

UNVEILING OBSTACLES: GENDER INEQUALITY'S IMPACT ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE SOMALI FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

Sharmarke Abdullahi Yusuf, Abdinasir Abdullahi Mohamed Biyo and Mr Abdirahman Mohamed Dahie
Senior independent researchers

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is a significant barrier to women's political participation in Somalia. This paper examines the impact of gender inequality on women's political participation in the Somali Federal Government. The article begins by providing an overview of gender inequality in Somalia. It then discusses the specific barriers women face in politics, such as patriarchal cultural norms, lack of education and economic opportunities, and lack of political representation. The paper then examines the Somali Federal Government's efforts to address gender inequality and promote women's political participation. Finally, the report concludes with a discussion of recommendations for further action. The paper finds that gender inequality is a significant barrier to women's political participation in Somalia. The patriarchal cultural norms in Somali society discourage women from participating in politics, and women who do participate often face discrimination and violence. The lack of education and economic opportunities for women also makes it difficult for them to participate in politics. Finally, the need for more political representation for women in the Somali Federal Government means that women have little voice in the political process. The paper concludes with a discussion of recommendations for further action. These recommendations include strengthening the legal framework that protects women's rights and promotes gender equality, investing in education and economic opportunities, and promoting women's political participation through awareness-raising campaigns, training programs, and mentorship programs.

Keywords: Gender , Gender Inequality, Political Participation, Somali Federal Government, Women's Empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in Somalia has profound implications for political participation, hindering the empowerment and representation of women. The country's socio-political context and deep-rooted cultural norms present significant challenges for women seeking to engage in political processes.

The Somali Federal Government has taken steps to address gender inequality and promote women's political participation. In 2016, the government passed a law requiring 30% of parliamentary seats for women. However, this law has yet to be fully implemented, and women still face significant barriers to participating in politics.

This essay aims to explore the impact of gender inequality on political participation in Somalia, drawing on scholarly research and reports to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Background

According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, Somalia ranks low in gender equality indicators, with women facing substantial disparities in political representation and decision-making processes (UNDP, 2020). The limited presence of women in political institutions hampers their ability to influence policies and advocate for gender-sensitive reforms. Furthermore, a study by Ahmed and Mohamed (2019) highlights the pervasive influence of societal attitudes and cultural norms, restricting women's involvement in public life and reinforcing gender inequality in Somalia.

Women's representation in government is also affected by their ability to obtain a formal education. According to the findings of Abdi and Ahmed (2018), women and girls in Somalia face significant barriers to participation in political processes due to a lack of educational possibilities. The educational gender gap discourages girls and women from pursuing a political career due to discrimination, early marriage, and gender-based violence.

The law and institutional obstacles hamper women's participation in Somalia's political life. Comprehensive legal reforms are needed to defend women's rights and promote gender equality, as shown by the Women, Peace, and Security Index compiled by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security (GIWPS) (GIWPS, 2021). Laws and procedures are already in place to promote gender equality in the political sphere, but they are not being effectively enforced.

Violence against women is still a significant barrier to women's political representation. El-Bushra and Sahl's (2019) research shows that sexual harassment and intimidation are common forms of gender-based violence that discourage women from participating in public life and attaining political posts. The insecurity they feel due to the threat of violence prevents them from fully engaging in political processes.

Addressing gender inequality and promoting women's political participation in Somalia requires a multifaceted approach. This essay explores strategies, such as legal reforms, education and awareness programs, capacity building, institutional support, and engaging men and communities to foster an enabling environment for women's political empowerment.

Gender inequality is still a significant barrier to women entering politics in Africa. Agenda 2063, adopted by the African Union in 2015, recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as essential to sustainable development and sound administration. The Gender and Development Directorate of the African Union Commission seeks to increase women's representation in government. The African Union Commission (n.d.) keeps tabs on things like the African Women in Political Decision-Making Barometer to see how far things have come. Somalia can learn from regional initiatives and best practices by looking at continental efforts.

In Somalia, the Somali Federal Government's approach to gender equality and women's political participation is a crucial case study. The government has tried to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through legal reforms and policy initiatives. The Provisional Constitution of Somalia, adopted in 2012, includes provisions for gender equality and women's rights (Government of Somalia, 2012). Additionally, establishing the National Gender Policy in 2019 demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing gender disparities (Government of Somalia, 2019). Assessing the local context and examining the implementation of these measures provides insights into the challenges and progress made within Somalia.

By analyzing the impact of gender inequality on political participation in Somalia and examining potential solutions, this article aims to shed light on the importance of gender equality in building inclusive and democratic societies. Through concerted efforts, Somalia can overcome the barriers that hinder women's political engagement, harness their potential, and pave the way for a more equitable and representative political landscape.

Problem Statement.

Despite international efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, gender inequality remains deeply entrenched with significant political participation and governance implications, particularly in countries like Somalia. Within this context, the Somali Federal Government, as a case study, presents a compelling example of the challenges and barriers that hinder women's meaningful engagement in political processes.

The issue pertains to the enduring and widespread gender disparity observed within the Somali Federal Government, impeding women's opportunities to engage in political leadership, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to policy formulation. The issue at hand is further intensified by historical, cultural, and socio-economic elements that sustain discriminatory norms and practices, eventually hindering the development of an all-encompassing and representative political environment.

The urgency of addressing this problem lies not only in the principles of social justice and gender equity but also in the broader implications for the country's stability, development, and effectiveness of democratic institutions. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of gender inequality on political participation within the Somali Federal Government is crucial for devising targeted interventions and policies that can dismantle these barriers and foster a more inclusive and equitable political environment.

General Objective:

The general objective of this study is to explore the impact of gender inequality on political participation within the Somali Federal Government and its implications for governance and inclusivity in Somalia.

Special Objectives:

1. To identify women's barriers and challenges in political participation within the Somali Federal Government.
2. To examine the consequences of gender inequality in political participation on the governance and effectiveness of the Somali Federal Government.
3. To analyze the underlying factors contributing to gender inequality in political participation within the Somali Federal Government.

Research question

1. What barriers and challenges hinder women's meaningful participation in political decision-making processes within the Somali Federal Government?
2. How does the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making impact the inclusivity and effectiveness of governance within the Somali Federal Government?

3. What cultural, societal, legal, and structural factors perpetuate gender inequality and hinder women's political participation within the Somali Federal Government?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender inequality in political participation is a pervasive issue studied extensively in various contexts. This literature review provides an overview of critical studies and research findings related to the impact of gender inequality on political participation, with a specific focus on Somalia and the Somali Federal Government.

Gender Inequality in Political Participation.

Gender inequality in political participation encompasses the existence of inequities and obstacles that impede women's substantial involvement in political decision-making procedures (UNDP, 2020). Various scholarly investigations have shed light on the prevalent global phenomena of women being inadequately represented in political leadership positions and the consequential impact on attaining inclusive governance (Krook, 2014).

Kabeer (2005) and Ewig (2014) have identified various obstacles women encounter in their political participation, including patriarchal systems, restricted educational opportunities, and societal norms and pressures. The issues are further intensified by conflict and insecurity in Somalia (Mulugeta, 2018).

Gender Inequality in Somalia.

Similar to numerous other nations, Somalia encounters substantial obstacles to gender inequality. Gender roles and stereotypes perpetuated by cultural and societal conventions frequently restrict women's opportunities for political engagement (USAID, 2019). The concentration of women in decision-making processes is further marginalized by discriminatory laws and practices, as stated by the United Nations Development Programme in 2020.

Ahmed (2017) elucidates how deeply ingrained historical and cultural norms perpetuate gender disparities in Somalia, constraining women's participation in decision-making processes and relegating them to traditional roles.

Participation and Governance:

Research has demonstrated the importance of gender equality in political participation for effective governance. Studies have shown that diverse perspectives and experiences enhance policy-making and strengthen democratic processes (Dahlerup, 2018). The underrepresentation of women can result in the exclusion of critical voices and interests, undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance structures (Tripp et al., 2019).

Various international commitments and initiatives have aimed to promote gender equality in Somalia. The Somali Federal Government has taken steps to address gender inequality through constitutional provisions and policy frameworks (UNDP, 2020). However, the implementation and impact of these measures require further examination.

Norris (2003) and Dahlerup (2006) underscore the correlation between balanced political engagement in terms of gender and enhanced policy outcomes. The underrepresentation of

women in political spheres frequently leads to policy objectives that neglect the demands and concerns of women (Hassan, 2020).

Barriers to Women's Political Participation.

Research has identified multiple barriers that hinder women's political participation in Somalia. These include cultural norms, limited access to education and resources, discriminatory laws, and security challenges (USAID, 2019).

These barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political decision-making roles.

Strategies for Enhancing Gender Equality in Political Participation:

Scholars and practitioners have proposed various strategies to promote gender equality in political participation. These include legal reforms, quota systems, targeted capacity-building programs, and efforts to challenge gender norms and stereotypes (Tripp et al., 2019).

Case studies from Rwanda and Nordic countries (Tripp, 2015; Krook, 2006) showcase strategies for enhancing women's political representation. These experiences provide insights adaptable to the Somali context.

While existing literature has shed light on gender inequality's impact on political participation in various contexts, there is a notable gap regarding a comprehensive exploration of gender inequality's specific influence on political engagement within the Somali Federal Government. Despite the relevance of this issue in Somalia's complex historical, cultural, and socio-political dynamics, few studies have delved into the intricacies of women's participation in the Somali Federal Government and its implications for governance and democracy.

Ahmed (2017) and Mulugeta (2018) offer valuable perspectives on gender dynamics within the context of Somalia. However, their primary emphasis lies on examining the larger societal dimensions rather than delving into the specific intricacies of political institutions. The significance of gender-balanced engagement for achieving favorable policy results is emphasized by Norris (2003) and Tripp (2015); nevertheless, the applicability of their findings to the Somali context remains unexplored. The absence of a comprehensive study examining the correlation between gender inequality and political participation in the Somali Federal Government creates a knowledge gap about the distinct obstacles and prospects for women's involvement in this specific political domain.

Furthermore, existing research often emphasizes women's barriers and challenges without a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental efforts to address these challenges. A dearth of studies evaluates the impact of policies enhancing gender equality within the Somali Federal Government (Hassan, 2020). The extent to which these initiatives have been successful in mitigating gender disparities and fostering inclusive political participation remains understudied.

Addressing this research gap is crucial for devising contextually relevant strategies to enhance women's participation and decision-making influence within the Somali Federal

Government. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the intricate relationship between gender inequality and political engagement within the specific context of the Somali Federal Government.

This literature review provides a foundation for understanding the existing research on gender inequality in political participation, particularly within the Somali Federal Government. It highlights the significance of addressing this issue and offers insights into the barriers, consequences, and potential strategies for enhancing gender equality in political decision-making processes.

3. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore the impact of gender inequality on political participation within the Somali Federal Government. Specifically, a case study methodology is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, barriers, and implications of gender inequality in political decision-making processes in Somalia.

Case Selection

The Somali Federal Government is selected as the case for this study to examine the impact of gender inequality on political participation. The selection is based on the significance of the government's role in shaping political processes and the availability of relevant data and resources.

Data Collection

a. Document Analysis: Existing literature, reports, policies, and legal documents related to gender inequality and political participation in Somalia and the Somali Federal Government will be collected and analyzed.

b. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including government officials, civil society representatives, and women leaders, to gather their perspectives on gender inequality and political participation. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

a. Thematic Analysis: The collected data, including documents and interview transcripts, will be analyzed using thematic analysis. Themes and patterns related to gender inequality, barriers, and impact on political participation will be identified and coded for analysis.

b. Cross-case Comparison: A cross-case comparison will analyze similarities and differences in gender inequality and political participation within the Somali Federal Government.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical guidelines will be followed throughout the research process. Informed consent will be obtained from participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. The research will adhere to ethical standards and respect cultural sensitivities.

Limitations:

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The study focuses on the Somali Federal Government as a case, which may limit generalizability to other political contexts. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data may present limitations regarding sample size and potential bias in data interpretation.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the impact of gender inequality on political participation within the Somali Federal Government and its implications for governance and inclusivity in Somalia. Through a qualitative case study approach, the following key findings emerged:

Barriers and Challenges

The study identified multiple barriers and challenges that hinder women's meaningful participation in political decision-making processes within the Somali Federal Government. These include cultural norms and gender stereotypes, limited access to education and resources, discriminatory laws, and security concerns. These barriers contribute to the underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles (Author, Year).

Implications for Governance

The underrepresentation of women in political decision-making roles has significant implications for the governance and effectiveness of the Somali Federal Government. Women's perspectives and experiences are essential for inclusive policy-making and democratic processes. The exclusion of women's voices and interests can lead to policy gaps and undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance structures (Author, Year).

Factors Contributing to Gender Inequality

The study revealed that gender inequality in political participation within the Somali Federal Government is perpetuated by cultural, societal, legal, and structural factors. Traditional gender roles, patriarchal norms, and discriminatory laws reinforce gender disparities and limit women's opportunities to engage in political processes. Structural barriers, such as limited access to resources and institutional biases, further contribute to gender inequality (Author, Year).

Efforts and Initiatives:

The research examined the efforts and initiatives the Somali Federal Government undertook to address gender inequality in political participation. These include constitutional provisions, policy frameworks, and gender mainstreaming initiatives. However, the study found that implementation gaps and inadequate resources hamper the effectiveness of these measures (Author, Year).

5. FINDS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address gender inequality within the Somali Federal Government. The persistence of cultural norms and discriminatory practices poses significant challenges to equitable political participation. The underrepresentation of women at various levels of government reflects an imbalanced decision-making process, limiting the potential for holistic policy formulation.

The study's findings resonate with existing literature on the importance of gender-balanced political participation for effective governance and policy outcomes. Strategies drawn from successful case studies, as mentioned by Tripp (2015) and Krook (2006), could serve as valuable blueprints for enhancing women's representation within the Somali political landscape.

Overall, this study emphasizes that promoting gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but a crucial step toward building a more inclusive and equitable political system. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves policy reform, educational empowerment, and shifting societal norms.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has examined the impact of gender inequality on political participation within the Somali Federal Government. Through a case study approach, the research findings highlight the barriers and challenges that hinder women's meaningful engagement in political decision-making processes. The underrepresentation of women in political leadership has significant implications for governance and inclusivity in Somalia. Cultural norms, discriminatory laws, limited access to resources, and security concerns contribute to gender inequality within the government. Despite efforts and initiatives by the Somali Federal Government, implementation gaps and inadequate resources hinder the effectiveness of gender equality measures.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance gender equality and promote women's political participation within the Somali Federal Government:

1. **Legal Reforms:** Comprehensive legal reforms should be enacted to eliminate discriminatory laws and ensure equal opportunities for women's political participation. This includes reviewing and amending existing legislation to remove barriers and promote gender equality.
2. **Quota Systems:** Implementing quota systems can increase women's representation in political leadership roles. The Somali Federal Government should consider adopting temporary special measures like quotas to achieve a more balanced and inclusive model.
3. **Capacity-Building Programs:** Targeted capacity-building programs should be designed and implemented to enhance women's skills and knowledge in political leadership. These programs can focus on public speaking, negotiation, policy analysis, and campaign management.
4. **Gender Mainstreaming:** The Somali Federal Government should strengthen its efforts to mainstream gender considerations across all policies, programs, and institutions. This

involves integrating a gender perspective in decision-making processes and ensuring that gender equality is a cross-cutting priority.

5. Awareness and Advocacy: Efforts to challenge cultural norms and stereotypes perpetuating gender inequality should be intensified. Awareness campaigns and advocacy initiatives should be undertaken to promote the value of women's political participation and challenge societal attitudes that hinder gender equality.
6. Resource Allocation: Adequate resources should be allocated to support gender equality initiatives within the Somali Federal Government. This includes budgetary provisions for implementing gender mainstreaming programs, capacity-building activities, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability.

By implementing these recommendations, the Somali Federal Government can take significant steps towards achieving gender equality in political participation. Enhancing women's representation and engagement in political decision-making will contribute to more inclusive governance, better policy outcomes, and a stronger democracy in Somalia.

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Author:

Abdinasir Abdullahi Mohamed Biyo

Email: naasirbiyo2010@gmail.com

Cell phone: +252 615593665/252618164909

Postal address: Warta Nabadda District–
Alikamin Village – Jamal Abdinasir Road -
Mogadishu –Somalia. Title: Lecturer at
Somali National University (SNU)

Accomplished education

- BsM - Bachelor of Education Mathematics
- PGD- Sociology and Social Work
- MAHD – Master Human Development
- MAAM – Master of Applied Mathematics
- MAPS- Master of arts in political Science



Author:

Sharmarke Abdullahi Yusuf

Email: baricarmo14@gmail.com

Cell phone: +252 611013041

Postal address: Hodan District–Taleh
Village- Makah Almukarah Road -
Mogadishu –Somalia. Title: Lecturer at
Somali National University (SNU)

Accomplished education

- BA - Bachelor of Social Work & Community Development
- PGD- Sociology
- PGD- Social work
- PGD- Education
- MAS – Master Sociology
- MASW – Master of Social Work



Author:

Abdirahman M. Dahie

Email: dahie@snu.edu.so

Cell phone: 252 613928080

Postal address: Warta nabadda District–
Alikamin Village – Jamal Abdinasir Road -
Mogadishu –Somalia. Title: Lecturer & Head
Department of Sociology and Social Work at
the Somali National University / Lead
Consultant for Waayeel Consulting Ltd. /
trained social worker/and also Independent
Researcher

Accomplished education

- BSW - Bachelor of Social work
- MASW – Master’s degree in Social Work
- MAHRM – Master of Human Resource Management