

Assessment of Women Political Participation in Community Development in Sheikh Region of Somaliland

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Abstract: This paper underscores the assessment of women's political participation in Sheikh Region of Somaliland. Somali women in this region are stereotyped because they are largely excluded decision making even in decisions that directly affects their own sensitive lives. They are often trampled down by men due to the patriarchal historical dominance which has continuously failed to build self-help communities there. An investigation that involved key informant interviewing, questionnaires and participant observation as the methods for data collection was applied. It was discovered from the ground research that women in Sheikh would wish to participate in the political decisions affecting their lives and community but are largely denied chances practically despite of the fact that they play a key role in ensuring livelihood survival in their various households. Women in Sheikh and most other women in Somaliland resort to social work where they are always submissively controlled by the already designed patriarchal decisions. The main argument in this paper is that sustainable development in any region of Somaliland will never be possible without equal participation of men and women in the political architecture.

Keywords: women, political, participation, community, development, Sheikh Region and Somaliland.

1. INTRODUCTION

Somaliland women suffer the highest vulnerabilities in the horn of African regions. This is a region dominated by men in terms of political participation just like the rest of the world. In Most Scholarly work, any positive development outcomes for women, children and society as a whole are closely linked to political participation (see, Sen, 1997; Beaman et al., 2012 cited in Dieleman and Andersson, 2016). In related literature however, the World's Economic Forum's (Global Gender Gap Report, 2015) reveals that although a good number of countries have been closing the gender gap from 1995 to 2016, none of them has ever achieved equal political participation and that women are drastically politically under-represented. A lecture facilitated by Sirleaf in Accra, Ghana, it was reported that global women's representation in parliaments stands at 18.2 percent – the highest it has ever been, but still not high enough as only 22 countries had achieved a critical mass of 30 percent or higher women representation in their national parliaments" (2010). Although women hold a key role in sustainable development, they take the lowest place in society and are without unlimited hope for the future whereby men underestimate their decision-making abilities.

Sub-Saharan Africa's women a thought to be the most under-represented in politics where by 17.2% are engaged in Parliamentary architecture (Kabwato, 2013). The Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation indicated that low political participation in Malawi is due to the "political system, its structures and the electoral systems that are inhibitive to women seeking national political positions" (CHRR, 2001 in Kabwato, 2013). Failure to achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and most especially Goals 5 (on gender equality) and 16 (on peace, justice, and strong institutions), many countries in Africa, as in other regions collates to the general lack of political will or a tendency to prioritize other goals and agendas to meet selfish interests of those in power (see, Community of Democracies, 2017).

While the political atmosphere in most African countries externally perceived welcome many women in legislative positions, the internal political realities in the host countries could be largely biased by citizens. What some previous research documented that South Africa has the smallest gender imbalance in politics as may even be convinced by televised parliamentary debates in South Africa may or may not guarantee women political empowerment in real sense. It is revealed that Rwanda's political gender imbalance is biased towards women in the legislative component while favouring men in executive positions ... figuring countries like Senegal, Uganda and Tanzania to be having the highest female influence with legislative component scores of 88.8, 76.4 and 74.9 (International Republican Institute-IRI, 2016). For some critics including myself, it is hard to believe that women in dictatorial countries like Uganda are free to make independent judgements and decisions without direct or indirect interference of government. Having a larger column is not a characteristic of competing political parties but a ruling party systemic plan disguised as democratic to always win on every political or economic debates within Parliamentary seating. What does it mean having almost all women members of parliament operating on orders of president?

Women in Somaliland are generally restricted to participate in decision making at all levels. Critics have reacted that the "international community ... over-emphasis on women's presence in public life and formal elected office as a marker of genuine power" (see Combaz, 2016 in Parke et al., 2017). It appears such critics underestimate the fact that sustainable development is impossible without equal participation of men and women in a political setting. Somaliland which is divided into clans, it is believed that a woman's place must be in the home. It could be the reason why we have two men in government positions who are given less chances in parliamentary debates. Most women opinions are not respected by Somali men. Social cultural barriers hamper political participation. This could justify the nominated of only one woman for Parliamentary elections (Cabdi, 2015). Meanwhile, civil society in Somaliland continue to call for constitutional reforms that could provide affirmative actions to increase women participation in politics and decision making process in a vital women's rights policy and legislative reforms for abolition of harmful traditional practices ... (Tungaraza, 2010)

Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland states that: "All citizens of Somaliland shall enjoy equal rights and obligations before the law, and shall not be accorded precedence on grounds of color, clan, birth, language, gender, property, status, opinion etc.' It is further provided that: 'Precedence and discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, clan affiliation, birth and residence is prohibited; and at the same time programmes aimed at eradicating long-lasting bad practices shall be a national obligation.'" This is a good policy in design and on paper rather than practice in the context of inclusive political participation of men and women in Somaliland. In the specific Sheikh region of Somaliland, Somali women are stereotyped in a sense that they are denied decision making power within mainstream parties and this is true in all other regions of Somaliland. In all political parties here, women are trampled down by majority men. As a result, self-help communities in Sheikh viewed to be an impossible creation due to the political design that underestimates women involvement. Very few men unsuccessfully value women political participation. It could largely be the reason why our country is struggling to achieve very tinny steps that could enhance sustainable development. Somali women political participation denial lies in the fact that patriarchy is a dominant social paradigm. The presence of both men and women politicians should be a vehicle to accelerate democratic governance. This study intends to investigate the belief that women are not fit to be politicians, evaluate the challenges faced by these women and then suggest their empowerment possibilities that that could enable them contribute to resilient communities in Somaliland.

This study aims to assess the political participation of women for community development of Sheikh Region. Specifically, it sets to identify the women who are involved in politics, describe the level of women involvement in the political decision making, state the challenges facing women in political participation and suggest possible measures that could be empower women in all aspects of development in the country.

2. METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

2.1 Research Area:

Research was conducted in sheikh district in Somaliland Sheikh also known as Sheikh, is town in the northwestern Sahil province in the autonomous region of Somaliland in Somalia. It is situated 70 km north of Burao. It is a place famous for hosting beautiful hills and meandering roads.

2.2 Research Design:

A mixed method comprising of qualitative method and quantitative was used to interpret and analyze data. The mixed method eliminates weakness of both methods when each method is applied separately. It is the major reason why (Greene,

2007) recommended its “opportunity to compensate for inherent method weaknesses, capitalize on inherent method strengths, and offset inevitable method biases.” I also realize its advantage of simplifying data interpretation to the audience.

2.3 Sample Size:

A sample of 108 people was first planned to participate in the study. This sample was calculated using an internationally recognized formula that was published by Baker (2012), which provides two Rules of Thumb. The first one suggests that if the population is less than 100, they are supposed to be interviewed all. In this study, Baker’s second Rule of Thumb has been applied to determine sample size. This Rule suggests that if the population is more than 100, the researcher should strive to interview at least 95% as participation confidence with a sampling error of ± 5 .

Baker says that whenever you go to the field like I went to Sheikh District for data collection, some people may or may not participate in the study. However, it is necessary that he or she strives to interview 95% of the target population. Baker recommends a formula for determining sample size: $n = 385 \div (1 + ((385/N)))$, whereby n =sample size, N =total target population.

The total population of Sheikh is estimated to be 200 according to the authorities there. Therefore, to calculate the sample size, I have applied Baker’s formula above.

$$n = 385 \div (1 + ((385/N)))$$

$$n = 385 \div (1 + ((385/200)))$$

$$n = 385 \div (1 + ((2.566)))$$

$$n = 385 \div 3.566$$

$$n = 108 \text{ (sample size)}$$

During the time of data collection, it was not possible to access all the planned sampled people but I managed to interact with only 105 men and women in Sheikh. Therefore, the analysis chapter has been based on the accessible sample.

2.4 Data Collection Methods:

2.4.1 Questionnaire:

Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents to fill at their convenient time as agreed between them and the researcher. For some of the respondents who did not understand English language, questions were translated in Somali language in order to understand in detail and elaborated and responded detailed information.

2.4.2 Key Informant Interview:

Key informants such as community/village elders, Clan leaders, principles of schools, chiefs and religious leaders were engaged in the conversation to share their perspectives and experiences regarding inclusive political participation. Most of them were not supportive of women involvement in decision making but emphasized a woman’s responsibility as to take care of domestic affairs at home.

2.4.3 Participant Observation:

It took me around two weeks of physical interaction with the research participants in Sheikh. Being physically present at the study area made me observe the body language of the respondents, emotions of a good number of women who expressed a desire to participate in national politics if the Government structurally support them. I also observed some food crops nearby the homes which I was told they were planted by women to be able to feed their families. A lot of women and children were selling fruits throughout the town council of Sheikh. The small scale businesses in which Sheikh women were involved proved that they were in position to support the education of their children and other basic needs. Dawson (2009) with whom I agree, described participant observation, as a research method, which cannot work unless you’re able to gain access to the community that you wish to study.”

2.5 Data Analysis:

This is the process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided. Primary data from various sources was edited, reviewed and analyzed by using SPSS. The analysis is visible in tables and figures but supported by the qualitative stories and experiences of women and men in Sheikh Region.

3. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

3.1 Demographic Data:

Figure 1: The Gender of the Respondents:

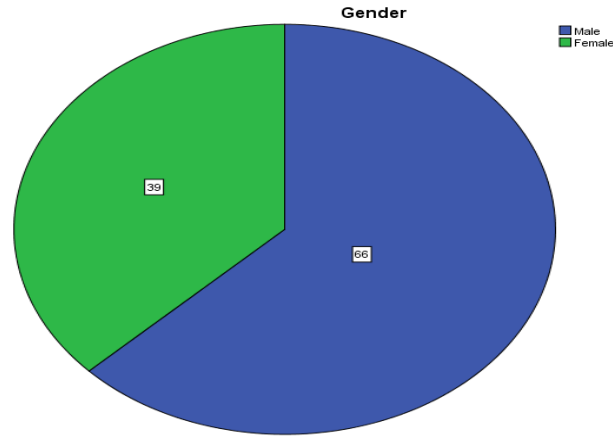


Figure 1: above shows that 39% of the respondents are female and 66% of the respondents are male.

Table 1: Age of the respondents

Age			
Frequency		Percent	
Valid	20-25	14	13.3
	25-26	17	16.2
	36-45	50	47.6
	46-55	24	22.9
	Total	105	100.0

Table 1 above indicates the ages of the respondents interviewed. For example, 13.3 percent of the respondents were aged between 20-25; the middle aged youth either girls or boys and 16.2 percent of the respondents were between 25-26 while 47.6 percent of the respondents were between 36-45 years. The latter were the majority of respondents. 22.9 % were aged 46-55.

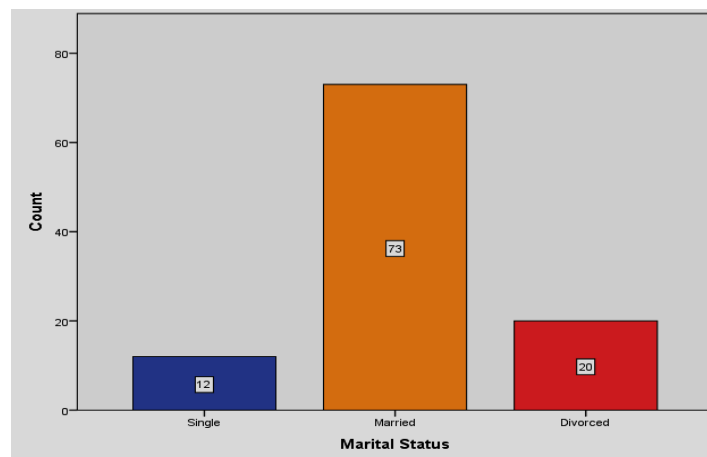


Figure 2: Marital status of the respondents

In figure 3 above, 12% of the respondents interviewed were single while 73 % married men and women and lastly 20% of the rest were divorced or separate women and men. In both categories, women expressed the urgent need for political representation.

Table 2: Education level of the respondents

Educational Level		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Primary	9	8.6
	Secondary	29	27.6
	University	48	45.7
	None of the above	19	18.1
	Total	105	100.0

Most of the participants engaged in the study had at least a university degree as represented by 45.7%. Those who had secondary education were 29 (27.6%) while 8.6% had attained primary school. Only 18.1% did not like to identify themselves with any age.

3.2 Daily Income of Respondents:

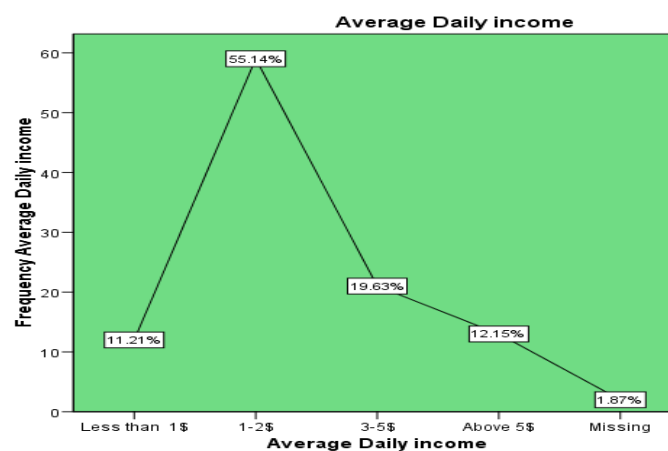
**Figure 3: Average daily income of the respondents**

Figure 3 indicates that 11% live by daily income less than 1\$ per day, 20% at 3-5\$, 13% can afford daily income above 5\$. By the standards of Somaliland, those who can afford \$3-5 could be ranked as middle class. The reason for an increased standard of living in sheikh district could be the business presence such as shops, restaurants, fuel stations, grocery and budgery those the sources of income in sheikh district and most income generated from there. Apart from fuel stations, I was told and could observe that most of the businesses were run by poor women. One would argue that an inclusive political participation of men and women could extend opportunities to even those poorest people living on less than a dollar per day.

3.3 Areas of Social Work for Somali Women:

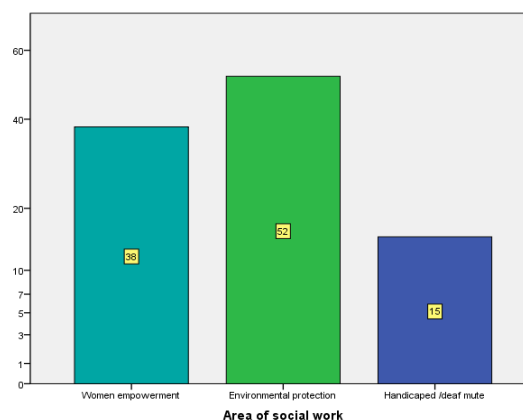
**Figure 4: Area of Social work**

Figure 4 shows the area of social work in the respondents of Sheikh District. For example, 52 out of 100 were working in community or social activities; and 38 out of the 100 were advocating for women empowerment mostly women and very few men among them. 15 out of 100 were working with the physically impaired or handicapped organizations. The nature of employment in Sheikh could justify the local or international organizations presence. Environmental protection and women empowering organizations included; Candlight, GIZ, World Concern, HPI, Red Cross and PYM.

3.4 Major Challenges facing Women in Sheikh Rural Areas:

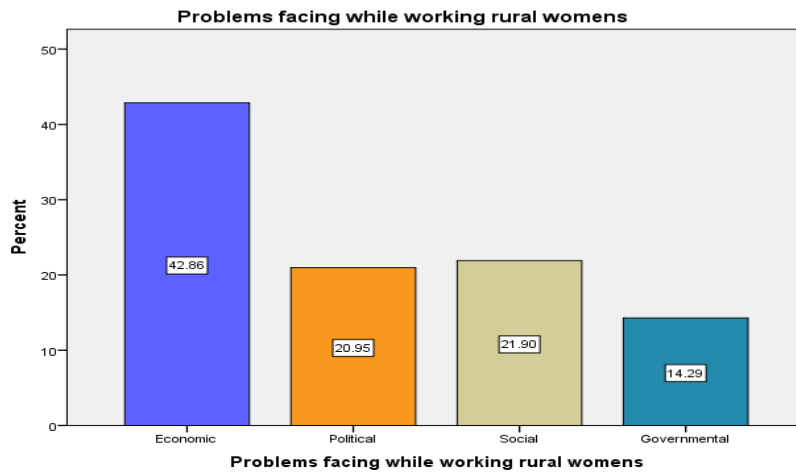


Figure 5: Problems facing Rural Area Women

Women in Sheikh cited a number of challenges ranging from the economic to social and political. Figure 5 above shows that most rural women’s biggest challenge was economic represented by 43%. On the other hand 21% of respondents selected political problem as major challenge. The low incomes associated with most women were believed to be a result of absence of women in political participation. The 22% women respondents cited social integration is a challenge while 14% cited inaccessibility to basic infrastructures as major challenges. All in all, if women could be given a chance to participate in the political decisions that affect their economic and social well-being, Sheikh Region would be an ideal place for women.

3.5 Why are Women in Sheik interested in Politics?

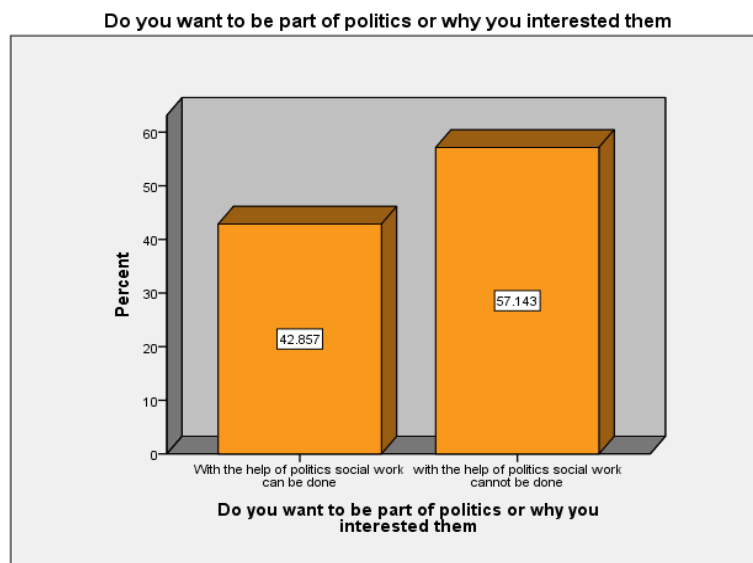


Figure 6: Reasons women interested in Politics

The reasons why Sheikh Women have are the same reasons why other Somali women are interested in political participation. In figure 6 above, 43% women said that politics helps to improve social work while the majority (57%) of the participants strongly agreed that direct involvement in political decision making could promote social work. Political decision making guides direction of development.

3.6 What can be done to address women challenges:

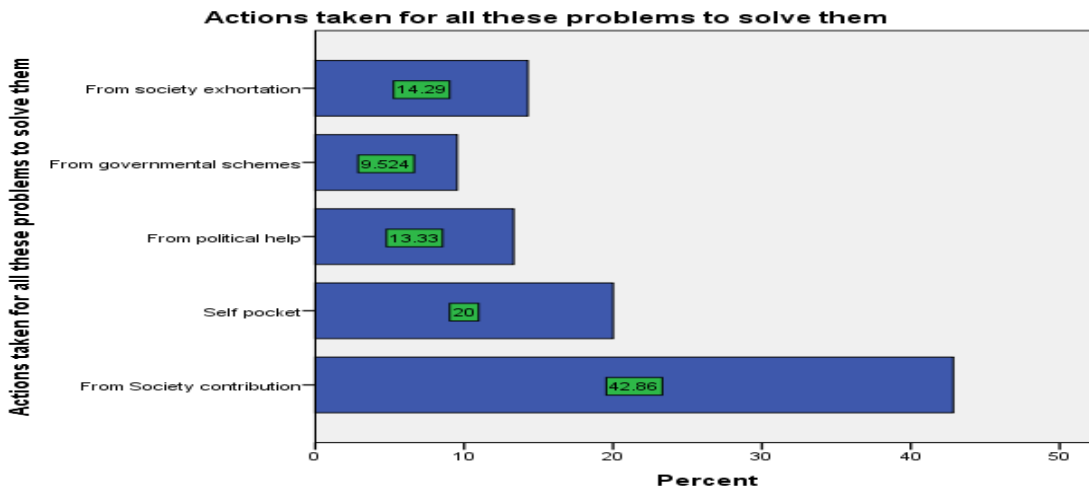


Figure 7: Actions taken to address Women challenges in Sheikh

Figure 7 above indicates measure that can be taken to solve women problems in Sheikh. At least 43% of the respondents said they solve their problems from within the community through self-help groups. 20 % of the respondents said they solve their challenges independently while 13 % of the participants cited the need for support from the political parties. Only 10 % of them revealed that their problems are solved by the government schemes and 14 % by society exhortation. As we see from the statistical point of view, women progressive empowerment could be made possible when they are actively involved politics.

3.7 Women willingness to Political Participation:

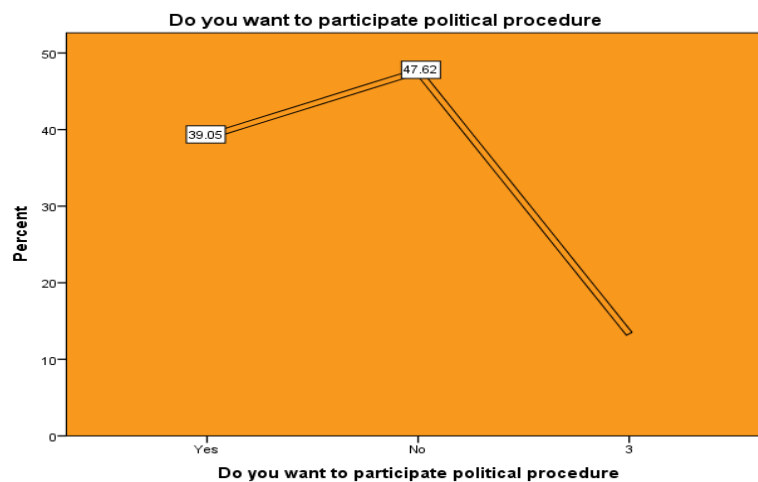


Figure 7: Women willingness to participate political systems

Figure 8 above illustrates the response for women’s willingness to participate Political architecture of Somaliland. 39% want to participate in political procedures of the country and be part of the policy making and implementation. Majority women (48 %) did not show interest in running political offices in a slow developing country. It appeared from their own words that most of them are submissive to cultural and religious barriers which require that women work better in low profile social roles. The historical male dominance could have resulted into this fact.

3.8 External support to Women Empowerment:

Table 3: External support to Empower Women

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	75	70.1
	No	30	29.9
	Total	105	98.1
			100.0

Table 3 above indicates respondents (70%) who believe that political support of rural women could empower them to live independent lives. A smaller percentage of respondents in the company of men and women (30%) were not in favour of political empowerment for rural women. The socio-economic feelings of the majority respondents could be relied on, to understand the political context of rural women who feel that government needs to give them an inclusive chance to improved lives.

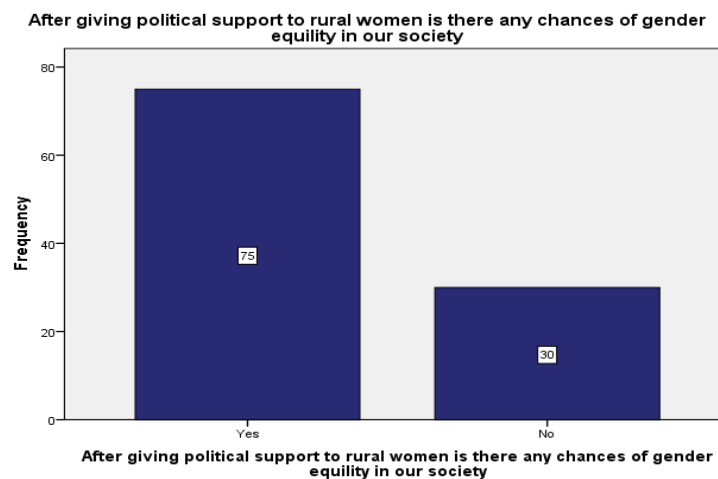


Figure 9: Chances of Gender Equality in Sheikh District

Figure 9 above illustrates how political support could empower rural women to achieve gender equality. The majority of the research participants (75%) supported the view that women standards of living could improve as soon as they are involved in political decision making. It was the smallest number of respondents (30 %) who did not buy the view that gender equality can be a product of political support and participation of rural women in public affairs. Responses like these could imply that every society is moved by different perspectives about related challenges.

3.9 Reforms that could Transform Rural Women in Sheikh:

Although most of the research participants had attended a degree, none of them showed proof of the qualification. It is most likely a lot of people liked to identify with the educated. This could explain how valuable an education could be to citizens of a country. While I was engaging some respondents in informal talks, many women and some few men mentioned that educating women could reduce the ignorance levels of all people in Sheikh. Nelson Manderla also once said that 'education is the greatest weapon we can use to transform the world. The presence of small scale businesses in Sheikh could boom for the better if men and women could be equipped with vocational skilling opportunities. Training them in areas of; tailoring, plumbing, electrical installation, carpentry and weaving could enable them achieve their intended dreams.

Women and men all need to be equipped with entrepreneurship skills to help them run their businesses in most competitive ways. If women succeed in business practices, they could livelihoods at household level. This could be done through televised media as well as community outreach and extending radio services to the local proximity.

By the time of data collection, stories were told of huge numbers of women who could not support their lives at all because of idleness. Supporting them with starting capital could enable them to establish small scale business and in turn develop capacity to self-help communities. Government could work with private companies to address this matter through public-private partnership.

4. CONCLUSION

Societies moved by gender-sensitive political orientation have proved to be successful in social, economic and political agendas. Inclusive political participation is a principal of democratic governance that should never be under-looked in a developing country in post-conflict transition. What Somaliland government should be concerned about is that; no country could achieve sustainable development if its people discriminated in lines of gender, race or political affiliations. Since women have proven to be instrumental in driving improved livelihoods as in Sheikh, denying them political rights or political decision making equity could throw the host country into the fire of the vicious cycle of poverty and conflict.

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