



Somaliland: Obstacles to Women Candidates in 2021 Elections

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In this briefing, CPA will highlight the major challenges women candidates facing in Somaliland's 2021 combined parliamentary and local council elections, with possible recommendations on supporting women candidates to win more seats in both parliamentary and local councils.

Introduction:

The conversation surrounding women's political participation is at an all-time high, with civil society organizations, interested stakeholders, and the central government all clamoring to have their piece heard. The narrative is startlingly the same, "women deserve more seats at the table", "women are severely unrepresented", "women deserve more", but actions speak louder, and that remains a rarity yet to be seen.

During Election Campaigns, the majority of the voters are women, and surprisingly all male-dominated political parties target to attract women voters. They include their political programs to increase women's political participation, and sometimes they sign commitment letters of 30% voluntary quota for women in their executive branch if they win. But after elections, they forget all those promises. In practice, women remain underrepresented in all public offices, including the executive branch and elected offices.

Somaliland's combined parliamentary and local councils' elections are scheduled to happen on 31st May of 2021. Even though the Candidates list is not final, CPA found that there are only 13 women candidates for the parliamentary seats out of the 246 candidates. And 14 female candidates for the local elections out of the 650+ candidates. The expected total candidates of Somaliland combined elections from the three political parties were 993 candidates, but some of the Electoral districts have no candidates for different reasons.

Currently, there is only a one-woman MP out of 82 members in the Somaliland House of Representatives. and 0 women MP in the House of Elders. And 10 women local councilors out of 323 local councilors. Thus, women running for parliamentary and local councils are facing major challenges in this stage before the election date. However, some assumptions say most voters are women, and the question is, why are they not voting for them?

I. Clan Politics System:

To get an answer to that question, we interviewed several women. One of the reasons is because the direction of the votes are predetermined some time ago, and household heads which mainly are men, instruct the women whom to vote for, and of course, it is clan-based voting. During the interview group discussion, a woman said, “my father told me whom I am voting for; that was how I voted for my sub-clan candidate for the last local council election to a man from my sub-clan”.

The most potent barrier to women’s political and leadership representation is the clan-politics system existing in the country. The sub-clan pressures and lack of support are reasons women give up on joining the participation in the early stages of their political ambition.

The subclan structure is very complicated. The clan money contribution (Qaadhaan) is what the clan elders collect from the men clan members, and that is how the subclan associations govern their problems and prosperities. Hence, the Somali culture is unique because they often do not ask for money for women, which applies to the women candidates. Therefore, it is hard to be active in this complicated system, considering that the clan system is not an officially vetted legal system/institution; it acts more as a hindrance towards Somaliland politics democratization because it disregards half of the population and leaves them unrepresented.

The patriarchal disposition of clan elders is also a problem that remains unaddressed even though clan leadership is the greatest tool for political platforms causing a wide disparity amongst male political candidates and female political candidates. A man has an instant advantage, regardless of political prowess, education, or monetary background.

2. Political Parties:

The political parties play a significant role in promoting democracy, and they are the main institutions controlling women's access to run for offices. Women are absent from the leadership of the political parties; that is where the gap is starting. They prefer winning seats.

The Political parties are the factory that produces the leaders and politicians, but they became more male-dominated parties. For example, the three political parties have Chairpersons and many deputies, Secretary-General, and Central Committee Chairperson. All these positions are filled by males, except the fifth Deputy Chairperson of Wadani Party, which is a woman. That picture shows how the decision-making position of the Political parties is male dominated.

On September 3rd, 2020, the three political parties of Somaliland signed an internal agreement to promote women's participation in the upcoming parliamentary and local council elections. They developed a voluntary quota for each political party to have six female parliamentary Candidates. According to the preliminary data, only the UCID Political Party has six female parliamentary candidates, while **Kulmiye** has four female candidates and **Wadani** has three female candidates.

The political party's internal agreement (voluntary quota) is not enough, and it needs to make sure the representation of women in the house of representatives. The reliance on the clan elders to select the candidates births a further issue citing the points above. However, this creates a leeway for the political parties to disregard accountability and create a bounce back and forth effect, hence washing all responsibility off their hands, allowing the undermining of politically ambitious women and announced female candidates.

CPA commends the efforts of the parties and the government, especially the waiving of registration fees for women candidates and minority communities.

3. Financial Barriers:

Somaliland election campaigns are expensive compared to the national GDP and rely mainly on the private sector. Both the required registration fees of candidates and the campaign finances are doubling year by year. Marginalized voices, including women, youth, and minority groups, cannot meet those financial requirements. That is creating a political class where the only wealthy politicians are eligible to be candidates.

According to the newly approved Election Law (Law No. 91/2020), if you are a university graduate and have a dream to serve your community or nation, and you want to be a candidate for the local councils of the Capital City of Hargeisa, you must pay a registration fee of 15,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$1,764) with other filling expenses in the political party. Also, you are required to have property or wealth. wealth¹. Simultaneously, the House of Representative candidates' registration fee is 40,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$4,705). The Registration fee of the Presidential Candidates is 150,000,000 Somaliland Shilling (\$17,647).

These expenses are only the registration fees, but other costs are more than the registration fees, including the campaign expenses, Media, party registration fees, etc. According to CPA's 2018 report of the 2017 Presidential Campaign Finance Report, more than \$54 million were used in the 2017 Elections.

Since the required registration fees and other financial expenses for the campaign are extremely high, women and other marginalized voices cannot cover these expenses. Because It created something that only the wealthy

¹ Article 81(10) Law No. 91/2020

politicians would be able to cover, which is why the number of female candidates in this combined election is meager.

4. Election Laws:

Only one woman is among the 164 members of the parliament. Most of the laws that the two Houses pass are male favored. One of the best examples is that the House of Representatives rejected several times to approve a quota for Women and Minority groups. That is why it is imperative to encourage and support women's participation in the upcoming parliamentary and local council election.

5. Campaigning Efforts:

The Somaliland election campaign module is different from most countries in the world. It is tribal based, not based on candidates' ideology requiring that women candidates go back again to the tribal line and understand all the subclan structures and earn the favor of their respective clan leader. After that process, the result can be to face rejection, misplaced, shaming, and waste a considerable amount of time, money, and energy trying to persuade their clan counterparts even to consider their candidacy.

On the other hand, the clan leaders are pre-selecting and supporting male candidates, even if their education and moral ethics are not the required standard to represent that clan. The traditional leaders in the sub-clan are starting to campaign against him and telling the clan members that this is their candidate. Thus, women candidates need more time and resources to use their campaign to influence their constituencies' voters. They are not contesting their opponent candidates only, but other powerful voices against women's participation in decision-making offices.

6. Voters Engagement:

Women engaging with their voters is another obstacle that needs to be addressed because the clan leaders are the voters' gatekeepers. Already the traditional leaders prefer a male representation in their clan. Clan-based Voters prefer to vote for less qualified men rather than women competent because of their clan affiliation. But there are a youth generation and women voters who have less affiliation with their traditional leaders.

The youth generations and women voters need huge coordination, finance, and campaign strategy to unite their voices to counter the clan-based political system. That is why it is very important to financially support the female candidates to organize those women and youth voters, who are the majority of the population.

7. Media Coverage:

The world is struggling with the COVID19 Pandemic. The public gathering is minimal, and most of the candidates are using both traditional and social media to reach the registered voters to sell their political agenda. The owners and most of the media houses' leading staff are male, and women's and youth programs are not on their priority list, except news or event-based programs. On the other hand, the cost of the media house programs is extremely high, which causes that women candidates are not able sometimes to cover the media expenses.

Women are disconnected from the political side of media and often are engaged in debates that do not correlate with their political ambitions or even try to convince the larger public why women deserve a seat at the table but are mostly met with disdain. Media houses do less to shelter women candidates from these unfortunate situations because they receive higher viewership percentages and channel traffic.

In conclusion, throughout the electoral cycle, women will face huge challenges in convincing their voters and exercising their constitutional rights to vote and to be elected.

Recommendations/The Way Forward:

It is important to have more women in decision making offices, particularly the elected offices. To achieve that, here are the recommendations:

1. Since the Political Parties are the factory that produces the politicians and leaders, it is important to include their leadership positions with women.
2. Thanks to the International Partners to support the Somaliland Democratization Process, but it is the time to evaluate how their funding supported women's political participation, particularly to directly support women candidates from the campaign finance expenses.
3. Somaliland Election Laws are creating financial barriers to the marginalized groups including women, also, the election laws are not supporting inclusive politics since the Quota for Women and Minority Groups excluded the Election Laws and did not include any alternative. We are calling the Election stakeholders including the Government, the Political Parties and Parliament that women voices are listened to during the drafting of any election law and to include them suggests to support inclusive politics.

About CPA

CPA was established to help the countries of Horn of Africa region to build, peace, democracy, human rights and effective governance systems where all citizens are equal. CPA is based in Hargeisa, the Capital of the Republic of Somaliland. CPA is a member of Independent Civil Society Organizations Coalition (ISCO) and is Currently the secretariat of ISCO Somaliland, coordinating 15 civil society organisations based across all the regions of Somaliland.

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