

## Understanding the Clan Barriers and Religious Perspectives for Women Political Participation and Elections in Somaliland

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### Abstract

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Somaliland women are regarded as very dynamic and vital for family affairs, socio-economic development, peace-making, sources of social connectivity, cultural exchange, and bridge of inter-marriage and lineage relations that connect clan families. This interplay inspires social relations and co-existence among clans and society at large. On the other hand, within social spheres, women have some prevailing natural resilience and stamina during difficult times such as civil wars, conflicts, droughts, natural disasters, and other episodes. During the civil war in 1988 and the post-war period, most families in Somaliland relied on women as breadwinners. Hence, this paper explores and sheds light on what instigates the Somaliland women to remain perennially a periphery condition in regards to their political rights generally, and participation in elections in particular. The paper seeks to understand whether the persistent matters of women resting on the cultural dogmatic assumptions or fatally customary practices. The inheritance of customary division of labor for men and women commences an obvious tendency as predetermined tasks for women that puts women below the men's roles of social and political affairs. This unequal division of roles and responsibilities that Somali customary dictated, has undermined women's potentiality socially and politically. For instance, if women attempt to break such a customary restraint that constrain their rights, it is instantly blamed that women infringe the social norms and cultural values of the society, this puts women in the spotlight. In addition, whenever women raise a concern, the customary law reflects on its basis of procedural and detrimental practices against women, even if the customary law does not consider the Islamic sharia guiding principles as in many cases happen. The rape cases are classical examples of how the traditional chiefs manipulate in the adherence of the customary law. In terms of political participation, and elections, the clan system is instrumental in diminishing women's ambition in politics by creating an unfriendly atmosphere for women's political participation and overall in decision-making circles. Furthermore, the paper also attempts to examine the Islamic sharia perspective on women's political participation in elections.

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**Keywords:** political participation, elections, customary law, culture

### 1. Introduction

Since Somaliland reinstated its sovereignty in 1991 from the Somali Republic's collapse, the country has flourished as a democratic state. The people of Somaliland demonstrated a series of commitment and interests for the democratic process and political pluralism because of the recollections of the dictatorship of Mohamed Siyad Barre regime. The experiences maintained during the Barre regime nearly 22 years from tyranny to destruction have broadly generated the public aspirations pushing Somaliland to attain a fully democratic system that opens up more competitive and inclusive politics. Moreover, Somaliland women claim that their roles and political creativity remain unexploited and unexamined. Women claim that the traditional and clan system impedes their rights for political participation. In the Somali culture, all adult males are entitled to speak at meetings, and most decisions are made on a consensus basis. However, women are generally excluded from such formalities, and their voices are confined to the informal spheres of the household, and increasingly business and civil society (Walls, 2007, p. 69). Defining women's roles in social life can demonstrate some encouraging signals about how women manage all family affairs and this can be translated into a more progressive socio-cultural paradigm against the stigmatization and stereotyping of women with politics and elections.

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Somaliland although, is attributed to one of the most democratic countries in the Horn of Africa due to its political system based on the multi-party rule. Nonetheless, one of the deficiencies of the Somaliland democratization process is the exclusion and downgrading of women's political participation and decision-making circles. This is divergent for the international and global commitments on advancing women's rights, where women's rights have been at the heart of a series of international conferences that have produced significant political commitments to women's human rights and equality (United Nations, 2014, p. 16).

Women in Somaliland have agonized for longstanding constraints that hampered their political desires and national commitments. Somaliland, one of the best democracies in the region, has failed, both to approve a quota system for women in the Houses of Parliament or appointing more seats for women in the executive branch of the government. The 18 years-old democratization process of Somaliland became a male-dominated decision-making system (CPA, 2020, p. 11).

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 elections, through the 2003 (presidential), 2005 (parliamentary), 2010 (2nd presidential), and 2012 (2nd local council) votes, without success (EA R F, 2017, p. 9).

From the beginning, Somaliland's electoral process had commenced with the most welcomed momentum due to the transition from the clan-based to more representative democracy through popular elections. In this regard, forming the political parties was highly instigated more public enthusiasm and optimism in which women have many contributions. Somaliland women's dedication has been noticeable to the democratic process and accomplishing some of the national dreams of competitive elections. Women in Somaliland have played an active role in moving towards peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction. Despite this, they remain disadvantaged politically, economically, and socially. (NAGAAD, 2010, p. 14). The NAGAAD report further states. "The current debate about Somaliland democratic process, one can observe that the political catalog is full of male in filling positions but in voting women have major turnout than the men".<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, there are a lot of controversies surrounding women in politics and other aspects of life. Women's exclusion from the politics and decision-making tables was indeed formalized by the culture, but now the country has politically shifted from the clan-based to the multiparty system (UNPO, 2018, p. 1). "Both the subsequent governments of Somaliland and political parties were not committed and honest in promoting women's political representations since this was overdue for longtime".<sup>2</sup> From these detrimental conditions, women become more vulnerable and relegated segments of society, and they are sidelined persistently.

On the other hand, many Somalilanders believe that the motives behind such obstruction of women in politics seem that the country's political system is male-driven for the simple reason the clan system sees women as unfitting for the clans' representation and its favor for domination. Most political parties get support from clans, which decide who should become candidates, and the clans don't ever put women candidates forward. The clans prefer men because they know where the men's loyalties lie. When a woman gets married, their loyalty changes to her husband's clan," says Abdi (The Guardian, 2014, p. 1).

Ironically, the clan system which is deeper throughout the political spheres in Somaliland has jeopardized the nascent democracy of Somaliland and women are part of multiple challenges that Somaliland has experienced in the past decades. The concerned advocacy groups justify women's population, and their turnout in elections would require much attention, instead of discouraging them. However, women in Somaliland are still largely absent from national and local decision-making bodies and are excluded from political processes, especially in recent times. Despite representing half the country's population (UNPO, 2018, p. 2). Hence, valuing women's participation in election campaigns and voting, they indeed deserve rewarding and greater grassroots support to elevate the political scene of the country. In the meantime, as far the women's political participation matters, the civil society and other proponents for women in politics suggested repeatedly to make some affirmative actions for women but this has not yet obtained sufficient audiences in the policy-making circles.

Moreover, in Somaliland, the issue of women in politics raises more stigma and negative connotations from a religious point of view and Somali culture. However, some Muslim scholars

1 Interview with Nafisa Yousuf, Executive Director, Somaliland Women's Network (Nagaad ) Hargeysa, August, 2020.

2 Interview with Ibrahim Mahdi Buubaa, member of Somaliland House of Representatives, Hargeysa, September 2020. It seems that the issues of women political participation has not been examined properly in the face of realities on the ground. The case of women was pending for decades that Somaliland moving forward in the directions of democratic elections and political pluralism. severely restrict the presence of women in public life, citing varied

reasons — the moral vulnerability of women and, in their view, women's tendency to be a source of (fitna) temptation and social discord (APD, 2002, p. 23).

This is one of the main religious leaders' arguments that women to interact with men is 'enticement' and arguing in Islamic sharia is prohibited such inducement to transpire. But the scope cannot be limited to one area but it needs to fully assess the characteristics in this matter since women have made significant contributions across the country's socio-economic, political, and cultural developments over the years.

In this regard, there is wisdom in Somali literature that says every brave, intelligent, charismatic, clever, and competent man is behind a woman, and literally, there are some reasonable facts and evidence in this wisdom. For Instance, Somalis say any man who was raised by a tough mother and who marries a good wife always becomes a successful person in life.

Following the statement of the President of Somaliland HE. Muse Bihi Abdi on the occasion of addressing a group of graduating policewomen that were given ranks. Subsequently, the President has repeated that women are more transparent, credible, and honest compared to men. The President stated. "We all know that the general public trust in women is far greater than that of men because they are our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters, they are more generous than men, less corrupted, and ethical. He continued to say that "women can create a better working environment, and cooperation, but Somali culture has its implications for women participation in state affairs."<sup>3</sup> President has promised that any woman or girl that completes a bachelor's degree will be given ranks.

Therefore, the issue of women's dual identity---- reveals more barriers that are directly and indirectly affecting women's political representation. The MP Artan discusses the obstacle for women's political representation and why women are so behind, he argues that the clan is yet more deeply rooted phenomena in Somaliland politics and clans only favor men. Artan highlights that women lack some fundamental elements because they are not members of the traditional systems.

Ostensibly, women are not economically strong due to their limited accessibility of family wealth and even inheritances. The poor economic foundations for women downgraded their voices and political representation despite other factors that mired their political rights.<sup>4</sup> Some local scholars and politicians contend that antagonizing women is sabotage for advancing political pluralism and democracy.

The insincerity of the culture for women in the political aspects or even other areas such as rape and an unfitting or incompatible marriage. The Somali culture does not explicitly state whether Somali women can hold a traditional leadership position or political offices. But in practice, we

<sup>3</sup> The President of Somaliland attended an event where police women were given ranks in the presidential palace in March 2021. The narratives of the president towards women were all highly brilliant and convincing, how he justified that women are more disciplined, competent and straightforward.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Abdirahman Yusuf Artan, a member of Somaliland House of Representatives, Hargeysa, August, 2020. find that the clan-based system does not provide women the right to hold public office or to have a formal role or participate in a traditional assembly (Shir or council). (APD2002, p. 24).

However, women's role was raised when civil wars broke out in Somaliland in 1988, and yet women have a major contribution to the livelihood of every household as many of them today are breadwinners. Hence, many women contend that their roles in society will not be only feeding the families where the men are privileged and recognized as the empire of the society. Honest

The civil society organizations (CSOs) have been the longstanding proponents for women's political participation. The CSOs argue that from the onset of the electoral process, there were progressive steps in the prospect of future democracy. A member of the CSOs claims "Somaliland women had an ideal view in which they thought that the electoral process would grow. Nonetheless, women at moment insist that they would not expect to remain in such a politically sidelining situation and male-dominated political system".<sup>5</sup>

In the meantime, Nafisa Yousuf discusses that women's political commitment and their devotion are bigger than the men's role as they are more proactive and campaigning at political parties' rallies. Nafisa shared that "Women demonstrated a more matured way to seek their political rights, though multiple challenges made our hands tie and limited our ability to confront those challenges".<sup>6</sup> Yousuf discloses that the political attitudes for men and their perceptions towards women would be gradually educating and sensitized at some levels in the last years, in contrast to a few years back but not upward yet and progressive.

Nevertheless, the women prominent activists are more confident and vocal for this matter of women's political representation, and they raise some critical argument for women in politics and their low scale of representation but some of these women are also critical of how women's approach in politics is not determinant instead of more ad hoc basis other than strategic and coherent. "Truly speaking women are not yet ready the politics to be their career as men do, and unless we must devote ourselves and dedicated to politics, women will never challenge for men, I'm so optimistic that one day the opportunity will come, but it needs the elite and educated women to cultivate the chances and remain endeavored".<sup>7</sup> In other words, women are blamed that they are neither investing in politics nor tolerant of the political dynamics, and this is one factor to be behind.

Moreover, the issue of women's political representation has recently become a major factor in the political debates circles in Somaliland, Ayaan Hashi who is a women activist, discusses the reasons that a group of women activists submitted an open letter to the President of Somaliland Muse Bihi Abdi in January 2020. She highlighted how women's representation across the country is less than 2%. Hashi contested that this is unacceptable for Somaliland women who are more than 50% of the population and major voters in the elections.

5 Interview with Faisa Aw Ali a member of Somaliland civil society, Hargeysa, 2020.

6 Interview with Nafisa Yousuf, the Executive Director of Somaliland Women Network –Nagaad, Hargeysa, 2020.

7 Interview with Sucad Ibrahim, a prominent women activist and former Progressio Somaliland Rep, Hargeysa, 2020.

Hashi argues that what needs to be understood is the root cause of women's marginalization, and they are remaining in periphery conditions. There are culturally driven myths and perceptions. She blames that the culture is the center and most driver elements. Somaliland women made multiple contributions to several fronts, including social, peace-building, economic development, and political reconstructions of the country. Therefore "It is deplorable that men assumed women as subordinate and incompetent in the political affairs, but without women, Somaliland will never survive, and we cannot accept such undermining and alienating politics."<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, the international community press statement on 12 July 2020 advised the Somaliland government, political parties, and parliament to adopt the women quota system for the upcoming local councils and parliamentary elections. Indeed, such emphasis on the international community for women quota is triggered by Somaliland women's dilemma in this course of political representation. "Somaliland government has more than 613 elected and nominated positions, nearly 97.4% of them are male while women secure less than 2.6% of decision-making positions"(Somaliland Women, 2020, p. 1).

Furthermore, when the members of the Somaliland House of Representatives were debating the electoral law in August 2020 in their normal session. The chairman of the subcommittee who worked on the draft of the electoral law MP Balaki, reading the electoral law draft, figured out that considering the constitution, the women quota is not possible to integrate the electoral law and draft law provisions addressing the women quota abolished.

However, some of the house members reacted to this issue. Abdiqadir Jirde, a former deputy chairman and current MP, denounced how the women quota was nullified. He highlighted that the constitutions' general provisions cannot be referred to in this matter of political representation of women.<sup>9</sup> "We are here to encourage the importance of increasing women's political participation, as a government we stand to allocate quota for women at regional levels, unfortunately, the parliament rejected the quota of the election bill".<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective, in September 2020, the Somaliland political parties sent a joint letter to the donors, and international elections stakeholders reaffirming their political commitment to women representation. But this letter seems to be that the political parties are attempting to create some sympathy for the international community to support the elections of parliament and the local council. There is no doubt that the international community is so exasperated with the women's nullification quota in the parliament. In this letter, political parties stated that political parties elect 18 women candidates in the parliament where each region is given three women candidates.

8 Interview with Ayan Ahmed Hashi, women activist and member of the women agenda group, Hargeysa, 2020.

9 Jirde further clarified how the nullification quota for women cannot be repeated by some general constitutional provision addressing one person one vote or equal rights for all citizens. There are other MPs such as Rayte who had some same view that quota for women cannot be undermined and politicized in this stage for electoral draft law.

10 Stated by Abdirahman Abdillahi Ismail (Saylici) , Vice President of Somaliland who attended WOMEN CONFERENCE on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Elections 24TH – 25th February 2021 in Har-

geisa organized jointly by the Government of Somaliland and International Partners as United Nations Joint Programme on Local Governments (UN JPLG, communiqué. This conference has revealed some of the major obstacles that women face in every election or even demanding the executive positions because the clan system seems more aggressive to the women issues of political participation.

Nevertheless, the final list of the women candidates in parliament is only 13 whereas the local council is 14 the total of 27 out of 993 seats together.

On the other hand, when Somaliland civil society met with Somaliland President HE. Muse Bihi Abdi Sept 06, 2020, at the presidential palace, some of the members who attended the meeting shared with me that the president demonstrated some facts surrounding the dismissal of the women's quota in the parliament in which he shared an unprecedented pressure from the religious leaders was the main factor that influenced the members of parliament and political leaders in general to terminate the women quota system.

In this civil society meeting, the president shared with civil society the new proposal for the political parties, which is the political parties to give quota for women at the party level. In this regard, the paper shall further explore the main factors affecting women to fully conquer their political rights of representation and participation by examining the socio-economic, socio-cultural, political, religious perspectives, and electoral modalities.

The challenge for Somaliland women's political participation and elections is limited access to participation across in the decision-making of the country both traditional and all branches of the state. The rumors and propaganda against women's initiatives for political participation to some degree are not all linked with religion or culture but many of them are manufactured campaigns made by the male contenders as women argue in the pursuit of women's rights in politics.

## 2. Methodology

As far as the paper is concerned, identifying the fundamental issues that in-depth discussions and extensive analysis have been conducted during the research. The paper examines how sociopolitical, cultural, and religious aspects are critical for women's issues particularly in political participation and decision-making trajectories. This is inductive, insightful, and analytical research that can offer the main factors associated with the constant political barriers that Somaliland women experienced over the past three decades.

On the other hand, the study has employed several instruments primarily, focus group discussions and face-to-face interviews were held aimed at making further discourse through more interactive discussions, analysis, and deliberations by debating the underlying causes that obstructed the women's participation in politics and elections.

The study has also engaged the various key informant groups and individuals mostly in women groups, civil society, government officials, members of parliament, political parties, intellectuals, and religious scholars. Despite the primary data collected, secondary data and other relevant literature were also consulted and studied.

## 3. Socio-Economic and Political Context

As the Somali culture proves that it has some favoritism for men compared to women when it comes to leadership and politics. It is indispensable that the role of women in social affairs and family management has paramount in all social spheres. "Women are the bridge between clans and sub-clans, and they play a vital role for peacemaking when conflict arises among the clans, and the intermarriage between clans and sub-clans occurs more respected manner."<sup>11</sup> Yusuf Shaacir explains that in Somali culture in general particularly Somaliland context, women are more respectful in the decision-making of the family or families but not in politics since the kingship is a male-dominated arena and the contestation of the political posts often is influenced by these kinship systems.

Likewise, women also profoundly talk about women's economic constraints to run elections and invest in politics. Muna Khalif, a women's activist states that "Somaliland politics are male-owned politics because men have more access to the wealth of the family, clan, and state, where women have so many restrictions at all levels, we cannot compete for the men since the situation is not selling political ideas and agendas but the pockets speak to the voters."<sup>12</sup>

Many women promoters believe that today women are much stronger than ever before in terms of their cooperation, education, awareness, and empowerment. However, they still lag behind in terms of financial and economic status. It is part of the cultural restrictions; women claim that family assets such as land and buildings are not distributed as evenly according to the Islamic sharia inheritance laws (dhaxal).

In this regard, women have many socioeconomic conditions that adversely affected their political spirit and campaigning. The dominance of patriarchal kinship structures makes it difficult for women in some respects. Firstly, they struggle to secure the support of their clan, who question their loyalty. It is then more difficult for female candidates to raise the funds necessary to mount an effective campaign (Progressio, 2017, p. 26).

It is in this background that women candidates for parliamentary and local council elections on May 31 2021 demand more funds because these candidates argue that this election even needs the voters to deploy their voter registration centers, and it is more expensive than the previous local council and parliamentary elections.

Thus, a lot of local people, both male and female, discouraging that women problems embedded socio-economic factors which the society not only experienced the practices of women irony but the totality of the culture standpoint towards women makes sense because the kinship system which is the most powerful and respectful in the Somali context has more impact to the socio-economic and political system in Somaliland and Somali in general.

From this economic constraint, the women candidates in upcoming parliament and local council elections in May 2021 highly demand financial support and fundraising. These women candidates claim that their equal men who are candidates obtain some financial support and fundraising from the clans' constituents where women are not given such opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

11 Interview with Yusuf Abdilla Shaacir a prominent poet in Somaliland, Hargeysa, July 2020.

12 Interview with Muna Hussein Khaliif, women activist and researcher, Hargeysa, August, 2020.

13 The women conference was jointly organized by the government of Somaliland and international partners, on 24- 25 February 2021. Participants in this conference particularly some traditional elders raised that women need more financial support. These traditional elders were among the few elders who endorsed women candidates in the parliament and local council elections but they were more skeptical how to sustain the campaigning process. The financial burden is particularly strong, with all women competing in the 2012 local elections saying that the experience had been a bad one for them personally, primarily because of the financial burden it imposed (Verjee et al, 2015:30–32), (Progressio, 2017, p. 26). This election seems more competitive than the 2012 election because this time only three political parties are running in contrast to the 2012 local council and political parties' elections with around seven political associations contesting in that election.

Da'ud, who is an expert on tradition and customary system proclaims that women had never been part of the traditional leadership system. In contrast, the traditional leadership system as a variety part of kingship as Sultants, Aqails Boqors, Ugaases, etc. are all-male domination social leadership organs. Hence, Da'ud indicates how women lack such grassroots leadership based on vibrant and dynamic social structures. Traditional Somali culture is a predominantly patriarchal society that blends nomadic pastoral traditions and norms with Islamic teaching. The shape of the culture is affected by the interaction between these two factors (APD, 2002, p. 11).

Therefore, Somaliland's political development in the last three decades was more advancing in the directions towards modernity and a democratic political system in which the citizens must have equal rights and citizenship. However, women are yet far behind such political and citizenship belongingness. Women demonstrating so many grievances socially, economically, and politically. In this regard, article (8) of the Somaliland constitution laid down the identical rights of the citizens, either male or female; this article shows how the law is indifferent to all citizens of Somaliland.

Somaliland constitution has comprehensively addressed the citizens' rights and obligations. The Constitution states, " All citizens of Somaliland shall enjoy equal rights and obligations before the law, and shall not be accorded precedence on the grounds of color, clan, birth, language, gender, property, status, opinion, and alike. (Government, 2000, p. 9)". However, women argue that these equal rights of the citizens do not practically exist in Somaliland, where women require affirmative action to alleviate their case and reduce the vulnerability of the women economically, socially, and politically.

The political context seems to be not fitting women's political preference because socioeconomic factors are mostly against women, economic empowerment, and political inclusion. Nevertheless, the persistent matters of women resting on the meta-problems of customary upward in which the inheritance of customary division of labor for men and women commences an obvious tendency that women are given some particular obligation below the men's roles of social and political affairs. The Somali customary law clearly dictates social roles and responsibilities. For instance, if women attempt to break such customary chains that undermine their rights, it is instantly blamed that women infringe the social norms and cultural values and this puts women in the spotlight in

order to freeze their criticisms against the odds of the cultural wrong practices. financially. Women candidates in the conference had some notion that financial constraints are a paramount critical factor for women candidates.

In the meantime, whenever women raise a concern, the customary law reflects on its basis of procedural and detrimental practices against women, even if the customary law does not consider the Islamic sharia guiding principles as many cases happen. The rape cases are classical examples of how the traditional chiefs manipulate in the adherence of the customary law.

Finally, Somaliland's political system is rooted and driven by power-sharing scales, both the Parliament and the Executive branch. This power-sharing, the clans, override the positions of either the presidential appointees or elected bodies seats. In this regard, the traditional system restrictions obscure the women's chances for politics. The most potent barrier to women's political and leadership representation is the clan-politics system existing in the country (CPA, n.d., p. 3).

Throughout the modern political history of Somaliland, clan elders have always put the men candidates forward for party nominations. They believe otherwise that their political share cannot be secured. Tribalism, in which clans use to hunt or search for more resources and political positions, does not equally prefer women's work as supposed to men. Hence, the socioeconomic and political context in Somaliland currently is dominated by a patriarchal system that is more antagonistic for women in politics and their participation in the decision-making arena.

#### 4. Islamic Perspective for Women Political Participation

Considering from the Islamic perspective for women in politics, women have a more frightening view in which they believe that the Islamic religion is rigid when it comes to women in politics. The religious leaders are generally undivided that women are not allowed to be a 'president or head of state' in Islam. But, many religious leaders do not oppose the idea of women holding political posts except the head of state.

On the other hand, the religious leaders are in harmony that women should be educated. At the moment, there are more females attending universities, and sometimes at a higher rate compared to young male adults. It seems that there is a change in parental attitudes towards educating their girls and sending them to school in order for them to compete with their male counterparts.

Sh. Hersi supports women's political participation. He explains that Islam does not forbid women from leading and contributing to the nation's social, economic, and political affairs. In contrast, Sultan Dahir believes that now women are in a better position which is producing children, and Dahir insists that Islam puts women in a more secure and acceptable progressive life. On the other hand, both Dahir and Hersi are in agreement that women contribute to the overall social life and economic activities of the country.

Da'ud believes that the combination of culture and Islamic religion make the women's case more difficult and resistant; however, Hersi describes how the wives of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) like Aisha were the vital person for the struggle of the Prophet. For example, Umulsalama one of the wives of the Prophet had advised the Prophet in the difficult period of Cirma to Mecca which the Muslims felt dilemma and upsetting about the situation but the advice of Umulsalama which the Prophet adopted, enabled Muslims to return to a normal situation.

Indeed, it was a big day for Muslims to slaughter sheep and goats for the intention of Cirma when the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH) commenced it because it was impossible at that time for Muslimsto proceed to enter the 'Mecca as a duty of pilgrimage or Hajj but the advice of Umulsalam in which the Prophet materialized, has saved all Muslims from the glooming the situation that they were and this is one of the classical examples among the Muslims that the role of women cannot be underestimated.

Sh. Abdulla talks about how Islam liberated women who in pre-Islam where even women were buried alive. However, Abdulla accentuates how Islam is more cautious about women in politics and how Islam has a lot of reservations about the integration and interactions of women and men in any circumstance. Moreover, Abdulla is faithful that a quite number of women working in the Ministry of Religious Affairs included departmental directors and sub-heads of sections of the Ministry because Abdulla considers such public work women can handle it in a manner that Islam confesses. "Some of the rights in Islam include the protection of women from any harmful practices" (A. Sheikh, 2020, p. 22)

The contesting grounds about women in decision making has in recent years an imminent debate which is necessary to further examine it. Among the rights granted to women by Islam were the rights to life and education as well as the right to inherit, manage and maintain the property (APD, 2002, p. 11). Sh. Ahmed underscores how

Islam respects women and protects them their lives and dignity; however, Sh. Ahmed is reluctant to outline clear directions in Islam admitting women in politics explicitly<sup>14</sup>, and he concluded his elucidations that women running elections does not encourageable in Islam, Sh. Ahmed insists that “first of all Allah gave the men the responsibility of the family to feed and care. Hence, women always are not obliged to perform such tasks of leadership” he said.

In this debate for women in politics, Dr. Kaydsane warns any campaign or messages that seem to be promoting feminism or carrying some Western culture elements may not work here in Somaliland because he claims that this will immediately create irritation with the public alongside the religious leaders in the country. Dr. Kaydsane again extends his views, which he vindicates what obstructs women's political participation may associate with how the case of women's rights externalized rather domesticated. Firstly, it is important that international involvement is not seen to dominate gender initiatives to the degree that these interventions add to the growing perception that ‘women’s issues are a concern of liberal foreigners and are therefore ‘un-Somali (Progressio, 2017, p. 9).

Similarly, other people hold this view that external actors drive women’s case is not locally contributing a health notion for women in politics Sh. Ahmed, Yusuf Shaacir, Prof Mubarik, Sultant Dahir, Sh. Yahye, have an abnegated notion of how women's issues are exaggerated by

14 Interview with Sh. Khaliil Abdillahi Ahmed, Minister of Religion of Somaliland, September, 2020, Hargeysa. Sh. Ahmed is more vigilant and assertive how Islamic sharia has made demarcations between male and female in terms of roles and responsibilities both private and public work.

He believes that women have so many social roles of family management where mothers have more rights than the fathers and he insists the reasons that Allah gives more rights to mothers is a clear indication how a mother is honored because of their duty bears of pregnant and nurturing children etc.

western countries and international institutions, their conclusions signaling the undesirable consequences and tendencies of such externalization of women's political participation instigated.

On the other hand, Sh. Dayib discusses several points; first, he believes the reasons that God opted only for men to be Prophets; there is clear wisdom that women may not lead the people. “Any leader of a Muslim country he is also iman who leads the prayers and preaches of the Islam in all occasions within the Mosques and other places and women are prohibited to lead the prayers for Muslims and to be iman.”<sup>15</sup> Dayib talks about other circumstances surrounding women like travel restrictions which Islam is not allowed a woman to travel alone without a man either her husband or other members of the close family, pregnant, and maternity conditions are also complex for a woman to lead the nation.

Thus, Dayib further explains how Islam renounces women to be free to interact with the men in such a manner compelled by women's politics and he maintains that this is undesirable Islamic behaviors to encourage the integration of women and men because Islam is so vigilant and cautious about how such integration may facilitate the unwanted relationship between men and women.

In contrast, Sh. Abdirahman underlines that Islam is not opposite women to be representatives of the society in the local councils and House of Representatives. According to him, women cannot also be the president of the Muslims. He added the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and his subsequent Muslim leaders as Abubakar, Osman, Ali, and Omar; none of them did appoint a woman to be a governor because being a governor in that period was common in the Islamic state and primary leadership.

Finally, most religious leaders have unrelieved the idea of women not being endorsed to take part in politics, arguing that men have all responsibilities either traditional system within the societies or political rule. Thus the religion and culture both do not favor women to participate in politics; however, some religious leaders are not objecting below the presidential level, women to participate in the decision making, in other words, the stereotyping, social experiences, social organization, and traditional system tempered increasing women periphery conditions.

These socio-cultural and religious arguments are all contrary to the constitutions which laid down the equality of the citizens as the constitution indicates. Every citizen who fulfills the requirements of the law shall have the right to be elected (to a public office) and to vote.<sup>16</sup> Hence, referring to the constitution, the elections law instructs that every Somaliland citizen has the right to be a candidate for the following positions, president, vice president, member of House of Representatives, and member of the local council.<sup>17</sup>

Somaliland constitution in which Islamic sharia has supremacy also respects international conventions and instruments. The Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland states in Article



15 Interview with Sh. Ahmed Dayib, one of the prominent sheikhs in Somaliland, September, 2020, Hargeysa.

16 Somaliland Constitution, Article 22: Political, Economic, Social and Electoral Rights, 2000.

17 The General Elections and Voter Registration—law No. Lr./91/2020, ratified by the Houses of Parliament, House of Representatives and House of Guurti.

10(1) that it recognizes and shall act in conformity with the United Nations Charter and with international law, and shall respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Furthermore, Article 21(2) states that articles that relate to fundamental rights and freedoms shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the international conventions on human rights and also with the international laws referred to in the Constitution.<sup>18</sup> In this case, all women proponents internationally and domestically have these constitutional provisions that consider such international conventions and universal obligations.

As a consequence of the above-listed concerns, the RFRO conflicts with a number of regional and international instruments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

However, in Islam, these conventions are not admitted all because the religious scholars contending that these international and universal principles and declarations are not in conformity with Islamic sharia, hence, this shows a predicament, and inconsistent of Somaliland constitution that on one hand gives Islamic sharia supremacy and accepted international conventions on the other.

In this discourse, Shamis Hussein who wrote *The Fallacy of Islamophobia* book (2007) discusses that Islam is not antagonistic to women rather Islam liberated women accord to the pre-Islamic history of how women lived in hard conditions, and she underlined that women challenges are widespread. In reality is that, in every society around the globe, women encounter segregations in almost every context. It has been the case that the United Nations, as well as individuals countries and agencies, continue to tackle women's problems (Hussein, 2007, p. 125). Hussein takes the example of some Muslim countries like Indonesia, Turkey, and Pakistan where women have succeeded to hold high-profile political positions. Hence, she dismisses the notion to liberate Muslim women but she admitted a need for improvement and contextualization.

Eventually, it seems clear that the primary cause of the lack of gender inclusivity lies with the continued predominance of the clan system rather than with religious interpretation or some other causal variable (Progressio, 2017, p. 26). Some women argue that Somaliland is neither an Islamic state nor a secular one, and this has complicated the role of women in the political spheres.

18 RAPE, FORNICATION AND OTHER RELATED OFFENCES BILL SOMALILAND(Law No. 78/2020), by UNSOM and UNFPA, September 2020

19 Ibid.

## **5. Challenges Headed for women's Electoral Environment and Options Available**

Women constantly raise the concerns of how the electoral laws are designed and evolving in a way that everybody can run the elections freely instead of considering women's political and socio-cultural context, which requires some affirmative actions. This maintains the importance of the women quota in this period which is difficult for women to win competitive elections. It is anticipated that the implementation of the women quota may not only enhance the political spirit of women but restore the hope and the will of the women to feel inclusive politics.

Notably, women groups advocate women's quota and women's political participation. Still, Somaliland's civil society is committed to delivering advocacy messages of women's political participation and quota realization. "The issue of Women's rights and representation vis-à-vis elections is a concern as there is great injustice in this area which underscores that the time has come for us to harmonize the traditional laws and the constitution, commented Indho, member of the Guurti"(SONSAF, 2011, p. 21).

According to MP Balaki, the chairman of the House of Representative subcommittee, which is responsible for drafting and developing the elections law, sees the women and civil society efforts on quota are unconstitutional and unattainable. He pointed out that women's political ambition and political behavior are incompatible

because he contends that every woman wants to vote for her son, husband, or cousin, instead of a woman. These allegations that women are not recognizing themselves are central for the argument of men, on the contrary, while women are in the mainstream of sociocultural system, clan loyalty and tribalism affected them similarly to the men but this is a big excuse for men to accuse women not supporting one another.

Women are not causation about the tribalism that curtailed and manufactured the country's political system, and some members of parliament raise that unless the constitution should be opened, any efforts towards the quota either women or minorities will exhaust and not considered as a legitimate motion that deserves the member of the parliament to debate and endorse. In contrast, other members of the parliament have different views justifying that the quota system and women affirmative action can be legalized at present time.

Somaliland women see this counter-argument against the women quota as unjustifiable and politically motivated, Nafisa, Sucad, Kinsi, Faisa, Muna, Ayaan among others, made the same remarks towards the notion of the constitutional breaching because of the introduction of women quota, these women activists have greater preservation of the women quota system which they argue is neither violating the constitution nor the electoral laws. "The constitution is breached, and one of the evidence is frequent election postponements.

Therefore, when the issue of women quota comes to the table the all men agree to provoke it and put the quota in the limelight by distorting it".<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The issue of the quota for women in the parliament has been going on for the last decades but this campaign that civil society and women groups were leading with the support of the international community did not succeed in integrating the women quota the parliamentary and local council elections dated 31 May 2021. The international community who supports Somaliland elections have become very disappointed how the women quota has been nullified during the election law ratifications in the House of Representatives.

The motive behind women seeking a quota is lack of political participation and when this quota law is raised, there is often a widespread campaign against it because men have fears that this will decrease their political roles of the monopoly of power and elections. Most spaces where power is exercised and important decisions are made are closed to women in Somaliland but open to men. Some of these spaces are also hidden, in the sense that agendas are set or deals made in 'informal' men-only spaces such as the mafresh where men gather to relax, talk and chew qaad, which may then feed into public decision-making (Progressio, 2017, p. 35). Indeed, these 'informal meetings' the women cannot attend because these places and meetings are more exclusive for men and this is what the Progressio report alludes to such social inner circles that decisions are made without the consent of women.

Accordingly, the traditional and religious leaders are labeling women that this idea of women in politics is not nationally constructed but external actors pushing for it, particularly the international community, however, women see this idea as a pretext that far away from realities but one cannot conceal that the international community is more sympathetic and dedicated to pushing how women attain the political space.

Thus, some specific constitutional articles are addressing the rights of women. Article (36) of the constitution expresses some issues about women's rights but not included any political rights; instead of the sub-clauses, this article emphasizes women's rights to own property or business and enhance women's level of education and skills. However, the all-male politicians in Somaliland are undeniable that women are major electoral stakeholders and majority election voters.

MP Rayte explains that all political parties' public gatherings and campaigning women are at the forefront. "Women are very dynamic, and mobilizers all time so if they have such commitment, why not elect women."<sup>21</sup> Shaping Somaliland democracy and modeling it, women's efforts contributed to expanding and realizing some of the key democratic principles of civic engagement, but their rights are not defined politically.<sup>22</sup>

Most women and the key civil society groups see one of the chances of women's political participation changing the electoral model, the last House of representative elections in 2005 and elections of the local council 2012 were used on an open list. However, the advocates for women's political representation strongly promote the upcoming elections of the parliament and local councils to employ the closed-list electoral system.

The women advocacy groups believe that this electoral model is an opportunity for women because this close list can help women to put the list in front. The political parties can put the list more women, and in this manner, people voting for the party, not the individual candidates. Unfortunately, the elections law that the Somaliland parliament passed in September 2020 has employed the open list model of the electoral system. Thus, the women's chances are very limited to win the elections of the parliament and local council planned to take place 31 May 2021. Most

21 Interview with Ibrahim Jama Rayte member of Somaliland House of Representatives, Hargeisa, 2019.

22 Interview with Abdirahman Yusuf Artan member of Somaliland House of Representatives, Hargeysa, 2020. of the men here in Somaliland are entirely in harmony that women are major constituencies of the turnout of the elections.

In the meantime, some of the women proponents are notable that holding elections based on constituencies can help women to demonstrate their competence in the pre-election constituent votes. Many advocacy groups express that the Somaliland election cannot properly display the candidates' profile because there is no pre-testing and examination of the candidates' abilities.

“Instead of political parties submitting the list of the candidates, we must create constituencies' elections, party elections and ensure the right candidates to run elections”.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, MP Rayte has the same argument that the constituencies' elections improve the quality of democracy and reduce tribalism. He acknowledges that such procedural elections cannot bring the candidates that people wish for, because he or she would not face any pre-elections –knowing their capability and character of leadership or even proper agenda.

The current electoral system is neither accommodative promoting vulnerable people to be represented as women and minority clans nor providing quality of democracy where systems enshrined provisions of the constitution hold accountable to the leaders.<sup>24</sup> Rayte further underlines the interplay between democracy, clan/traditional system, and Islamic sharia system created a lot of political challenges that can push for Somaliland in the middle of nowhere. Dr. Jama has a similar notion that reconciling the interplay of tripartite trajectories portrayed some extraordinary challenges that women faced including the mismatch of the constitutional system and the political practices that the clan system manipulated.<sup>25</sup>

## 6. Sociocultural Obstruction for Women Political Participation

Somaliland women are more critical to the cultural and traditional barricades, women claim that tribalism, clannism, and unpredictable political behavior for men have not only underestimated women's roles in general, but women are so disappointed with what is going on in Somaliland. At the national level, existing attitudes influence the election and appointment of women and hence limit women's voices from being heard in decision-making and planning processes. (NAGAAD, 2010, p. 41).

The political isolation that women encounter for the past decades is not something that can bring undesirable results for women only, but the entire country may suffer it, and it is impossible to ignore such a huge potential number of the society.<sup>26</sup> The contemporary political settlement in Somaliland fundamentally reflects the clan system, so any description of that settlement must start with a clan, with the traditionally camel-herding 'noble' or bilis lineages of the Isaaq, Daarood (Harti), Gadabuursi and Ciise dominating the northern Somali areas (Progressio, 2017, p. 21).

In reality, the clan structure is not static but it is so dynamic and overlooks gender equality regularly and this notion fits what the Rift Valley Institutions (2016) defined manhood or

23 Interview with Sucad Ibrahim, member of civil society, candidate for parliament

24 Interview with Ibrahim Jama Rayte member of Somaliland House of Representatives, Hargeysa, 2019

25 Interview with Dr. Jama Muse Jama, the Executive Director of Hargeysa Cultural Center, Hargeysa, 2020.

26 Interview with Muna Hussein Khaliif, a researcher and women activist, Hargeysa, 2020.

(raganimo) which literally echoes a real social and cultural identity in this essence. The clan a woman is born into tends to be reluctant to support her if she marries into another clan, yet her husband's clan may suspect she remains loyal to her clan (The Guardian, 2014, p. 1).

Inter-clan and intra-clan relations are governed by a system of social contract known as xeer, with highly structured roles for men and women each gender plays a significant role in Somali society, but formal social and political structures are heavily weighted towards a patriarchal hierarchy (Progressio, 2017, p. 21). This asymmetric social structure is where women encountered the most difficult challenges of their political engagement and leadership. The factors that hinder women's participation and full realization in the political arena are very much related to socio-cultural conditions which tend to discourage women from taking an active role in public affairs (MESAF, 2009, p. 33).

On the other hand, the intellectuals and politicians cannot conceal the socio-cultural impediments that women face on a daily basis. Especially in the political arena; for instance, both women and men are undisputed the level of traditional and cultural stigma when women attempt to raise their political aspirations, i.e., Da'ud, Prof. Abyan, Dr. Fadal, Dr. Jama, Farah, Yusuf Shaacir, Artan, Buubaa, Balaki, others, all stress how the socio-cultural context is in deeper than what we all think in this issue of women political degeneration and restrictions associated the sociocultural systems.

It is incontrovertible that women themselves grow up in this preservative situation where women are not able to confront the men in the political spheres due to social and cultural perceptions; saying women must be at home, you are good housewives, and you are producing children, etc.

Likewise, when you have some girls and some boys, the girls cook the food and wash the clothes for the boys, and both they go to school, and this is where social inequality structurally commences. Although there is a newly built democracy in Somaliland, tribalism is another limiting factor to women's participation in Somaliland's politics. The impact of this factor is enormous as it has its roots in the grassroots, the clans which are very crucial in getting elected into any political office (UNPO, 2018, p. 1).

Women contend that the Somali- culture sees women as subordinate, incompetent, and only suitable housewives, Sucad, challenges this cultural perception. She is so confident that women can make this culture more informed and educated to understand the women issues instead of women afraid to avoid such confrontations; she discusses that Somaliland women are so proud to develop their country and people in a manner that is not contrary with the good side of the culture and Islamic religion. There are constant factors stemming from the Somali culture before the Islamic religion dictated the sociocultural directions and behaviors.

The sociocultural system as customary – xeer manipulates this phenomenon in which women are perceived lower than the men when it comes to leadership either traditional system and political. The nomadic Somali culture has a division of labor based on identified characteristics of who is doing what –for instance, in the nomadic lifestyle this division of labor the men are doing heavy jobs such as camel management. Traditional gender norms in Somali society are largely derived from gendered divisions of labor. The clan has played a significant role in shaping women's perceptions of their status within a wider kinship group (Rayale, 2015, p. 8).

Constructing the livestock fens in which Somali is called (xorada xoolaha) and supplying water to the livestock from the deep and difficult wells, among others, men do the hard work, in contrast to women, because this nomadic Somali culture women care about sheep and goats and other less heavy domestic work. As Progressio report (2017) analyzed there is a 'labor division of work' and as the report indicates mostly women do unproductive work or unpaid.

Nevertheless, Somaliland women have concerns about the cultural harassment both the gender domestic violence as rape and restricting women to extend their roles and potentiality; some of the women groups raise their dissatisfaction on the issues of women in terms of cultural standpoints of how women are not taken into account with their desires and rights to participate and contribute the national decisions.

These women groups blame that Somali culture as a barrier such as a desirability and accessibility for women in decision making at all levels. In a society of male patriarchy assessed through socio-cultural lenses, men had ultimate power, while women were viewed as household guardians. Somali pastoral poetry is one source to witness how women had long been disempowered in this setting favoring males over females (Ingiriis, 2015, p. 3).

In this socio-cultural context of the male-dominated arena, women are recognized as subordinate people and irrelevant in many decisions both at the clan level and at the national level. On the contrary, women on one hand are sources of motivation and spirit where there is a war, peacebuilders, and development-oriented people on the other.

In the meantime, women are extremely debating: how women are not given the rights that Islam had given them due to the Somali culture in which women denounce how it miscalculates the women's potentiality, creativity, and rights. The rights of women in Somaliland in accordance with the Islamic principles have not been fully implemented, due to the fact that the knowledge of Islam has been limited (APD, 2002, p. 21). In today's Muslim world women's positions in various sectors of the state and society differ from one country to another. In other words, there is no uniformity. In practice, most countries are often inclined to devolve traditional mechanisms (Hussein, 2007, p. 124).

Moreover, Somaliland women have now some umbrella organizations, associations, and advocacy groups who both work on preventing harmful cultural practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), rape, and other

domestic violence and pressuring political system and decision making bodies how the women energy and ingenuity to be utilized at the national level.

According to these women groups who participated in the interviews and debates on women's political participation, the women argue that they cannot accept the existing cultural settings which are far away from reality. For instance, women now are leading, feeding, or managing many families that either the father died during the civil and political conflicts or not carrying on his duties because of unemployment or other social problems.

The Rift Valley report –the impact of war on Somali men (2015) demonstrates the decline of men their roles and responsibilities as feeding the families, Somalilanders have some practical experiences in 1988 the war broke out between the Siyad Barre regime and the Somali National Movement (SNM) and even the post-conflict times as we noted earlier.

In Somaliland, there is a common word which is said that the women who sell Qat and vegetables are responsible families and children since they become breadwinners. Many SNM fighters strongly believe that Somaliland women took a very big role in the liberation of the country, like Jama Doola one of the SNM fighters saying that women were both combatants and assistants but no single women included the national congress of SNM, let alone the bureaucrats.

From these analyses, the women's persuasive and credible increasing evidence of their representation in many families in which the Somali culture did not adopt before such modified roles and responsibilities is arguably a dividend for women roles in national affairs.

Some women argue that the most disguising and mystifying cultural factors are how men grow up in an environment in which women are degraded all the time. Women similarly nurtured this environment where women themselves have the more inferior belief. Still, these are unfounded cultural perceptions that sabotaged women for their life and citizenship rights.<sup>27</sup>

Some critiques are questioning why women are given such a quota for the elections. These critiques address the legal angle of the quota, indicating that this is unconstitutional since the elections are competitive and open to every citizen. Still, some very conservative men argue that women's cognizance of politics is yet far behind, so they need to enhance their level of economic, education, and awareness. In the meantime, it is not fair for the clan system to dictate and dominate the political and electoral system of the country. It is a backward or shame for the modern state, the non-state actors as traditional elders to manipulate the political system of the country.

In the meantime, there are some role model women –Edna Adan Ismail is professionals, competent, extraordinary, and a patriot who contributed both to the political system and development of the country. Edna wrote a book –The Midwife who Changed the World –a Women of Firsts (2019) this book which is 322 pages has a long description of Edna's personal history throughout the 20th and the 21st century. The book has demonstrated a profound account of Edna. The majority of Somalilanders view Edna as the mother of Somaliland because of her patriotism and far-sightedness. Edna served as the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Somaliland in 2003-2006 and other positions as Somaliland Envoy to the talks between Somaliland and Somalia.

## 7. Summary of Findings

The summary of findings demonstrated how complex and paradoxical the issue of women's political participation and elections. Therefore, the article wants to display seven main issues that are key barriers for women in politics and elections.

First, Islamic sharia is more restrictive to women for the leadership of Muslims. Islam does not encourage and permit a woman to be ahead of the state in Islamic countries. But other positions below the head of state, Islam is not dogmatic to some degree. Nevertheless, there is no inspiring

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Sacad Yusuf Odowa, women activist, and one of the women candidates of the parliament in the 2021 elections, Hargeysa, 2020. sign that Islam is comfortable or sympathetic women to be part of either parliament, local council, executive, or other branches of the state.

In this regard, there are two contesting groups of Sheikh's first group believes that women entirely cannot participate in the decision making bodies and elections because this group insists that Islam controls the freedom movement of women in general or any given freedom of women have some specific pre-conditions, those Sheikhs argue that women are not admitted to even travel without (muxrim which means a man who is a closer family as a husband, father, brother, uncle, etc.

The second group of Sheikhs has divergent idea saying that women can participate in the decision making and elections as parliamentary, local council elections, and even the executive branch, this group justifies that women can be doctors, engineers, political scientists other specialists, thus, this group assumes that these skills and knowledge of women cannot be idle but utilized in a way that compatible in Islamic sharia.

Second, the traditional/clan system does not value women to be part of the decision-making even at the clan level because women are not part of traditional authorities that lead and manage the clan system as *Diyapaying* and other customary activities within and between clans and societies in general. The traditional authorities have prominent roles in the decision-making both at the clan and at state levels. The political system in Somaliland is more rooted in the clan system whereas a politician starts campaigning at the clan level when he decides to seek either executive position or elections. In contrast, women are absent in this wide range of traditional leadership or kingship.

Women encounter a lot of cultural implications that undermine their sociocultural identity and potentiality. Intermarriage is one of the elements that instigate women's clan identity confusion and the crisis of social belongingness because when a woman is married from another clan, she is often perceived that she lost her identity to her original clan and becomes a member of the family who belongs to in marriage - literally. Ultimately, the sociocultural factors which are based on traditional, customary, and clan systems are all unfriendly to women's rights in various areas and aspects.

Third, the externalization of women's political participation has triggered some negative connotations in domestic consumptions believing that women's issues are westernized phenomena and are, by extrapolation, against Islamic sharia and good Somali cultural practices. This kind of assumption has labeled and distorted women's issues-particularly in political participation.

Many people suggest the issues of women's political participation and elections must be domesticated and mainstreamed to the state institutions and traditional systems. The international community and civil society of Somaliland have been pushing this agenda for women's quota and women's rights for political participation and decision making since Somaliland moved the directions to democratic elections and a multiparty system.

But this effort that civil society and the international community were doing for the last 20 years has ended up in no affirmative action accomplished so far and these proponent actors are blamed that this issue of women in political participation has become a project-minded, project-driven, and externalized agenda.

The majority of the people suggest and strongly recommend this issue of women's political participation must be nationalized, and integrated into the government institutions and all state branches. The discourse on women's political participation cannot also be limited to elections or elected bodies instead of advocating broad participation of women in state affairs and this is one of the tendencies that women's political participation raised in its decades of struggle.

Fourth, women's economic muscles do not exist because women have very limited access to the wealth of the family and the state resources compared to men. For instance, the family property as main fixed assets of land, farms, frankincense, buildings, camels, and business all remain in the men's hands whether the father is alive or has passed away.

The women also have no access to the state resources since they are not part of the political system. Women's economic and financial deficiencies are on the top list of women's political participation and election obstacles. Women in business and the private sector are gradually increasing because women in the diaspora brought back to the country some new skills and business innovations that elevated women in the private sector, however, this has not yet reached a level of men who become riches and owners of the family properties.

Fifth, the failure of a democratic system in which the clan system diluted and distorted, has affected women's political participation and elections. As far as Somaliland's constitution is concerned, the country took the path of a democratic system based on multiparty and competitive elections. However, the clans and political parties together are not concealing or shame to illustrate or display the candidates of the parliament and local council elections that these clans, sub-clans are submitting to the political parties – where both sides celebrate and welcome such candidates branded a clan X or Y and they are pairs –one to run the parliamentary and other local council elections on May 31, 2021.

In this regard, there is no signal clan that submitted to the political parties or celebrated two women candidates at the same time, and women candidates are 27 out of 993 candidates. The majority of people say the de-

mocracy of Somaliland is raped by the clan system and the country needs more political reform otherwise the clan system and democracy are both paradoxical and extremely divergent. In terms of voting, it is both explicit and factual that women have the major turnout or they are dominant those casting their votes in every election. Lack of effective gender policy or missing some affirmative legal frameworks that preserve women's political participation.

Sixth, the majority of the people suggest and recommend reviewing and redefine the women's political participation advocacy interventions or overall gender issues. For the last two decades, this advocacy was going on but there are a lot of accusations in this account of women's political participation and gender development. Therefore, many people criticize the approach and methodology that civil society handles with the advocacy initiative while others also denounce how this concept of women's political participation and elections are mainstreamed into NGO-driven activities.

Thus, there are a lot of people as traditional, religious, members of parliament, Ministers, and even ordinary citizens have shown more stigma and negative attitudes towards this issue of 'gender development' because the way that civil society manages is not integrating into these existing systems either state institutions cultural or religious aspects.

Indeed, these people argue and question why the women quota failed or even why other issues of women as the sexual offensive bill did not get full attention instead of misinterpreted and nullified because there are some reasonable degrees of tendencies and misconceptions toward this matter of women political participation. Suggested changes to the names as gender policy, gender advocacy, gender development, gender roles, marginalized groups, etc. The language used in these gender issues created some conflicts of interest for those who were involved and irritated with many parts of the society.

## 8. Conclusions

Somali customary law (Xeer), which is not a written but guides to all social practices of culture, norms, and values, is not only substantial for Somalis to manage their social matters, but it stands for safeguarding the social coexistence while it contributes to the peace and political stability. But for women, the customary law and cultural practices are peril and sources of vulnerability of women, and it is needed to understand why the customary system conceives women are less regarded in contrast to men. The identity crisis of women's origin is what the cultural practices created a lot of tendencies and misconceptions against women.

Women claim that their roles and political creativity remain unexploited. Women constantly blame the traditional system for obstructing their rights for political participation. However, one of the challenges that women particularly experienced included the belongings of women either their origin clan or the clan of the husband, this is a kind of identity crisis, and women strongly reacting that such kind of barriers brought to the traditional system, is not bearable, a country which is democratic and has civic-oriented policies.

On the other hand, religious perspectives exhibit some unbending views when it comes to women in politics, and the religious leaders are undivided that women are not allowed to be a president or head of state in Islam, but many religious leaders are not more antagonistic women to hold other political posts. The religious leaders are all agreeable that women should be educated, and now there is progress that at the moment, that many young women are in the universities, even more than the young men. This shows that there has been a massive change which the parents had not before, to send girls to a school similar to the boys.

Indeed, if women continued such efforts of education and economic development, it is apparent that women will much improve their political status shortly. The inheritance of customary division of labor for men and women commences obvious tendencies as predetermined tasks for women that are below the men's roles of social and political affairs. In this labor division of Somali customary for example, the rape cases that the traditional chiefs handle in the adherence of the customary law is a typical example for such matters.

In terms of political participation, the clan system that uses such cultural and customary law practices generates some sort of impaired and politically unfriendly environment for women. Thus, women are in a critical situation to win popular elections and a receptive cultural environment.

Somaliland women are regarded as very dynamic and vital for family affairs, socioeconomic development, peace-making, and sources of social connectivity, cultural exchange, and bridge of inter-marriage and lineage relations based on from one clan to another. The traditional elders are fully aware of these contributions from women in the national affairs, however, traditional elders see unacceptable women come on the table that the clan and sub-clans taking decisions either political or other issues of concern.

Lastly, the unproductive state institutions and weak governance systems are not helping women overcome such complex sociopolitical conditions that exist in Somaliland. Many people who are proponents of these issues of women's political participation and elections argue that the democratic process of the country is distorted by the clan system, and the state institutions are dysfunctional and incompetent. It is undeniable that first and foremost, women lack the platforms either traditional system or political. This impedes women to compete with the men who have in every platform, which has incited imbalanced power between women and men across social, economic, and political settings.

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