

Women and elections in Somalia: 2021/22

“Reliving the Experiences”



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Foreword

“Reliving the Experiences” is a collection of profiles and voices of women traditionally marginalised in politics sharing their experiences of Somali women’s participation and representation in elections. This photo book illustrates that the drive for gender equality is important to women and Somali society. It records a wide range of challenges that women face in making their voices heard and looks at policy changes and attitudes to promote the inclusion of women in decision-making processes.

“Reliving the Experiences” highlights the journeys, challenges, and aspirations of Somali women. Beyond seeing this condensed profile as a “medium” to broadcast voices of women advocating for participation and representation, the booklet is a contribution towards supporting and appreciating the work that has been, and that needs to be done, to promote women’s political participation. The stories and interviews collected in this photobook have been compiled from interviews with current and former women parliamentarians and aspiring candidates for the 2021/22 elections. We hope you will find these stories inspiring.



Background

The civil war that broke out in 1991 transformed Somali society in profound ways, transforming the role of both men and women. This included the expansion of the responsibilities of women in society as well as women actively participating and seeking inclusion in the rebuilding of the state.

The introduction of the 4.5 power-sharing electoral system introduced in 2000 did not assist in contributing to the inclusion of women as it was based on clans, giving clan elders unlimited power to determine who could represent the clan. Because of its patriarchal nature, clans tended to prioritise male representation. The influential role of the elders meant that women's pursuit of political participation and representation remains an insurmountable challenge.

During the 2021/2022 indirect elections, the 30% women's quota was agreed upon by the National Consultative Council (NCC). However, consideration was not sufficiently given as to how women's participation could be effected. However, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, civil society organisations, and other institutions such as the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) made numerous efforts to ensure the promotion and implementation of the women's quota. During the 2012 indirect elections, women only achieved 14% of the seats and in 2016 saw an increase to 24% in the indirect election. In the 2021/2022 indirect elections, women's representation declined to 20% in parliament.

This photobook examines the challenges and opportunities that women candidates and politicians encountered as they strived for participation and inclusion in the process. The photobook further looks at the opportunities and challenges that women faced in running for office.

In discussing these challenges, this booklet builds on interviews with women who contested the 2021/22 parliamentary elections. Some were elected and others could not make it due to various obstacles.



Interviews



**Faisa Mohamed
Jeyte**



**Amina Hussein
Ali**



**Dega Hassan
Hussein**



**Mariam Mohamed
Hussein**



**Hodan Abdi
Shire**



Hani Abdi Gas



What are the lessons learned from the indirect election?





**Mariam Mohamed
Hussein**

Mariam Mohamed Hussein, former MP of the Somali 10th parliament, failed to secure a seat in the 2022 elections, now a deputy Minister of Health.

I was among the MPs elected in Adado in 2016, whose term terminated in 2022. I learnt many lessons on how things went about during the elections, for example, the discrimination against women candidates and the misallocation of seats meant for women at the clan level. I got the seat through women's quota in the 2016 election, since an agreement made during that time underlined that clans with at least three seats should allocate one of the seats to women.

In 2022, to avoid being contested, women's seats were reversed, and my seat was changed to male and the other female, on the other side the contest was not open, it was restrained and I got no chance to contest. In terms of the challenges, women had many challenges and one of them is the culture. Somali culture is based on clans, and this has led to a lack of equality between men and women when it comes to political representation. There is a clan perception that the boy is good at representation than the girl. Likewise, no electoral laws or provisions were respected. The federal member states administration managed the election and secured seats for whomever they wanted and there were no guidelines to protect women's seats

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**Hodan Abdi
Shire**

Hodan Abdi Shire,
a candidate for the
Lower house elected
from Galmudug state.

The seat I was running for was reserved for women, but nothing was changed in the elections agreements to make sure women's seats are protected. One of the things I learned is that although women were supported by the government and the electoral committees, they failed to get seats because only men selected seats. The traditional elders and clan leaders did not give chance to women, politicians also had the same attitude. There was also a view reinforcing that women should stay in their homes and that further discriminated against women aspiring candidates.

The very fact that you are a woman in leadership is still not socially accepted because the optics out there are that when people see an MP or a president, they see a man

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Hani Abdi Gas

Hani Abdi Gas, a young candidate, contested in the Galmudug state and could not win the seat

Joining the Parliament is not so easy, to aspire as a woman a parliamentary seat is challenging, you go into an election campaign, you knock on every door, contesting in the elections is sometimes challenging to the women because the indirect election system is disappointing to the women due to the clan, politicians and traditional elders' attitudes that do not support gender equality. The election was based on favouritism and manipulation. We have learned from what happened that 2021/2022 cannot be described as an election and will be an obstacle to women's participation in government.

Somali women are politically discriminated and most of them are not allowed to have leadership ambitions even if they are educated. If they want to step forward, their legs are tied so that they cannot smoothly step forward.

Somali women are challenged by culture and our culture is stronger than the religion. I believe as women, we are the backbone of the nation and can take part in state building but we don't have the opportunity, we are more active than men in many jobs. There are more males than females (in politics). For you to be heard, you need to interact a lot with men and in most cases, people misconstrue your aims or intentions.

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**Amina Hussein
Ali**

Amina Hussein Ali is currently a member of the 11th Parliament and elected from the Jubbaland state and a former member of the Somali women's union officials.

Elections are different every year. In 2016, seats were administered by the clan that owned the seat. For the 2021/22 elections regional administrations took the role and had a lot of influence. There were many challenges in the 2022 election, including that there was no system and compliance with what was agreed upon to ensure women's representation. Politicians did not want women to have important positions in society such as in parliament.

On the other hand, I felt that women had no access, at first, we thought that its financial reasons as was the case in 2016, but in 2021/22, one did not need money since one only needed the support of the regional administrations. Consequently, some state administrations blocked the women and not the clans they hail from.

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**Faisa Mohamed
Jeyte**

Faisa Mohamed Jeyte, currently a member of the 11th Parliament from Galmudug, is a former advocate in the Somali judiciary and an advocate for women's rights.

"I was elected from Galmudug and worked hard for three years to represent the community I come from. One of the things I learned from the election was that a candidate needed more effort because the election process was very difficult and long and there was no respect for the agreements made.

The efforts I made were important, all of this was since everyone is from Allah, if it is intended for you to receive it, if Allah decrees you, you'll get it. That is the reason, if you believe in that, you should strive hard, your chances of success are 90%-95%. When you lose it is fate.

One of the challenges that women faced is the Somali culture that rejects women in general, without looking at the advantages and disadvantages. The system is based on ignorance and tribal beliefs. The second problem is the lack of connection between men and women. There are no groups for women. Men help each other, let us help each other as women through networks or help each other with money. Women don't have support and they don't give each other support either".

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**Deqa Hassan
Hussein**

Deeqa Hassan Hussein, from Somaliland, was a senator in the 10th and 11th Somali parliament.

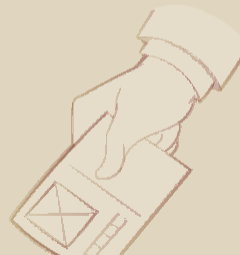
"It is the second time I ran for the indirect election. The indirect election does not give much choice to the candidate. The choice is made by specific people, the state president, or a traditional elder, so the burden is huge, and the will belongs to those with influence.

Women have no resources, especially when they want to start campaigning for political offices, so parliament should pass laws that promote and empower women while giving them equal opportunities. In the two elections of 2016 and 2021, the two elections that I contested, in 2016, there were very few women who sought the seat, but in 2021 many women wanted to participate and were motivated and educated, but in terms of finances they could not contest for the seats because of the indirect election in which you needed to pay money. It was an election that required one to have sufficient financial support. Therefore, most challenges were based on financial grounds."

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Women Candidates: “In their own words”

What are your suggestions
to enhance women’s
participation in politics?





MARIAM MOHAMED HUSSEIN

Mariam Mohamed Hussein, former MP of the Somali 10th parliament, failed to secure a seat in the 2022 elections, now a deputy Minister of Health.

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“I would advise women first to unite and decide their destiny. I say to the women, don't be discouraged and move forward, don't get tired. I would also recommend that gender equality awareness be raised. I think women should be united and give votes to each other. Community leaders should put the interest of the women before the clan. The media reinforces society's traditional views of women. Women are rarely portrayed in the media in positions of power or discussing political issues. On an individual level, this decreases women's interest and motivation to be politically aware; on a macro level, it contributes to lowering women's political participation”



HODAN ABDI SHIRE

Hodan Abdi Shire, member of the 11th Somali parliament from Galmudug state.

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“I would recommend that the federal government should empower Somali women, give a share to the women in the leadership, and start valuing female employees in the government before they reach the top positions. Women who graduate from universities should also be employed, when you look at the majority of female graduates, very few are given jobs in the ministers. According to their knowledge and skills, there are other issues, so it is necessary to build an organization that stands for advocacy, or a special body that supports women who are looking for jobs and politics and stands up to openly compete for the positions they have applied for, without strict conditions and all indirect activities are protected. In addition, women should find a department that protects women's rights in every institution. The Ministry of women should give importance to the creation of opportunities for women and there should also be a special office where women can submit their complaints when they face abuse. What I want to conclude is that women should unite and come together. Let the women in parliament advocate for women's rights.”

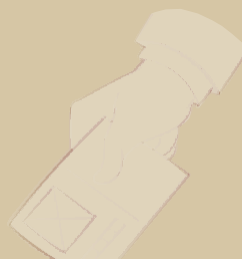


HANI ABDI GAS

Hani Abdi Gas, a young candidate, who contested in the Galmudug state, failed to win the seat in the 2022 elections,

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“I recommend that more economic opportunities must be created for Somali women. Women must have representation in the highest offices of the country such as the President and the office of the Prime Minister. I think women need to be well resourced because when we campaign, we find that men are better resourced than women. Men have that advantage over women. Giving women a chance is very good particularly the young women, to encourage intergenerational learning. I would add that, to increase the political awareness of women, training should be done for both women in the parliament and those who are outside”.





AMINA HUSSEIN ALI

Amina Hussein Ali, a member of parliament elected from the Jubbaland state, former Somali women's union official, and current chairperson of a group of women campaigning for women's quota. First time to be elected as a member of the federal parliament.

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“To overcome the challenges caused by the indirect election, the country should move to a party-based election, that brings one person-and-one vote process. And women should have representation in the political arena. In addition, the women should return to their constituencies and connect with the people they represent. I would recommend that Somali women come together with solidarity and unity so they can break the barriers that oppose them, for example, to combine ideas and advocate jointly with female ministers among them”.





FAISA MOHAMED JAYTE

Faisa Mohamed Jeyte, is a current member of the 11th parliament, a former lawyer in the Somali judiciary, and an advocate for human rights.

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DEQA HASSAN HUSSEIN

Deeqa Hassan Hussein is from Somaliland and a senator in the 10th and 11th parliament.

“In my opinion, considering the results of the two indirect elections (2016 and 2022), one person one vote election is inevitable. Women should make a strong campaign to claim their constitutional rights. Women constitute the largest part of Somali society, and I hope that if they support each other, they can get a wide representation”.



Summary recommendations from interviewed women.

Supporting aspiring women candidates' access to economic resources to ensure that women candidates have a good opportunity to be elected.

Training and mentoring in political campaign skills, fundraising, communication, and managing media.

Including the gender quota in the Constitution and the Electoral Law as the country Somalia moves towards one person one vote.

The gender quota must be in line with the Somali Women's Charter which provides for a 50% quota.

Capacity building of the Women's Caucus in the parliament to enhance their advocacy for women's issues.

Strengthening mechanisms for protecting women from harassment and abuse in electoral processes.