Women in Peace and Transition Processes

Inclusive
Peace & Transition
Initiative

September 2018

Somalia (2000)

Name of process
Somalia National Peace Conference

Type of process
Peace-making

Outcome of process
- The Peace Conference established an internationally recognized authority, but it never gained power outside Mogadishu
- Subsequent efforts led to the Transitional Federal Government in 2004, and a new constitution and post-transitional government in 2012
- The humanitarian crisis persists in Somalia, with an ongoing armed insurgency by Al-Shabaab, recurrent droughts and flooding, and 1.1 million people living in protracted internal displacement[1]

Women's inclusion
- Direct representation at the negotiation table

Women's influence
Moderate influence due to:
- Presence of strong women's groups.
- Women's coalition transcending clan divisions
- Successful advocacy and strategic communications
- Influence of policy debates on inclusion of women in the lead-up to UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (2000).

However, women's influence negatively affected by:
- Gendered, clan-based selection criteria and decision-making

The Somali National Peace Conference held in Arta, Djibouti, in 2000 was one of the most inclusive peace conferences since the collapse of the state and the outbreak of war in 1991.[2] The Conference, aimed at ending the war and re-establishing a central government, included civil society groups, clan elders, and politicians.[3] Women's organizations were officially included, thanks to their successful advocacy vis-à-vis those involved in the Conference's organization, including UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and facilitator President Guelleh of Djibouti. Women's organizations built a strong coalition to increase their influence in the negotiations, which took the name the Women's Clan, and became known as "the Sixth Clan."

As a result of women's inclusion, the Transitional Charter that came out of the conference emphasized the human rights of children, women, and minorities, and women's organizations successfully secured a women's quota of 25 out of 245 seats in the transitional parliament (women did not reach this level of representation again until the elections of 2016/2017). However, parliamentary seats were divided using a clan-based formula, and the allocation of women's seats by men clan leaders had a dampening effect on the quota.[4] Moreover, the agreement of the Conference was never fully implemented, and the Transitional National Government was only able to gain authority in one part of the Somali capital of Mogadishu.[5]

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I. Background

Somalia became an independent nation after the independence and subsequent unification of British and Italian Somaliland in 1960. Nine years later, army commander Mohamed Siyad Barre overthrew the democratically elected but corrupt government and established a socialist authoritarian regime that came to be characterized by violent persecution and imprisonment of political opponents and dissidents.[6]

In south-central Somalia, it was not until 2000 that women began to publicly challenge men at various levels of the political system

The time under Siyad Barre was marked by improvements in gender equality indicators, in terms of citizenship, access to social services and jobs, as well as paid maternity leave.[7] Under Barre, women gained positions of power, including in the government (women made up 10 percent of members of parliament).[8] However, Somalia overall remained a strongly patriarchal society where men dominated political, social, and economic decision-making.[9] In south-central Somalia, it was not until 2000 that women began to publicly challenge men at various levels of the political system, including local councils, regional and national parliaments and the national cabinet.[10]

The Somali population is socially organized along six main clan families: the Dir, Isaq, Darod, Hawiye, and the Rahanweyn, consisting of the Digil and Mirifle clans, as well as a number of minority groups.[11] Minority groups include the Bantu and Banaderi,and although they may be a minority at the national level, they often constitute a majority at local levels throughout south-central Somalia.[12] In some instances, a sub-clan of a majority clans may constitute a minority at a particular level of governance. The capital Mogadishu hosts a variety of clans and is historically cosmopolitan, with inhabitants from across East Africa.[13]

Somali women have a more ambiguous and complex clan identity

Clan membership is an important determinant of social exclusion and inclusion.[14] The clan system is strongly gendered, with clan decision-making structures and bodies a men-only domain that women influence from the sidelines, through their husbands and men family members.[15] While Somali men are more strongly tied to their clan affiliation, Somali women have a more ambiguous and complex clan identity.[16] Women traditionally possess significant social capital and serve as primary community mobilizers, peacemakers, and mediators within and between families and clans as a result of their ties to both their father's and their husband's clans.[17]

In 1991, after a long period of increasing discontent, Barre was overthrown and the national government collapsed. Violence quickly escalated as armed clan factions fought for control over land and resources. This period was the most violent of Somalia's civil war—25,000 people were killed in Mogadishu alone, 1.5 million people fled the country, and 2 million were internally displaced.[18] Society became increasingly defined along clan lines, as Somalis relied on their clan for security and governance, including adjudication.[19] It became dangerous for anyone, but particularly men, to live outside their clan's territory. Gendered clan identities separated men and women family members, as women sought safety in their father's clan territory.[20]

Like elsewhere, experiences of the war in Somalia are significantly gendered. Men and boys made up the majority of people killed. Militias have used sexual violence against women as a psychological weapon to humiliate their opponents.[21] Those targeted most by sexual violence were women from traditionally marginalized clans and other minority groups, who were unarmed.[22] The refugee crisis was also gendered; women and children accounted for around 80 percent of the 300,000 people who sought refuge in Kenya in 1993.[23] Few Somali women physically participated in combat during the civil war,[24] although a large number provided critical services like cooking or washing for the fighters.[25] Both women and men encouraged their clans to fight by engaging in the traditional practice of praising their clans through spoken and chanted poetry.[26] Armed conflict did shift traditional gender roles, with many women replacing men as family breadwinners.[27] For example, by 2001, an estimated 70–80 percent of households in the region of Lower Shabelle in southern Somalia were dependent on the woman's earnings to sustain the family's livelihood.[28] Women also played the more traditional role of peacemakers. Throughout the 1990s, hundreds of new women's civil society organizations were actively engaged in local stabilization efforts and peace processes.[29]

Throughout the 1990s, hundreds of new women's organizations were engaged in local stabilization efforts

There was a series of failed peace talks and international interventions. In 2000, Djibouti's President Ismaïl Omar Guelleh initiated the Somalia National Peace Conference in Arta.[30] In a departure from previous peace conferences, President Guelleh advocated for the participation of large numbers of civil society groups, including clan elders, intellectuals, the diaspora, and women's groups, in addition to religious leaders and representatives of a growing business community.[31]

The National Peace Conference sought to address the causes of the conflict, understood as internal disputes about state-building and access to political, economic, and social resources; the legacy of the colonial insistence on ethnic identity; and the impact of Cold War politics, and wars between Somalia and neighboring states (such as the Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1977–8). The conference began in May and culminated in August 2000 with the Arta Declaration and the formation of the Transitional National Government (TNG), with Abdiqasim Salad Hassan as President.[32] This was the first Somali government since 1991 to secure a measure of international recognition, enabling Somalia to resume its seat at the UN and in regional bodies, which it had lost when the war broke out.[33] However, the implementation of the peace agreement met with immediate challenges as faction leaders controlling the capital announced they would not allow the TNG to establish itself in the city.[34]

Within approximately one year of the TNG's establishment, it had been undermined. It met strong opposition from faction leaders, who were supported by regional powers, and was weakened by internal fighting, corruption, and lack of resources.[35] A new peace conference would begin in 2002, which led to the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government.

Since the Arta Somalia National Peace Conference, little has changed for women in Somalia. According to the most recent *Somalia Human Development Report* (2012),

Somalia ranks among the lowest in the world on socio-economic indicators, for both men and women. Gender disparity is indicated as "alarmingly high" across all socio-economic dimensions.[36] Women's political and economic participation is still strongly challenged by religious and customary clan beliefs and practices.

Actors Involved in the Process

The conference in Arta lasted from 2 May to 27 August, and 2,000–3,000 delegates attended, including 100 women and many civil society representatives. It has been described as innovative, and was the most inclusive peace process in Somalia's history up to that point.[37]

Faction leaders were invited on the condition that they would respect the outcome of the conference. This condition, and the inclusion of civil society in the negotiations, led a number of faction leaders, who retained significant power and arms, to boycott the conference.[38] Others attended, such as representatives of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army, who controlled southwestern regions of the country, but they withdrew their support for the process after the conclusion of the conference.[39]

Women Involved in the Process

The four biggest women's organizations included at the Arta Conference were the Women's Development Organization (IIDA); Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC); the Family Empowerment and Relief Organization (FERO); and an umbrella organization called the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organizations (COGWO). The four organizations shared a common focus on conflict resolution, the promotion of women's voices and influence in peace negotiations, and the empowerment of women and girls. IIDA, established in 1991, is the oldest of the four organizations, and throughout the 1990s it expanded its conflict resolution workshops and training with international support.[40] SSWC, established the following year, became internationally renowned for promoting peace and women's rights.[41] FERO, also established in 1992, and COGWO, from 1995, both promoted sustainable peace and the empowerment of women in their work.[42] COGWO and IIDA extended connections to other groups within Somalia, such as the Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN), and among the diaspora, including the Somalia Peace Line.[43]

This case study focuses on the roles of organized women's groups in the Arta Conference, including women's coalitions or networks.

Modalities of Inclusion of Women's Groups

One modality of women's inclusion prevailed in the case: direct representation at the negotiation table.[44] Significantly, women united across clans under the name of the Women's Clan, also popularly referred to as the "Sixth Clan," pointedly referencing the clan-based selection criterion of the conference.

1 | Direct Representation at the Negotiation Table

The setup of the Arta Conference was inspired by the clan-based system and drew on mechanisms such as the Shir Beeleed (clan council), which is a traditional governance model, and the Guurti (council of clan elders), designed to resolve conflict, among other things. Decisions were made by consensus.[45]

The Conference was divided into two stages. The first stage was to agree on the criteria and procedure for selection of the delegates. The second stage was to negotiate an Transitional Charter and to select members of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), the Transitional National Government (TNG), and its president.

Stage one took place from 2 May to 13 June 2000. Representation was such a contentious issue that it threatened to end the conference. In the end, clan leaders agreed to base the selection of delegates on the 4.5 formula agreed at the Sodere National Conference in Ethiopia in 1997. The 4.5 formula is a quota system under which an equal number of seats (and votes) are given to the four major Somali clans that dominate south-central Somalia and Puntland (the Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Rahanweyn consisting of the Digil and Mirifle). Traditionally marginalized clans were, together, given half the representation of a major clan (the 0.5).[46]

92 women joined together in the first day to vote as single bloc

This clan-based selection procedure made it difficult to include women in the conference, as clan elders systematically choose men representatives over women. In response, 92 women joined together on the first day of the conference in an effort to transcend clan identity and vote as a single bloc. The "Women's Clan," also known as the "Sixth Clan," had two co-chairs and three vice-chairs, who represented the four main clans of south-central Somalia.[47] During the first stage of the conference, the Sixth Clan mainly advocated for the inclusion of women in the second phase, as well as the establishment of a cross-clan women's coalition. President Guelleh decided to allow women to participate, but as part of their respective clan delegations.[48]

By the end of the first stage, clan elders had chosen 810 delegates for the second stage of the negotiations. The four delegations of the main clans each included 20 women, and a further 10 women were included in the delegations of minority clans.[49] Eventually, 100 women delegates participated in the Conference.

The Sixth Clan focused on promoting women's inclusion and an end to violence

During the second stage of the Conference, which took place from 15 June to 27 August, the Sixth Clan coalition mainly focused on promoting women's inclusion in the transitional political system, and advocating for provisions addressing social issues, and an end to the violence in the country. The Transitional Charter was adopted on 16 July, with a three-year mandate. It emphasized the human rights of children, women, and minorities. Furthermore, the it guaranteed women 25 out of 245 seats in the transitional assembly.[50]

II. Analysis of Women's Influence: Enabling and Constraining Factors

Women influenced the process by transcending clan structures

Both process and context factors enabled the inclusion of women's organizations and their influence in the 2000 Somalia National Peace Conference. These factors included effective communication from women's organizations to the organizers of the Conference to ensure their inclusion, as well as the presence of strong women's organizations and support from the facilitator to enhance the influence of the Sixth Clan coalition. One major constraining factor for women's inclusion and influence was the clan-based selection criteria.

Ultimately, women were able to influence the process by transcending clan structures and voting in one bloc. The establishment of the Sixth Clan and the influence that it was able to exert was a major achievement.

Process Factors

1 | Exclusive Selection Practices

The selection of participants in the Arta Conference allowed for the most inclusive peace negotiations since 1991. However, the selection criteria proved to be a major constraining factor with regard to the inclusion of women. The formula based on clan affiliation risked the exclusion of women due to the highly gendered workings of the Somali clan system. Clan leaders held the power to make decisions on selection, and these were all men; women could only influence moderately from the sidelines.[51] Nonetheless, women were able to establish the Sixth Clan coalition within the conference, which transcended clan boundaries and advocated for women's participation in the conference and political participation beyond.[52]

2 | Successful Advocacy from Women's Organizations to Key Stakeholders

Somali women's organizations were effective in advocating for women's direct representation in the negotiations.[53] Prior to the Arta Conference, approximately 120 women, including women from SSWC and the FERO, wrote a letter to the then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The women informed him of the many challenges women face in Somalia and petitioned for their inclusion in future peace talks. In response, the Secretary-General added SSWC to the list of organizations advising him on peacebuilding in Somalia and promised to include them in future peace negotiations.

Women urged President Guelleh to include women as equal partners in the peace process

A delegation of five Somali women from SSWC and the FERO also met with President Guelleh in Djibouti, to advocate for a peace and reconciliation process in Somalia.[54] The women urged President Guelleh to include women as equal partners in the peace process, not just as observers.[55] He agreed and facilitated the participation of 100 women in the first stage of the Conference.[56]

During the Conference, women recited poems *(buranbur)*, a Somali tradition and one of the most powerful and effective techniques of expressing suffering and the desire for peace.[57]

3 | The Enabling Attitude of Facilitator President Guelleh

One significant factor for the inclusion and influence of women in the Arta Conference was the role of the Djiboutian President Guelleh. His focus on broad negotiations meant that the Arta Conference included the largest number of participants from civil society organizations in Somali history, who were, importantly, included on equal terms to faction leaders. These organizations included women's groups, which by the end of the 1990s had established themselves as important actors in the field of conflict resolution.[58]

4 | The Strength of the Sixth Clan Coalition

On the first day of the conference 92 women agreed to break out of their individual clan delegation and vote in one bloc. This was a reponse to the general lack of space for women's representation. They named their coalition the Women's Clan, popularly known as the Sixth Clan, and included women regardless of clan affiliation. The coalition did not include all women who participated in the conference. For example, one woman belonging to a minority clan chose to represent her own clan and voted accordingly. She explained that her clan was experiencing significant discrimination and difficulties compared to the major clans, and she perceived improving the conditions of her own clan as a higher priority than joining a coalition dominated by women from the major clans.[59]

The coalition succeeded in establishing a women's quota

Effective advocacy ensured the inclusion of the Sixth Clan throughout the conference, and one of their leaders, Asha Haji Elmi, was selected to sit on the Conference Committee, the body overseeing the conference proceedings.[60] The coalition succeeded in establishing a women's quota in the new TNA.[61]

Context Factors

1 | Strong Women's Groups

From the start of the war, women's organizations managed to transcend clan affiliation to obtain basic necessities. By the time of the Arta Conference, they had progressed in their cooperation to advocacy, mediation, and peacebuilding. Their common goals were to increase women's input into men-dominated negotiations such as political reconciliation, and to support a plan that would both lead to sustainable peace and empower women and girls.[62]

2 | International Policy Debate on the Inclusion of Women

By 2000, international and regional actors in the peacebuilding field had developed a more pronounced focus on the political rights of women and minorities, and this had an effect on the Arta Conference. For example, the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) advocated on behalf of Somali women and minorities in its direct contact with Djibouti during the planning of the conference. During the conference, an officer from the UN Office of the High Commission for Human Rights twice travelled to Djibouti to advocate for the rights of women and minorities and to assist the drafting committee of the Transitional Charter.[63] The concrete effects of these initiatives are difficult to measure, but they illustrate a growing focus on women's role in peacebuilding, which culminated in the drafting and passing of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000. Some experts suggest that the drafting of 1325 had an influence on the Arta Conference.

3 | Gendered Clan System and Notions Surrounding Gender Roles

Despite the fact that the clan-based selection procedure made it difficult for women to be included in the Arta Conference, women traditionally have a conflict-mediating role in Somali society due to their more ambiguous clan affiliation compared to men. This proved an enabling factor during the Arta Conference, as women repeatedly used this role to ease tensions and, with support from the Guurti, to encourage the resolution of conflict and differences.[64]

The clan-centric and patriarchal system undermined the gains made by the women's organizations

Overall, however, women's marginalization from the political sphere did prove to be a constraining factor. The clan-centric and patriarchal system undermined the gains made by the women's organizations. For example, it was assumed that women would support proposals put forward by men from their clan, who did not expect the women to play a major role in the Conference.[65] This sentiment was particularly prevalent in traditionally marginalized clans, which all together had only half the number of seats accorded to the majority clans; members of these clans prioritized men delegates, meaning that for some, women were not appointed to the TNA at all.[66]

III. Conclusion

The Arta Conference represents a significant step for Somali women as they succeeded in participating in and influencing the outcomes of the Conference. The unprecedented inclusion of women at the negotiation table and the Sixth Clan coalition resulted in a political commitment to include women in the TNA, and for the first time in Somali history women were guaranteed parliamentary representation through a gender quota for the Assembly.

However, the agreement of the Conference was never fully implemented, and the TNG never established power outside one area of Mogadishu. It remained formally in power until 2004 and the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government, but had been undermined within a year of being established. The opposition of faction

leaders (supported by Ethiopia), as well as internal fighting, corruption, and a lack of resources all severely limited its ability to govern.

The Sixth Clan, while it managed to influence the outcome of the Arta Conferece, has had a fairly limited impact on women's participation in politics and peacebuilding in Somalia. The combination of a highly patriarchal society, clan divisions, custom, and the 4.5 clan-based form of political participation has severely challenged the progress that women's organizations have attempted to make. The use of the 4.5 formula has allowed men clan leaders to be the gatekeepers to women's political participation, and ties to clan identity have often taken priority for both women and men representatives.[67] The 2016/2017 electoral process featured a 30 percent women's quota,[68] but only 24 percent of parliamentary seats being taken up by women MPs. In the executive, women held 23 percent of minister positions, and seven percent of Deputy Minister posts. By April 2018, the proportion of women ministers had fallen to 16 percent.

A highly patriarchal society, clan divisions, custom, and the 4.5 formula have severely challenged the progress attempted by women's organizations

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Acknowledgments

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