterparts. The research profiled some of the comments of many voter participants during the focus sessions to illustrate the disappointment of the voters emanating from the weak bids of the women candidates

## 2. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 2.1. Women's Political Participation at Global Level

#### a) Women's Political Empowerment (WPE)

Women globally face a “double hurdle” to power, with “formidable obstacles” restricting their access to decision-making positions and processes, as well as their ability to influence within them (O'Neil and Domingo, 2016). Critics have asserted that the international community has placed an over-emphasis on women's presence in public life and formal elected office as a marker of genuine power (see Combaz, 2016). However, as emerging evidence reveals, women's meaningful political access and influence are crucially involved in strengthening the inclusivity of structural and institutional environments, in addition to supporting transformative changes in women's capabilities, common beliefs, and expectations about women and men (see O'Neil and Domingo, 2016).

However, despite having a growing understanding of the number of women operating in public decision-making, trajectories of women's political influence and leadership are “mostly still poorly documented or explained” (Domingo et al, 2015: 2).

As Domingo et al (2015) highlight, the evidence base on women and politics largely considers how participation is achieved in the political space rather than unpacking the political processes by which women influence. Central to a consideration of women's political participation and leadership, the concept of ‘women's political empowerment’ (WPE) captures women's ability to articulate their concerns and have their interests represented, in addition to being able to critically influence decision-making.

WPE is also about understanding where power and decision-making are located in both formal and informal spaces and how women can be supported to access and influence these processes. In this respect, WPE may extend beyond women's representation and influence in political office to capture women's experiences in areas, including civil society, business and service delivery. Whilst this study has focused on women's participation and leadership within government structures, understanding the broader context of WPE as related to both women's access and influence, in addition to the central consideration of formal and informal power, is key.

#### b) Political Analysis

Of note, concepts of WPE speak to feminist perspectives on power, which reveal those debates on ‘thinking and working politically’ (TWP) and political economy analysis (PEA) have “missed one of the most significant systems shaping power relations worldwide: gender” (Koester, 2015: 1). This “at best superficial consideration of gender” means that PEA and the TWP agenda are “blind to key components of the workings of power: the ways in which power and politics in the ‘private’ sphere shape and are influenced by power relations at all levels of society”, and, “the ways in which wider economic, political and social structures rely on and reproduce gender power relations”; (Koester, 2015: 1).

As Hudson and Leftwich emphasize in their discussion of ‘political analysis’, current political economy approaches “lack the analytical tools needed to grasp the inner politics of development”, whereby political economy has come to be seen narrowly as the “economics of politics” and as such misses

what is “distinctively political about politics – power, interests, agency, ideas, the subtleties of building and sustaining coalitions” (2014: 5).

In broad terms, the donor and international community continue to build their approaches around over-simplified models of empowerment, and are failing to support approaches that address power and political economy and adapt to specific contexts and inequalities (see Combaz, 2016). In addition, a significant gap exists between the political settlements’ literature and the mainstream feminist literature on women in politics (see ESID, 2014).

### 2.2. The Somaliland context

#### a) Somaliland’s Self-Rule and Democratization Journey in Focus

In 1991, Somaliland claimed sovereignty after a three-decade-long civilian and armed struggle that put an end to the military regime. The former British Somaliland protectorate which merged with the former UN Trust Territory of Somalia in 1960 established the Somali Republic. Ever since the reinstatement of Somaliland, state-building has been a rather indigenous, inclusive, bottom-up, and locally-owned process that is exceptional in the Horn of Africa and the wider African continent (APD, 2015).

In 1993, Borame (the capital of Awdal region) hosted the most significant National Reconciliation Conference. It was here that delegates adopted the country’s first National Charter—a framework agreement endorsed by key stakeholders which gave rise to Somaliland’s three-decade-long political stability, social cohesion, and de facto statehood (Lewis, 2008). In 1997, Somaliland hosted another crucial reconciliation conference in Hargeisa, which brought an end to the civil war and built upon the successes of the Borame conference (APD, 2010). In the later years of the 20th century, the Somaliland government introduced more inclusive policies to strengthen the country’s unity in the form of ‘clan-based power-sharing arrangements.’ In doing so, the Somaliland government created new political and social institutions. From these arrangements emerged a decentralized governance system with three branches (executive, legislative, and judicial) that would check and balance each other, political associations that would compete to become national political parties and hold local, parliamentary, and presidential elections. These also established peaceful transfer of power from one administration to another and an independent press—though they have been subject to unlawful arrest and intimidation—meets intimidation and arrest from the government— that would critically take part in safeguarding the freedom of the press, but most importantly, hold the government accountable.

It is important to note that much of Somaliland’s democratization process was spearheaded by informal players— clan elders, intellectuals, the private sector, and aspiring political leaders. Hence, Somaliland’s democracy was instituted while drafting the country’s constitution in 2001. The International Republican Institute (IRI), a Washington DC-based organization, sent a delegation to Somaliland to observe the first popular referendum vote. IRI released a report which praised the Egal government for conducting a rather successful referendum with no violence and fraud in a country that had not witnessed an election in over four decades. Additionally, the report stated the following: “Based on these observations, the Institute concludes that, on the whole, the constitutional referendum held on May 31, 2001, was conducted fairly, freely, and openly, and largely adhered to the election

procedures set down by the Somaliland parliament and in accordance with internationally accepted standards.” (IRI, 2001). The Constitution was ratified with around 97 percent of public approval in 2001 (Somaliland Laws, 2005).

The Somaliland government held three main objectives for finalizing the country's Constitution. First, to legalize Somaliland's re-assertion of independence through popular voting. Second, to lay the foundations for the Somaliland political and governance system. Third, to open-up a political space for opposition parties for the country to enjoy the freedoms of a democratic society through the formation of political parties. The Constitution ratification gave rise to the first local council elections held in 2002. These were Somaliland's first multiparty elections since the late 1960s. During the months prior to the election date, the first political association emerged. Six associations led by various political heavyweights from different sectors of the society competed to participate in those elections. The Constitution dictates that only the three political associations, those with the most votes qualify for being the country's national parties. This was done to avoid past mistakes, such as, in the 1960s when hundreds of clan-based political parties competed for the last major election in the former Somali Republic (APD, 2015).

### **b) The Evolving but Still Elusive Gender Equality Context**

Whilst there is a growing body of literature examining Somali women's roles in state building and peacebuilding processes, there has been relatively little documented around women's specific engagement within formal government structures and politics. The majority of literature in this space has explored the unconventional and indirect ways in which women have promoted peace, rights, and restored law, largely at the community level. These findings obscure Somali women's strong history in advocating for their political rights and leadership opportunities dating back at least to the final days of the colonial period, when representative assemblies were being formed by Italian and British administrations in preparation for independence. As Ingiriis (2015) has highlighted, there is a lack of evidence showcasing women's historical engagement prior to the Barre regime, including women's contributions to the nationalist movement (1943-1960), which provide an important foundation for understanding the current context of women's movements in both Somalia and Somaliland.

The Barre regime (1969-1991) has been described by some scholars as a 'golden era' for women (discussed in Ingiriis and Hoehne, 2013; Torunn et al, 2015) with the government's 'scientific socialism' rolled out at a time when all other social organisations and political parties were banned, as reflected in the establishment of the Somali Women's Democratic Organisation (SWDO), the 'women's section' of Barre's Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party in 1977 (Mohamud, 2014). The government also sought to improve healthcare and education for women during this time and several laws were introduced, including the Family Law of 1975, guaranteeing in part, equal rights to inheritance in contradiction to Sharia'h law and the customary (xeer) law, which triggered outrage across the religious community (Mohamud, 2014).

However, these arguably progressive gains are shown to have shifted over the second decade of Barre's regime, where women are said to have been instrumentalized by Barre, and used as a tool to legitimise his authority and consolidate his power (Ingiriis, 2015). Following the overthrow of the regime, the civil war period marked a moment of significant transformation for women and their

associated rights and freedoms.

Some critics have argued that the breakdown of the old order gave women new spaces for social, political and economic engagement, however, the evidence base around this is limited and provides mixed insight (see Ingiriis and Hoehne, 2013). Despite the quota not being reached, critics have argued that it helped to importantly increase the visibility of advocacy around women's political rights and inspire and motivate women to continue fighting for equal representation. Tripp (2016) has also discussed the ways in which post-conflict transitions in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly since the 2000s, have had a significant and independent influence on women's formal rights and levels of political representation, and in the Somali context from 2000, women became even more engaged in grassroots and national-level peacebuilding initiatives.

However, progress has been notably much slower due to legal obstacles, the entrenched role of elders and more conservative ideologies. It is in this context that successive proposals for the introduction of a quota in Somaliland have stalled. Serious proposals have been debated prior to each of the elections in Somaliland, from the first 2002 local council vote, through the 2003 (presidential), 2005 (parliamentary), 2010 (2nd presidential) and 2012 (2nd local council) votes, without success. This is why the May 2021 elections provided a keen focus to observers keen on deepening gender equality, with particular interest on if inclusion of women in politics would register meaningful progress.

### 2.3. Background Information of The Study

In 1991, Somaliland unilaterally declared the restoration of independence where the territory had enjoyed for several days in 1960. This represented an end of allegiance to the greater Somalia. In late 1990, Somaliland's political leadership declared a commitment to representative democracy, and the first local elections were held in 2002. The Presidential elections were held in 2003, and parliamentary elections in 2005, this all contributed to democratic progressive steps in Somaliland.

On 12th July 2020, Somaliland's three national political parties reached an agreement to hold parliamentary and local elections. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) organized an election on 31st May 2021 showcasing evidence of Somaliland's progressive stability. The Somaliland elections in 2021 ushered hope that a successful democratic election would potentially increase Somaliland's international recognition.

The elections were the region's first parliamentary elections since 2005 where three parties – Somaliland National Party (Waddani), Justice and Welfare Party (UCID), and Peace, Unity, and Development Party Kulmiye – put forward 246 candidates who competed for 82 seats in the House of Representatives, of which 13 were women. The current House of Representatives has only one female Member of Parliament, out of 82 members and only 10 women in local councils out of 323 council members - thus, reflecting the challenges and barriers women face in competing for political offices in Somaliland.

After a peaceful and conclusive election on 31st May 2021 results revealed that no single woman was elected for a seat in parliament and only three were elected for the local council. The results

show that Somaliland had regressed in the progress made for women representatives. Women in Somaliland are now largely absent from national and local decision-making bodies and have been excluded from any political processes in parliament. Despite women representing more than half the country's population (51%), no single women parliamentarian elected in the House of Representative. Women are part of our society and their political engagement is invaluable. Building women's and men's equal participation in governance procedures is very important for sustaining inclusive and effective governance in Somaliland. As a developing society, it is very essential to recognize that women can play vital roles in their communities, as they are effective in advocating about pertinent issues that concern them. Regardless of the successes recorded in some Somaliland institutions, the underrepresentation of women in these political institutions is quite appalling. The reason for this is not far-fetched, as they face serious challenges trying to be a part of male dominated political atmosphere. These challenges include structural barriers emanating from cultural and religious beliefs, which cripples the ability of women to vie for a political office. Throughout the history of Somaliland and traditions, the clan system favors males and fails to recognize and represent women in the political landscape of the country. Other key factors which include social barriers, gender-based violence, inability to get support, as well as lack of adequate resources affect the participation of women in leadership roles and decision-making affairs.

### 2.4. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study was to understand the underlying causes hindering women in various political positions to be elected in local and parliamentary government in Somaliland. Specifically, the project intended to;

- i. **Examine the social barriers and challenges facing women aspirants and candidates**
- ii. **Study the behaviours and attitudes of female voters and clan members**
- iii. **Assess the incentives and motives towards the decision making by the voters**
- iv. **Explore broader constitutional changes or legislations e.g., Female quota**
- v. **Recommend practicality of women's political participation and governance**

### 3. THE STUDY IMPLEMENTATION

The study adopted two-pronged approach which included;

- a) **A comprehensive literature review**
- b) **Qualitative research**

A comprehensive literature review, adopting the thematic induction analytical approach systematic review principles. Quite a rich repository of secondary literature including both academic and non-academic reports was consulted.

Qualitative research involving focus sessions with a diverse mix of respondents with a special focus on women, which were conducted in June 2021 in Somaliland. A total of three focus sessions were carried out with three categories of respondents: women candidates in the just concluded elections, a mixed group of women and men drawn from a wide segment of society (women working in government, women leaders in civil society, and business, women in the security sector, religious and clan leaders), and, women voters drawn from the various clans at a community level.

Table 1: Summary of the FGDs

	Group	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	VENUE	FGD DATE
Group A	Female only political candidates	8	Asood Hotel	11th June 2021
Group B	Mixed gender group of people with diverse backgrounds	11	Asood Hotel	12th June 2021
Group C	Mixed gender group with clan based voters	7	Asood Hotel	13 <sup>th</sup> June

### 4. THE STUDY FINDINGS

These findings are organized around the objectives of the study, and these are to:

- i. Examine the social barriers and challenges facing women aspirants and candidates
- ii. Study the behaviors and attitudes of female voters and clan members
- iii. Assess the incentives and motives towards the decision making by the voters
- iv. Explore broader constitutional changes or legislations e.g., female quota
- v. Recommend practicality of women's political participation and governance

Each of these is discussed in the subsections below.

#### 4.1. Social Barriers and Challenges Facing Women Aspirants and Candidates

##### a) Clannism is The Main Barrier to Women's Political Participation and Leadership.

This research found strong support across participants that clannism represents one of the most significant barriers to women's political participation and leadership, whereby 'this [political power] goes through clans and as long as that happens, they are the biggest challenge.

**Women are discriminated against on the basis of their femininity while many other people are discriminated against on the basis of clan affiliation"-**

##### Female political candidate

**In my opinion, when the chief allowed women to represent their clan, the families were divided into parts. Family or clan division regarding women's representation creates friction among the clan affiliation members. Traditionally, women are meant to stay at home and therefore this was another hindrance of women" -**

##### Mixed-gender group participant

**Politics and culture are intertwined because most people believe that men are superior to women while the constitution says they can all participate in politics. However, it seems that women are not mature for politics and sometimes it's very difficult for women candidates to persuade the electorate on their agenda to vote for them".**

##### Clan based voter

Clans in Somaliland are culturally consensual identities inherited from patriarchal ancestors, within which power is differentiated along gender and age lines with women subjugated to men, and young to old. The status of women within the Somali clan structure is widely understood to have remained in place, despite the social, political, and economic changes brought on by colonialism, post-independence state-building, and civil war.

Being a patriarchal clan-based society, where lineage is traced through the male parent. Women are considered transient members who belong to neither their father's clan nor that of their husband. These multiple clan connections are an asset in building networks and community connections but have simultaneously made it difficult for them to participate in the clan-based politics of Somalia. Clan elders have played various roles in Somali politics and governance.

This position is strongly validated by recent literature materials and studies conducted on the subject, many of which point to the fact that clans in Somaliland are culturally consensual identities inherited from patriarchal ancestors, within which power is differentiated along with gender and age lines with women subjugated to men, and young to old. The status of women within the Somali clan structure is widely understood to have “remained in place, despite the social, political, and economic changes brought on by colonialism, post-independence state-building, and civil war” (Rayale et al, 2015).

**Tribalism is an essential part of the women's failure in elections because men are accompanied by other men in their clans with effort but women are alone and they are neutral and mostly didn't get support from their clans.”**

**A woman political candidate.**

Thus, women are formally excluded from clan discussion and decision-making structures.

In a political system predicated on balancing power between clan and sub-clan groups, as Somalia's is, women are therefore disadvantaged because the exclusion they experience in clan structures is directly mirrored in formal politics.

Indeed, tradition favors consensus-based politics, which is physically “close” to the local community. The Somaliland experience highlights some of the pitfalls for women in this transition. As highlighted by Walls et al (2017) in Somaliland, although electoral democracy was intended to eliminate tribalism and serve as an alternative to the clan, ‘it has turned into an effective tool for spreading tribalism in Political parties, elections and democracy have all been misunderstood and misused to the point that they have heightened tribalism to new heights we have never seen before’ (male 61–70, private sector, Sanaag: 59). Walls et al (2017) also find that clannism or tribalism is seen not so much as an ‘ideology but as a ‘corruption’ of the clan, which is increasingly prevalent and undesirable.

### b) Islamic Religion Doctrines Do Not Favor Women

This research identified a significant proportion of participants who felt that certain tenets of Islamic jurisprudence prevented women from taking on presidential and senior level roles, some of whom located this to a specific Hadith. In society, sheikhs are the most respectful and listenable people, but sheikhs don't want women in political seats.

**From a religious point of view, it is difficult for women to join in politics and get elected because people are active listeners to the religious sheikhs who are not willing to support women in political platforms”.**

#### Female political candidate

**In Somali society, sheikhs are most respected and people listen to them, unfortunately sheikhs do not encourage women participation in leadership positions”.**

#### Clan based voter

**Religion does not allow women to run for elective positions”.**

#### Mixed gender group participant

There is a growing number of Imams and Sheikhs in Somaliland who argue that there are separate rights for women and men. There is overwhelming support for the view that states women should stay at home, and men should not only be breadwinners, but they should lead society. The more power ultra-conservative religious leaders gain; the more challenges will arise for women. There is a fear that if members of the religious community are sent to parliament, they will suspend the quota debate once and for all.

Literature points that in Somali culture and religion look inter-twinned and dictate, to a large extent, the social aspects of life (Abdullahi, 2007). These factors were further corroborated by views collected from across the categories of participants of the focus sessions who felt that culture and religion have a lot of influence on politics, and the decision of the voters to elect women.

**From a cultural and religious point of view, it is difficult for women to join in politics and to be elected, this is because people are active listeners to the religious sheikhs but unfortunately sheikhs are not willing to give support to women in order, women to join the political platforms.”**

#### Said a female voter

### c) Gender Inequality and Stereotype

In Somalia, the political responsibility of taking care of the society and solving the problems of the family and the community at large are generally masculine. Across the contemporary Somaliland society, communities and clans have low expectations that women will offer solutions to society us-

ing a political office. They are not adequately tough to speak before men and force a response. This makes it difficult for women leaders to be elected to top and important political positions.

Somali is a patriarchal society. The imbalance of power and political economy between male and female gender coupled with gender-based violence including rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, and denial of resources such as property inheritance are some of the social problems that Somali women face. There is emotional abuse, which makes the women feel inferior and can never stand up for herself let alone go for an elective post.

Even political parties are yet to mainstream affirmative action and gender quota in their political structures, thus disenfranchising women and women's voices. Participants, both voters, and the women candidates are able to note this as not only a serious concern but also point that parties, working on the deep knowledge of how culture and region, clannism influence vote against women, favor male candidates, especially from populous clans to have a good chance of winning the seats.

Many participants felt that due to gender biases of the male leadership in politics, women are rarely elected to positions of power in both internal party positions and the external seats. This also minimizes the chances of women getting power within the party structures.



I agree with my sister because the man is accounted for among the clan while the girl is not accounted for to be among the clan and Women are not good at politics and campaign this is because men are campaigning from urban, rural to nomadic areas while women are only focused in the main cities.”

**Observed a female voter.**



Traditionally, women are meant to stay at home and therefore this was another hindrance of women”

**Mixed gender group participant**



In my opinion, women are not honored, in society men are preferred. Community believes women are supposed to stay home”.

**Clan based voter**



“Men and women do not get the same opportunities. Always focus was given to the man”.

**Female political candidate**



Political parties didn't favor women and didn't give attention to the women but instead they showed support to the men.”

**Woman Candidate.**

### d) Inadequate Women Voices in Media and Weak Advocacy

Participants reported that most media favored male candidates because most owners are men and they can easily control the narrative that favors them as well as have the power to sway how people vote through the use of radio and television. Therefore, they can easily control the narrative that favors them as well as have the power to sway how people vote through the use of radio and television. The New media has not helped much because most of the female aspirants are not trained on how they can leverage social media to help them sell their policies. Women who have many followers on social sites also choose to popularize the male candidates instead of their female counterparts. Coupled with these factors, is the 'notion' that gender equality and affirmative action is a foreign ideology that is not African and therefore not engrained with the culture and traditions of the Somaliland people. Participants commonly felt that gender equality advocates are still perceived as 'western' influenced, and somehow are still weak and not taken route among most communities and clans, which are still the engines and base of political power in Somaliland, as political decisions are collectively made in these confines.

Several participants suggested that if women within government and civil society could come together to form a commonly agreed agenda around enhancing women's political rights, as demonstrated through the case of advocacy and lobbying around the quota, then this would potentially lead to a meaningful impact.



**The media favored men because media owners were advertising for men at a lower cost compared to women. On the other hand, when it comes to information sharing, the media was favoring men by posting men candidate information and election campaign materials more than for women candidates. This automatically had an impact on women”.**

**Mixed gender group participant**



**Women were not active enough in social media utilization, I have seen people opening a Facebook page for women candidates in the last weeks of the election campaign”.**

**Female political candidate**



**Women did not engage in any visible campaigns such as door-to-door campaigns, visiting villages receiving the most votes and they needed to mobilize in rural areas and IDPs as well and to meet village committees and persuade their ambitions”.**

**Clan based voter**

### e) Lack of Constitutionally and Legally Enforceable Framework on Political Representation and Influence

Respondents generally felt that in the absence of a quota or a framework for promoting women's representation, female candidates for the upcoming parliamentary elections on 31 May 2021 had sought support and endorsement from their respective clans. Seven women reportedly pursued the backing of their clans. Only one of them won the full support of her clansmen, setting a precedent as was the first time in Somaliland's history that clan elders, intellectuals, the diaspora, youth, opinion makers, and businessmen publicly endorsed a woman's candidacy. Securing her clan backing furthered her candidacy. Resources were mobilized and a database was established to support her and to ensure the maximum registration of her clan constituency during the voter registration exercise. In contrast, another female candidate, who failed to secure the support of her clansmen, has faced strong and consistent resistance and opposition from her clan leadership and politicians.

The absence of legal commitments and special arrangements to promote the representation of women, minorities, and clans from Somaliland's contested regions in the election will reinforce the exclusionary majoritarian voting system. This will clearly produce segments of winners and losers and, ultimately, will lead to less inclusive representation.

The most obvious losers are women. Already, few women offered themselves as candidates for parliamentary and local government elective posts due to the prevailing social barriers. At best, women are likely to have meagre representation in parliament. This will mean that women continue to be denied equal legislative rights, which will also have a negative impact on public policy.

### f) Inadequate Financing of Women

Many women simply do not have the private capital to mobilize a large number of people. Women candidates usually cannot get the same amount of money if they try to fundraise for their campaigns as opposed to male candidates. Two reasons are preventing women from accessing private capital. First, the private sector is a male and religious-dominated class. Second, clan-facilitated fundraising is managed by traditional structures, and women are not represented in those informal institutions. This was a recurring problem for the women candidates who were interviewed for this paper. One female candidate who was interviewed for this report stated that "if she had money, she could even get imam's who could support her candidacy." However, this view of it all comes down to access to finance and has been challenged by others who argue that traditional structures trumps above all. Some businesswomen tried to mobilize their sub-clan base, but they still did not get the support of their sub-clans.



**"Women and men candidates did not have the same opportunity in obtaining election finance from their communities".**

**Female political candidate**

### g) Weak and Poor Networking, Activism and Social Action

Participants of the focus sessions commonly highlighted that women's Organisations and female politicians are not working well together towards a common goal, and at worst, there is a culture of competition between them. There is little networking and connection between women organizations, especially political candidates to the social movement and advocacy groups to enhance the campaign to mainstream the female quota system into the politics and political structures of governance. Women candidates still largely rely on the clans to get the female candidates for them. More often than not, female candidates come into the campaigns late into the day when their male counterparts have already covered tremendous ground.

Participants expressed that the advocacy activities of the civil society organizations on women empowerment agenda are somewhat disjointed and weak, project driven rather outcome-oriented, and are insufficient to challenge the deeply embedded cultural and religious systems that work against women, and thus often bear very insignificant results.

**“The role of civil society needs to be relooked in terms of awareness campaigns, strategy building regarding women's political needs i.e., constitutions learning, enactment and rectifying the other laws which favors women 's political willingness. Civil societies didn't engage the right people regarding women rights and empowerment. Civil society roles in women empowerment are on a project basis, they don't engage women's concerns by heart.”**

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**Study participant**

In addition, the research found out that representation of women in the Civil Society sector is too meagre to drive the pro-women Agenda. In many instances, women in civil society do not work in key positions that would influence their CSO's programmatic agenda to be pro-women.

**“The managerial positions for women in the civil service sector are very low levels, for example mostly women are employed as secretaries”.**

**Remarkd a voter participant.**

### h) Political Naivety and Lack Of Capacity in Some Key Areas Including use of Social Media Platforms for Campaigns

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Even with other existing barriers, voter participants nonetheless strongly felt that women candidates did not offer stronger bids enough to match male candidates. The candidacy of most female candidates, except one, was often described to be marred by a complexity of inferiority and weak posture that could not win or match men. This is mainly associated with political naivety and inexperience of candidates of female gender as compared to others. The research profiled some of the comments of many voter participants during the focus sessions to illustrate the disappointment of the voters emanating from the weak bids of the women candidates:

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**Women neglected themselves, no one overrode them".** **Remarkd a participant.**

**Women did not engage in any visible campaigns such as door-to-door campaigns, visiting villages receiving the most votes and they needed to mobilize in rural areas and IDPs as well and to meet village committees and persuade her ambitions."**

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Participants across the categories also felt political inexperience is one of the factors that hold back women to win in the elections, "for example, most women came into politics from other sectors which have no relation to politics or mostly were absent form government administration, while men were mostly from the different sectors of the government skeleton" As expressed by one voter participants.

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Equally, besides naivety and inexperience, women candidates often did not exploit other campaign avenues like candidates of male gender did. Participants observed that very few women candidates used the social media platforms to drive their campaigns. Social media and other avenues such as social hall meetings, as well as door-to-door campaigns are some of the avenues that exist for women candidates to explore, particularly the social media which has become an integral part of every communication in nearly every sphere of life.

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**Social media is one of the most creative places we can reach out to the community",**

**one voter expressed.**

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The political inexperience and naivety exhibited by women candidates in a male dominated patriarchal society with deeply embedded cultural and religious prejudices against women, the women candidates' performance was always going to be poorer. This calls for multi-dimensional women empowerment interventions and strong advocacy that includes key sectors of the society.

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### 4.2. Behaviors and Attitudes of Female Voters and Clan Members

The study also held focus sessions with female voters drawn from various clans in order to examine their behavior and attitudes to assess if at all they were ready to vote for female candidates during elections. Whereas female voters reckon that women would provide better leadership, and that they are ready to vote for them, "I think, as women maintains family togetherness, they also do this in society, and women are at the heart of society", participants still felt that culture, religion and clannism were still the predominant factors that would influence the voters behavior and attitude towards voting in women.

**No, religion does not allow women to rule a country, because the messenger Said "if a woman rules a country, the country is in a doomed state."**

**Said a voter.**

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When asked if there could ever be a female president in Somaliland, the female voters' respondents unanimously felt that time is not ripe for a woman to be president. Still, few responded to the affir-

mative.



Yes, she can be Insha'Allah, for example, countries with a female president are safer than countries with male presidents.”

**Said a female voter**

The general attitude of the participants of the focus sessions, represents the general societal attitude and behavior of the voter in Somaliland. Whereas, they think women would provide good leadership, they are still under the grip of clannism, culture and religion, which largely determine their voting direction to a large extent. This points to the need to engage clan and religious leaders in influencing perception of voters at the grassroots on the importance of women political empowerment and gender inclusivity in leadership.

### 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1. Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the underlying causes hindering women in various political positions to be elected in local and parliamentary governments in Somaliland. The specific objectives sought to examine the social barriers and challenges facing women aspirants and candidates, study the behaviors and attitudes of female voters and clan members, assess the incentives and motives towards the decision making by the voters, explore broader constitutional changes or legislations and recommend practicality of women's political participation and governance.

About the first specific objective on barriers and challenges facing women aspirants and candidates we found out that clannism, Islamic religious doctrines, discriminatory gender norms, inadequate women voices in media, weak advocacy, and inadequate financing of women as the main barriers hindering women to participate in political positions.

Clannism represents one of the main barriers to women's political participation and leadership, whereby this political power goes through clans. Islamic teachings prevented women from taking on presidential and senior-level roles and due to gender biases of the male leadership in politics, women are rarely elected to positions of power and this also minimizes the chances of women getting into leadership positions.

Media favors male candidates and the new media has not helped much because most of the female aspirants are not trained on how they can leverage social media to help them sell their policies. Additionally, women have limited financial support as opposed to men. Many women simply do not have the private capital to mobilize a large crowd. Women candidates usually cannot get the same amount of money if they try to fundraise for their campaigns as opposed to male candidates because the private sector is a male and religious-dominated class and clan-facilitated fundraising is managed by traditional structures, and women are not represented in those informal institutions.

Working directly with clan leaders to help identify opportunities for women to potentially engage in local clan meetings and other fora, may offer particularly transformational opportunities. The voices of religious leaders who are supportive of women's political empowerment should also be amplified (as key shapers of public opinion), and where possible synergies made between gender-equitable outcomes and pro-women's rights with Islamic values and ethics through strategic engagement. Organizations that have successfully worked with religious leaders on gender issues (such as the Somaliland-based annual International Book Fair) do so based on long-term, strategic relationships. Trust and personal relationships carry significant weight in Somali culture, and such relationships will provide a foundation for partners to leverage support from – and provide support to – the voices of leaders and scholars who may be willing to support.

Further, in supporting women-led civil society it is important to foster inclusion and diversity within and between women's groups and networks - so that existing power structures of age, class, race, and ethnicity in any given context do not undermine, subvert or corrupt the feminist purpose, politics and leadership practice of women in power. This allows long-term development of skills and capacities that women need to access, hold and employ power safely, 'hard skills' in negotiation, influencing, and consensus-building in their technical expertise to enable them to work with legitimacy in key sectors and at all levels.

In addition, there is a need for safe spaces to enable women to meet and learn from each other's experiences. Women acquire political skills and networks through a variety of experiences, including informally through early socialization as part of politically engaged families, student politics, professional and voluntary experiences, as well as more formal leadership training and engagement in party politics and exposure to mentorship.

Creating more enabling institutions, processes, and working cultures involve building civil and political rights, reforming discriminatory laws, electoral and party reform, shifting sexist attitudes and practices towards women in public life, as well as developing formal platforms and mechanisms, such as quotas and opportunities to participate in constitutional reform.

Finally, regarding broader constitutional changes or legislations, we noted that to improve women's participation in the political process, there needs to be a framework for promoting women's representation.

Further research is needed to elucidate insights on how participation, power, and influence impact women operating at different levels of government, with a specific focus on unpacking the experiences of women operating at the local level, and how this translates upstream to influence at the national and federal levels.

In conclusion, these key constraints in our findings and research have allowed HACOF to identify progressive solutions and ideas forwarding norm-changing values. HACOF noted that to improve women's political participation there is a need for a framework in place and broader constitutional changes or legislations - this will contribute to the development in women's representation and further amplify voices that are positively in favor of women's political participation and leadership.

### 5.2. Recommendations

Based on these findings, we would like to make the following recommendations:

Table 2: Recommendations

Theme	Recommendations
<b>Challenge Discriminatory Gender Norms.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Raising awareness of contradictions with other norms (e.g. religious teaching regarding mutual respect for men and women)</li> <li>✓ Enable people to see it in a new way (e.g. women in positions of political power may support improved social outcomes for women and men and the community as a whole),</li> <li>✓ Highlight the “direction of change” within a reference group (e.g. increased numbers of clan leaders and Islamic leaders who are coming out in support of women’s political participation and leadership).</li> </ul>
<b>Regulate Electoral Financing Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Working towards regulating electoral finances could help to alleviate challenges associated with women who may have less access to financial resources being disadvantaged in pursuing political ventures and candidacy</li> </ul>
<b>Enactment of Legal Frameworks to Support Women</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Creating more enabling institutions, processes and working cultures, involves building civil and political rights, reforming discriminatory laws, electoral and party reform, as well as developing formal platforms and mechanisms, such as quotas and opportunities to participate in constitutional reform.</li> </ul>
<b>Roll-Out of Media Campaigns Showcasing Successful Powerful Women.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Radio shows, posters, and social media presence could be used to highlight the achievements of local female leaders, and profile and acknowledge the powerful role of key women.</li> </ul>

## 6. HORN AFRICA CONSULTANTS FIRM - HACOF

Horn Africa Consultants Firm (HACOF) is a leading consultancy firm working in complex and challenging geographic locations in the Horn of Africa with a strong presence in Somaliland, Somalia, South Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia. The firm is one of the fastest-growing market, opinion, and social research organizations in the Horn of Africa Region with an outstanding reputation for researching in the highest quality. Since its inception, HACOF has set standards in the conduct of scientifically rigorous surveys, including advancing technical knowledge in survey methodology. Through the provision of training, capacity building, and research consultancy services - HACOF uses proven strategies, methodologies, and roadmaps to provide relevant, insightful, and cost-effective research across the region. Our work includes major studies on Democracy, Governance, and Peace-building; Media Monitoring and Communications; Third-Party Monitoring (TPM); Conflict, Justice, and Reconciliation; Economic Growth and Livelihoods.

## 7. APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Is the participation of women in national parliamentary and local councils beneficial for society?
2. What are the main factors that prevent women from contesting for elective positions in Somaliland?
3. What role does tradition play in women's political participation?
4. Do you believe the 2021 combined elections in Somaliland were fair towards female candidates?
5. Could you please tell us what motivates you to vote?
6. Do you think the media is not doing much to showcase women in politics?
7. Does a woman's role in the household reflect the overall women's role in politics and decision making?
8. Do you think women acquire the same equal opportunity in obtaining election finances from their community?
9. What factors obstruct women in getting the gender quota?
10. In your opinion, do you think a quota system guaranteeing a selection of seats to female candidates is fair-minded?
11. Should there be legal frameworks in place which favors women to be selected?
12. Is there a need for constitutional change?
13. If yes, what kind of changes are necessary for women's inclusivity in the current political statute and structure?
14. Currently men take the majority of seats, could there be repercussions?
15. Could there ever be a female president in Somaliland and why?

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