

# The Role of Women in Post-Conflict Peace Building in Hargeisa-Somaliland

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**Abstract:** The end of civil war between Somaliland and Somalia left formal and informal systems underdeveloped and under-capacitated in terms of the socioeconomic capital. Post-conflict peace building without the full participation of men and women has been going on in Somaliland with less success. Since history, the Somali women have been detached from the conventional peace building; it has traditionally been a responsibility of men. Where women have been involved, their voices have not been respected in the peace negotiations and processes, no sustainable peace has been constructed in Somaliland. This study examines the role of women in post-conflict peace building, the efforts they are making and the major impediments they face along the way. A qualitative approach was applied to investigate the experiences of Hargeisa women in the post-conflict peace building. Questionnaires were distributed to participants between the age of 18 and 50 while in-depth interviews were also conducted between with clan leaders to capture their opinions on women's roles in peace building. Focus group discussions were also conducted with groups of women and related views were shared to express their experiences. This research also drew from previous research to identify and fill the gaps in the available literature. After an extensive analysis of the primary information, the author argues that only peace building policies which respect women inclusion in all stages of peace processes are largely likely to register sustainable peace in Somaliland.

**Keywords:** Peacebuilding, civil war, post-conflict, women and Somaliland.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women discrimination in peace building processes is not an African problem but has been a global challenge. Evidence discloses that peace processes at International level often ignore and sometimes discourage the contributions and expressions of women (UN, 2006 in Stone & Affa'a Mindzie, 2006). They have been both actors and victims of war. However, when it comes to addressing their effects in the aftermath, they are excluded from participation aimed at designing solutions to their problems. The role of women in peace building is recognized globally in the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution 1325 adopted in October, 2010 for being constructive as peace builders (see, Alaga, 2010). It is also acknowledged in the UN Secretary General's 2010 seven point's plan which set significant goals for institutionalizing women's participation in all post-conflict strategies and planning processes and provides technical assistance to support women in decision-making in public forums (UNSC and UNGA, 2010). However, despite international efforts to strengthen women's abilities to participate confidently in peacebuilding fora, the year 2012 was marked with 70 assassinations of women in Afghanistan who tried to seek political space or raise their voices to fight for their rights in post-conflict recovery (see also, Zaher, 2013). On the other hand, some European countries like those in the Scandinavia, women enjoy full empowerment to participate in peace building processes at home and internationally and recruit women into high decision-making offices. This gives them opportunity to lift their living standards for the benefit of men and women together.

In the context Africa, women have been excluded from peace building participation since history except in West Africa where women were in the past very instrumental in mediating conflicts between states and reconciling warring parties. However, their participation in peace building was later altered by the changing trends of war that started targeting women as tools of warfare through rapes and sexual slavery (Alaga, 2010). Building sustainable peace is still complicated

by multiple insurgencies terrorizing the region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Uganda in East Africa is another case where post-conflict peace building processes have been dominated by men. Since the 2009 end of war, the country is still struggling to achieve sustainable peace in programs that do not fully include gender equality in implementing peace building resolutions (Ainebyona, 2011).

In most of the previous and prevailing armed conflicts like in Sudan, Sierra Leone where women were targeted as tools of war, peace building initiatives worked with women and registered adoption of sustainable peace agreements (see, International Crisis Group, 2006 in Stone & Affa'a Mindzie, 2006). A related experience too place in West Africa where a discourse on the importance of gender equality in peace building has evolved out of women campaign demanding full participation at all levels (Alaga). Lessons learned could be borrowed by other countries where peace building is still very problematic. The participation of women is critical to the success of any peace building process and therefore should not be underestimated. Women if given a chance could bring different peace building perspectives and resourceful priorities to men and their role in re-establishing the social fabric in the aftermath of conflict is vital.

Peace building in Somaliland is a long way to go. A country emerging from war continuously upholds traditional norms that push women out of the peace building processes. Little progress has been made with an effort of Nagaad women right umbrella organization of Somaliland to advocate for women equality, equity and the women mainstreaming the political arena, influencing the law, policy and practice for improved women equality and women human rights in Somaliland. However, women are sidelined in peace processes and representation in positions of power which makes it difficult for them to participate in peace building processes. In a Somalia Gender Project, it is stated that "Somaliland Parliament removed discussion on the quota for women in the Parliament from its agenda at the start of the year" (UNDP, 2014). Somaliland women's efforts to call for peace dialogues after 1991 when the country's major clans fought for leadership of the self-declared independent state did not win them any big support as they were largely granted observer status at the conferences rather than the right to vote ... their participation was limited to more traditional roles such as providing food to peace negotiators (Rayale; Pomfret & Wright, 2015). Coupled with weak institutions in the post-conflict setting associated with traditional and religious beliefs that undermine gender equality, much needs to be done to build sustainable strategies to peace building in Somaliland.

According to the practical evidence women in the Horn of Africa and Somaliland rarely participate in peace building of their country (see, Jama, 2012 and Carl et al., 2013). With the clan system of organization, women's contributions to peace building are limited by this reliance on the clan that is believed to be the conceptual foundation of peacebuilding (Rayale, Pamfret and Wright, 2015). Somaliland women are largely excluded from participation in the peace building initiatives. In peace processes, women are granted observer status and their roles are limited to traditional roles such as serving food and drinks to male peace builders. This has disabled peace building progress that does not achieve lasting peace. Those women who would wish to contribute strategic ideas to peaceful progress are not even given a chance to do so because their culture dictates that women must never participate with men on peace building table and thus limiting possibilities of sustainable peace in Somaliland.

The researcher intends to identify the possible Somali women abilities that could be incorporated in policy planning, formulations and implementation of peace building aimed at creating and strengthening sustainable peace.

## 2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is examining the role of women in post-conflict peace building in Somaliland. The study was specifically aimed to:

1. To find out the reasons why men do not like to include women in peace building initiatives.
2. To justify reasons for women exclusion in peacebuilding initiatives
3. To state the challenges women face as they seek participation in peace building initiatives.
4. To suggest possibilities of women participation in peace building in Somaliland

## 3. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Why do you think men do not like to involve women in peacebuilding initiatives?
2. Why are women excluded from peace building initiatives?

3. What challenges do women face in seeking to participate in peacebuilding initiatives?
4. In which ways can women contribute to peace building in Somaliland?

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Target Groups

This study targeted Hargeisa women who were ranging between the ages of 18 to 50, this age group was selected because they were likely to be familiar with peace building process in Somaliland. Both local women and those working with Nongovernmental organization peace activists, and religious leaders also participated. The latter were included due to their huge influence on the structural operations of the general society of men and women in the Islamic context. Both men and women believe in and respect them for their perceived divine powers by the virtue of being spiritual leaders.

### 4.2 Sample Size

The sample that participated in the study was determined by Morgan table which composes of internationally acceptable population size estimates and their appropriate samples (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). Fourty people were selected to participate in the study. They include 26 women and 14 men all sampled from both the local people as well as staff working with government, NGO and religious institutions.

The frequency and percentage distribution was used to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Primary data which comprised of life stories from participants was coded, edited and arranged in to good sentences that were interpreted to make meaning. Individual stories from the participants were presented and discussed. An interpretation of statistical findings was part of the report in which Microsoft excel was used as one of the analysis tools.

### 4.3 Data Collection Methods

#### Questioners

The main research instrument used in this study, were questionnaire. A semi-structured questionnaire was distributed to women in Hargeisa ranging between the ages of 18 to 50. They filled them expressing their own opinions on the role of women in peace building as well as their challenges and ways of improvement. Those who filled them returned them to the researcher; the reason of selecting this instrument was that the questioners were the most reliable instrument to get the relevant information from the respondents without fear or hesitance. It was also less costly compared to other instruments. Each respondent was provided a chance to express his or her ideas and views freely in the provided space without any undue influence of the researcher or his assistant.

### 4.4 Participant Observation

This was one of the major methods of data collection; it connected the researcher to the most basic human experience. "Discovering through immersion and participation of the how's and whys of human behavior in particular context, participants observations also means being embedded in the action and context of social settings, by getting in to the locations of whatever aspects of the human experience you wish to study, building rapport with participants and spending enough time interacting to gather needed data" (Dawson, 2002). If the researcher stays or with the community of study, it can be easier to familiarize with them to understand their behaviors better and the reasons behind them. By staying within the community, it helped the researcher to get a feeling of what it means to be a vulnerable person. Much of the hidden information about the impediments of Somali women from peacebuilding processes was captured.

### 4.5 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

Focus groups discussion was also another way the researcher used during his field study. Focus groups were consisting of 5 to 10 people, in a face-to-face interaction. Two focus groups were selected to participate in the study. Each member of the group was asked similar questions by the researcher until all of them participated in all questions. The researcher took note of the informant they shared with him about women and peace building in the context of Somaliland.

### 4.6 Key Informant Interview

This tool involves asking questions to some people in the community who hold responsibility or leadership. Dawson (2002) states that key informant interviews are qualitative in depth interview with people who know what is going on in

the community. The researcher visited clan leaders (Aqil), some people in the government positions and religious leaders and asked them to share their information about the role of women in peace building. Most of them were negative about women participation in peace building and condemned it as a taboo.

#### 4.7 Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the relevant authorities with respect to the respondents' views. This was important for the protection of the respondents from harm or harassment and the confidentiality of the respondents' and their leaders' sensitive information. The researcher protected the identity and anonymity of his participants. Respondents were promised their names would not appear or be written anywhere in this dissertation. The process of interaction was introduced to the participants before the interview started. It was observed that when the participants were assured of their privacy, they were highly motivated to share even the sensitive information about their opinions regarding women thoughts on peace building.

### 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Both quantitative and qualitative materials have been analyzed. Field experiences are especially the presented, discussed and interpreted.

#### 5.1 Research Findings

After a deeper interaction with various respondents, significant information or unique details were shared and thus coming out with a list of findings as outlined below.

- ❖ Religious leaders interviewed were more negative about women involvement in peace building. Clinging on the fact that Islamic religion doesn't allow it. Leaders say its western philosophy to include women in negotiating peace
- ❖ A mixture of men and women claimed that Somali culture does not allow women to participate in peace building. Most women termed as a bad culture
- ❖ Most men aired out that women's responsibility is to stay at home and take care of children
- ❖ The research disclosed that awareness on peace building has been done by Somaliland government by fixing few billboards and on walls expressing peace building
- ❖ Although in number of male participants don't believe in women involvement in peace building, most women feel they can and have contributed to peace building activities in various ways such as singing songs of peace and encouraging their husbands or men to stop war.
- ❖ Some participants disclosed that women can't contribute anything because they must be a busy at home with children
- ❖ Women felt that if their rights are respected they can make contribution to peace building
- ❖ It was also discovered that women can negotiate peace better than men. Most women said that they create peace at the heart of the children, family and society to build a culture of peace and peaceful coexistence.
- ❖ Intermarriages were pointed as a measure to restore peace between disputant parties in society

#### 5.2 Discussion of Results

##### Demographic Data

This research comprised of fourty participants as indicated in table 1 and figure 1 below. During the research, the majority of participants were females or women and girls of different ages representing 65%. Males were only 14 that were represented by 35%. This well demonstrated in the graph below where the bar for females is longer than that of males. More females than males participated in the study not only because the study was focusing on women but because of convenient access places where women were found. Most of them were found at their institutions of learning and at their work places.

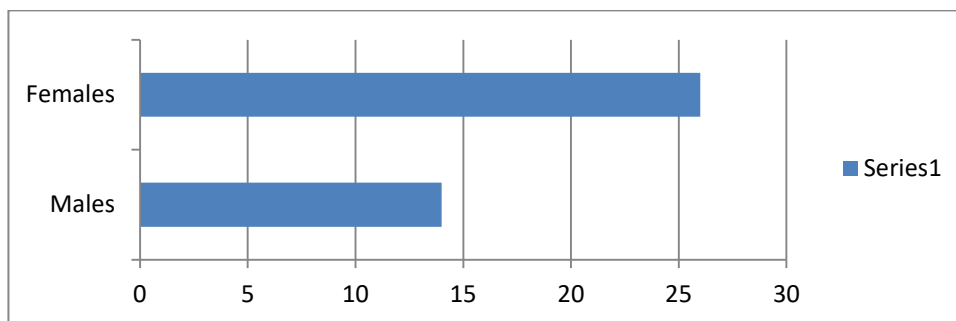
It may be difficulty to have access to Somali women in their homes because of the cultural sensitivity surrounding women and they may not feel free to share any information with anybody or a male researcher who is not their husband or close relative. At their work places or schools or institutions of learning, women may feel free to share with anybody even when

they are not related at all. The research took advantage of absence of the relatives of the respondents which is a major reason why he was able to access many of them. The small percentage of men were included in the study because the researcher wanted to capture men's perceptions, attitudes or viewpoints regarding women roles in peace building.

**Table 1: Gender of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	14	35%
Females	26	65%
Total	40	100%

**Figure 1: Frequencies on Gender of Respondents**



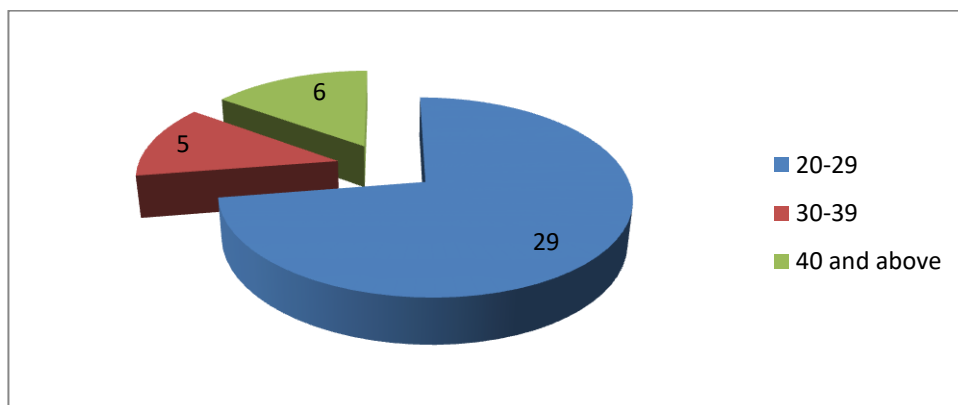
#### Age Group of Respondents

Table 2 represents 29 respondents which is 72.5%, who were ranging from the age of 20-29. Others were from the age bracket of 30-39 equivalent to (12.5%). And age group above 40 was only five participants (15%). The participants presented mostly were junior employees who had just graduated from universities in the last three years and most of them were found at their places of work and easily accessible. They were more willing and knowledgeable about the problem under investigation. Those from 30 and above were mostly elderly or married people who seemed to be busy with their domestic responsibilities. At times it was not possible to get wider or deeper information about them due to their reserved nature. Such categories of people are by tradition and naturally not used to sharing what they think is sensitive information.

**Table 2: Age Group**

Age	Frequency	Percentages
20-----29	29	72.5
30-----39	5	12.5
40 above	6	15
Total	40	100%

**Figure 2: Frequencies of Age Group of Respondents**



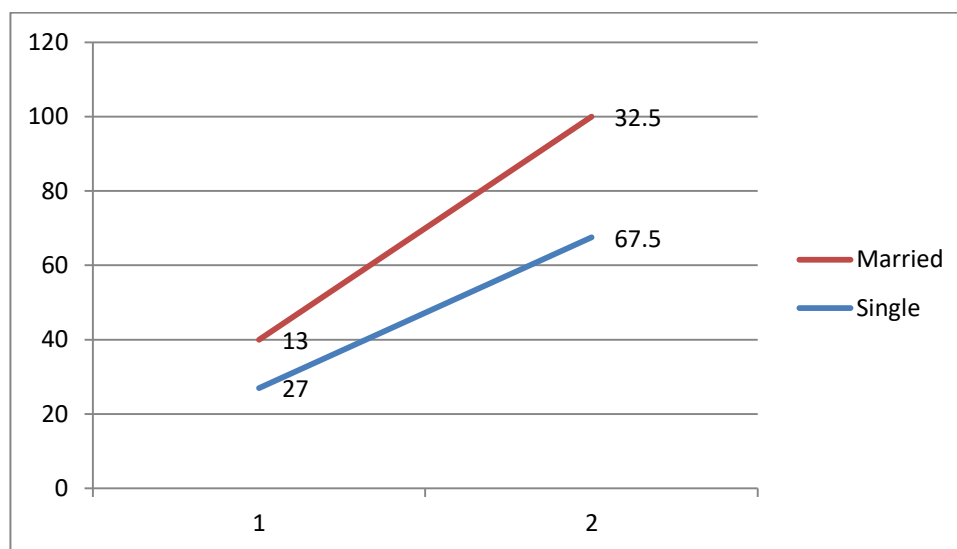
### Marital Status of Respondents

Both men and women participated in the study although majority women were a key concern to the researcher because the latter needed specific information on women role in peace building. Table 3 shows that 27 (67.5%) were single and 13 married participants were equivalent to 32.5%. The researcher who is not yet married was more comfortable to interact more with unmarried respondents. Those who were married were most likely to feel conscious especially if they were interacting with a male researcher.

**Table 3: Marital Status**

Marital status	Frequencies	percentage
Single	27	67.5
Married	13	32.5
Total	40	100%

**Figure 3: Marital Status of Respondents**



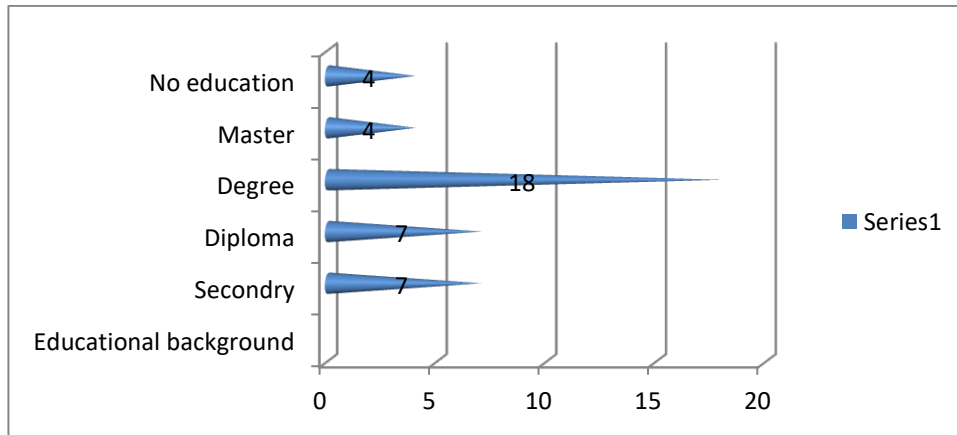
### Education background of Respondents

The researcher targeted various respondents with different educational background. For example, 17.5% had completed secondary education before the civil war in Siyad Bare regime and don't get opportunity to continue their higher education in university. The 17.5% of the respondents were diploma holders and 45% had a degree. Somaliland women who graduate from university find opportunities in NGOs. These groups of women were very interesting to contribute peace activities and take their roles while are fresh graduates and seek their roles and responsibilities among community. Women who had no education background were not ready to contribute peace building activities which are the reason why the researcher did not concentrate on them more. Respondents with master's degree were very few too because not many men or women go beyond first degree in Somaliland due to lack of awareness about the value of higher education.

**Table 4: Education Background**

Educational background	frequencies	percentage
Secondary	7	17.5
Diploma	7	17.5
Degree	18	45
Master	4	10
No education	4	10
Total	40	100%

Figure 4: Education background of Respondents



Looking at figure 4 above, one may get an impression that more women are not participating in peace building initiatives due to lack of skills to contribute or may not also be confident about their abilities. Of course gender discrimination contributes more to lack of women skills or illiteracy.

**Employment Background of Respondents**

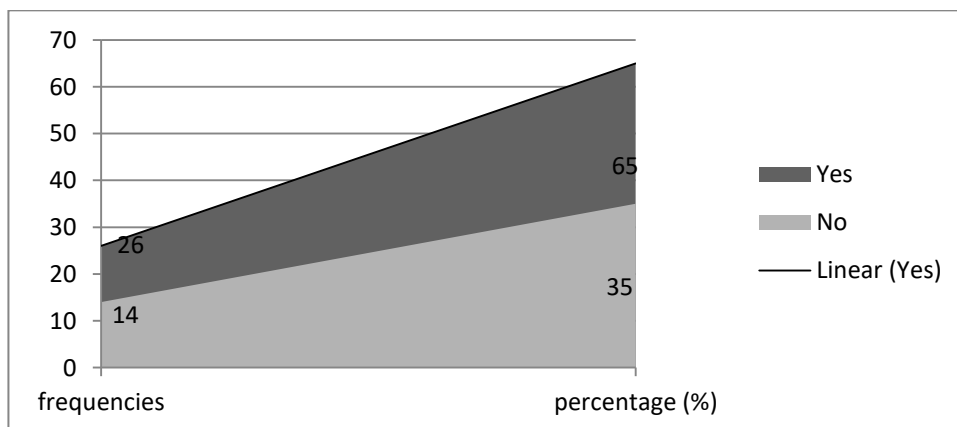
The researcher took advantage of employed women who were mostly young women and girls. Table explains the type of unemployment whereby some of the categories were unemployed another’s are employed. A total of 26 respondents (65%) were employed. While the other 14 (35%) were unemployed. Therefore most of women the researcher are interviewed were employed.

Table 5: Employment of respondents

Employment	frequencies	percentage
Yes	26	65
No	14	35
Total	40	100%

As we see in figure 5 below, the researcher accessed majority of respondents that were employed. This could mean it was very convenient to find and interact with them at their work places than their homes. The unemployed few also had some information about peace building in Somaliland and could share their perceptions and experiences of peace building initiatives in Somaliland.

Figure 5: Employment of Respondents



**5.3 Involvement in Peace Building**

Research disclosed that men have more chances of participating in peace building in Somaliland context than women. During the study, respondents who acknowledged that they had been involved in peace building initiatives were



categorized into males and females. For example 60% of respondents were women who were denied chance of participation. The smallest number of women said they had been involved but at low level like in the family but not in the national conflict resolution or peace building. Most women in Somaliland are marginalized socially and don't participate in peace building and other positions in the government. Men who dominate the decision making positions think that women are passive and cannot contribute in peace building initiatives except in household works such as care of children and their families. All men who were interviewed expressed that it is their responsibility to build peace.

**Table 6: Involvement in peace building**

Gender	Responses on involvement in peace building	frequency	Percentage %
Females	Yes	4	10
	No	24	60
Males	Yes	12	30
	No	0	0
Total		40	100%

#### 5.4 Perception of Women contribution in Peace Building

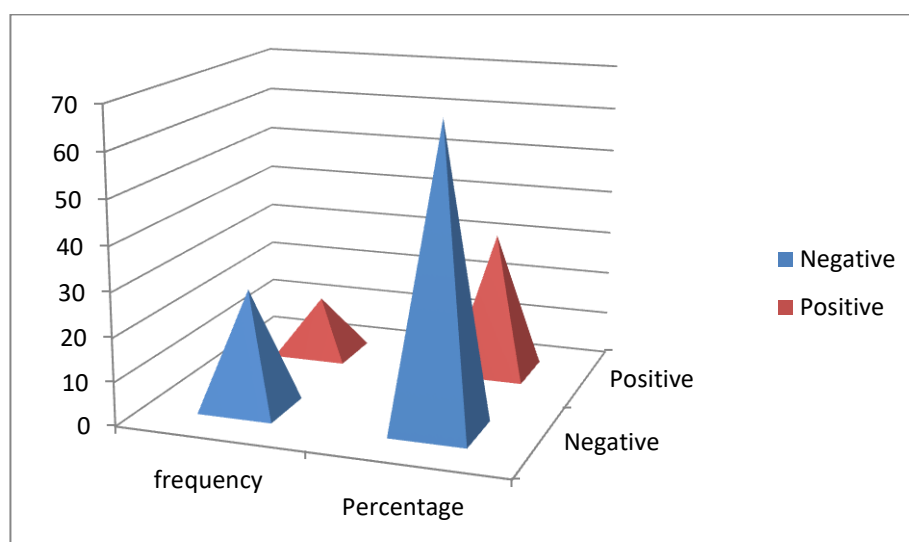
According to the table 6 above, 27 respondents (67.5%) had negative perception on women in peace building. These comprised mainly the men and very few women. Somali cultures has made women to be submissive to men. This could imply that majority women are not confident enough about their capabilities although they are blocked by the culture which does not allow women and girls to team up with men groups in building peace.

The number of participants who had positive attitude on women contribution was small but comprised mainly women. This may imply that some women are more willing to participate and feel they have something to contribute in building peace but they are not given a chance. This interpretation is also illustrated in table 7 and figure 7 below.

**Table 7: Women perception in peace building**

Perception	frequency	Percentage
Negative	27	67.5
Positive	13	32.5
Total	40	100%

**Figure 7: How women are perceived**



#### 5.5 Role of Women in Peace Building

Although women roles have generally been underestimated by most people especially men, the latter may not have been exposed to ways how women contribute in peace building. Somaliland women have harnessed grassroots methods of



promoting peace and for pursuing a cessation to major and minor conflict through the use of poetry, songs and poems. When conflicts arise, Somaliland women travel to different disputant groups and sing touching songs of peace that encourage men to stop fighting.

### **5.6 Capabilities of Women in Peace Building**

Somaliland women have capability to promote peace, conflict resolution and social relations in society. Peace building business is men and women responsibility. However, women such as the Somali women are discriminated from public participation because of the general assumption that women have no capacity. Somali women are capable of contributing to peace building for example when they were asked how they can contribute to peace building, most of them continuously said “we sell our gold and property in order to provide food for those involved in peacemaking and peace building”. There may be other capabilities Somali women could have if they are given a chance.

### **5.7 Category of People who are trusted to influence Peace Building**

There are many trust group to influence peace building activities in Somaliland, these include traditional elders or chiefs, religious leaders and government officials, traditional leaders have been vital for peace and stability in Somaliland, they have played commendable role in clan reconciliation and in the rebirth of Somaliland. It takes months of reconciliation meeting to heal wounds of the conflict and reach the stage where people could put the past behind them and look toward the future but women are discouraged from participation claiming that religion does not allow them. Although sultans or chiefs advocate for peace and stability, discourage violence, adjudicate social disputes in Somaliland and make final decisions which are mostly binding (sultans or chief is a sign of clan). A chief represents, negotiates and make decisions between families and clans for the purpose of peace building.

### **5.8 Beliefs surrounding Women in Peace Building**

There are many beliefs about women participation in Somali culture. These beliefs are believed to be real and with divine power and they come with punishment if any member of Somali communities does not believe in them. For example, when a religious leader was asked about the role of women in peace building, he became more emotional and sensitive and asked what my name was. I told him, “My name is Mawliid.” He said, “Please do not ask me this question again. It is western philosophy. Building peace is the work that belongs to men and women should stay at home.” Religious leaders in Somaliland or Muslim community are people who hold greater influence on the structures and systems of the country. They have the largest following of the citizens and believers. They are respected as people of divine authority from Allah. Therefore whatever they say or recommend is supposed to be respected and put into action. If a religious leader spreads a message of Allah instructing women to stay at home and not team up with men on any project, who can go beyond this? The responses of this religious leader were not different from those of lay men in Somali communities. There is a general belief that among most men and some women in Somaliland those women cannot contribute anything to peace building.

### **5.9 Women awareness of Peace Building Initiatives**

Women are key to conflict resolution and peace building in all over the world, but they are not always given a chance. It seems women are aware of peace building negotiation but they are not always put at the forefront of the peace agenda. Most Somali women said they can negotiate peace better than men as most of the men are perceived with eating khat or green grass. Cases have happened where Somali women have been intermarried among disputant parties as a way of addressing conflicts.

### **5.10 Policy Interventions in Peace Building**

Much as there is negative perception on women participation or involvement in peace building in Somaliland, government has made some effort to involve some women in initial peace building activities. For example, women were asked if they had ever participated in peace building and only one testified she was asked to make awareness about peace and conduct training on possibilities of peace building in this country. These women could have been given the chance to participate because she was working with an NGO and she was also convinced that when women are educated, they will understand the importance of peace and contribute to peace a lot in conflict management in areas of collaboration and reconciliation. Therefore, interventions on women involvement are not taken very seriously as indicated in chapter one above, otherwise if the number of women in peace building could be increased and encouraged by policy interventions, there would be more success stories.

### 5.11 How Women can be involved in Peace Building

Women participation is possible if men have a good will to allow them in peace building initiatives. All respondents were asked what they think could be done to improve women participation in peace building initiatives and most of them recommended the need for women empowerment in foreign colleges so that they may learn how to apply their skills in building peace. Other women recommended the need for gender equality where women and men could participate equally in all development projects. The implication is that women feel much more disadvantaged when it comes to building peace. The idea of forcing women to remain at home when men are away may be a stereotype against Somaliland women usually claiming they are busy with their homes and their children. What men can do may not be impossible for women as already mentioned that women could be better negotiators than men in the Somaliland context.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This section summarizes all the lessons learnt from interaction with the community of study as well as the literature explored. While focusing on the dilemmas of women in peace building, recommendations have been outlined below.

It has been discussed that dissemination of women in peace initiative projects is not a new phenomenon. Various scholars have also observed and documented the lived experiences of women. Dissemination from participation is a challenge most women face in development and especially in Somaliland.

During field research, many related stories were told about Somaliland women's disadvantaged position. Most men believe that women's roles must be in the home only to take care of domestic responsibility. The literature reviewed agree with the primary information that was collected from the women and other key figures that participated in the study .it may not be easy to have women get involved in peace initiative even though some women feel cheated by men.

In the scholarly was documented that education is an opener for all women in the development process (Carmen, 2003). It was realized during field interactions with women that most of them demonstrated the need for education to gain more skills that could enable them participate confidently in peace building initiative.

One of the greatest lessons learnt was that religious leaders were more sensitive and emotional about having women involved in peace building .some men considered questions about the need to have women involvement in this matter as a shame. Traditional leaders believe that peace building negotiations are their own but not for women or any other people in the community. This could mean they are behind the move to the block women from participation.

Religious leaders were highly condemning women involvement in peace building they put strong emphasis on the fact that religious does not require women to participate but to be in the home and take care their children and domestic work. Some women were not confident that they can contribute to peace building they even more negative saying that peace building is none of their business.

It was learnt from research that men religious and traditional leaders were the greatest roadblock against women involvement and participation in any development projects including peace building. Therefore women were generally blaming men to be the root causes of their problems.

## 7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for sensitizing the general population of Somaliland men and women, boys and girls in order to remove traditional cultural rigidity that makes women ineffective and passive. Somaliland women contribute a lot to peace according to some men because they aren't like men. They like peace very much while they are vulnerable, sometimes they contribute and songs and music to express the importance of peace and to keep our stability and freedoms.

Our society and government are reluctant to include women participation in peace building effectively and they also accelerate stereo types that women should have stay at home and given nurturing and care to their children and family this contributes the discouragement of women or did not use their capacity to initiate peace at family and national level. This is not good for both the women and men because one head may not be enough to build peace. Therefore women should be empowered by giving and respecting their rights to participate in peace building. Women should be treated equally with mean and be valued as other human beings in Somaliland and the rest of the world.

There is need for cultural change to break down the stereo types against women. Women also deserve the respect that men respect. The only way culture can change is through education

Nelson Mandela once said, 'education is the only weapon we can use transform the world.'

Religious leaders and other men could learn from lessons in other countries where women have been active participants. Peace building initiatives for example in West Africa where women groups moved the warring parties to negotiate for peace as mentioned in the background section above. Embracing Annan's conviction that "we can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contribution of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace building, peacekeeping and reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men" (2005) will be a big step towards realizing peace building in Somaliland.

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