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## The Sixth Clan — Women Organize for Peace in Somalia: A Review of Published Literature

author: Debra M. Timmons  
foreword: Mohamed Sahnoun  
editor: Mary E. King





University for Peace  
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The mission of the University for Peace is to provide humanity with an international institution of higher education for peace with the aim of promoting among all human beings a spirit of understanding, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence, to stimulate cooperation among peoples, and to help lessen obstacles and threats to world peace and progress in keeping with the noble aspirations proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations.

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## FOREWORD

Somali women are gradually exerting a real, positive influence in the current talks in Nairobi on the future of Somalia. Women in general are perceived more and more by observers of the international community as much better peacemakers than men. They show a greater capacity for empathy, forgiveness, and objectivity. They have the courage to question taboos pertaining to traditional attitudes of the clan system, and they advocate the need to look at long-term interests of the society as a whole. They are therefore less biased than men and more inclined to relieve the suffering of the Somali people. They know more than men what suffering really means in the turmoil of conflicts.

The clan system in Somalia is based on men's lineage, not on women's. When conflicts occur between clans, a woman looks helplessly at her husband fighting her father or her son fighting her brother, because they are not from the same clan or subclan. Too many women end up in isolation as widows, homeless, or victims of rape or torture.

For some time now, however, women in Somalia have refused to be helpless victims. They have organized themselves across the clan system to communicate and exchange experiences. They are able now to articulate their interests and the interests of the society as a whole and to establish contact with global networks for assistance and support. University for Peace is one of these networks.

The determination and mobilization of Somali women compelled men at the negotiating table to allow women to participate in the negotiations. It was agreed that they would be considered as the «sixth clan» and eventually represented in each clan's delegation as well. Somali women realize, however, that in order

to fulfill their objective in a male-dominated environment, they need to improve their negotiation skills and their ability to use technical instruments for information and communication, as well as nurture relationships and advocate for their approaches.

Hence the need for institutions such as the University for Peace to provide the necessary means for capacity building in those areas. Women in Somalia are not any more an «untapped resource» for peace. They are today an important leverage. They need help. This study lays the ground for a pragmatic approach in assisting Somali women.

Mohamed Sahnoun  
Special Adviser to the  
Secretary-General of the United Nations  
July 2004

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**Debra M. Timmons**

Debra M. Timmons was graduated from the School of International Service, The American University, Washington, D.C. She has worked in the fields of human rights, peace, nonviolent direct action, corporate social responsibility, and the ministry. Her writings, research, and documentation are on HIV/AIDS in Africa, conflict resolution, global hunger, and awareness of poverty. She has led workshops and a skills-training programme on peacebuilding, HIV/AIDS, hunger and poverty, and raising global awareness, for groups ranging in size from 15 to 1,500. Ms. Timmons currently works for Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore, Maryland.

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## **SUMMARY**

Women's contributions to peace are only now beginning to be documented around the world. As the United Nations continues to monitor the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for the inclusion of women and women's issues in all official peace negotiations, analysis of women's inclusion in and contributions to such negotiations will be crucial to the evolution of peace in theory and practice. The story of the women of Somalia has much in common with many of the cases and patterns emerging in this growing body of literature. The techniques employed by Somali women are at their core original, imaginative, and cultural, but also exportable.

Despite the devastating impact of thirteen years of civil war, the women of Somalia have created a vibrant national network of women's social and humanitarian organizations. As a result, women's issues and perspectives are well articulated and represented from the grass roots to the highest levels of political discourse. The development of the women's peace movement in Somalia follows the stages common to many other such movements, but as one might expect, Somali women also employed culturally specific techniques to act for change in the community and advocate for it on the national level.

This literature review provides an overview primarily of women's struggles and triumphs in southern Somalia based on the available English-language case studies and analyses.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Negotiating peace in any long-term conflict is difficult, and brokering the end to a civil war in particular requires a delicate touch and cultural fluency. The more parties that have an interest at stake in peace negotiations, the more challenging the effort

becomes. Somalia of the late 1990s was a failed state in the throes of a protracted civil war perpetuated by countless factions of its five major clans.<sup>1</sup> Thus Somalia did not appear to be a good candidate for successful peace negotiations, and indeed, it was not.

By 1999 thirteen attempts to negotiate a peace had frustrated the international community, which had difficulty gathering all essential stakeholders around the negotiating table; the countries of the Horn of Africa were also confounded as they attempted to balance their own priorities with the need to stabilize Somalia. In summer 2000 hope sprang from the least likely of places: Somalia's women. Following a path that many prominent women's peace movements around the world have traversed, the Somali movement gained strength as women moved beyond their traditional role as caregiver, taking on that of peacemaker.

From the beginning of the conflict in Somalia in the early 1990s, women had banded together to earn money and provide for their families' basic needs. As these humanitarian networks grew, women's priorities shifted from subsistence and emergency relief to addressing the root causes of their suffering. Somali women became protectors of human rights and educators for peace, first locally and then regionally and nationally. Because the women's movement grew slowly, moving gradually from the grass roots upward, women gained the trust of their communities and became respected leaders within them. Of importance, they were able to maintain communications and relations with factional leaders from their communities.

It was Somalia's women who eventually persuaded the leaders of the five main clans in southern Somalia to attend peace negotiations in Arta, Djibouti, in 2000. It was Somalia's women who challenged the delegates at Arta to think beyond clan boundaries in drafting a peace agreement. Today it is Somalia's

women who continue to invigorate the transition to peace in their country.

## **SOMALI HISTORY AND GENDER ROLES**

### *Somali History*

Analysis of recent Somali history is key to understanding the current conflict and the strides Somali women have made in moving their society toward peace. In 1969 Mohammed Siad Barre came to power as a result of a military coup d'état.<sup>2</sup> The first decade of Barre's rule brought stability, increases in infrastructural development, a de-emphasis of clan divisions, and a constitution conferring equal rights and opportunities on both sexes.<sup>3</sup> The second decade of Barre's regime essentially erased much of the progress made during the first ten years. In 1977 Barre declared war on Ethiopia over disputed territory in the Ogaden region. As the three-year war neared its end, popular support for Barre's regime had eroded, and Somalia suffered a crushing defeat in Ethiopia in 1980. A year later, the Barre regime reignited the flames of clan loyalty to quell a popular insurgency. As members of Barre's Darood clan were rapidly promoted through the ranks, members of rival clans began losing powerful positions in the government.<sup>4</sup> This practice gradually reinforced clan divisions and promoted animosity toward the Darood.

As clan divisions hardened, so too did state-supported violence, corruption, and isolationist policies. This led to a rapid decline in foreign aid, which hastened Somalia's economic devastation and contributed to the destabilization of the Barre regime throughout the 1980s. Groups dissatisfied with Barre's government began to capitalize on the weakness of his regime. Northwest Somalia, or Somaliland, declared war on the central government in 1988 in an effort to secede. In 1989 the Hawiye,



a rival of the Darood, established the United Somali Congress (USC) as an opposition political party.<sup>5</sup> These developments brought the Somali state ever closer to failure and steeped the bush in chaos.

This chaos was institutionalized in 1991, when the USC managed to overthrow Barre's regime. All hope of the USC creating a viable Somali government in Mogadishu evaporated when the Habr Gidir and Abgaal subclans of the Hawiye clan began fighting over control of the USC in November 1991. The destruction inflicted on Mogadishu by this intraclan warfare laid the groundwork for the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), a confederation of members from the Darood clan, to attack USC forces. Fighting between the USC and SPM spread quickly to outlying areas in the Juba Region and Lower Shabelle, sparking a vicious cycle of inter- and intraclan fighting and revenge killing.<sup>6</sup>

The violence and destitution suffered by the populace meant that Somalis were unable in 1992 to mobilize against a severe drought, which gave way to a disastrous famine. The United Nations responded, but the operation was largely ineffective in achieving its mandate of securing humanitarian relief for those suffering from the famine.<sup>7</sup>

Factional fighting and inter- and intraclan violence continue to this day. In May 1991 Somaliland, and shortly thereafter Puntland, in the northeast, seceded from the whole of what comprised the state of Somalia. Both have since established viable internal governing structures, although neither is internationally recognized, and have attained a degree of stability that continues to elude southern Somalia.

More than fourteen peace conferences have been convened since 1991 in an attempt to end hostilities and bring a measure of stability to southern Somalia. At the Somali National Peace

Conference in 2000 in Arta, Djibouti, a 245-member Transitional National Assembly was established, to be comprised of representatives from each of the five major clans.<sup>8</sup> The Somali parliament chose Abdiqassim Salat Hassan as interim president and Ali Khalifa as interim prime minister and coined this temporary arrangement the Transitional National Government (TNG).

At the conclusion of the Arta process, the newly appointed officers of the TNG moved to Mogadishu, where they have had little impact on life in Somalia. The TNG controls only one section of Mogadishu and a few outlying areas.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the Inter-Governmental Agency on Development—founded by seven East African nations to foster regional security and promote economic development—has since convened two more peace conferences in Kenya.<sup>10</sup>

### *Gender Roles*

« *Talo naaged reer kuma tanaado* »  
(No family will prosper if it relies on women's decisions).<sup>11</sup>  
« Only a fool will not consult his wife and seek her opinion. »<sup>12</sup>

As these quotations imply, women's experiences in prewar Somalia were varied. Not surprisingly, women in urban areas led lives quite different from those of women who lived in rural areas, and women in pastoral settings had very different responsibilities from women in agricultural households. Ibrahim Nur, in a 2002 study of the Lower Shabelle, found that stereotypes and perceptions of what are considered women's naturally endowed qualities—particularly lower intelligence than men—contributed to the exclusion of women from social,



economic, and political power structures. In this region, Nur found these perceptions to be firmly ingrained in the minds of men as well as of women.<sup>13</sup>

Christine Choi Ahmed had presented a different perspective in *Finely Etched Chattel: The Invention of a Somali Woman*. Ahmed asserts that in matters of economics and lineage, some women have been able to retain a modicum of personal (if not public) power within Somali society. For example, women are sole stewards of their own property: jewelry acquired upon marriage and goods and livestock inherited from a father or other male relative. Ahmed also presents evidence that women frequently voice their opinions to their husbands behind the closed doors of the household and are able to use their dual clan membership—belonging to their husband’s clan and the clan into which they were born—to influence male family members. Ahmed argues that this gives women de facto input into the political process of the clan.<sup>14</sup>

The experience of the majority of Somali women is likely a complex mixture of both these perspectives. Women traditionally have had relative autonomy over household decisions about child rearing and other «womanly» duties. Occasionally women would make their views known to the men in their lives on important issues outside of the domestic sphere. Men, on the other hand, were expected to act as the public economic and political face of the household, serving as breadwinner and representative to clan decision-making structures.

Somali women are not, however, unacquainted with the idea of equality between women and men. During the 1940s and 1950s a national women’s movement emerged as the country strove for independence from Britain and Italy. Women became increasingly aware of their subordinate roles in the household and within the larger society and began a campaign to combat

the oppression they suffered in their own spheres of influence. In 1959 and 1960 two national women’s organizations were started to further the concept of women’s rights in the political sphere. When Siad Barre took power, all social organizations not affiliated with the government were immediately outlawed, including these fledgling women’s rights organizations. Some progress was made on women’s issues late in Barre’s regime, but much of it occurred on paper and was never fully implemented or integrated into Somali culture. Thus, the collapse of Barre’s regime provided Somali women with an opportunity to resurrect their efforts at equality.<sup>15</sup>

## CONFLICT AND SOMALI SOCIETY

### *Power Structures in Prewar Somalia: The Clan*

The clan is the most influential structure in Somali society.<sup>16</sup> Membership in clans historically afforded Somalis a social and political safety net by providing physical protection, economic security, bride prices for marriage, support for widows and orphans, and means for resolving conflict and seeking restitution for grievances within and between groups.<sup>17</sup> In a study of Somali women and war, Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra define clans as follows:

[A] group of people who claim descent from a common ancestor and who trace their blood relationships through the male line. The six principal lineages are Dir, Isaq, Darood, Hawiye, Digil and Mirifle (the latter two are collectively know as Rahanweyne). Each of these clan families breaks down into a number of clans . . . [and] each of these segments into smaller sub-clans. . . . Sub-clans are composed of primary lineage groups and within each of these are the diya-paying groups . . . the most meaningful and binding level of the clan system for most people.<sup>18</sup>

No formal power structure exists within Somali kinship structures. Rather, respect is allocated according to age and gender, with older members of the clan retaining more power than younger members, and men more power than women. All adult men are considered «elders» within the clan structure and are therefore entitled to a voice in the *shir*, or open council. The *shir* can be called at any level of the kinship structure for the purposes of entering into war, negotiating peace, stabilizing relationships between subgroups, or providing restitution for grievances. Women are not permitted to speak at the *shir*.<sup>19</sup>

Women's access to power within the kinship structure is directly tied to relationships through marriage. Over time, marriage evolved into a means of negotiating the complicated social, economic, and political interactions within and between clans:

Marriage in Somali society is a contract between families or lineages (groups of families linked through male ancestors). There is a preference for this bond to be between groups not already related by clan lineage, or not closely related or living in the same area. . . . [Y]oung people are encouraged to marry into a group where new relations can be established. This is known as exogamous marriage.<sup>20</sup>

Women and men relate very differently to the members of the immediate and extended family created by marriage (see Appendix A). For men, exogamous marriage can cement relationships between their lineage and that of their new bride, acting as a peace offering to settle a grievance between the clans, providing the man security when traveling through areas controlled by the wife's lineage, and offering access to more wealth.<sup>21</sup>

After entering into an exogamous marriage, women retain the identity of the clan into which they were born. When a Somali woman marries into another clan, her cousin—her father's brother's son—becomes her protector, bound to avenge any violence done to her and to take responsibility for her welfare should her marriage dissolve. The woman's cousin serves as an advocate for her and can seek restitution from an aggressor or ex-husband on her behalf with the weight of the clan behind him. Thus, the role of a woman's cousin in an exogamous marriage has historically served as a deterrent for rape and domestic abuse of Somali women.<sup>22</sup>

In the traditional clan structure, members are protected by the practice of *diya*. In this system, each male member of the clan is required to contribute to a payment when one member of the clan commits a crime or offense against another clan. Diya is used to resolve such incidents as looting, rape, and even murder. The traditional diya for murder is revenge killing, thus many Somalis have been killed on the basis of their clan identity.<sup>23</sup> Internally displaced persons (IDPs) who lose ties to their clan structure have no recourse within the diya system when they suffer loss of property because of looting, sustain injuries in fighting, or become victims of sexual violence.

#### *Economic Structures in Prewar Somalia: Urban, Pastoral, and Agricultural*

Women's economic standing and responsibilities in prewar Somalia varied by location. Women who lived in urban settings might likely have had husbands who worked in industry or government and acted as sole breadwinners for the family. These women would be tasked with the activities of running the household and bearing and raising children. In pastoral families, women shared in some duties outside the household, including the care and feeding of animals, selling of milk, and in some

cases herding of livestock. Women in agricultural communities also engaged in activities outside the traditional household duties, assisting in the cultivation of fields and harvesting of crops.<sup>24</sup>

Women's work, in the sense of maintaining the household and bearing and rearing children, has historically been recognized as essential to Somali society.<sup>25</sup> Some women have been able as well to secure and maintain control over independent economic resources through inheritance. By tradition, any livestock, jewelry, or other property inherited by a female from her father or older relatives can never be acquired by a husband upon marriage.<sup>26</sup> This tradition has afforded Somali women some access to property outside of the clan structure. Although some women effectively maintained property, women's contributions to the economic livelihood of the family and clan outside of household duties were largely discounted and ignored, and they did not give women any power within kinship decision-making structures.<sup>27</sup>

### *War and the Decimation of Prewar Systems*

Traditionally, in Somali pastoral society feuding and conflict were bounded by codes and social conventions. . . . In the inter-clan warfare from 1991 onwards these traditional laws have played little part, and women as well as children and other non-fighters were attacked by warring factions with impunity.<sup>28</sup>

Somali society was significantly altered during the first phase of the civil war, from 1991 to 1992. As fighting intensified during this period, many people were forced to flee their homes. Some fled to refugee camps in Kenya or Ethiopia, some fled to ancestral regions where their clan was in the majority, and those with access to money sought asylum in Europe or the Gulf states. This mass

migration of people was the first step in a long-term problem with IDPs in Somalia.<sup>29</sup>

This mass migration severed many individuals' contacts with their kinship structures, leaving them without recourse through diya payment and shir negotiations as they suffered the indignities of war. Clan warfare during the second phase of the conflict, from 1992 to the present, cemented the collapse of the traditional clan social support system, as clans and subclans perpetrated violence against their own lineage. As Tanya Powers-Stevens comments in her 1995 assessment of the Somali conflict, «dislocation and violence has destroyed many family and social structures along with the norms and taboos.»<sup>30</sup>

### *War's Impact on Women*

The disintegration of traditional kinship structures, beginning with the household, greatly affected women. Husbands, cousins, uncles, and fathers were killed or maimed or deserted the family, leaving women to provide for and protect the children, the elderly, and the sick left behind. This shattering of the Somali household forced women into the uncharacteristic role of breadwinner.<sup>31</sup>

In 1997 ACORD, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) conducted a study in Lower Shabelle that found that women in the region were working 30 percent more than men. By 2001 ACORD found that an estimated 70 to 80 percent of the region's households were dependent on women's earnings for the family's livelihood.<sup>32</sup> Somali women faced with either the loss of a husband or a husband unable to find work found means of earning a living through petty trade and cooperatives established with other women.<sup>33</sup> According to Powers-Stevens, at the household and subclan level, «there has been an increased level of respect for the important role women are playing in meeting the economic

burdens of supporting the family. This is an area which women will need to capitalise on in the future if they are to increase their voice in decision making.»<sup>34</sup>

With no protection from clan structures, violence against women dramatically escalated at the outset of the war. Somali women and girls were repeatedly subjected to physical and sexual violence. Rape, used in Somalia as a tool of clan-based warfare, traditionally brings shame and stigma to the victim.<sup>35</sup> Women, particularly young unmarried women, are ostracized from the family and are considered ineligible for marriage.<sup>36</sup> Traditional means of restitution, through clan negotiations and diya payment, is not an option for many women who are disconnected from the clan. As a result, the household receives no compensation for the shame and destruction brought upon the family by this violent act.<sup>37</sup>

In Somalia the usual physical and psychological tortures that accompany sexual assault are compounded by the near universal practice of female genital mutilation (FGM). Infibulation, the most severe form of FGM, is widely practiced in Somalia.<sup>38</sup> For women and girls who have undergone this procedure, sexual intercourse is excruciatingly painful and nearly impossible unless infibulation is reversed. Many women and girls in refugee camps who had never had sexual relations reported that their rapists had forcibly removed this “external virginity” with bayonets, razor blades, or daggers.<sup>39</sup>

### *War's Impact on Men*

As clashes developed between Darood and Hawiye clans, men left their families to join clan-based militias. As the conflict progressed, men became targets of inter- and intraclan cleansing and revenge killing.<sup>40</sup>

In order to keep the household safe from factional violence, men often led their families to remote parts of the country, leaving behind clan structures of protection and security. Without clan protection, many men lost their property to looters. Many families became impoverished.<sup>41</sup> The conflict significantly reduced the number of job opportunities, whereas before, men had little trouble finding work to support their household and acquire or improve property. Somali men derive much of their identity from their status as head of household and breadwinner. The lack of economic opportunities in the country has caused widespread depression among Somali men, as they have seen their social status in the clan and community decline because of their inability to fulfill their traditional roles in the household. Some men in this position have taken to selling goods from donkey carts; such men are described as having «castrated themselves» because this is usually a woman's job. Other men, known as *fadikudbirir* (literally “fighting while seated”), participate in «idle talk» and no longer make an effort to contribute to the household income.<sup>42</sup>

One advantage Somali men have over women, in terms of survival, is their freedom. In many cases—when men have become seriously ill, food has become scarce, or the household has been unable to remove itself from a situation of dire danger—men have simply deserted the household. On their own, men are able to travel to obtain medical care or food or to move to a more secure area.<sup>43</sup> Because women are traditionally charged with raising and caring for children, women are left behind to fend for themselves and the rest of the family.

### **SOCIAL AND HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN**

At the community level, women often emerge as the main informal providers of social welfare, a need that is generally increased as a result of conflict (caring for the sick and wounded, rape victims, orphans, or supporting sick or injured women in their household tasks). It is this commitment to caring that often provides women with the political space—after the war is over—to demand changes to their status.<sup>44</sup>



Because of women's historical «invisibility» in Somali power structures, women were among the most vulnerable members of Somali society when clan and kinship structures fractured after fighting began. Somali women were left out of all clan calculations, strategies, and decision making pertaining to the war. As Isabel Coral Cordero notes, during the conflict between the Shining Path Marxist rebels and the central Peruvian government throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, women were initially thought of as insignificant, «neither useful nor dangerous.»<sup>45</sup> Such was the case in Somalia. For the first time, many women were faced not only with caring for their families without the safety net of the clan, but also without a male head of household.<sup>46</sup> It was through this weakness that the women of Somalia eventually found strength.

During the initial stages of the conflict, Somali women were forced to leave home to make money to provide food, shelter, health care, and security for their children. In some regions, women banded together to provide for these basic necessities.<sup>47</sup> In Lower Shabelle, women began organizing traditional credit and savings schemes called *shollongo*.<sup>48</sup> In northern Somalia—Hargeisa and Bosaso—women raised funds through local NGOs to establish and manage local police forces in order to create a secure environment.<sup>49</sup> This development of local and regional organizations provided women the opportunity to network and share their experiences of war. Stories of sexual violence committed against members led the organizations to begin counseling victims and training other women to document such abuses. Cordero notes a similar phenomenon during the conflict in Peru: «Women mobilized for survival and then extended their fight to include the defense of human rights.»<sup>50</sup> The women in Somalia took the development of these organizations a step further, as discussions of the endless losses women suffered at the hands of violence prompted the groups to organize and empower women to practice the art of peacemaking.<sup>51</sup>

International Alert, an NGO working at the local, national, regional and global levels to generate conditions and processes conducive to the cessation of war and the generation of sustainable peace, developed the Sharing Know-how project in May 1999 to «respond to women's concerns about their exclusion from decision-making levels of peace, security, reconstruction, and development processes.» The Sharing Know-how project identified five major activities women's groups worldwide have engaged in during times of conflict: meeting survival and basic needs, peacemaking, advocacy, participation in decision-making and leadership, and community outreach and building of communities postconflict (see Appendix B).<sup>52</sup> The Somali women's organizations that have received attention in the English-language literature have largely followed this framework in their development. Although Somalia could not be said to have entered the postconflict rebuilding stage on a large scale, women's organizations have been quite effective in promoting community outreach and postconflict rebuilding in their respective towns and regions. These successes are evident in the progress made by two women's organizations.

### *IIDA Women's Development Organization*

*Iida*, meaning «celebration,» is the name given to baby girls born during festival days.<sup>53</sup> IIDA, the organization, was founded on May 25, 1991, by a group of professionals to improve women's social and political role within Somali society.<sup>54</sup>

The IIDA Women's Development Organization began its work in the community providing what the International Alert framework terms «survival and basic needs.» At the outset of the war in 1991–1992, fighting in the area surrounding Merka had already contributed to the disintegration of families. The sick and wounded set up camps in looted government buildings, and it was there that IIDA organized its first outreach efforts.<sup>55</sup> IIDA built on its network and initial experiences to extend its

influence and impact by providing housing, counseling, education, training, and jobs for women affected by conflict and victimized by human rights abuses.<sup>56</sup> As IIDA developed, it moved into peacemaking, the second stage of the International Alert framework. IIDA members trained local women in mediation skills and opened a Peace Center to coordinate the organization's efforts.<sup>57</sup>

In 1996 IIDA received an award from the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) for its work in Merka.<sup>58</sup> In 1997 the IIDA leadership implemented a project to address the problem of armed men and youth committing crimes and causing instability. In return for weapons, the program provided 150 militia members with classes in literacy, technical skills, and English. All 150 men graduated from the program. Incredibly, several graduates remained in Merka to work in the community. In the end, IIDA confiscated a significant number of weapons, including bazookas, AK47s, assault rifles, grenades, rocket launchers, and countless rounds of ammunition.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of this program's success, the IIDA Women's Development Organization promptly moved into the International Alert framework's advocacy and women in decision-making and leadership stages of development. In September 2002 IIDA organized a large peace rally in Merka to celebrate the International Day of Peace.<sup>60</sup> It also worked with the United Nations in early October 2002 to organize a meeting of women representatives from five regions in central and southern Somalia to discuss and prepare a platform of action for women's issues at peace talks scheduled for late October 2002 in Kenya.<sup>61</sup>

### *Coalition for Grassroots Women Organizations*

Women leaders had often discussed the need to create an umbrella group to coordinate the efforts of Somali women's organizations. This came to pass in January 1995, when members of women's

organizations from regions across Somalia gathered for a workshop in Nairobi. The delegates at the workshop developed a joint program for presentation at the Fourth Women's World Conference in Beijing in October 1995. Their presentation was a success, and their collaboration was formalized in January 1996 as the Coalition for Grassroots Women Organizations (COGWO).<sup>62</sup>

COGWO has been effective at the local, regional, and national levels. In Mogadishu, after the warlords failed at a twelfth attempt to negotiate a peace agreement, COGWO organized the Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN), which consists of a committee of seven citizens in each of the sixteen districts in the Banadir region (surrounding and including Mogadishu). The committees, supported by a diverse group of civil society actors—including former militia members, women and youth, traditional elders, sports groups, and members of the media—act as mediators between and among neighborhoods. They are responsible for identifying immediate needs among the population—for example, security, health issues, and other problems that require prompt attention—raising awareness of these needs locally and advocating for collective solutions to the most pressing of them. The committees also mediate disputes nonviolently and serve as an early warning team.<sup>63</sup> Many women working on these committees crossed the «Green Line,» which metaphorically divides Mogadishu into two hostile camps, to work for peace and overcome clan differences.<sup>64</sup>

On the regional level, COGWO has opened a center to identify and track cases of violence against women. In addition to monitoring and documenting such cases, the center provides counseling and limited healthcare to victims.<sup>65</sup> At the national level, COGWO is building the capacity of women to advocate for peace and participate in the developing political system.<sup>66</sup>

## THE SIXTH CLAN COALITION

We knew that peace in our country would come from cross-clan reconciliation, not official negotiations among warlords and faction leaders, so we cared for the wounded, [and] built schools in communities regardless of clan, ethnic and political affiliations.<sup>67</sup>

By 2000 Somali women's social and humanitarian organizations had developed from small local structures meeting basic requirements to regional and national networks advocating for the requirements of the communities they served and actively promoting peace. The success of these humanitarian and peace efforts paved the way for the Somali National Peace Conference in Arta, the fourteenth attempt at brokering peace among the five major clans.<sup>68</sup>

In Arta, for the first time, women—100 of them—were among the 2,000 to 3,000 Somalis selected to serve as representatives of their clans. As noted, women's groups had begun cooperating across clan and kinship lines at the start of the conflict in order to obtain basic necessities, and they had continued this work as they moved into advocacy, mediation, and peacebuilding. Thus, the women selected to participate in the conference were well versed in working with one another and had many hopes for bringing women's issues and abilities to the table.

The leaders of the five clans intended to advocate for a peace accord that distributed power based on clan identities, but the women realized that a peace based strictly on the traditional clan structure would permanently leave women's voices out of decision-making structures.<sup>69</sup> On May 2, 2000, a group of 92 women delegates gathered outside a large military tent in Arta and agreed to break out of their clan-based allegiances to vote

as a single bloc. When the conference opened, the women lobbied successfully to be recognized as a «Sixth Clan,» transcending clan identity.<sup>70</sup>

The Sixth Clan Coalition focused its efforts not only on encouraging male delegates to work toward peace, but also to include the women's agenda in the discussions and draft language of any agreement. The Sixth Clan used a number of techniques to obtain their objective. Asha Haji Ilmi, a coalition leader, described the women's use of poetry, a Somali tradition and one of the most powerful and effective techniques:

In Arta, we presented *buranbur*—a special poetic verse sung by women—to show the suffering of women and children during 10 years of civil war. We lobbied for a quota for women in the future legislature, the Transitional National Assembly (TNA). But we faced opposition from the male delegates. «No man,» they told us, «would agree to be represented by women.»<sup>71</sup>

The Sixth Clan Coalition campaigned for 10 percent representation for women, or 25 seats (with each of the five main clans allotted five seats within the women's delegation).<sup>72</sup> During the conference, 70 percent of the women in the coalition voted as a bloc and were able to bring about the creation of a national charter that reserved 25 of the seats in the 245-member TNA for women.<sup>73</sup> The charter that the women helped to negotiate also guarantees the human rights of children, women, and minorities. Ilmi asserts that the charter «ranks among the top in the region and the best in the Muslim world.»<sup>74</sup>

## IMPLEMENTATION AND CONTINUED ACTION

The women of Somalia have overcome significant obstacles in their journey to the peace negotiation table. The question remains



whether the women's peace movement can effectively make the transition into a women's movement once peace is secured. The strength of the gains women have made in social recognition and political power will be measured in the implementation of the guarantees they have secured at the negotiating table and in long-term changes to women's roles in Somali society.

Although women made substantial gains in the political arena at the Arta conference, the ineffectiveness of the TNG in implementing those gains was a setback for the Sixth Clan Coalition. This ineffectiveness coupled with the lack of viable, educated female candidates to fill promised assembly and ministerial posts highlighted the new challenges the coalition would face during negotiations at the peace talks in Kenya.

The story of Somalia's women is by no means ebbing. The peace process continues. The Nairobi talks concluded on January 29, 2004, with an agreement for a new parliament and government structure to replace the TNG. This plan calls for the appointment of members from each of the clans to form a 275-member parliament, with 12 percent of the seats reserved for women delegates. The Sixth Clan Coalition passed another milestone at the Nairobi conference, as its leader, Asha Haji Ilmi, became the first woman in Somali history to sign a peace agreement.<sup>75</sup>

## QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Although much has been written in English about women's contributions to peace in the Somali context, there are still several areas that bear assessment:

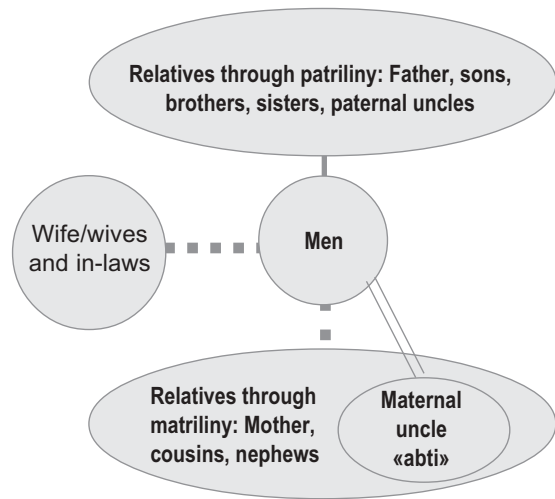
- Implementation—Somalia could be an excellent, expanded case study for examining what happens once women secure a seat at the negotiating table. It is not enough simply to make concessions to women in order to appease donor nations and international organizations. How can the

international community help to ensure that women's voices are not just heard, but that their ideas are considered worthy of implementation? Are incentives or sanctions available to assure full participation of women in the political and juridical institutions of a society?

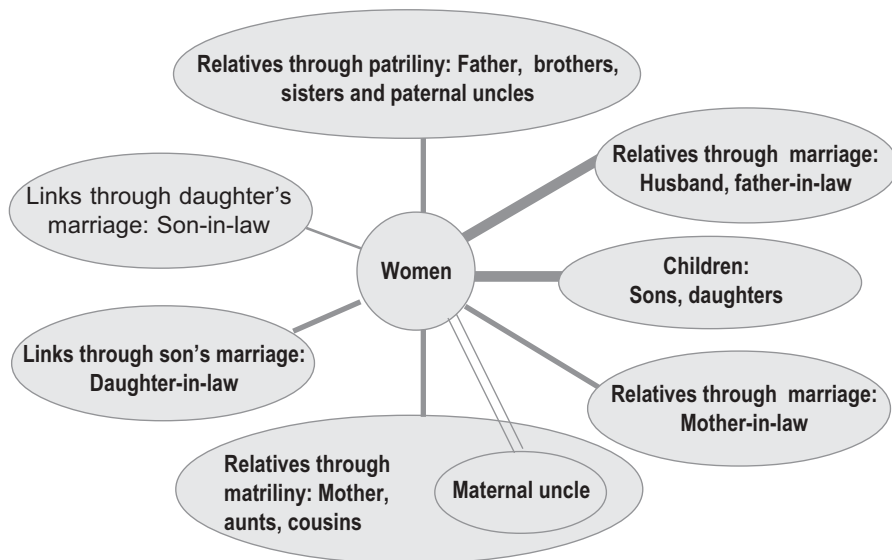
- Cultural Change: Gender Roles—What impact will women's leadership in social and humanitarian organizations have on Somali society in the long term? Will the gains in economic and political influence that women have seen be sustained if a new Somali state comes to fruition? How will Somali men cope with long-term shifts in gender roles? How will future generations be socialized and educated to overcome the exclusion of girls and women in Somali society?
- Daughters of the Revolution: Somali Women of the Next Generation—Girls who came of age during the civil war have had fewer opportunities for education than had their mothers and grandmothers. In addition, these young women have lived through the physical horrors of war, including sexual violence, destitution, and famine. Are these particular young women equipped to take the reins of the women's movement from the mothers of the Sixth Clan? How will these young women fare in a new Somali state?
- Somali Diaspora—What impact does a large diaspora population have on securing and maintaining women's human rights and women's access to the power structures within the country? How can a diaspora community help to strengthen or weaken a failed state? What role can (or should) a diaspora community play as a new state develops?

**APPENDIX A: KEY RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN KINSHIP NETWORKS FOR SOMALI MEN AND WOMEN**

**Somali men's kinship network**



**Somali women's kinship network**



Source: Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra, eds., *Somalia: The Untold Story. The War through the Eyes of Somali Women* (London: Pluto Press and Catholic Institute for International Relations, forthcoming), 160–161.

**APPENDIX B: INTERNATIONAL ALERT'S WOMEN'S KNOW-HOW FRAMEWORK**

**1. SURVIVAL AND BASIC NEEDS**

- provision of food
- provision of medical care
- generation of income
- provision of shelter
- provision of counseling and de-traumatization for victims of violence
- provision of care for orphans
- attention to HIV/AIDS and conflict issues

**2. PEACEMAKING**

- effecting traditional modes of cross-community dialogue, making contact, and building bridges across conflict divide
- creating spaces for dialogue
- analyzing conflicts, identifying needs and priorities, and building consensus around critical issues
- facilitating talks cross-community and/or national-level peace processes
- mediating

- engaging in peace accords, monitoring of national processes

### **3. ADVOCACY**

- Launching national, regional, and international campaigns to raise awareness
- lobbying on single-issues (e.g., disarmament before elections, addressing IDPs)
- documenting human rights abuses, disseminating information
- working with the news media
- building strategic alliances to promote an issue (e.g., exclusion from peace negotiations)

### **4. PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING AND LEADERSHIP**

- role of women in elections
- role of women in political parties
- women in peace mechanisms
- women in peace negotiations (formal and informal)
- women as parliamentarians
- women in the judiciary

### **5. COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES POST-CONFLICT**

- healing and reconciliation
- peace education and raising awareness
- child care and education
- demilitarization, reintegration of soldiers, and disarmament
- counseling and training of women
- uniting around women's equal rights issues—in legislation, education, employment, and governance
- disarmament issues (e.g., small arms, land mines)

*Source:* Judy El Bushra, ed., *Sharing Know-how: Women Building Peace* (London: International Alert, 2002).

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> They are Darood, Dir, Hawiye, Isaq, and Rahanweyne.
- <sup>2</sup> UNIFEM, Women, War and Peace Project, *War, Peace and Security: Somalia*, December 7, 2003, <http://www.peacewomen.org/WPS/Somalia.html>.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Nur, «Annex 5: Somalia Case Study,» *Gender-Sensitive Programme Design and Planning in Conflict Affected Situations* (London: ACORD, 2002), 7.
- <sup>4</sup> UNIFEM, *War, Peace and Security*.
- <sup>5</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 7.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>8</sup> Judith Gardner and Judy El Bushra, eds., *Somalia: The Untold Story. The War through the Eyes of Somali Women* (London: Pluto Press and Catholic Institute for International Relations, forthcoming).
- <sup>9</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 153.
- <sup>13</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 11.
- <sup>14</sup> Christine Choi Ahmed, *Finely Etched Chattel: The Invention of a Somali Woman*, ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1995), 164, 171.
- <sup>15</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 175–177.
- <sup>16</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 26.
- <sup>17</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 154.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 154, 155.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 52.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, 58, 59.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 52–53.

- <sup>23</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 32.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.
- <sup>25</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 57.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 43.
- <sup>28</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 69–70.
- <sup>29</sup> IDPs have remained a problem in Somalia. A 2002 report from the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office estimates that 350,000 of the 7 million people residing in Somalia were IDPs. See Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 14.
- <sup>30</sup> Tanya Powers-Stevens, «Somalia,» in *Gender Conflict and Development*, vol. 2, *Case Studies: Cambodia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Algeria, Somalia, Guatemala and Eritrea* (Brighton: BRIDGE, 1996), 95–96.
- <sup>31</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 34.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–36.
- <sup>33</sup> Powers-Stevens, «Somalia,» 99.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.
- <sup>36</sup> Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 76.
- <sup>37</sup> Powers-Stevens, «Somalia,» 96.
- <sup>38</sup> Infibulation is the total removal of the clitoris, labia minora, and portions of the labia majora. Any remaining tissue is sewn together, leaving only a small space for the passage of urine and menstrual blood. Generally, this process is reversed upon marriage with a small incision to separate the fused tissues. Gardner and El Bushra, *Untold Story*, 72–73.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 16.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> Judy El Bushra, ed., *Sharing Know-how: Women Building Peace* (London: International Alert, 2002), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Isabel Coral Cordero, «Social Organizations: From Victims to Actors in Peace Building,» in *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, ed. Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark (London: Zed Books, 2001), 151.

<sup>46</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 15, 33.

<sup>47</sup> Powers-Stevens, «Somalia,» 100.

<sup>48</sup> Nur, «Somalia Case Study,» 27.

<sup>49</sup> Faiza Jama Mohamed, «Somali Women's Role in Building Peace and Security» (speech before the ARRIA Formula Meeting on Women, Peace and Security, October 23, 2000), [http://www.womenscommission.org/take\\_action/arr/eq\\_now.html](http://www.womenscommission.org/take_action/arr/eq_now.html).

<sup>50</sup> Cordero, «Social Organizations,» 157.

<sup>51</sup> Common Futures Forum Members Profiles, «Nasri H. Adam,» <http://cff.yinternet.org/members/adam.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> El Bushra, *Sharing Know-how*, 42.

<sup>53</sup> UNIFEM, Women, War and Peace Project, Somalia—Country Page, December 7, 2003, <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/somalia/somalia.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> United Nations, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, «Somalia Monthly Situation Report (1-30 November 1996),» *ReliefWeb*, <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/s/E2994D5D3D7DE306C12563FB00512AA5>.

<sup>57</sup> Common Futures Forum, «Adam.»

<sup>58</sup> UNICEF, «Information Section Updates—UNICEF Somalia Review, November 1998,» <http://unicef.org/somalia/inforsect/novrev.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Common Futures Forum, «Adam»; Mohamed, «Somali Women's Role in Building Peace and Security»; UNIFEM, Somalia—Country Page; Angela Ernest, *Best Practices in Peace Building and Non-Violent Conflict Resolution: Some Documented African Women's Peace*

*Initiatives* (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees et al., 1998), 17.

<sup>60</sup> «International Day of Peace Marked for War-torn Somalia,» *People's Daily Online*, September 22, 2002, [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200209/22/print20020922\\_103642.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200209/22/print20020922_103642.html).

<sup>61</sup> «SOMALIA: Women from Southern and Central Regions Discuss Peace,» *IRIN Report*, October 8, 2002, <http://www.irinnews.org>.

<sup>62</sup> NOVIB, «Strengthening Somali Civil Society—Partners, COGWO,» [http://www.somali-civilsociety.org/partners/cogwo\\_profile.asp](http://www.somali-civilsociety.org/partners/cogwo_profile.asp).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.; Mohamed, «Somali Women's Role in Building Peace and Security.»

<sup>64</sup> NOVIB, «Strengthening Somali Civil Society—Partners, COGWO»; Nora Boustany, «The Mother Courage of Somalia,» *Washington Post*, July 19, 2002, A23.

<sup>65</sup> NOVIB Somalia, «Strengthening Somali Civil Society—Partners, COGWO.»

<sup>66</sup> See World Movement for Democracy, «What's Being Done On . . . Increasing Women's Participation in Politics?» <http://www.wmd.org/action/aug-sep02/empowerment.html>.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and the Role of Women in Peace-building* (New York: United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002), 78.

<sup>68</sup> «Somalia: IRIN Interview with Maryam Arif Qasim, Member of Somalia's Transitional Parliament,» *IRIN News*, September 4, 2000, [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=5372&SelectRegion=Horn\\_of\\_Africa&SelectCountry=SOMALIA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=5372&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa&SelectCountry=SOMALIA); Mohamed, «Somali Women's Role in Building Peace and Security.»

<sup>69</sup> El Bushra, «*Sharing Know-how*,» 44.

<sup>70</sup> Rehn and Sirleaf, *Independent Experts Assessment*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> «Maryam Arif Qasim.»

<sup>73</sup> Rehn and Sirleaf, *Independent Experts Assessment*, 78; «Maryam Arif Qasim.»

<sup>74</sup> Rehn and Sirleaf, *Independent Experts Assessment*, 79.

<sup>75</sup> «Somalia: Groups Sign Compromise Deal,» *IRIN News*, January 29, 2004, [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=39199&SelectRegion=Horn\\_of\\_Africa](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=39199&SelectRegion=Horn_of_Africa).