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**Barriers and opportunities faced by Somaliland
women in their struggle for political leadership and
representation**



Academy for Peace and Development
kaademiga Nabadda iyo Horumarka

APD INSTITUTE OF
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Executive summary

- **Objective:** This study produces nuanced insights for understanding the barriers and opportunities to women's participation in political leadership and representation in Somaliland. The study focuses on the complex and interwoven individual, social, economic, and political issues affecting women's quest for political leadership and representation. We also correct certain misconceptions about women's political participation.
- **Methodology:** The analysis of this study draws on a participatory, empirical and robust qualitative research design and data sources, including 174 interviews and discussions with youth, women, elders, Chief Aqils, political parties, intellectuals, male and female candidates, and religious leaders. The study was conducted in major urban areas and less populated rural settlements across Somaliland's six main regions. The study was designed to compare the views of different social groups - men and women, 'elites' and 'ordinary citizens', rural and urban dwellers, young and old generations, conservatives and liberals, defeated and winning candidates - on barriers and opportunities for greater female political participation. Different tools, including key informants' interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies, were used for this study. Desk research and literature reviews were also undertaken for this study.

KEY FINDINGS

- ***There is a need to disaggregate the concept of women's political participation from women's political leadership and representation:*** This report's conceptualisation of female political participation emphasises that there is no outright exclusion of women from politics. Women are active in voter registration, political mobilization, electoral campaigns and voting but not in leadership and representation. Therefore, the study suggests disentangling women's political participation from female political leadership and representation as conflating these concepts can be misleading.
- ***Embedded interests reinforce pre-existing perceptions that women cannot represent kinship groups:*** The main barriers to women's participation in leadership is the ingrained beliefs among various influential interest groups that women cannot advance

or protect their interests. These interest groups include traditional elders, businessmen, political parties, politicians, kinship influencers, and political brokers. These influential actors influence the many ordinary and less educated citizens, notably women and youth, the majority of the registered voters, to vote based on clan, kinship pride and reinforce pre-existing perceptions that women cannot represent the clan group.

- ***Clientelism is gendered and limits possibilities for women's political leadership:*** In a context where political and financial opportunities are limited, and access to them is largely determined by clientelism and informal networks; the prevailing understanding is that women representatives have less chance to succeed and bring resources and protect or advance kinship interests. Interest groups reinforce this perception in order to limit women's participation in public leadership.
- ***The hybrid and informal governance system negatively affects female participation:*** Somaliland's governance system is described to be a hybridised mix of democratic, Islamic, and traditional governance systems. This system affects women's participation in public leadership in different ways. Much of the governance is informal and takes place outside of formal working hours and away from official working spaces. It takes place in informal social settings and might take place in the afternoon or late evenings. This creates issues of access for women leaders among key stakeholders, gatekeepers, and interest groups.
- ***Women's ambiguous identity in the kinship system limits opportunities for political participation:*** In the Somali social system, a woman's identity is divided between her blood ties and her marriage kinship. Based on this, it is believed that *Gabadhu dhalasho iyo dhaxdin midna ma laba* [the woman is neither fully identified with her blood kinship nor with her marriage kinship, her identity lies in between]. Therefore, no kinship group wants to have their seat shared by another kinship through marriage ties.
- ***Socially constructed gender roles affect women's chances of standing or being elected:*** Some roles, including leadership, are believed to be appropriate for men. These ingrained beliefs are reinforced by political brokers and interest groups against women representation. These ingrained beliefs play out in the elections as many voters believe that

women candidates will not attract enough votes to be elected and hence decide to not ‘waste’ their vote. The beliefs also cause self-doubt in some of the female candidates.

- ***International migration of elected women leaders concerns kinship groups:*** The migration of public leaders has broad social implications. While there were cases of migration of elected representatives from both genders, the international migration of female leaders was singled out to have concerned some kinship groups, especially in Borama and Odweyne districts which reported the cases of female leaders migration. One plausible explanation of why female migrants were singled out could be that political brokers use female leaders’ migration in their campaign against women’s political leadership and representation.
- ***Clan rotational power sharing arrangements limit women leadership opportunities:*** The rotational power sharing arrangement within kinship groups is an important nomination criterion that different clans consider. In the kinship system, priority is given to groups that do not have representation. This kinship arrangement affects women with political aspirations because if it is not the turn of her clan, then she will not get an endorsement from the elders.
- ***Late to elections:*** Some of the female candidates in the 2021 elections announced their political aspirations late in the process. Political aspirants that had announced their candidacy earlier, sometimes several years before the election, and who invested in the voter registration and built their grassroots presence have had a higher chance of getting elders’ endorsement.
- ***Limited public and grassroots engagement:*** Some of the female candidates were reported to be from ‘elite’ backgrounds and did not frequently engage with the grassroots. Engagement, especially within the clan, is important for political aspirants as they are able to build relations with the grassroots and gatekeepers who will see what the leader’s representation would mean to them. There are varied forms and platforms that male candidates reported to have engaged with the grassroots through. These include providing water and food during droughts, spearheading community projects such as the construction of water points, Mother and Child Health Centres (MCH) and roads in the clan territories, attending clan meetings, supporting needy members, and employing youth.

These engagements with the grassroots were largely gendered as many of the female candidates were either not engaged with the grassroots, or their role was not visible. While women face political leadership and representation challenges both at national and clan levels. Access to funds contributed, in large part, to women's limited public engagement.

- ***Some women candidates were unable to appeal to voters:*** Convincing and attracting voters is vital for elections. Candidates used different campaign strategies to appeal to voters. Most candidates – including women - focused on appealing to their kinship voters; few candidates appealed to cross-clan voters, such as other female voters outside their clan and young people. The reasons varied- some interviewed women candidates believed that most women voters outside the kinship did not have any agency i.e., they were not independent in their voting due to the influence of clan and gatekeepers; hence it was a waste of time to target them. Youth and women informants reported that gatekeepers' intimidation of women and youth voters was common during the elections. Other women candidates reported that they sensed the disapproval of their elders and political brokers to target voters outside their clan. Some informants believed that women failed to visit schools, markets or take their campaign online to appeal to youth and women voters.
- ***Women's social capital and access to stakeholders is limited:*** In a clan-based representation context, the relationship with kinship gatekeepers and interest groups strongly influences the election or appointment of leaders. Kinship gatekeepers are more likely to endorse, for leadership and representation, those they believe that they will have access to. Most of the research participants, including female candidates, were in consensus that access between female candidates and gatekeepers/political brokers was limited both before and during elections. Interviewed female candidates and gatekeepers reported that women candidates did not understand certain norms, such as how payment of elders works. This challenge manifests itself in terms of low trust, lack of commitment from the side of the gatekeepers/political brokers and inharmonious interactions between female candidates and gatekeepers/political brokers.
- ***During their electoral campaign male competitors reinforce prejudices against women leadership :*** Most women candidates had male competitors during the candidate selection process and in the elections. The male competitors lowered the chances of female candidates in different ways, such as dividing or breaking kinship votes and campaigning

against women candidates by reinforcing existing prejudices against their leadership and representation.

- ***Women candidates' limited campaign spending in an increasingly transactional elections:*** Somaliland elections are transactional and costly. On top of their campaign money and logistics, candidates are expected to finance the operation and pay gatekeepers, mobilisers, and influencers. However, campaign spending was gendered: many of the women candidates spent far less than male candidates. This was the case not only due to female candidates' limited access to finance but also because of their self-doubt about winning and their mistrust of the clan's gatekeepers/political brokers.
- ***Gradual acceptance of women candidates is emerging.*** In the 2021 election several women candidates received the undivided endorsement of their elders, although none won seats. the total votes of women candidates for the 2021 HoR increased to 3.5% compared to 1.7% in the 2005 HoR elections.

1. Introduction: Why study on ‘women’s political participation.’

Somaliland is a tribal society. The clan system, a social structure based on lineages, is usually activated for political and social purposes. The clan system influences political order and governance, both in positive and negative ways. Most importantly it influences collective action such as collective pride and punishment. It also influences access to natural, political, and financial resources.

It has been 20 years since Somaliland transitioned to direct elections. Somaliland adopted its constitution that stipulated universal suffrage in 2001; since then, it held three successful local councils (LC) elections (2002, 2012, 2021), two house of representatives (HoR) elections (2005, 2021) and three Presidential elections. Somaliland has earned local and international acclaim for its home-grown democratisation process. However, the low representation of women, comprising 46.6% of the registered voters and minorities have concerned many stakeholders, including its democratisation partners.¹

According to the global ranking of representation of women in parliament in 2020, Rwanda is at 61%, Ethiopia 39%, Djibouti 26%, Uganda 34%, Somalia 24%, Kenya 21%, with the average across 185 countries at 23.8 % (The World Bank, n.d.). Women’s participation in political decision making ‘provides a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and may as such enhance the legitimacy of political processes by making them more democratic and responsive to the concerns and perspectives of all segments of society’ (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019, p. 1).

In Somaliland, two women MPs were elected in 2005, while one of them resigned in 2012. Following the 2021 elections, there are now no women MPs in the current parliament. In the combined 2021 elections, 28 women candidates (HoR:13 and LC: 15) ran for elected seats across the country. However, no women were elected to the parliament. One obvious question is, what are the barriers to women’s political leadership in Somaliland? And could there be some prospects of increased women participation in political representation? Against this backdrop, this study was commissioned to seek a nuanced understanding of the barriers and opportunities to greater women’s political participation.

¹ Limited International Election Observation Mission estimated that 46.6% of the registrants who collected their voting cards are female

In Somaliland, there is no shortage of grey literature on this subject. Reported barriers to women's political participation include **cultural beliefs** such as assigning inferior positions of leadership to girls in their formative years (Ahmed, 2013), anti-women law-making institutions such as the Guurti, religious and cultural institutions (APD, 2021) and attitudinal barriers such as the patriarchal attitudes that dictate women cannot take up leadership positions (Yusuf, n.d.). The **clan-based system** has also been reported to be a barrier to women's political participation and this manifest itself in different ways, including in the ways that traditional elders hold women back (Affi, 2020). This is because elders prefer male candidates (APD, 2021) and reinforce gendered roles by placing women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives, in contrast to men who are expected to operate in the public sphere (Ahmed, 2013). Women are also perceived to have dual loyalty to their father's clan and the clan of their husbands (Ahmed, 2013), and for this reason, clan leaders raise questions about women's loyalty to the kinship group (Nagaad, 2021). It has also been reported that the male-dominated political class (APD, 2021), a lack of political commitment from the male-dominated political class (Yusuf, n.d.) and the clan based-voting (Ahmed, 2013) are other challenges that stem from the clan-based system.

Finance has also been found to be a barrier to women's political participation. Women's lack of access to capital (Ahmed Abdi, 2021; APD, 2021) and lack of clan financial support (Ahmed Abdi, 2021; Yusuf, n.d.), are examples barriers to women's political participation. **The absence of women in decision making** has repeatedly appeared in the existing grey literature as a challenge to women's political participation. The failure to pass the women and minority quota (Ahmed Abdi, 2021; Ahmed, 2013) has been blamed for exclusionary politics (APD, 2021). In Somaliland's political system, women have been reduced to cheerleading groups (Ahmed, 2013). The fact that **religious leaders** are a barrier to women's political participation has been repeated in the existing grey literature, albeit in a more abstract fashion. It has been reported that the religious leaders had cited texts that promote the restriction of women from public life (Yusuf, n.d.) and that their views that women's political involvement is forbidden suppress women's ambition to political participation (Ahmed, 2013). The male-dominated **media** is also believed to limit women's political participation through unequal coverage (Ahmed Abdi, 2021). **Limited social capital** is also an issue as women are not connected to the clan elites (APD, 2021), which, in part, is caused by the social and practical duties that women hold in the household (Ahmed, 2013). Also noted are **poor strategies of women's political participation**, such as the absence of sustained strategy and grassroots buy-in (APD, 2021; Yusuf, n.d.).

The existing body of grey literature on Somaliland women's political participation has limitations, including a lack of proper conceptualisation. For example, what is meant by women's political participation has not been defined. Another important limitation is that most of the findings draw on either desk research or short fieldwork which mainly focused on major urban areas and elite groups. Moreover, the grey literature does not explicitly state the scope by explicitly defining the form (s) of women's political participation, appointment or elections, under discussion. Therefore, as a result of these shortcomings in methodology key nuances of barriers to women's political participation are missed out.

Political participation is a means to inclusive decision making. **Political participation is understood as the conventional and unconventional activities that contribute to the inclusion of the target group in decision making.** Conventional activities include electing candidates as representatives, financing, voting, volunteering and other activities available in the electoral circle, while unconventional activities include boycotting, protests, petitions and demonstrations (Marsh & Kaase, 1979). **This study adopts Abdulle's definition that political participation, which 'encompasses the full range of behaviours, values, and activities by the citizens [stakeholders] either individually or collectively' (Abdulle, 2018) that affect women's participation in decision making through elections.** The activities include activism, lobbying, voting, donating money, grassroots campaigning, membership of political parties and awareness-raising. While values include culture, tradition, norms and beliefs.

Women's participation in political leadership, which is different from women's political participation, can take place through appointments or elections. In Somaliland, women are largely absent from appointed positions and decision making (Gaheir & Jama, n.d.) However, in political participation through elections, a key component of the democratisation process, women are active, and their role in voter registration, campaigns, financial mobilization and voting are visible. These activities indicate female inclusion in the decision-making around who they can vote for as representatives. However, as with the former form of political participation, women become invisible when it comes to election to public leadership, i.e., as MPs and on LCs. The 'gender affinity effect' theory assumes that women voters are more likely to vote for female candidates (Mendez & Herrick, n.d). However, the findings from this study show that higher numbers of female voters have not translated into more votes for women candidates. Considering that women actively participate in politics except for leadership positions, **this study focuses on barriers and opportunities to women's political leadership instead of broader women's political**

participation. This is important to define the problem more narrowly so that it is easier to pinpoint where barriers to female participation in public leadership arise from. This report aims to identify the main challenges that women face to participate in political leadership and representation and, by doing so, to inform a timely discussion and interventions to address these challenges.

2. Methodology

This study draws on 15 days of fieldwork between 6 and 21 September 2021 in 12 election districts (six urban areas and six peri-urban areas) in Somaliland. The administrative capitals of the six major regions - Hargeisa, Borama, Berbera, Burao, Erigavo and Lasanod -were selected as urban study sites while Gabiley, Dila, Sheikh, Odweyne, El-Afweyn and Ainaba were selected as peri-urban study sites, each under one administrative capital, respectively. A total of 153 research participants were sampled for the study using participatory research tools, namely: key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs) and case studies based on personal experience of the male and female candidates in the recently concluded combined elections. 45 KII, including case studies, and 18 FGDs were carried out during the fieldwork by two teams. One research team undertook fieldwork in the eastern regions, namely: Togdheer, Sool and Sanaag and another research team in the western regions, namely: Marodijeh, Awdal and Sahil. The FGDs were conducted in the peri-urban settlements, and each discussion lasted between 45 to 60 minutes and was participated in by six discussants. Most of the KIIs and case studies were conducted in urban areas. The interviews and FGDs were conducted in Somali and transcribed/translated into English by the researchers. Some interviews and FGDs were recorded while others were not.

Table 1: Research participants

Group	n= number of participants
Chief Aqils	8
Elders	18
Youth	362
Women	31
Intellectuals	8
Female candidates	9

² Half was female

Male candidates	5
Female election observer	1
NEC	3
Political parties	9
Civil society	12
Religious leaders	18
Campaigners	1
Total	159

This study aimed to provide more nuanced insight into barriers to women’s participation in political leadership representation, especially through elections. Emphasis on elite interviews has been one of the weaknesses of existing grey literature on Somaliland women’s political participation, and to address this concern, the study was deliberately designed to focus on the peri-urban areas and the grassroots. Out of the 159 research participants, 108 were purposefully sampled non-elite, namely: ordinary women, elders, and youth in the peri-urban areas. The study was also designed to compare the views of different social groups such as male and female, ‘elite’ and ‘ordinary’, rural and urban, young and old generations, conservatives and liberals, and losing candidates and winning candidates. They were asked about barriers and opportunities for women’s greater participation in political leadership and representation. Furthermore, the study used the 2021 combined elections as a case study since elections were fresh in the memories and experiences of people.

3. Barriers to women participation in political leadership and representation

In the discussion of barriers to women’s participation in public leadership and representation, the role of influential interest groups should not be underestimated. While previous studies touched on the role of religious leaders and traditional elders, **other key local actors such as the civil society organizations, political parties, the electoral commission, and political brokers have been largely overlooked.** This section focuses on how local interest groups and stakeholders impose barriers to women’s participation. The section tries to answer three related questions: What are the embedded interests and expectations that key local actors hold for the current or prospective political leaders or representatives? What are the concerns of these actors on how women’s leadership affects (advancing or limiting) their interests? What should be done by actors interested in improving women’s participation in political leadership, including women

themselves, to address concerns held by local interest groups about female leadership or representation?

3.1. Embedded interests: Impact of interest groups on women's 'political participation'

At the kinship level, most traditional elders, businesspeople, politicians, and influencers (*'qab-qab-layaal/afkuxoog-layaal'*) may often feel inherently against women's political leadership and representation. These actors influence the *"kinship youth and women, majority voters and [those] who happen to be less enlightened, that a woman cannot represent the clan or kinship group because she will not protect or advance kinship interests when it is actually the interest of the interest groups that we [they] think women cannot protect or advance"*.³ Ironically, the same actors believe that women's and youth general political participation - but not political leadership and representation - to be important. Understanding the interests of these groups is critical to improving women's participation in political leadership and representation.

3.1.1. *Traditional elders are important gatekeepers and main barriers to women's political leadership and representation*

Traditional elders, the most important kinship and clan gatekeepers, remain the main barrier to women's participation in leadership as they reduce women's chance of running in the elections. Bottom-up state-building in Somaliland has empowered the traditional elders to play an active role in institutions and public affairs, albeit some Somaliland citizens critique the increased politicization of the traditional system, as *"people are becoming increasingly fed up with elders' involvement in politics"*.⁴ Elders do not only influence the elections but the appointments of public officials as well. The elders are in charge of the primary elections at the kinship level and leverage their position to disqualify women aspirants at the primary elections. Sometimes they accept a woman's candidacy but also endorse a male candidate (s) who run as the kinship flag bearer in a political party different to that which accepted the woman's candidacy. Moreover, elders slow down their campaign efforts when the candidate is female, although, as will be discussed below, women candidates in part also hinder elders. An interviewed political party informant said, *"In the 2021 elections, elders did not support women candidates. Out of the 28 women who run, only a few women had the undivided endorsement of their elders... indicating that the attitude of elders is skewed against women"*

³ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021

⁴ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 9 September 2021

candidacy”.⁵ An interviewed female HoR candidate who was the sole candidate for her kinship group recounted, “*while my elders were unanimous that I become the kinship group’s sole candidate for the HoR, they did not commit themselves during the campaign as they would have committed themselves for a male candidate*”.⁶

Traditional elders have varied reasons to oppose women’s representation. *First*, like other actors, traditional elders believe that women are unable to advance or protect clan and elders’ interests. For the former, elders are under the influence of a patriarchal system that attaches pride to male representation. For the latter, kinship representatives in the government are important for the role of the elders in the society, including the management of blood compensation, assisting kinship members in trouble with the law or providing financial support to the elders, many of whom are not employed but leverage their position to get resources, “*many elders do not work, but they live on handouts [shaxaad] and most of the time elders get hesitant to ask women for shaxaad...*”.⁷ A *second* reason is that some clans who are vying for top leadership positions such as the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Speaker or Deputy speakers, will not support women, believing that electing a woman will eliminate their chance for these positions as women have minimal chance of being elected to top leadership roles. A *third* reason is based on the perception that women have limited networks and weak negotiations skills in a male-dominated political system. Therefore, elders believe that a woman will not negotiate well or take a firm decision and conclude that “*women are better at home not at the decision forum*”.⁸

To reinforce their concerns, elders employ different tactics that are largely effective in deterring voters from women candidates, including intimidation. Elders remind voters in their clan that electing a woman representative does not reflect clan pride as other kinship groups would elect male representatives. Here they create concern among clan voters that a woman representative would not protect or advance their interests. If these scaremongering tactics do not work; elders use religion as a pretext for their opposition to electing a woman. Many of the interviewed women candidates and some women and youth voters recounted that sometimes elders took more extreme measures such as ‘cursing’- wishing bad luck- or disowning those voters who insisted on campaigning or voting for women. Furthermore, elders tell the clan voters that a woman married outside the kinship does not fully represent the group due to her ‘divided identity

⁵ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

⁶ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁷ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

⁸ Interview, *election officer*, Borama, 14 September 2021

and loyalty’, the implication that her political seat would be shared with the clan of the woman representative is married to or will marry into.

A participant of the women’s discussion held in Gabiley said, “*I was campaigning for a female candidate. She was not from my kinship group. The elders of my kinship found out that I was campaigning for her. They approached me and wished me bad luck if I did not stop campaigning. I stopped because I did not want the curse of my elders*”.⁹ Similarly, a senior election officer in Borama said,

*During the election day, I ran into a man I knew was a campaign team leader for a woman candidate, and I asked him whom he voted for; he said he voted for the woman candidate’s male competitor. I was surprised that the woman did not get vote even from her campaign team! I asked him why he did not vote for the woman? He said, you see, the kinship group is important, when I went to cast my vote, I remembered the elders and wished their blessings, so I chose the elders over the woman whose resources I used...he said, don’t you remember Mr X, who had a bad luck after he refused to listen to his elders, I do not want to refuse my elders and have bad luck.*¹⁰

The traditional elders’ role in the candidates’ nomination process did not favour women candidates. However, it is also important to acknowledge that elders are not the sole actors who influence the candidate nomination process. **Businessmen and politicians within the clan also have an important role as they work through the elders and other kinship political brokers to influence the clan’s candidate:** “*in fact the politicians and businessmen are more influential than us because they have the financial resources which we do not have*”.¹¹

The elders are not just a challenge to women participation in public leadership but wider democratisation due to their resistance to democratic processes at the grassroots level; “*if Somaliland wants to strengthen its democratisation, there should be a way to reduce the role of undemocratic elders in the democratic system*”.¹² Some of the research participants suggested **depoliticising traditional elders and reducing their role in the election process,** “*I think it is important to take away the role of the traditional elders in politics. Doing so would allow women to freely engage in politics without the need to be endorsed by traditional elders*”.¹³ Not all interviewed traditional elders were against, at least in principle,

⁹ Women focus group discussion, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

¹⁰ Interview, election officer, Borama, 14 September 2021

¹¹ Interview, Chief Aqil, Berbera, 17 September 2021. The salary of a registered chief Aqil is 280,000 SoShs (less than \$ 50)

¹² Interview, male candidate, Berbera, 18 September 2021

¹³ Interview, male candidate, Lasanod, 28 September 2011

women's political leadership and representation. Some participants in the elders' discussions supported women's political leadership and representation. Surprisingly, **all discussants in the elders' group in Gabiley, the only town in Somaliland that had a woman as a mayor, unanimously opposed women's political leadership while the discussants in the elders' group in Dila, the neighbouring district that had never had a female candidate, unanimously supported women's leadership.** One plausible explanation could be that elders who had experienced woman as a Mayor had seen how a female Mayor could limit their material expectations as implied by this view, "*we have seen how women leaders can improve governance, we had a female mayor and whenever elders visited her and asked for money or land, she said I need cement for community projects, I need your contribution, and they did not like this*".¹⁴ An interviewed female candidate in Gabiley narrated how elders were firmly against women candidates for the LC.

Some of the interviewed elders have used religion and tradition as a justification for their opposition to women's political leadership and representation. However, the bottom line is that many of them were motivated by interest and were using religion and tradition as a pretext. Explaining that tradition is not a barrier, a Chief Aaqil in Berbera who supported a female candidate in the 2021 election said, "*during the campaign, people were welcoming my candidate and they were chanting that she is boqol nin dbaan, [better than 100 men]. That shows that tradition is not a bottom-line obstacle to women's political leadership*".¹⁵ Traditional elders encourage women to actively participate in voter registration, campaigning, and voting, indicating that Somali tradition is not an inherent challenge to women's political participation. However, it might be a challenge to women's political leadership and representation. A female informant said, "*men limit or increase the freedom of women depending on how this benefits men's interests...this would not have happened if women were educated and enlightened*".¹⁶

3.1.2. Political parties support women's political participation but not female leadership and representation

Like elders, women's political participation is important for the political parties; nevertheless, women are excluded from party leadership (Hogaanka xisbiga).¹⁷ Women's participation in top party leadership would, in part, have given female leaders visibility and

¹⁴ Women focus group discussion, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

¹⁵ Interview, Chief Aqil, Berbera, 17 September 2021

¹⁶ Women focus group discussion, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

¹⁷ Wadani party included one woman in the party leadership during its grand party conference in October.

educated the grassroots that women can become leaders. The political parties acknowledge lack of women participation in top party leadership,

*The political parties use women's political participation as image building and to manage the public perception. If there is no women's wing, other political parties and politicians can use that against the party; therefore, the three parties have women's wing but there are no women in the parties' leadership. Thus, within the political parties, women's political participation is not a cause and a principle but a means to party goals.*¹⁸

Interviewed women candidates in the 2021 elections stated that they did not receive commitment and endorsement from the party's top leadership during the campaign. The parties believe that women candidates do not have enough grassroots support and therefore their chance to win seats is slim. Interviewed party informants emphasized that the perception of grassroots support is an important candidates' vetting criterion. Other important criteria for nomination of candidates are elders' endorsement: *"the parties consider factors such as endorsement of Chief Aqils over personal qualities. The assumption is that candidates who have the support of their Chief Aqils have the support of their clan constituency and can raise funds for their campaign"*.¹⁹ **The parties' reliance on elders for their primary elections (candidate nomination process) means that women with political ambition who do not have elders' endorsement cannot run for the party.** When asked how political parties saw women candidates in the 2021 elections, a senior party leader interviewed for this study said:

*In the 2021 elections, X party [name removed for anonymity] accepted the candidacy of 10 women. The main challenge was their lack of constituency [clan] stronghold. We always doubted if they will attract enough votes. The women candidates were also costly to us because we have to financially support them and exempt them from the political party fee. The government of Somaliland paid their fees to the Ministry of Finance because the payment is based on an Act and the government cannot just exempt the fee. We believe had we nominated men as flag bearers for the constituencies where we had women candidates, male candidates could have attracted enough votes and won the seats...therefore, women candidacy was costly for the political party.*²⁰

Interviewed female candidates argued that **Somaliland political parties are clan-based political platforms that lack ideology and permanent party membership.**²¹ An interviewed long-term

¹⁸ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

¹⁹ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

²⁰ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

²¹ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

member of a political party highlighted the lack of permanent membership, “*during parliamentary and local council elections, political aspirants come to the political parties but those who have been with the party for long do not have a guarantee that they will have privileges over newcomers*”.²² This affects women’s participation in political leadership in three ways: first, **women candidates did not get organized and dedicated party support** due to, in part, lack of ideology that bonded parties and female candidates together, “*during the socialist party of Siyad Barre, I was a teenager, I remember neighbourhoods were organized based on parties and they committed themselves to the parties and supported party candidates, but this does not happen now. The political parties are not organized institutions with party values and philosophy that bind party members together*”.²³ Two, **women’s party membership does not guarantee party endorsement during elections.** Three, **party ideology would have incentivized competent women to join the party while its absence disincentivizes women’s party membership.**

Other political parties accept male candidates from kinship groups that have a female candidate, hence dividing kinship votes and lowering the chance of female candidates since, as shall be explained, there is an inherent bias against female candidates among the voters. Interviewed women candidates believed that if political parties met two conditions: pledged wholehearted support and did not accept male candidacy from the kinship groups that already have endorsed a female candidate, several female candidates would have won seats and joined the current parliament.

The political parties reinforce clannism, which does not favour women’s leadership. Political parties are embedded in the clan system and clan rivalry for power and representation is ingrained in the party decisions. An interviewed Chief Aqil said, “*it is not entirely true that Chief Aqils are against female candidacy. In fact, it is the political parties that exclude women on the basis of arguing that female candidates do not have enough votes from the clan constituency. The Chief Aqils who endorsed female candidates were meeting challenges from the political parties*”.²⁴ A second Chief Aqil said, “*political parties have been the biggest challenge to women candidates because the parties did support women candidates like they should have*”.²⁵ A top leader in one of the political parties said, “*during the candidate vetting process, the political parties consider three criteria: support in the clan constituency, public presence, and endorsement of key Chief Aqils, these three factors did not favour women candidates*”.²⁶

²² Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 9 September 2021

²³ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

²⁴ *Chief Aqil focus group discussion*, Burao, 19 September 2021

²⁵ *Chief Aqil focus group discussion*, Burao, 19 September 2021

²⁶ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

3.1.3. Unfavourable electoral processes for female candidates

A study on women's political participation in Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries found that both illicit electoral strategies that many politicians resort to and overt and subtle electoral violence against women had negative impact on women's political participation (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). In Somaliland, **interviewed female candidates were unanimous in their belief that the electoral processes were a barrier to women candidates. They firmly believed that they lost as a result of irregularities in the recently concluded elections.** They advanced several explanations to support their claims. One, the political parties had observers during vote counting and tallying but individual female candidates did not, albeit female candidates' low trust in the political parties. Two, their votes were promising until the last minute only to be shocked by the results released by NEC. Three, neither the political parties nor NEC gave them access to the breakdown of the voting results. Moreover, at least three interviewed female candidates in three different study sites complained about election irregularities and believed that they could have secured enough votes if it were not for irregularities such as voter buying and tampering of results during tallying. The female candidates strongly believed that election irregularities such as voter card hoarding by some male candidates, vote buying during the elections, and lack of transparency in vote tallying (which both the political parties and electoral commission were alleged to be tolerant of) reduced the chance of female candidates in the 2021 elections. A male candidate interviewed in Lasanod recounted,

We allocated some money to buy voters. We took their voting cards and kept them in our possession. We had their contact numbers and knew where they lived. Three days before the election day, we distributed the voting cards to them. During the voting process, voters took screenshots as evidence that they voted for me and sent them to my campaign team via WhatsApp. We paid \$20 to the broker who brought the voters and \$10 to the voter.²⁷

It is not easy to ascertain claims of election malpractices and irregularities and this was not the focus of the study. Interviewed election officers stressed that **while the chance that female candidates lost because of election irregularities is slim, it is true that the vote tallying process is not transparent to the individual candidates,** creating suspicion among them. Commenting on this, a female candidate said,

²⁷ Interview, *male candidate*, Lasanod, 28 September 2021

There have always been election irregularities but unfortunately, all these irregularities are unspoken by all stakeholders, including the donors, parties, electoral commission, and international observers ...I believe women lost because of result fixing, I do not believe that 3 [not sure about the figure] female candidates are reserves and waiting to join the HoR in case some seats become vacant.²⁸

Somaliland's election system transfers key election processes to the individual candidates and kinship groups. Voter registration, voter education and awareness raising, voter card collection, and access to polling stations are shouldered by kinship groups and candidates, especially in rural and coastal areas. An interviewed male candidate in Berbera recounted the electoral steps where he took on responsibilities that the election commission should have performed:

I have spent money on voters' registration, voters' card replacement, transportation of voters to their polling stations...all these costs should have been shouldered by the nation as part of the election process, but it has been transferred to the candidates and I would suggest that the electoral commission and other election stakeholders consider how to take these costs away from the candidates because these practices are negatively affecting the merit of elections and democratisation by taking voters away from their rights to vote for the candidate they want as they are forced to vote for the candidate who sponsored them. The state should have facilitated voters' accessibility to the polling stations, but now candidates facilitate voters' access to their polling stations.²⁹

It is this process where political aspirants and candidates are left to shoulder these responsibilities that, in part, facilitate the practices of voter card hoarding, vote buying and the influence of kinship gatekeepers and interest groups on women and youth voters.

On the electoral framework, Somaliland used the closed list proportional representation for the 2002 elections, while the rest of the elections (2005, 2012, 2021) were conducted based on the open list proportional representation. One interviewed electoral expert believed that the closed list system, supported with political commitment and legal provisions, would have allowed more female candidates to win seats.³⁰ A similar belief was held by HoR women candidates who attended the research findings validation workshop. An instructive case is that the Puntland State of Somalia

²⁸ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

²⁹ Interview, *male candidate*, Berbera, 16 September 2021

³⁰ Follow up interview, electoral expert, 27 October 2021

used the closed list system for its October 2021 local council elections in three districts. In those districts more women candidates were elected since there was a legal provision that 30% of the first three seats should be women. In practice, every political party had to give 30% of its votes to the women candidates on its list and for this to happen, every three candidates that receive votes, one should be a woman. However, in Somaliland, political parties prefer the open list system, and empowering the voters, because of they have a greater choice in individual candidates, is one of its merits.

3.1.4. *limitations and implications of the civil society organizations on women's political representation*

Civil society organization (CSOs) have been active in advancing women's political participation over the last two decades, albeit **that the CSOs' efforts have been mainly focused in major urban areas. Some research participants, including female candidates and political parties, questioned the impact of civil society in advancing women's political participation.** Those who questioned the CSOs based their criticism on the fact that in Somaliland, **civil society activism is largely not a cause and calling, but rather incentive-based, i.e., conducted for access to donor-resources.** Commenting on this, a political party informant said,

Women's political participation is not an ideology and passion among the civil society actors, it is no more than an approach to attract donors' resources. For example, during the 2021 election, one of the local civil society organizations [anonymised] that received a large amount of money from the donors to advance women's political participation paid us just a few hours visit to tick the boxes, and they never returned to pressure us to support or advance women candidates. From the meeting, we knew they visited us to tick the box.³¹

Evidence from this study suggests some (unintended) negative impacts of donors' and CSOs' role in women's political participation. First, once the news that donors have paid money to CSOs to advance women's political participation reached the public, the conservative sections of the society and sceptics used this to justify their beliefs that Western countries have agenda in women's political participation, namely, to change the local tradition and social values. Second, this triggered rumours that female candidates had received financial support from the donors through CSOs, leading supporters and election teams of some female candidates to demand payment:

³¹ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

I have been part of civil society since 1996. Civil society made efforts to promote women's rights. However, in the 2021 elections, there were rumours that the donors paid each female candidate \$100,000 through some civil society organizations. These were rumours and speculations that opponents of women candidates and political brokers created and spread, then everyone was expecting money from us! Those who wanted to vote for us suspected that we were advancing the foreign agenda. This also affected our fundraising. The only payment I received from the civil society was \$4000, but this was not direct payment, they sponsored our campaign material and paid the money to printing companies. They also said they paid some money to the telecommunication companies to send for us bulk messaging, but this was never done. A UN organization [anonymised] donated me 20 t-shirts and caps; considering the amount of money I incurred, this was nothing. The CSOs became an obstacle because people who were willing to volunteer were now asking for payments because they heard rumours and speculations that women candidates were paid money.³²

This case reveals several important points. First, **the existence of sceptics about donors' role in women's political participation who suspect a foreign-driven agenda to change the social structure.** Political brokers and opponents of women's political leadership find it easy to spread rumours that women's candidacy is foreign-driven. **Two, the CSOs provided negligible in-kind support to (some) women candidates, but this had a negative impact as political brokers exaggerated it to hundreds of thousands of dollars.** The propaganda that women candidates were advancing a Western agenda was not limited to Borama and female candidates in Burao reported similar challenges:

I received about \$6,000 from a CSO (anonymised), I also received \$1000 from an informal women's group (anonymised). And I raised \$34,000. I spent most of the money on khat, renting campaign offices and equipment, and the campaigner's salary. Male candidates had a lot of resources, and they were buying votes from voters in the queue. Funds are a big part of campaigning, and male candidates were telling the public that Westerners sent women candidates and that they have received \$200,000 to participate in the elections and campaign.³³

Considering the arguments that women's political participation is largely not a cause and calling among the CSOs actors and the negative (unintended) impact of (limited) CSO support for women candidates, it is important to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of CSO activities for women's political participation.

³² Interview, *female candidate*, Borama, 11 September 2021

³³ Interview, *women candidate for the LC*, Burao, 19 September 2021

3.1.5. *Political brokers limit women's political participation and leadership*

Kinship groups have political brokers (elders, businessmen, politicians, campaigners, community influencers, mobilizers) who influence youth and women voters in favour of their candidates or against candidates they do not support. The political brokers are capable of crafting and spreading propaganda and often **do not get along with female candidates**, as interviewed political brokers and female candidates confirmed. Commenting on this, an interviewed current MP said, “*every clan has qab qab layaal [political brokers] who are good at creating and spreading [negative] campaigning messages, [and] women leadership aspirants need to work with these groups*”.³⁴ Several factors including the fact that political brokers were not happy with the campaign spending behaviour of women candidates and limited access between the female candidates and the political brokers contributed to their disharmonious relationship.

It was reported that access/contact between political brokers and male candidates was higher compared to the female candidates. However, limited access of women candidates to kinship political brokers is one factor that, in part, contributed to the failure of women candidates to attract enough votes from clan voters. An interviewed intellectual said, “*female candidates do not understand the interests and the modus operandi of the political brokers because they have not been interacting with them... female candidates think that paying a political broker a few dollars once is enough when these brokers are paid a lot of money regularly*”.³⁵

Most of the interviewed female candidates confirmed that they lacked the understanding of social norms of etiquettes of political brokers. Interviewed female candidate said, “*elders and political brokers used to visit me and after end of the discussion, I would just get out to attend to other priorities, but the visitors kept seated and when I asked relative males why elders were not leaving, they told me that they wanted money. How could I understand if they wanted money when they did not ask for it*”?³⁶ Some the interviewed female candidates and Chief Aqils also recounted that female candidate were holding political brokers accountable for the money they gave, and if they were not convinced, they sought alternatives such as their close male relatives. Interviewed Chief Aqils, complained that women candidates lacked understanding of how things work, including the tactics and strategies to win

³⁴ Informal interview, *elected MP*, Hargeisa, 4 September 2021

³⁵ Interview, *intellectual*, Burao, 19 September 2021

³⁶ *Findings validation discussion for female candidates*, 6 October 2021

the support of kinship political brokers. Some female candidates reported that “*kinship political brokers were initially cooperative but a few weeks down the road they started to slow down and showed no commitment*”.³⁷ The political brokers said they started to mind their business after they found out that female candidates were not managing relations well. In fact, **the reported poor relationship between female candidates and kinship political brokers could have more serious implications for women’s leadership aspirants as the political brokers might be influenced by their 2021 experience with female candidates and not endorse female candidates in future elections.**

3.2. General barriers to women’s participation in political leadership and representation

Besides the interest groups, there are general barriers to women’s participation in public leadership. These include women’s ambiguous identity in the kinship system, gendered clientelism, the hybrid and informal governance system, socially constructed gender roles, the migration of certain former women representatives, and clan or kinship rotational power-sharing arrangements. These general challenges in the governance system are used by certain interest groups to justify their opposition against women's public leadership.

3.2.1. Women’s ambiguous identity in the kinship system

Kinship or clan political brokers believe that women leaders or representatives are not well placed to protect or advance kinship interests compared to the male leaders. This embedded concern arises from different sources of which the most important is women’s divided identity, and by extension, her representation, between her blood and marriage kinship groups. Many of the research participants explained or justified barriers to women’s participation in public leadership and the absence of organized women kinship group that women candidates could appeal to on the basis that ‘*Gabadhu dhalasho iyo dhaxdin midna ma laba [a woman is neither fully identified with her blood kinship nor with her marriage kinship, her identity lies in between]*’.

Evidence from the 2005 and 2012 elections shows that being married within the same kinship worked to the advantage of female candidates. Women’s marital status was also relevant in the 2021 elections when the marriage status of female candidates, such as whether she was unmarried, divorced, widowed, or married outside the kinship, all contributed to, or were used

³⁷ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

to label the female candidate as not fit to represent the kinship group. Commenting on this, a Chief Aqil who had a female candidate said, “*the main reason the kinship group were against the female candidate I was supporting was not that she is a woman but that she was married outside the clan*”.³⁸ Marriage from the kinship group mattered mainly because it influenced who would have access to the female leader or representative. Marriage status influenced women’s rights to lead to the extent that some **interviewed female candidates stressed that any woman with political aspirations should not marry outside her kinship group.**

In a system where the voting is clan-based, women’s ambiguous identity from marriage affects them in different ways. For example, kinship political brokers and gatekeepers who do not want shared representation, encourage clan voters to vote for male candidates whose identity and clan representation is seen as less ambiguous. This denies most women candidates grassroots support in the clan constituency.

3.2.2. Gendered clientelism

The perception that women leaders cannot perform as well as men, in part, arises from the system of clientelism where it is common that public officials use their powers to accumulate resources and benefit their supporters and political brokers. Many of those interviewed believed that in the system of clientelism, women leaders have fewer opportunities. This is, however, more than a perception, as evidence shows the gender gap in political clientelism (Daby, 2021). In a context where opportunities are limited, and their access is largely influenced by clientelism and informal networks, this reduces the chance of women being elected to public offices. Commenting on this, an election officer said,

*The elders are the main barriers to women candidates or women to hold public leadership in which they represent the kinship group. Elders’ opposition to women’s leadership in public office is based on their perception that women leaders are less likely to siphon off public resources or are less connected to the powerholders; hence they may not advance the interest of the elders to have access to resources or power. They believe women are more shy or less corrupt.*³⁹

³⁸ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021

³⁹ Interview, *election officer*, Borama, 14 September 2021

This quote represents views held by most of the research participants on the reason elders were against women leadership. The same reason could be extended to other stakeholders. For example, employment was a top priority to youth, and they perceived that women leaders were less likely to find jobs for them due to their limited connection or access. The participants of a youth focus group discussion held in Dila unanimously agreed that youth unemployment is a major challenge there as there are several unemployed university graduates in most households. They were also in consensus that **due to ‘rampant patronage’ in the country, the chance of female representatives finding jobs for the clan’s youth was minimal, compared to male representatives.** A young male discussant said, *“people are employed on who they know and who they are related to...there is no fairness in employment...we rather choose a man we think may find for us a job based on his connections than a woman who does not have connections or may not be bold enough to find jobs for the clan’s youth”*.⁴⁰

Besides elders and youth, business leaders make up their minds on who to support as a leader with consideration of the clientelism in the country. Most of the time, businessmen do not provide resources to female candidates from their clan partly based on their perception that women leaders cannot protect or advance their business interests. Commenting on this, a senior party leader said, *“in Somaliland men have more access and network to lobby compared to women. Gatekeepers, including businessmen, know this reality and therefore they do not sacrifice resources to support women. Moreover, businessmen have religious affiliations and do not believe in women’s participation in leadership”*.⁴¹

There was a divergence between what women thought that they could do as leaders and the perceptions of men: interviewed women believed that female leaders are as capable as male leaders, while many of the other research participants believed that in the clientelism system, women leaders are less capable. Nevertheless, many of the research participants believed that if it was not for the system of clientelism women leaders would have performed better than male leaders. The proponents of this theory cited a few instances where female leaders performed well in terms of improving social services and did not undertake massive siphoning off of public resources.

There was a consensus that women have a stronger moral compass: *“I do agree that women are more trustworthy than men when it comes to handling money. This is the reason why women are cashiers in all major*

⁴⁰ Youth focus group discussion, Dila, 14 September 2021

⁴¹ Interview, political party leader, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

companies and government offices today".⁴² However, in a governance system where service provision is not (most of the time) readily available – but instead requires negotiation and lobbying - many believe that male leaders are better positioned to do this and obtain resources than female leaders. Commenting on how this has been internalised by women, an elder said,

*Woman's opinions and thoughts have never been respected. This has been detrimental to the self-consciousness and confidence of a woman. If a woman sat with us today and we debated about an issue, it is very likely that she would say you all know best because you are men. It is true that there are some men who know best but that is not the case all the time. Men have underappreciated women to the point that this left them with an inferiority complex.*⁴³

Kinship gatekeepers, political brokers and interest groups are familiar with the system, and they want to elect a clan representative who they believe will not shy away from many things that women leaders would.

3.2.3. *The political pluralism and informal governance system*

A study on women's political participation in Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries found that political pluralism has a negative relationship with women's political participation as 'countries... with [higher] level of pluralism are likely to have low levels of women's political participation'(Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019, p.13). Somaliland 'boasts... vigorous political pluralism (Bryden, 2003, p. 362). **The political pluralism in Somaliland affects women's participation in public leadership in different ways.** First, in this political order, **traditional elders have a direct role in the election and appointment of leaders from their kinship groups.** The elders are, however, inherently biased against women leadership, therefore, the role of elders in the political order and public affairs limits women's participation in public leadership. Second, **male politicians and political brokers meet outside the working spaces and after the official working hours to discuss politics and this constitutes an important form of political participation for men and excludes women.** Men meet and discuss political issues in Khat chewing sessions (Hansen, 2010). These are political *Mafresh* that open in the afternoon after the closure of political institutions (Ducaale, 2005). Men also meet in other social spaces such as hotels and restaurants which are 'flat or egalitarian' spaces where politics are

⁴² *Youth focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

⁴³ *Elders and religious leaders focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

discussed, information is exchanged, and deals are negotiated. Women, in general, have limited access to these informal political spaces. Political brokers are aware of this and prefer to elect male leaders whom they believe can operate in these informal political spaces.

3.2.4. *Socially constructed gender roles*

The roles of different genders are, to large degree, socially constructed. Religious leaders and traditional elders repeatedly stated that **a woman's role should be limited to the house and should not include participation in discussion or policy forums**. Many, if not all, Somalis have been raised with gendered roles in the household and more widely in society. This has resulted in gender roles getting programmed in the subconscious mind of generations. Therefore, some of the research participants, mainly religious leaders, elders, and some youth and women, held mistrust towards women's leadership capabilities. Gatekeepers and political brokers take advantage of these gendered beliefs to *“remind us [women and youth] that women cannot take up leadership or role of representation”*.⁴⁴ The belief that roles in the society are gendered also plays out in the elections as many voters believe that women candidates will not attract enough votes to be elected and hence decide to not ‘waste’ their vote. This also affects women candidates in the form of ‘self-doubt’ and ‘low confidence’: *“the truth of the matter is that female candidates themselves do not have the confidence to even stand in front of you and convince you that voting for her is the right choice. This is due to systematic beliefs that have caused women to be a bit insecure about what they can offer if elected”*.⁴⁵

Somali women value family and, most of the time, barriers to women participation in political leadership arise from the close family who tend to be unsupportive for women seeking elected or appointed seats. The position of relatives towards women's leadership is informed by their perception that public leadership is unsafe for women. The main concern held by them is *Ikhtilad*, i.e., if women join in public leadership, it will cause intermingling of male and female in leadership, something that neither Somali tradition nor Islamic values encourage.⁴⁶ Women discussants recounted how men are not supportive to women's leadership careers at any level, *“Husbands will not support women with leadership ambitions. Men's egos cannot handle having a strong, career-oriented woman as a wife. There are only about 5% of men who could be comfortable and supportive of their wives”*.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Women focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

⁴⁵ *Youth focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

⁴⁶ *Women focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 November 2021

⁴⁷ *Women focus group discussion*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

The socially constructed gender roles are deeply entrenched in the society but more so in the rural areas of the country where the local community has never had experience of a female leader or candidate in their area. Responding to the question of whether she believed women should be elected to positions of power, a young male discussant in Dila said, *“I have never seen women running for a position of power. Women do not have political ambitions”*.⁴⁸ An informant in Erigavo echoed a similar observation: *“most of the election voters are the rural community, and they tend to be conservative. When a female candidate goes to the remote rural areas, they are often asked what clan she married into, and if she is single, it is believed that the seat will be that of her in-laws once she gets married. Besides this widespread belief, rural communities don’t value, trust, or listen to women as much as men”*.⁴⁹ These quotes suggest that those in the rural where traditional values are more ingrained are more likely not to accept female candidates.

3.2.5. Migration of women leaders and clan rotational power-sharing arrangement

Some research participants cited several examples of previously elected women who gave up their representation for migration.⁵⁰ While there were cases of migration of elected representative from both genders, the migration of female leaders was singled out to have concerned some kinship groups, especially in Borama and Odweyne districts which reported the cases of female leaders’ migration. One plausible explanation of why female migrants was singled out could be that political brokers use female leaders’ migration in their efforts against women’s political leadership and representation. One elder in Odwene said, *“back in the 2012 local council elections, we supported a female candidate to represent the community and compete for the local council elections. Eventually, she won in that election and was elected to the local council. However, she married a man from the diaspora and left the country to start her new life abroad. Her seat had to be filled. Therefore, this incident became a challenge facing women in seeking elections in Odweyne”*.⁵¹ There is no evidence that women representatives or leaders are more likely to emigrate than men.

One important election criterion is the rotational power-sharing arrangement within the kinship groups. The kinship group that has an appointed officer or the kinship group of the

⁴⁸ Youth focus group discussion, Dila, 13 September 2021

⁴⁹ Interview, campaigner, Erigavo, 23 September 2021

⁵⁰ Two elected women leaders in Borama and one elected women leader in Odwene were cited as examples of women who were elected and ended up migrating

⁵¹ Elders focus group discussion, Odweyne, 22 September 2021

outgoing representative generally cannot have a new candidate due to rotational power sharing; the candidacy goes to a clan that does not have or has not had representation previously. This kinship arrangement affects women with political aspirations because if it is not the turn of her kinship, then she will not get an endorsement from the elders. Commenting on this, an elders' group discussant said, *“a diaspora woman from our kinship decided to participate in the recent elections. She was told that it wasn't the turn of her sub clan to represent the community, and she also wasn't aware of how the selection process of candidates took place within the community, neither did she come at the right time of nomination since the community had already selected other candidates to run for the elections”*.⁵²

4. Exploring the challenges women faced in the 2021 elections: Have women played to gender stereotypes?

Women did not face major challenges in voter registration, voting and campaigning - three important activities in political participation - but they did face major challenges to be elected. A nuanced analysis of the challenges women faced in the 2021 elections indicate that **not all barriers were external, but some barriers stemmed from within women themselves, as individuals and a social group**. Some of the challenges that informants identified and believed to limit women's capacity to get elected were women being latecomers to elections; limited grassroots presence and social capital within the kinship system; and limited social skills to negotiate in the complex system of transactional politics at the clan and national levels. Other barriers included the lack of distinctive campaign strategies that reflected the unique challenges that women candidates faced and that were designed to appeal to the voters both within and outside the clan; the spending behaviour of female candidates, and limited access between female candidates and political brokers. While most of these challenges stem from the individual women candidates, it is important to note that factors external to the women influence them.

4.1. Late to elections

Several postponements have resulted in uncertainties surrounding elections. The plan to combine presidential and HoR elections was called off in 2016 and starting from this period, some political aspirants announced their candidacy and mobilised their grassroots support. Many of the women announced their political aspirations in 2020 and 2021. The

⁵² Elders focus group discussion, Odweyne, 22 September 2021

timing that election aspirants announce their candidacy is important in a number of ways.

First, early aspirants engage in grassroots campaigning to improve their public presence within the kinship system or among general voters. Two, early aspirants actively mobilise, and finance, their kinship groups during the voter registration. Three, early aspirants leverage their early announcement and role in the kinship group during the nomination process. Many of the research participants stressed that (most) female candidates announced their candidacy late and “*when (some) women announced their political aspiration within the kinship, they were told xishooda oo ragga mudada dheer sii sharaxnaa u daaya [respect those male aspirants who have announced their aspiration a long time ago]*”.⁵³

Answering the question of why women were latecomers to the election, **some of the interviewed women candidates stated that they were hoping that a quota for women and minorities would be passed. Responding to the question of what female political aspirants should do differently in future elections, many of the informants said that women should announce their political aspirations early,** “*women candidates need to start announcing their candidacy and campaign early and be active and known among the community*”.⁵⁴

Some evidence suggests that **if women candidates announce their political aspirations for elected seats early enough and get elders’ endorsement, then some of the elders are willing to keep their promise:**

*For two years, a woman has been our clan’s nominated representative for the next elections [2021]. However, once the elections came around, a male candidate came asking for elders’ endorsement. We told him that a woman has been aspiring for two years. He asked if, on his behalf, the clan elders could request the female aspirant to step down in an exchange of compensating her for all the expenses she has incurred so far. The elders told him that it was not their job to do so, and if he wanted, he should talk to her in person. He then spoke with the female clan candidate; the woman had accepted his offer, and he compensated \$15,000 in return. After verifying the deal with the girl, the elders endorsed the man to become the kinship group candidate, and the whole kinship rallied behind him, and he won. In our kinship, this woman was the first female political aspirant, and she stepped down on her own will, but the kinship and its leaders were already campaigning for her.*⁵⁵

⁵³ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

⁵⁴ *Women focus group discussion*, Burao, 19 September 2021

⁵⁵ *Chief Aqil focus group discussion*, Burao, 19 September 2021

However, announcing candidacy early has financial implications. The aspirant has to financially support political brokers and be active and finance kinship initiatives such as the voter registration and providing emergency assistance to kinship members affected by calamities.

4.2. Limited public and grassroots presence

As reported, before election many of the women candidates did not have a public presence on media (both social and mainstream), neither they had presence within the clan. Women candidates had started to engage with the kinship group and the public after the election date was scheduled. According to an interviewed political party leader, *“many of the women candidates did not have a public presence before the elections. They were not visible on social media...they created their social media pages when the election drew near”*.⁵⁶ A civil society worker in Burao echoed a similar observation, *“female candidates did not have a public presence on social media before the election. Even the most educated candidates created social media accounts during or just before the elections. Many other women candidates trusted the traditional clan-based campaigning”*.⁵⁷

The limited public presence affected women candidates in at least two different ways. *First*, they were late to raise awareness among the voters, generally about their candidacy and specifically about women’s leadership and representation. Commenting on the importance of public presence before the election through social media, a key informant said, *“from this election, the influence of social media was obvious...those who were active and used social media platforms effectively saw the benefit... social media has become a powerful platform”*.⁵⁸ *Second*, the candidates were late to get buy-in from the voters.

Public presence could take place in different forms and on platforms, including being active on media or in the kinship group. The goal, however, is that the public should be familiar with the candidate prior the elections. **Evidence shows that some of the women elected in the previous elections or those who attracted a good amount of votes in the 2021 elections had a public presence.** Commenting on the importance of public presence in elections, a women activist interviewed in Borama said,

The woman MP elected in 2005 from the Awdal region had a public presence because she used to be active in community projects, including the Dila-Borama road construction where she led a group of women from the

⁵⁶ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021.

⁵⁷ Interview, *civil society worker*, Burao, 18 September 2021

⁵⁸ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

region who raised \$65,000. When she started to campaign, she was already known, and her contribution to the community was already seen. Similarly, the woman LC [member] elected in 2012 also had a public presence because she was a health worker known in the community. However, some women candidates in the 2021 elections announced their candidacy early but rarely visited the region as they were stationed in Hargeisa.⁵⁹

Many of the women candidates were seen as coming from elite backgrounds and were disconnected from the grassroots. For this reason, a top political party informant argued that **“women want to parachute to political positions without grassroots participation... Women do not want to get out of their comfort zone to enter the uncharted territory of politics...they just want an easy and less resistant route to public leadership”**.⁶⁰ Commenting on the importance of grassroots participation for women’s political participation, a women’s group leader in Borama said,

*In 2011, I was among a group of women who visited Rwanda, the county with the highest [number of] female MPs in Africa. We asked women MPs how they managed to achieve great women representation and they told us that they had started from grassroots level [meel boose]; women held public offices in the villages, districts, and regions. I would suggest that women with political ambitions should start their career from the grassroots so that the local people know them, see what women leaders can achieve and start accepting women leaders.*⁶¹

Having a public and grassroots presence improves the chances of the candidates. However, due to the complexity of barriers to women representation, there is no guarantee that every woman with public and grassroots presence will win a seat. Women with leadership inspirations need to balance public presence within the kinship group and public presence outside the kinship group, but most importantly, any public presence that does not reach out to the wider everyday society may not yield positive results.

The case of two [male] candidates, the current Mayor of Hargeisa, and the ‘minority’ clans representative in the HoR, who attracted the highest number of votes in the 2021 election, indicates that public presence is important for appealing and reaching out to cross-clan

⁵⁹ Interview, *the leader of a women group*, Borama, 11 September 2021

⁶⁰ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁶¹ Interview, *the leader of a women group*, Borama 11 September 2021

voters.⁶² Both leaders branded themselves as social activists; the former as an anti-clan activist and campaigned for ‘cleaner and greener’ Hargeisa during the election. The latter branded himself as a minority activist and, during the elections, employed a ‘victimhood’ strategy. Arguably, the public presence and the unique campaign strategies yielded positive results for both. In Somaliland, the ‘minority’ clans are treated to occupy lower social status and therefore politically and socially disadvantaged by the so called ‘noble’ lineages.

4.3. Campaign strategies: Have women candidates been unable to appeal to women voters?

Whether candidates were targeting kinship or cross-clan voters, appealing to voters is always important for elections. While the elections are clan-based - and therefore most candidates focused on their clan constituency during the campaign - in some instances, **targeting the wider public, especially youth, with precise and persistent campaign messages yielded good results.**

Many of those interviewed believed that women candidates fell short of employing a unique campaign strategy different from the male candidates, therefore, they could not appeal to voters. According to a senior political party leader, “*women candidates in our party did not have strong campaign strategy to convince voters, they were meeting with a limited number of people and lacked coherent strategy...women candidates did not appeal to women and youth voters*”.⁶³ A similar observation was echoed by the regional coordinator of a women’s association, “*women candidates concentrated on their kinship groups, they did not even visit marketplaces (sariibad) where they could meet women traders and market-goers to ask for their votes. They did not visit educational centres to appeal to young voters*”.⁶⁴ Moreover, a participant in the women focus group discussion in Gabiley opined, “*the women candidate in our area did not reach out to us, she was campaigning using the clan approach, if women’s campaign is clan-centric, then women voters belong to different clans and they will not cross the clan line, but if women candidates reach out to us and appeal to us without using the female card, we can vote for them*”.⁶⁵

One plausible explanation of why some women candidates did not appeal to women voters was rooted in their perception about the agency of women voters. A female candidate

⁶² The term ‘minority’ could be misleading, but it is commonly used to describe clans including Gabooye, Midgan, Madhibaan, Tumul...(International Crisis Group, 2015) “Somaliland: the strains of success”.

⁶³ Interview, senior political party leader, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁶⁴ Interview, *the leader of a women group*, Borama 11 September 2021

⁶⁵ *Women focus group discussion*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

confirmed stated, “*some people asked me why don’t you appeal to women? I told them do not mislead me because there are no independent women voters to be appealed to; women voters are under the clan influence.*”⁶⁶ **The evidence from this study supports the argument of limited agency of women and youth voters.** Some of the interviewed women voters stressed their lack of independence to vote for the candidate they wanted, “*I was campaigning for a female candidate outside my kinship, the kinship elders were upset with me and threatened that they would curse me -wish me bad luck- if I do not stop campaigning for the female candidate, I got afraid and stopped to campaign for the female candidate*”.⁶⁷ A second female discussion participant said, “*In the past elections, elders threatened kinship members whom they came to know were willing to vote outside the clan. They visited any woman who planned to vote based on her view and told her they would curse her if she didn’t vote for whoever the elders were endorsing. The elders were not letting women vote based on their own will and thoughts.*”⁶⁸ Female candidates recounted how elders intimidated voters and campaigners who did not endorse elders’ preferred candidate.⁶⁹

4.4. Limited social capital and access of female candidates

Due to the clan-rooted elections, social capital, i.e., the shared norms, values, knowledge, trust, and access to the kinship group, is important as it facilitates the relationship between candidates and kinship voters and gatekeepers/political brokers. However, **research participants reported that the social capital of women candidates was limited compared to the male candidates.** For some of the women candidates, it was the first time they were engaging with the kinship gatekeepers/political brokers or visited clan territories:

*I could hear female candidates saying it was their first time they visited kinship’s rural areas, especially remote areas...a network within the kinship is an important criterion that elders consider because they believe that if the person does not know the kinship very well and is not well connected to them, he/she might be able to advance the interest of the kinship and gatekeepers.*⁷⁰

Interviewed female candidates acknowledged that their social capital was limited compared to male candidates:

⁶⁶ Interview, *women candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁶⁷ *Women focus group discussion*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁶⁸ *Women focus group discussion*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁶⁹ Women candidates who participated study findings validation meeting, 6 October 2021

⁷⁰ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 9 September 2021

*Our social capital is indeed weak, especially among the kinship group. The social capital is built through socialization and engagement with the kinship group, which is part of the Somali men's lifestyle. Men engage and socialize in different social spaces, but women do not. When it comes to kinship knowledge, men have advanced knowledge and a stronger network than women who know only the basics and have a limited social network within the kinship group.*⁷¹

A second female candidate said,

*My competitor was a man from the diaspora who did not have much social capital [dad badan muu aqoon] within the kinship; I had better social capital than him. However, limited social capital has not been a problem to him because the elders and other kinship gatekeepers benefited him in their social capital since he was able to pay them. They finally frustrated him, and he quit and left the country.*⁷²

These two quotes reveal three things: first, the gendered roles influence social capital. Male members routinely engage with their male kinship members for different reasons such as socialisation and are more active at kinship level political participation. Second, some men may also have limited kinship social capital, but the gatekeepers assist them through their social capital as long as the former is willing to reward the latter. Third, limited social capital within the clan is a barrier to both male and female candidates who inspire to represent the kinship.

Female candidates' limited social capital manifested itself during elections in numerous ways. Firstly, the trust between female candidates and gatekeepers/political brokers was low. Interviewed Chief Aqil, who supported a female candidate said, “*she trusted some unreliable political brokers and gatekeepers and once they betrayed her, she started to lose trust in everyone thinking that everyone was after her money and started to hesitate to work with gatekeepers...she wanted to be everywhere by herself*”.⁷³ Secondly, it limited female candidates' negotiation and manoeuvring tactics. Thirdly, it limited female candidates' access to political brokers, as female candidates and gatekeepers/political brokers reported limited access to each other. Three interviewed women candidates stated that they had male relatives as intermediaries between them and kinship gatekeepers and political brokers who facilitated access and interpreted for them unspoken communication i.e., jargons, indirect words, gestures and signals that elders use to communicate when they do not want to directly ask for something. Fourth, it limited female candidates' political participation at the kinship

⁷¹ Interview, *women candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁷² Interview, *women candidate*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁷³ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021

level. Women candidates were not attending elders' conferences and deliberations, but final decisions were delivered to them, which they sometimes found, irrational. Commenting on this, a female candidate said, “ *I have not been attending elders' meetings, if I attended, my presence would have influenced the meeting outcomes because I would have known my supporters from my opponents and if an elder whom I have paid wanted to be against me he would have felt shy in my presence, but when I am out of sight, they will not feel shy*”,⁷⁴

Below is a classic example of how female candidates' limited social capital played out in the election:

*I did not have good access to kinship gatekeepers and political brokers. My access to male dominated social spaces such as Khat chewing sessions and elders' conferences was limited. These are the social spaces where political transactions and negotiations take place. I relied on my male relative as intermediaries, and most of the time, my engagement and negotiation with the elders' and political broke were taking place through these intermediaries. My clan had established a committee of 14 elders for the elections. They expected that I would fund their meetings and field trips. When I was budgeting for the election, I did not know that I would give out per diems and sponsor daily Khat sessions for different groups. Every move costed me money; when I sent an elder, I had to pay him \$100 per day. Everyone I interacted with was expecting money! Unlike male candidates, the limited access benefited women candidates to some degree by saving us money. Unlike male candidates, women candidates were not available all the time by the kinship elders, gatekeepers, and political brokers. It was hectic; I was receiving endless calls from people who said they were kinship members and were asking for money, Khat, help...then I started not to receive phone calls between 11:00 am and 5:00 pm. This is the time when these groups make phone calls to make money. I took this decision after a female candidate shared her story with me, in fact she was switching off her phone during this time, but I decided not to receive calls and only call back contacts I was interested in. Someone or group of people I did not know would call me saying they were from my clan and demanded all sorts of support, Khat, and money...I did not even know if they were telling the truth to belong to my clan. Male candidates were with them; they could find them anytime, which is why men candidates spent more money on elections than female candidates.*⁷⁵

There are several things about the challenges female candidates encountered that this quote reveals. It shows a breakdown of communication and relationship between some female candidates and political brokers and gatekeepers during the campaign. Two, gender played out in

⁷⁴ Interview, *female candidate*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021.

⁷⁵ Interview, *women candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021.

the access between gatekeepers/political brokers and candidates. Three, some actors wanted to exploit women candidates' weakness of not being familiar with kinship members and relations. Four, it explains the reason for the reported lack of elders' and political brokers' commitment to female candidates. Five, it justifies gatekeepers' concern about access to female leaders and representatives. A Chief Aqil in Berbera said,

*Male leaders and representatives are accessible. We can find them in their offices, houses, hotels, coffee shops, or other social spaces. Access to the kinship leaders and representatives is important for the Chief Aqils because we need them when we have to find a job for a kinship member, when we need to promote kinship rights when assisting a kinship member who is in trouble with the law. We cannot access the woman representative; we cannot visit her in the house; we cannot access her in public space. These are the concerns that kinship gatekeepers and interest groups have whenever the discussion of a female representative is raised. If we elect an MP or propose the appointment of a kinship member to a political office, we should be able to access them.*⁷⁶

The research participants were in consensus that access to women leaders and representatives is the main concern of kinship stakeholders. A female youth said, “if women want to be elected as public leaders, then they should know that they will represent their kinship and therefore need to address the concern of lack of access”.⁷⁷ A campaigner held a similar view in Erigavo, “future female candidates need to be active members of the community and know context, needs, interests, and values of the people they want to represent”.⁷⁸ A Chief Aqil also said, “I was the Chief Aqil of Aisha [name changed for anonymity] who was contesting for the HoR. I supported her, but the questions that kinship members kept asking me were, why are you wasting your vote? Where will you find her? How will you access her? Okay, assume we gave her our vote; where will we find her?”.⁷⁹

4.5. Women’s limited campaign spending in transactional elections

The cost of elections is continuously increasing in Somaliland (see Verjee et al, 2015). Candidates spend money on the constituency/kinship voter registration, gatekeepers, transport of voters to their polling stations and finance Khat chewing sessions. **The findings show that during elections, it is not only access to finance that makes a difference but also spending behaviour.** Interviewed Chief Aqil said, “if women candidates have money and are willing to spend, they can

⁷⁶ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021

⁷⁷ Interview, *female youth/2021 election observer*, Borma, 14 September 2021

⁷⁸ Interview, *campaigner*, Erigavo, 23 September 2021

⁷⁹ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021.

manage the gatekeepers by satisfying their immediate interests, i.e., financial needs. Suppose the gatekeepers are well massaged during the election. In that case, they can either think less about their post-election interests as they will understand the female candidate's spending as an indicator of accessibility and be willing to share with the gatekeepers. However, the challenge is that women candidates are hesitant to spend money even when they have it. Women cannot take the risk to spend money, they calculate more than male candidates ”.⁸⁰

Gatekeepers/political brokers reported female candidates' limited familiarity with certain social norms. Interviewed Chief Aqil said:

The campaign is full of politics...your opponents will try to tarnish your image. When dealing with a female candidate, your image is at risk because, for example, you will tell her to bring money to buy in some political brokers who are against her. Then you pay them, but you may not win all of them since they are also getting money from other candidates. When the women candidate sees those she paid still campaigning for her opponents, she will get upset, she won't understand, and she will say I gave him money to buy them in, how did he spend the money? When opponents hear the accusation, they will use it against you by spreading rumours that you ate her money! During the campaign, the gatekeepers working for candidates need to carry cash in their cars and move around the kinship areas. Once they see a village that is a stronghold for another candidate and party, they should be able to pay the gatekeepers to replace the rival candidate's posters or party's flags with their preferred candidate's posters. However, women candidates do not trust political brokers. It is difficult to campaign for women candidates.⁸¹

Interviewed male candidate said,

The gatekeepers transact voters as a commodity! They will tell you that they have 400 voters in a certain area, and they demand 50,000 SoShs [\$5] per voter if you have to get them. Once you send the money and travel to the area, you will find that they only had less than 100 voters, but you cannot confront them, we ignore them, but women may confront them and lose the 100 voters. If one is not patient, the whole mobilization system will collapse.⁸²

Interviewed male candidates, and informants from the political parties stated that women candidates were spending less money than the male candidates during the campaign. This has, in part, contributed to women's failure to attract enough votes to win seats. Interviewed female candidates accepted that they spent less money compared to male candidates and provided

⁸⁰ Interview, *Chief Caqil, Berbera*, 17 September 2021

⁸¹ Interview, *Chief Caqil, Berbera*, 17 September 2021

⁸² Interview, *male candidate for the LC, Berbea*, 16 September 2021

three justifications. One, ‘self-doubt’ in their chance of winning due to perceived electoral irregularities and lack of commitment from kinship gatekeepers and voters. Two, their limited funds since they did not get financial support from kinship members and businesspeople who provide financial support to some of the male candidates during the election. Three, their limited trust with kinship political brokers and gatekeepers whom whose accountability they were not happy with. The below case study is a classic example of a female candidate’s campaign spending:

It is true that my spending during the campaign was limited compared to the male candidates I spoke to or heard from. My lack of trust in the election system and lack of support from the kinship group and kinship businesspeople have contributed to my lower spending compared to the male candidate. I budgeted \$70,000 for the elections, and I spent \$90,000. This was largely personal finance; the only financial support I received was from my close kinship, who fundraised well. When you have a budget, you cannot just exceed the limit, and you cannot be blamed for that. I had money, and I could raise money, but the question is if it is worth it? Because I did not have full trust in the process! I know some male candidates who spent between \$200,000-\$300,000. Some spent more than that; the election was very costly. However, some male candidates got financial support from the wider clan, friends, and businesspeople. Even in the periphery areas such as Lasanod, I met someone who said the election cost him \$300,000. I later met with businessmen who told me how they donated thousands of dollars so that their favoured male candidates won, how they used the money to get leverages over those candidates who did not have money. I was shocked to know how the businesspeople donated money to candidates and I did not receive a coin from businessmen. This could influence spending between (some) male and female candidates, and once you do not spend a lot of money, those who spend more money will get the votes because even the voting is just transactional. The whole electoral circle is transactional, and it is getting more transactional by the day. This transactional electoral circle does not favour women and some men who are not part of the transactions because of how much money will you raise to buy votes.⁸³

One female candidate for Borama LC recounted that she spent \$15,000 for her campaign and confirmed that she could get the commitment of gatekeepers/political brokers and voters if she had money to spend.⁸⁴ A male candidate for the LC in Berbera recounted that he spent \$300,000 for the election of which \$70,000 was spent on the election day and the day before the election.⁸⁵

⁸³ Interview, *women candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁸⁴ Interview, *women candidate*, Borama, 12 September 2021

⁸⁵ Interview, *male candidate*, Berbera, 16 November 2021

4.6. “We have a male candidate”: inherent bias against female candidates

One major challenge that faced female candidates was the inherent bias of male candidates. All the factors explained above have contributed to bias against female candidates. The ‘we have male candidates’ was specifically a challenge to most female candidates who had a male competitor from the kinship. In instances where a male and female candidate were contesting for the same seat, the chance kinship political supported the male candidate was very high.

Interviewed women voters confirmed that they prioritised voting for ‘their’ male relatives over women candidates and provided several justifications for this. One, in the presence of relative male candidates: son, husband, father, cousin, uncle...they felt it was ‘their duty’ to their male relatives. One female candidate complained of low commitment from women from her clan during the campaign, *“I did not get the commitment of women from my clan. When I invited them for meeting, their turnout was low. At some point, I suspected if politics with the kinship was at play, and I started to meet women from every kinship group separately but that did not work either”*.⁸⁶

Two, women and youth, the largest group of voters, lack civic education and as a result kinship gatekeepers interpret for them that elections is about kinship/clan pride, *“we saw that every kinship group worked hard to have their male candidates become elected, then we also had to ensure our male candidates become elected and we forgot about women candidates”*.⁸⁷ A second woman said, *“honestly, I will not vote for a female candidate if a man from my clan is running for that same office. If I vote for the female candidate, then I am not supporting my family”*.⁸⁸ A young man in Dila recounted that *“I decided to vote for a female candidate because I heard that women leaders could improve service delivery. When I told my father that I would vote for a woman and not a man from my kinship, he [the father] was so close to kicking me out of the house. I decided to vote for women in the LC in Borama where I cast vote and to the male candidate preferred by the father for the HoR”*.⁸⁹

These quotes explicitly pinpoint the inherent bias of voters against female candidates. However, **the conduct of elite women and the few women leaders partly informs this bias.** One relevant question is who do elite women and women leaders represent? Do they represent women

⁸⁶ Interview, *women candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

⁸⁷ *Women focus group discussion*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁸⁸ *Women focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

⁸⁹ *Youth focus group discussion*, Dila, 13 September 2021

more widely? Their kinship? Or is women's leadership just an employment creation strategy for the individual women? These questions arise from the concern held by women discussants in Burao: “the female leaders don't meet with women groups or come back to their communities after their appointment or election. Therefore, when the relationships and the contributions of the few women's political leaders and representatives is low, there is no reason for women to prefer women candidates over men”.⁹⁰

4.7. Male competitors

Kinship male competitors were a barrier to women candidates in different ways. First, except for a few cases, most kinship groups with a female candidate also had a male candidate. The clans were thus divided and presented two different candidates to two parties. Commenting on this, a female candidate in Gabiley said,

*The committee of elders was divided, many of them were against me, and few of them were with me. Those against me were endorsing a male candidate whom they encouraged to run for the clan despite the fact that he was initially uninterested. They wanted him to contest for the ruling party. For a long time, my kinship group and ruling party leadership knew that I was interested in running as a candidate. The party accepted my file, and it could not accept a file of another candidate from the same kinship. The elders took his file to an opposition party. Then he divided kinship votes.*⁹¹

While some male candidates faced similar challenges, women candidates were more affected due to inherent bias against women. Interviewed informants opined that if political parties did not accept male candidates from the kinship groups that had a female candidate, many women would have been elected,

*It is the political parties that, in part, contributed to the failure of women candidates. Suppose political parties agree not to accept male candidates from kinship groups that have already presented the file of a female candidate in one of the other parties. In that case, many women candidates will get enough votes to win seats.*⁹²

Second, the ‘twin-candidates’ (*isku sidkanayaa*)- every HoR candidate had a twin candidate from the same kinship group for the LC- were also a barrier to women candidates. The twin candidates

⁹⁰ Women focus group, Burao, 19 September 2021

⁹¹ Interview, female candidate, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁹² Interview, political party leader, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021.

were sharing the election cost and reinforcing each other in the campaigning, but this did not happen for some of the women candidates. Some of the female candidates complained about a lack of the twin candidate's collaboration during the campaign. Among 10 female candidates who attended the findings validation meeting, only one candidate stated that her male twin candidate collaborated with her.

5. Assumptions about barriers to women's political participation that distort understanding

Analysis of desk research on barriers to women's political participation in Somaliland reveals several assumptions that affect the discussion. These assumptions hinder the pursuit of clear problem identification and can lead to ineffective programming and policy decisions. This section attempts to correct such assumptions.

5.1. Women's political participation or women participation in political leadership and representation?

Women's political participation has become a catchphrase for the civil society organizations in Somaliland. The research reviewed for this study adopted this catchphrase without defining it. In Somaliland, 46.6% of registered voters who collected their voting cards are female (LIEOM, 2021). Women also turn out in large numbers to vote and during the campaign (Jeffrey, 2016). Women, including those in the diaspora, play an active role in the mobilization of funds for the candidates. These activities indicate women's political participation. However, this is not translated into the election of women to political leadership and women representation. **This study suggests that discussion shifts from women's political participation, which does not seem to be the problem, to women's political leadership and representation.** This is important in order to define the problem more narrowly.

5.2. Religious leaders are against women's political leadership but have less influence on practice

In the desk-reviewed research, religious leaders are believed to be a major barrier to women's political participation. In principle, religious leaders are generally sensitive to Western culture and values, including democratisation and elections. Based on this, it was reported that they lobbied

against a quota for women and minorities. The findings from this study show **two reasons for this opposition: *Ikhtilad* – the concept of intermingling of male and female leaders/representatives in relation to Islamic values - is used by some religious leaders justify their opposition to women participation in political leadership and representation.** Commenting on the *Ikhtilad* reasoning, an interviewed local university lecturer said, “*women and men mix in daily life, there is Ikhtilad in the election circle, I do not understand why religious leaders are singling out Ikhtilad if women are elected or appointed for public offices, there is something else the religious leaders are not telling us and they just find religion as a justification since they know that many people will not question the religion*”.⁹³ Secondly, **religious leaders who participated in the discussions were in consensus that women cannot occupy top leadership in the country, i.e., the Office of the President, but they were divided on women leadership in positions other than the highest level.**

The position of religious leaders on Somaliland’s democratisation has shifted over time. According to one informant, in the early 2000s, when Somaliland transitioned to direct votes, many of the religious leaders were not pleased, but since then, they have divided into two groups. One group remains against democracy but does not want to openly oppose something that local people have accepted. The second group have accepted to participate in elections because they believe that people should elect their leaders.⁹⁴ A religious leader in Sheikh district who was against women’s political leadership and representation was asked why religious leaders did not openly oppose women candidates in the 2021 elections. He smiled and said, “*there is an Islamic principle on committing the lesser of two evils, we found that keeping quiet was a lesser evil than talking about it and creating a social disharmony*”.⁹⁵

A participant of the elders and religious leaders’ group discussion in Gabiley said, “*70% of the challenges women [face] to be elected or appointed emanate from the clan system, and only 30% from religion*”.⁹⁶ Similarly, a local university lecturer familiar with debates on women’s leadership in Islam also said, “*religion is not the main barrier; I would argue that its influence on voters’ behaviour is not more than 20%. It is the combination of the clan system, the absence of civic education and the socio-economic realities that combine to 80% to influence voters’ behaviour against women candidates*”.⁹⁷

⁹³ Interview, lecturer of a local university, Borama, 11 September 2021

⁹⁴ Interview (male), political parties, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021. Influential religious groups are Ikhwaan, Salafi and Al-Itisaam

⁹⁵ Focus group discussion, elders and religious leaders, Sheikh, 18 September

⁹⁶ Focus group discussion, elders and religious leaders, Gabiley, 18 September.

⁹⁷ Interview, local university lecturer, Borama, 11 September 2021.

Challenges that women face to participate in political leadership and representation are rooted in the clan system, but at the same time, the clan protects women candidates from criticism of non-kinship people, including religious leaders. When asked if religious leaders were a challenge to her candidacy, a female candidate said, “*no, they were not a challenge, no religious leader dared to criticise me because supporters from my kinship will not accept that...the religious leader knew this very well, and they kept quiet during the elections*”.⁹⁸ Another female candidate said, “*we women candidates were even wondering if the silence of religious leaders could be translated as a change of their position*”.⁹⁹ Answering on the question of religious leaders as a challenge to women’s political participation, a female candidate in Borama said, “*the religious leaders did not directly incite voters against me. The three most important challenges that I blame for the seat I lost are: the Somali tradition that does not encourage women’s leadership, the electoral commission whom I believe did not protect my votes, and the influential politicians from my kinship whom I believe had a role to incite voters against me and to steal my votes*”.¹⁰⁰

The findings show that religious leaders pose no direct challenge to women candidates [and by extension to women’s political participation]. The argument that religious leaders were not a challenge to women participation in public leadership and representation in the 2021 elections are based on two main factors. First, whether in agreement with women’s political leadership and representation or not, religious leaders opted for silence in the 2021 elections. They did not say women should not run for the elections. Two, religious leaders did not have the authority to endorse or not endorse female candidates.¹⁰¹

5.3. Not all male candidates get financial support from the kinship group, and finance is not necessarily a challenge to all women candidates

From the desk reviewed research, women’s lack of access to finance, including kinship support, has been constantly reported as one of the main barriers to women’s political participation. **Findings from this study show that, with few exceptions, both male and female candidates struggled to receive financial support from the larger kinship and were only able to get financial support from close kinship.** Interviewed female candidates for the HoR were no less financially capable than their male candidates as they budgeted and spent hundreds of thousands of US dollars on the elections. With a few exceptions, male and female candidates self-financed

⁹⁸ Interview, *female candidate*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

⁹⁹ Interview, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

¹⁰⁰ Interview, *female candidate*, Borama, 11 September 2021

¹⁰¹ Interview, *election officer*, Borama, 14 September 2021

their campaigns. An elder in Odweyne said: “*a candidate would approach us with the aim of informing us his intention of running for the kinship seat. I was a part of the process of selecting nominees. We will ask the nominee if he/ she has the financial budget to finance his elections. If he has the money to fund his candidacy, we will support him to represent the community.*”¹⁰² An informant in Erigavo said, “*the clan contributed about 20% of the campaign money, and the candidate needed to have 70-80% of the campaign money*”.¹⁰³

It is, however, true that women are far less likely to receive a financial contribution from the kinship since they are not in the clan insurance registry: “*women are not in the kinship clan registry, the female candidate I was supporting sold her land to raise funds for the election and did not receive a contribution from the kinship. Once we tried to ask for kinship financial support, they said she is a woman; this is what both her kinship group and the kinship she is married to would say*”.¹⁰⁴ This quote indicates that women candidates had assets/property to sell, which they may use instead of clan financial contributions.

6. Opportunities for women participation in political Leadership and representation

The complex and interwoven political, social, economic, and institutional challenges that limit women’s political leadership and representation may not disappear in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, there are some promising dynamics that are important to watch and may be leveraged to promote greater female political leadership and representation.

6.1. Increase in female access to education presents prospects of narrowing gender gap in the educated class

In the last decade, female access to education has increased in Somaliland, especially in urban areas. For example, out of 1,980 students who sat for their University of Hargeisa entry examination in October 2021, [1,035 were female](#). According to an interviewed political party leader, unlike in the past, the middle-income parents in urban areas have accepted that male and female children have equal rights to access education.¹⁰⁵ **Increased female access to education is likely to impact women’s political leadership and representation in the future in at least three ways. One,**

¹⁰² Elders focus group discussion, Odweyne, 22 September 2021

¹⁰³ Interview, *campaigner*, Erigavo, 23 September 2021

¹⁰⁴ Interview, *Chief Aqil*, Berbera, 17 September 2021

¹⁰⁵ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021

it will increase civic education among women. Two, it will narrow the gap between the male and female elite class who have political and leadership aspirations. Three, it will increase the number of employed women who have access to capital (social and financial).

However, some research participants were sceptical that women's increased access to education will be translated into an increase in women participation in political leadership and representation. For example, a senior political party leader said, *"I do not think that women's increased access to education will be translated to greater political participation. Let us ask ourselves, where do educated women end up? Most of them do not climb up the professional and political ladder. Women do not want to make family and personal sacrifices; their priority is the family"*.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, a local university lecturer in Borma said, *"access to education may not automatically lead to increase in women's participation in political leadership and representation, gender roles are socially constructed, and for education to make an impact, there must be a civic education [such as awareness raising about the rights and responsibilities. Many citizens do not know the rights as voters, their right to leaders, even their right to the country and the right of women], not just formal education. Because many of my learned colleagues are against women's participation in political leadership and representation"*.¹⁰⁷

6.2. Increase in women candidates and votes for them

Despite challenges, the 2021 elections indicated gradual acceptance of women candidates.

The total votes of women candidates for the HoR was (3.5%) compared to 1.7% in the 2005 HoR elections (Table 4). Secondary data analysis shows that three women candidates for the HoR could have won seats if they were flag bearers for a smaller party or contested in the regions outside the capital.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, according to the official election results upheld by the supreme court, Su'ad Ibrahim, Waris Dhobale, and Su'ad Amriye had more votes than 47, 40 and 11 elected MPs, respectively.

Table 2: comparison of the percentage of votes for women candidates in 2005 and 2021 elections

Region	2005 Women %	2021 Women % of votes
Awdal	2.6%	1.8%
Marodijeex	3.5%	3.0%

¹⁰⁶ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 10 September 2021

¹⁰⁷ Interview, *local university lecturer*, Borama, 11 September 2021

¹⁰⁸ Su'ad Ibrahim, Zamzam and Su'ad Amriye

Saaxil (mligo)	0.6%	14.6%
Sanaag	0.0%	3.6%
Sool	0.0%	2.0%
Togdheer	1.6%	0.8%
National	1.7%	3.5%

Source: analysis of secondary data

Several factors, mainly demographic changes since the last parliamentary election in 2005, could have contributed to the increase in the percentage of votes for women candidates in the 2021 elections. One, the 2005 election was the first parliamentary election in Somaliland after 1991, and the awareness of voters and women candidates was low. Two, in the 2021 election, the number of female candidates has increased compared to the 2005 elections which has contributed to the aggregate of women votes. Three, the profile of women candidates has also increased in this election as there were several women candidates who built a successful career in the civil society for the last two decades. Four, it has been sixteen years since the 2005 election, since then the voters' demographics has changed in terms of age composition, awareness, education, and access to information. Five, some of the women candidates who attracted higher votes such as the aforementioned Waris and Suad were the sole candidates for their kinship group and had received undivided endorsement of their elders. Six, increase of young voters in the major urban settlements who voted across clan lines may have had an impact, along with significant increases in girls' access to education in urban settlements since 2005.

The factors contributing to the votes that women candidates had received vary across regions, kinship groups and individual candidates. Nevertheless, there were three related factors that interviewed women candidates emphasised as having contributed to their votes. These were contributions to the community projects such as development projects or emergencies, kinship support, and social capital. Informants in Borama district where two women had previously been elected (one of the two women MPs in 2005 and a female local councillor in 2012) also stressed similar factors that they believed had contributed to the election of the women candidates. This report draws on the experience of Four female candidates, one for the LC and three for the HoR, to examine what has worked for women candidates. Their cases were elected because they represented different realities and were among women who attracted the highest votes. Two of them are on the HoR reserve list.

The first female candidate is Nimo, who contested as a local councillor in the Gabiley district. Her case reveals that by being active in the social and political spheres, women candidates can overcome some election challenges, such as the lack of Chief Aqil's endorsement. In her own account:

Before the election, I was known in Gabiley. I had worked as a health worker at the hospital for many years. I also had social media presence and was an active ruling party supporter in the Gabiley district. In his last visit, the President addressed the public, and he noted my contributions to the party. He also stated that he heard my political aspirations and assured party support for me. When the time came to register for the local council, I had faced challenges from the elders of my kinship, especially the Chief Aqil, who vowed that he would not endorse me. He endorsed a male candidate, but the party and the community supported me. For my kinship group, I was the flag bearer for the ruling party for the LC elections in Gabiley. Chief Aqil failed to register his preferred male candidate in the ruling party, and he finally registered him in the opposition party. I had the support of many voters. I lost with marginal votes because my kinship vote got divided.¹⁰⁹

The second female candidate is Waris, who contested for the HoR in the Maroodijeeh region and received 3,753 votes. Waris was among the few women candidates who did not complain about her kinship group political gatekeepers. Her case reveals that women candidates can get buy-in from the kinship gatekeepers if they engage in contributions within the kinship group. In her account:

I had the full endorsement of my kinship group, for whom I was their sole candidate for the HoR. Before the elections, I used to be very active within the kinship group. I sponsored over 50 students to get scholarships, played an active role in youth employment and built community projects such as schools. I was active during the drought by distributing food and water to the affected pastoral communities. Because of my previous track record, my kinship group fully supported me. I had a harmonious relationship with the elders and gatekeepers. My twin candidate for the local council collaborated with me, and our election billboards had our two photos. I am not complaining about my kinship group; I lost because of election irregularities.¹¹⁰

The third female candidate is Su'ad Ibrahim, who contested for the HoR in the Maroodijeeh region and received 4,229 votes, the highest for women candidates. Her case reveals that her professional career helped her as she received support from educated and professional youth. In her account:

¹⁰⁹ Interview, *female candidate*, Gabiley, 9 September 2021

¹¹⁰ Notes from findings validation meeting, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 12 November 2021

I have over two decades of professional experience in civil society. I was also the sole candidate for my kinship group. Although I did not get the full breakdown of my votes per polling station, the evidence shows that I received most of the votes from my kinship stronghold areas in the Maroodijeeb region. Though I later faced some challenges from my kinship group's political brokers, I received a good support from educated and professional youth, both genders, who tirelessly contributed to my campaign.¹¹¹

The fourth female candidate is Suaad Armiye, who contested for the HoR in the Sahil region and received 2,611 votes, the highest votes for a female candidate in the Sahil region. Her case reveals the importance of social capital outside the kinship group. In her own account:

I had challenges, including voter card boarding and challenges from the kinship male candidates. However, I will not forget the moral and financial support I had received support from my social network, mainly men without whom I could not do much!¹¹²

Views on women's political leadership have gendered, geographic and generational dimensions. Geographically, some areas have been more conservative than others. This is, in part, has been influenced by social trajectories. For example, as argued by an interviewed party leader “clans or geographic areas that have never been represented by women are more conservative than clans and geographic areas that have been represented by women”.¹¹³ However, findings from Gabiley, a district that had female mayor, show that the views on female leadership are gendered. It was the only district where participants in the traditional and religious leaders group discussion unanimously believed that women cannot become leaders. Women participants believed that service delivery increased during the tenure of the female mayor, but elders were unhappy and lobbied against the female candidate. Surprisingly, there was no substantial difference in the views of informants in urban and peri-urban areas neither in the eastern and western regions. Arguably, the informants' positive views towards female political leadership have not been translated into more female participation in political leadership because the denominator factor was the negative influence of gatekeepers, political brokers and electoral processes.

¹¹¹ Notes from findings validation meeting, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 12 November 2021

¹¹² Notes from findings validation meeting, *female candidate*, Hargeisa, 12 November 2021

¹¹³ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 9 September 2021.

6.3. Youth voters and the prospects of changing behaviour

Immediate change of the role of traditional elders in politics (elections and appointment) is unlikely, and continuation of elders' role does not favour greater women participation in political leadership and representation. In the 2021 combined elections, the voting results of two candidates who broke away from the traditional clan-based voting strategies have excited those concerned with low women's participation in political leadership and representation. This was interpreted as a shift away from clan-based voting among certain social groups such as the youth. Commenting on this political party informant said, *“there was a time when the clan was centre to political leadership, but the case of the current Mayor of Hargeisa and the minority MP shows that people are moving away from being under the influence of clan when voting. The young generation is moving away from clan-based voting...so there is a hope for increased women's political leadership”*.¹¹⁴

Most of the researcher participants were, however, less optimistic and stressed that the two cases should be treated in isolation and should not be interpreted as a change in the clan-based voting system. They provided two reasons for this: one, the combination of 40,000 votes the two 'progressive' candidates received is a fraction of the total votes of the youth in the country. Two, while clannism is less important to youth (below 30 years) compared to the older generation, it becomes increasingly important to them as their age advances, especially men, who find themselves increasingly in need clan protection, insurance and support for themselves, their families, business, and political careers. Commenting on this, a political party informant said,

*Somaliland clans have two systems; those in the eastern regions register male kids upon birth and require them to pay blood compensation, while in the west, male members are registered once they get married and are required to pay blood compensation. While both systems have advantages and disadvantages in reinforcing clan identity, it is true that as the age of men advances they become more dependent on the clan for protection and insurance. For example, I was not familiar with clan 10 years ago because I did not need it, [but] I am familiar and need it today. It is the need for protection and insurance that makes me closer to the clan, and children may not need these two now and but as they grow older, they will need it.*¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021.

¹¹⁵ Interview, *political party leader*, Hargeisa, 8 September 2021.

7. Conclusion and discussion

The challenges to women's political leadership and representation are complex, interwoven and range from social, economic, political, traditional, and individual. Breaking with these challenges would require time and concerted effort. Kinship gatekeepers and political brokers are the main barriers to women's political leadership and representation. This is reinforced by the clan-centric, asymmetrical and clientelism system of governance in Somaliland. Key local stakeholders promote women's political participation to achieve their goals but at the same limit women's political leadership and representation. While there are prospects for increased women's political leadership, including the fact that women candidates attracted higher votes compared to the previous elections, the failure of women candidates may have negative implication for women leadership in the future as kinship political brokers and political parties may use the poor election results of women as an excuse to not endorse or nominate women candidates.

Previous studies emphasized that religious leaders and the lack of women candidates' access to finance (kinship contributions and capital) are main barriers to women's participation in political leadership and representation. The findings from this study show that while religious leaders lobbied against the women's quota, research participants including women candidates themselves were in consensus that religious leaders did not openly preach against women candidates, nor did they significantly influence voters' behaviour. Moreover, this study discussed in detail the key actors such as political parties, political brokers, and electoral commission processes that had been underreported or analysed in previous studies. The following recommendations build on this analysis and have been validated during a meeting held for 10 women candidates in Hargeisa:

8. Recommendations

The recommendations are informed by the study findings and analysis and has been proposed for the key stakeholders, including legislative bodies, political parties, national electoral commission (NEC), international partners, government, and the civil society organisations (CSOs).

8.1. Political parties

- Should adopt a **voluntary quota** whereby each party ensures that the list of candidates it submits to the electoral commission has a minimum of 15-30% women candidates.

- Should raise awareness of women's political leadership by **including women in the party leadership** (*bogaanka xisbiga*) and giving women platforms to get public presence.
- Introduce **intra-party women's groups** that closely work with different stakeholders

8.2. Government

- A **national civic education strategy** is needed so that citizens become aware of their rights and obligations. This is important to promote and sustain good governance, democracy and women's participation in political leadership and representation.

8.3. Legislative institutions

- The existing electoral laws should be amended to **guarantee a legal quota for women at all electoral levels**. Since timing is important, the debates and discussion on quota should start early.
- Undertake a **broad stakeholders' consultation** and discussion regarding the barriers to women's political representation that stems from the current electoral system (**open list**). Considerations should be given to a **closed list** or **hybrid system**.
- Electoral reforms should aim at **de-clanising the elections**. The deeply clan-centric system of elections is a major barrier to women's political representation. One way to achieve election de-clanisation is to **shift from the current multi-member district/regional to a single-member constituency-based system**.
- The House of Representatives should establish **women's political participation coccus** that promotes and sponsors women related bills and initiatives.

8.4. National Electoral Commission

- Accessibility of voters to the polling and registration centres is a major challenge, especially for women. To **increase accessibility to polling and registration centres**, the mobility of the pastoralist communities should be taken into account. In addition, the voter registration period should be prolonged.
- A **comprehensive and sustained voter education programme** that targets women and voters in rural and peri-urban areas where access to information is limited should occur.
- The commission should **increase the transparency of the electoral process**, including voter tallying, complaint mechanism and procedures, and timely publish polling station-

level results. In addition, **the result management system should be verifiable and auditable.**

- NEC should **promote women's participation in the electoral processes** as voters, observers, candidates, election administrators and party agents.
- NEC should **enforce electoral laws that promote women's political participation**, by implementing code of conducts such as the voluntary quota .

8.5. Women with political ambitions

- To create a public presence and grassroots support, women with political ambition should **be active in community initiatives and build their social capital within the kinship groups** so that they do not become new faces during the elections.
- Should announce their political aspirations early and lobby among political brokers and gatekeepers. Should be active in clan conferences, and build a relationship with Chief Aqils.
- **Should address the concern of lack of access held by the kinship gatekeepers and political brokers.**
- Women candidates should appeal to voters, including youth and women, through town halls, social media, and face-to-face engagements.
- Women should have active and sustained pressure groups

8.6. International partners

Following recommendations are the perception of the research participants and have been validated during the NPGM meeting held in Hargeisa:

- Donor programmes promoting women's participation in political leadership and representation **should be long-term, result-oriented, and timely.**
- Should **go beyond the civic society organisations and work with intra-party women's groups and the parliamentary women's political participation caucus.**
- Should **support women candidates to organise town halls** in their respective electoral constituencies or return to their communities.
- Should **promote local ownership of women's political participation interventions** so that sensitivities towards the role of donors in women's political participation is reduced.

8.7. Civil society organisation

- Women's political participation should not be a cash cow for civil society organisations. A cadre of civil society actors that meaningfully and ideologically engages in civil activism is needed.
- Women's political participation is limited to major urban centres; it should be decentralised to reach out to people in the rural and peri-urban areas of the country.
- Expand the number of CSO partners that donors collaborate within the regions and districts so that a few CSOs do not become gatekeepers and beneficiaries of donor resources.
- Conduct a study on the cost-benefit analysis of the role of civil society organisations in women's political participation.

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