

WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

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Challenging or maintaining
the status quo?

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Gender democracy and women's self-empowerment: A case of Somali diaspora civil society ¹

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Abstract

The Somali diaspora plays a vital role in bridging the gap between international non governmental aid organisations and local Somali civil society. Somali women's empowerment initiatives face many challenges in transitional societies such as Somalia. Yet, concerted efforts and multi-faceted investments in this endeavour have the potential to improve the status of women in post-war contexts. This chapter explores the role that Somali diaspora civil society organisations (SD-CSOs) engaged in gender democracy and women's self-empowerment efforts play in the promotion of gender equality. Through an analysis of capacity development at the meso-level, the study outlines how SD-CSOs are best equipped to support women's empowerment processes in Somalia through the application of strategies that are both culturally acceptable and internationally recognised.

Keywords

Somalia, civil society, gender, democracy, meso-level, diaspora, Muslim context.

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Introduction

Somalia is currently reengaging with the international community after the 1988 civil war followed by a devastating complete state collapse.. After decades of war and living without a government, many Somali families were forced to take their language, culture, skills and move to other parts of the world in search of a better way of life. In effect, they are a living example of the African diaspora. A diaspora is the dispersion of a people, language, or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place, to scatter, to displace, to live in separated communities (Source: December 4, 2015 <http://las.depaul.edu/centers-and-institutes/center-for-black-diaspora/about/Pages/defining-diaspora.aspx>). Somalia faces challenges in the establishment of a democratic, peaceful and just human development process. Somali authorities have identified the empowerment of women as a priority in the reconstruction and reengagement of the country. International development agencies support this priority through women's empowerment projects advocating for greater asset ownership and participation in decision-making processes. Similar to other developing, post-conflict and post-emergency countries, Somalia faces both challenges and opportunities related to mainstreaming gender equity into its agenda for poverty reduction, democratic governance, human security and sustainable development (Visvanathan, 2011). By providing support to relevant Somali stakeholders, the gender empowerment agenda in Somalia is recognised nationally and internationally as a priority for peace and development.

The necessary steps required for achieving women's empowerment in Somalia range from strengthening women's leadership capacities to developing women's political participation. This process also requires collaboration with community-based organisations and civil society to engage with communities on sensitive issues such as sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and female genital mutilation/circumcision (FGM/C). Building gender mainstreaming capacity and promoting gender equality in Somalia requires cross-sector initiatives, which transcend national and cultural boundaries (Howell and Mulligan, 2005). This capacity development requires processes directed toward the promotion of gender equality and women's rights through advocacy campaigns, community dialogue and leadership development.

This study explores the empowerment and capacity development processes for Somali women through the examination of Somali diaspora civil society organisations. Within the analysis of the crucial role that the Somalia diaspora has in the reconstruction process of Somalia, the authors put forward an integrated, "meso-level" model of women's empowerment connected to the assets and missions of selected SD-CSOs. Linking the macro (from above) and micro (from below) approaches are essential to bringing about sustainable changes and a comprehensive approach to women empowerment (Sahay, 1998; Demos and Segal, 2009). Most of the women empowerment studies fail to examine the strategic power of a mid-level (meso) approach which links the macro with the micro while also providing organisational development opportunities. Through an examination of 'social remittances' (Levitt, 1998) we argue that such partnerships at the organisational level are critical in supporting the women's empowerment process in Somalia. Based on the examination of development literature and selected organisations, we also argue that gender empowerment through such a meso-level must be integrated with macro-level policies for gender mainstreaming and social inclusion as well as micro-level empowerment approaches to interpersonal gender dynamics within the household.

Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are key areas of effort for the

establishment of a peaceful, just, prosperous, and inclusive society in Somalia. The 2012 election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, a civil society activist and education campaigner, led to the appointment of Fauzia Yusuf Haji Adan, the first female foreign minister and deputy prime minister. This was a historical first for Somalia. However, the many barriers challenging gender democracy initiatives are complex. Developing gender inclusivity within Somali society requires active engagement from both civil society and the Somali diaspora. Somalia is a nation spread worldwide with approximately one million Somalis living in the diaspora, concentrated in areas of the Horn of Africa and Yemen, the Gulf States, Western Europe and North America (United Nations Development Programme, 2009:4). Achieving the third UN Millennium Development Goal: to promote gender equality and empower women (MDG 3) in Somalia requires national commitment, international support, and diaspora cooperation.

Empowerment in the Somali context

Studies of women's empowerment in challenging contexts such as the Horn of Africa (HOA) and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) state that it is vital to the region's progress that women play a larger role in the economy and society (Moghadam, 2008). In order to be relevant to Somalia's reconstruction process, women's empowerment must also be relevant to Somali cultural and development challenges. The Republic of Somalia, located in the Horn of Africa has an estimated population of ten million. The majority of the population are Sunni Muslim. In spite of the many important roles Somali women play in their society, they remain greatly disadvantaged in a context where their familial resources are limited. Discrimination against women is deeply rooted and evident in many aspects of Somali women's lives. The patriarchal norms that associate men with power and leadership in both the private and public spheres are evident in both family and social relations. Therefore, women's empowerment in Somalia cannot be effectively implemented without a full and realistic consideration of local and customary norms.

Defining women empowerment has different meanings at the local and international levels. To the international community, empowerment means the achievement of specific goals, while Somali society and activists may have different priorities and understandings of empowerment. It is in this gap between local worldviews and international worldviews about the rights of women where SD-CSOs emerge as important agents linking the macro and micro actors. At the meso-level, the Somali diaspora become an important bridge connecting the local perspective with the international perspective and help UN agencies and small domestic NGOs who share a common agenda to improve the status of women in society. Operating at the meso-level of empowerment requires contextual knowledge and the capacity to mediate international expectations and local interpretations (Parpart et al, 2002). SD-CSOs uniquely possess this combination of knowledge and capacity, existing in an optimal position linking the macro and micro levels. Implementing women's empowerment programmes through the meso-level also requires new frameworks for dialogue allowing diverse interpretations, including interpretations within the Muslim framework. While there are no monolithic interpretations of Islam, many agree that challenges to women's rights in the Islamic world primarily utilise religious prescriptions and readings that place women in subordinate positions (Mernissi, 1987; Ahmed, 1992). But these religious documents, often the Koran and the Hadiths or the practices of the Prophet Mohamed, also serve to strongly promote and support women's empowerment in all

spheres of society (Mernissi, 1987; Ahmed, 1992) and can thus be used to counter gender oppression.

The report “Women’s Empowerment in Muslim Contexts” presents extensive research on the issues of gender, poverty and democratisation in achieving the Millennium Development Goal 3 and is pertinent for the study of Somalia. Their research confirms that gender equality is a precondition for reducing poverty and that women’s empowerment needs a new narrative that is aligned with the international community’s perspective on gender issues while still remaining contextually relevant. The report states:

There is a broad consensus on what the priorities are for achieving women’s empowerment. ... Yet we are far from achieving these in practice and there is little understanding of how to achieve them. Current research relating to these issues is relatively ad hoc and anecdotal. What works in one context does not appear to work in others and there is a lack of analysis and synthesis across different empirical contexts drawing together lessons learned. Organisations and decision makers working to empower women therefore need to know more about what strategies work, which ones don’t and why this is the case in different situations. There is a strong need for a new “narrative” that can reshape practical strategies and approaches at both country and international levels, build on current successes and bridge the gaps between the ‘lived realities’ of the poor and the actions of decision makers at all levels. (Women’s Empowerment in Muslim Contexts, 2008:4)

Cultural and religious contexts that deny rights to women and actively disempower them are prevalent in patriarchal societies throughout the world. Gender norms in these contexts can be oppressive to women, even if they are presented as culturally endorsed forms of gender relations and norms (Women’s Empowerment in Muslim Contexts 2008:18, 39). Still, new narratives for women’s empowerment have gained momentum over the course of the last few decades, and local narratives on the position of women in society have now become difficult to distinguish from international gender discourses and expectations. This shift can be said to be the result of increasing global awareness of the prevalence of gender-based violence and gender discrimination in education and employment (United Nations Development Programme, 2012:51, 54; United Nations Women, 2011:15). However, this bridging of local and global attitudes is also linked to women’s awareness of the conflicting discourses on the place of women, which are often justified based on cultural and religious norms. This awareness and increasing access to secular and religious education permits women of all regions, including women within the Muslim world, to question many taken-for-granted prescriptions of the role of women and their rights, both within their nation states as well as within the Islamic jurisprudence (Shukrallah, 1994).

Other empirical studies on women’s empowerment in Muslim contexts confirm how religion is often confused with local patriarchal cultures (Chaudhary et al, 2012). The complex intricateness of cultural norms and religious beliefs require the women empowerment process to become aware and competent in these value systems. It is therefore empirically evident that the empowerment of women through consciousness raising, economic security and integrated development occurs even in less developed Islamic societies (Chaudhary et al, 2012:978). Beyond cultural and religious diversity, women’s empowerment strategies still need to pass through a holistic model which integrates consciousness raising (women’s rights, self-esteem

and education) with economic empowerment (strengthened economic security) and integrated human development (enhanced access to education, health and resources). These globally accepted strategies in women's empowerment need a culturally appropriate approach in an Islamic and Arab society. For instance, the 2005 Arab Human Development Report stated that the term 'women's empowerment' is not a culturally appropriate term in Arab societies.

The first Arab Human Development Report (2002) used the terminology 'women's empowerment' clearly an Arabisation of an English term. Perhaps a better term in the Arabic language is 'the rise of woman' in contrast to 'the empowerment of woman' to connote woman's struggle for her rights through the building of her capacity and its effective use in a conducive societal framework (UNDP and AFESD, 2005:55).

Effective women's empowerment programmes in Somalia need to take into account many contextual factors. Besides cultural and religious diversity, they need to consider the level of gender inequality and gender-based marginalisation in post-conflict and post-emergency fragile contexts. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) evaluates women's empowerment as a factor in the Gender Inequality Index (GII) based on two indicators: educational attainment (secondary level and above), and parliamentary representation. Somalia's strikingly low Human Development Index is among the lowest in the world (UNDP, 2014). Gender inequality in Somalia is alarmingly high as the fourth highest in the world with a GII value of 0.776 where 1 is complete inequality. Illustrating the range of scores, the Netherlands GII value is .045. Between these two extremes fall the United Kingdom at .205, China at .213, Brazil at .447, and Kenya at .608 (United Nations Development Programme 2012: xviii).

Women in Somalia provide basic needs to family members, depending on natural resources such as water and vegetation. But displaced women have little access to property, education, or healthcare. These women bear the brunt of hardships intensified by poverty, conflict, and natural disaster (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2011:4-5).

Gender mainstreaming through capacity-empowerment

Gender mainstreaming requires that both men and women become fully and equally included in all aspects of policy planning and implementation (United Nations Development Programme, 2012:96; United Nations Women, 2012). It also requires having a comprehensive strategy for empowerment that articulates economic, political and social specific agendas. In the delicate Somali process for human security, political reconstruction, community development and poverty reduction, gender mainstreaming needs to be integrated and included in strategic national priorities and objectives of international cooperation initiatives. It is also necessary to include relevant Somali stakeholders in the implementation of gender-specific interventions. Gender mainstreaming needs to align local, national and international efforts for gender equality, female empowerment, and gender integration. The USAID and USDOS recognize gender equality (same rights and opportunities) and female empowerment (women and girls) to be core objectives for diplomacy and development (USAID, 2012). In Somalia, as in other countries impacted by poverty and violence, the focus on women's rights and empowerment as a means of achieving gender mainstreaming and integration are the conditions to attain poverty

alleviation (development) and human security (peace). As Hillary Rodham Clinton stated during her tenure as Secretary of State, “Achieving our objectives for global development will demand accelerated efforts to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. Otherwise, peace and prosperity will have their own glass ceiling” (USAID, 2012).

Due to a combination of systemic violence, institutional failures, social norms and coping strategies, Somalia remains one of the worst places in the world to be a woman. The UNDP study on the state of gender in Somalia describes this in detail. .

The Gender Inequality Index for Somalia is 0.776 (with a maximum of 1 denoting complete inequality), placing Somalia at the fourth highest position globally. Somalia has extremely high maternal mortality, rape, female genital mutilation and child marriage rates, and violence against women and girls is common, though statistics are difficult to find. The participation and role of women in politics and decision-making spheres is extremely limited, perpetuating narrow gender based roles and inequalities. (UNDP 2012a:2).

Like other international development agencies, the UNDP aims to respond directly to the many acute challenges faced by Somali women, including the high rate of maternal mortality, which is amongst the highest in the world at approximately 1,400 per 100,000 live births (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2011:4). Contributing to this issue is the limited access to health services. Gender inequities are also demonstrated in literacy rates; the adult literacy rate for Somali women is 26% compared to 36% for men (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2012:2). As a consequence, women experience lower rates of formal employment compared to men (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2012:51).

Further challenges contributing to gender-based marginalisation include limited participation in decision-making and high child marriage rates. 45% of Somali women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18. Gender-based violence mainly goes unreported and unpunished. This is partly because customary or traditional law is more often followed than laws imposed by the state judiciary, and because women lack access to formal justice mechanisms (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2011:5). The World Health Organisation estimates that 98% of women in Somalia undergo some type of female circumcision, which in the Somali context often involves the most severe form of cutting, removing the clitoris as well as the inner and outer labia. Female genital mutilation or circumcision (FGM/C) occurs most often between four and eleven years old. Community support for FGM/C is high, which perpetuates challenges associated with its eradication (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2012:2). Sadly, many women experience lifelong medical problems as a result of undergoing FGM/C (United Nations Development Programme Somalia, 2012:51).

In Somalia’s transition from post conflict to recovery, empowering women will contribute to building resilience in crisis prevention. Yet, the many challenges represented by Somalia’s currently weak capacity for building international relations, national cultural

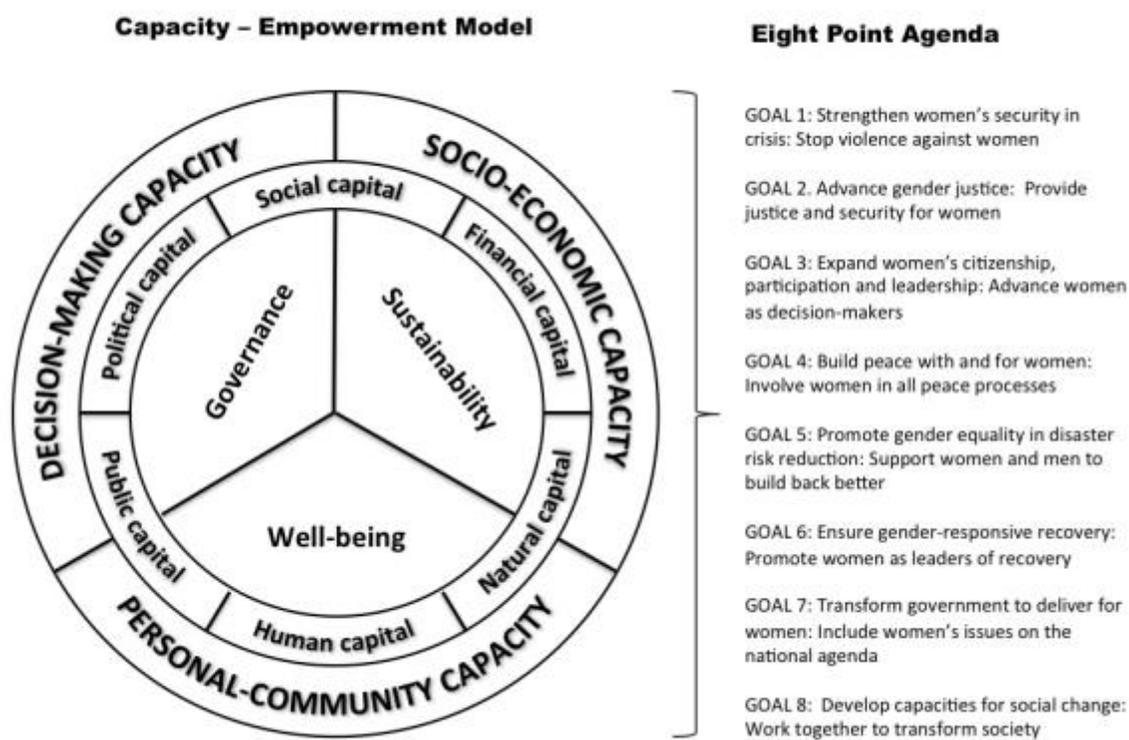
identities and integration, require the women's empowerment process to be integrated into the peace process. Gender-specific challenges in Somalia require strategic agendas such as those illustrated by the UNDP Eight Point Agenda. The Agenda promotes practical, positive outcomes for girls and women in crisis through (1) an end to violence against women, (2) provision of justice and security, (3) advancing women as decision-makers, (4) involving women in all peace processes, (5) supporting women and men in disaster risk reduction, (6) promoting women as leaders of recovery, (7) including women's issues on the national agenda, and (8) working together to transform society (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

These points address gender empowerment in relation to human security and humanitarian emergencies. Working toward this Eight Point Agenda will facilitate Somalia's re-engagement with the international community, and allow support at the macro-level for the country to achieve these goals. However, such an agenda must be closely associated with other general development and capacity-building frameworks for women's empowerment. The United Nations has been at the forefront for the promotion of an integrative model for capacity development and women's empowerment (UN ECOSOC, 2010; UN Women, 2012). Such a comprehensive and inclusive model considers empowerment at the political (governance), economic (sustainability) and socio-interpersonal (well-being) levels. These elements of women's empowerment are critical for gender mainstreaming and effective integration of women into the decision-making processes of their families and communities. The IFAD, the UN specialised agency for agriculture and development, utilises a similar model for achieving gender equality and women empowerment (UN-IFAD, 2012). Specifically, IFAD recognizes their work for gender equality and women's empowerment to be based around three priorities:

- 1) Economic empowerment: Improving women's access to income-earning opportunities and productive assets.
- 2) Decision-making: Increasing women's say in community affairs and strengthening women producers' organisations.
- 3) Well-being: Improving access of rural people, in particular women, to basic services and infrastructure.

These three areas are also central to a capacity development approach. The illustration below represents a relational model between these general and integrated capacity frameworks with the more specific goals that are a priority in the context of Somalia.

Figure 1: Capacity and Empowerment Connected Model



Source: Elaborated by Tavanti from various sources

The Capacity-Empowerment Model above illustrates the frameworks through which Somali society can advance the empowerment of women and identifies outcomes related to these three frameworks. The frameworks, well-being, governance and sustainability, indicate the importance of women's empowerment in increasing economic opportunities (access to capital) while promoting human rights and development capacity (evidence of capabilities). Improved well-being can increase personal-community capacity; addressing empowerment through governance improves decision-making capacity; and sustainability of empowerment can be achieved through improved socio-economic capacity. The inner ring of the model indicates the six types of capital to be affected by the achievement of empowerment in each framework. Various studies have shown the relationship between women's empowerment and capacity development relative to human rights, property rights, financial capital and capacity development (Christabell, 2009; Hallward-Driemeier and Hasan, 2013; Nussbaum, 2013).

This comprehensive model indicates that having an impact on gender inequality requires efforts coming from each of the three frameworks. Although the goals outlined in the UNDP Eight Point Agenda fall within the frameworks listed in the Empowerment Model, the points can be supplemented and strengthened with sustainable solutions to the challenges facing women's empowerment processes. Achievement of the Eight Points alone may not ensure lasting empowerment in Somalia. Addressing the Eight Points in conjunction with the

Empowerment Model allows for a multifaceted, comprehensive approach to empowerment. Furthermore, we argue that applying the knowledge and resources of the diaspora and SD-CSOs will further improve the sustainability of empowerment initiatives.

Social remittances and transnational identities

The last 20 years of political and economic turmoil in Somalia have led to a complete collapse of the state and the displacement of millions of the population, either as refugees in neighbouring countries or internally displaced peoples within Somalia. Throughout the many years of war, systemic violence, extreme poverty and recurring famine most of the talented and educated Somali men and women were forced to seek protection and opportunities in other parts of the globe. This situation illustrates the definition of diaspora as “the dispersion of a people, language, or culture that was formerly concentrated in one place, to scatter, to displace, to live in separated communities.” (DePaul, 2015).

The study of growing diaspora communities around the world has recognized how these kin global communities play a vital role in their homeland domestic affairs (Lum, et. al, 2013). The transnational ethnic linkages of diaspora Somali affect political, social and therefore empowerment dynamics for community development. This Somali diaspora community, settled throughout the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Australia and the United States, has been vital to the survival of the country through remittances, family support, solidarity projects and advocacy.

Remittances are financial transactions between family members living abroad and their families back home. Somali migrants around the world send approximately \$1.3 billion to Somalia. \$215 million comes from Somali Americans. This makes up a significant share of Somalia’s economy and provides an alternative to foreign aid dependency (Lindley, 2010; Orozco and Yansura, 2013). These remittances help Somali women achieve greater financial stability, increase savings and improve the family’s quality of life (Orozco and Yansura, 2013:10-11). Studies show that when women receive and control remittances they are more likely to improve the overall well-being of their households through increased expenditure on health, education, and nutrition (UN-IFAD, 2009).

Forced and voluntary migration has helped the Somali diaspora to access educational, social, and cultural capital (Kleist, 2008; Langellier, 2010). The dynamic and transnational connections of Somali society make it possible for the transformations in gender dynamics that occur in the diaspora to also affect gender relations and debates in the home country. Diaspora women in particular represent agents of positive cultural change in Somalia. They have the ability to benefit local women who have never had the chance to migrate. Collaboration between civil society organisations, the diaspora and local women helps address problems such as gender-based violence, as well as social, political and economic marginalisation.

Research confirms that diaspora communities transmit new practices, ideas and norms to their families and communities of origin. In ‘Somalia’s Missing Million’, a report for UNDP by Hassan Sheikh and Sally Healy on the role of the diaspora in Somali development, the notion of

‘social’ remittances was extensively discussed (UNDP, 2009). Social remittances refers to identities, practices and norms as well as social capital that migrants transmit and transfer to their homelands through letters, travel, phone and internet communication (Levitt, 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011).

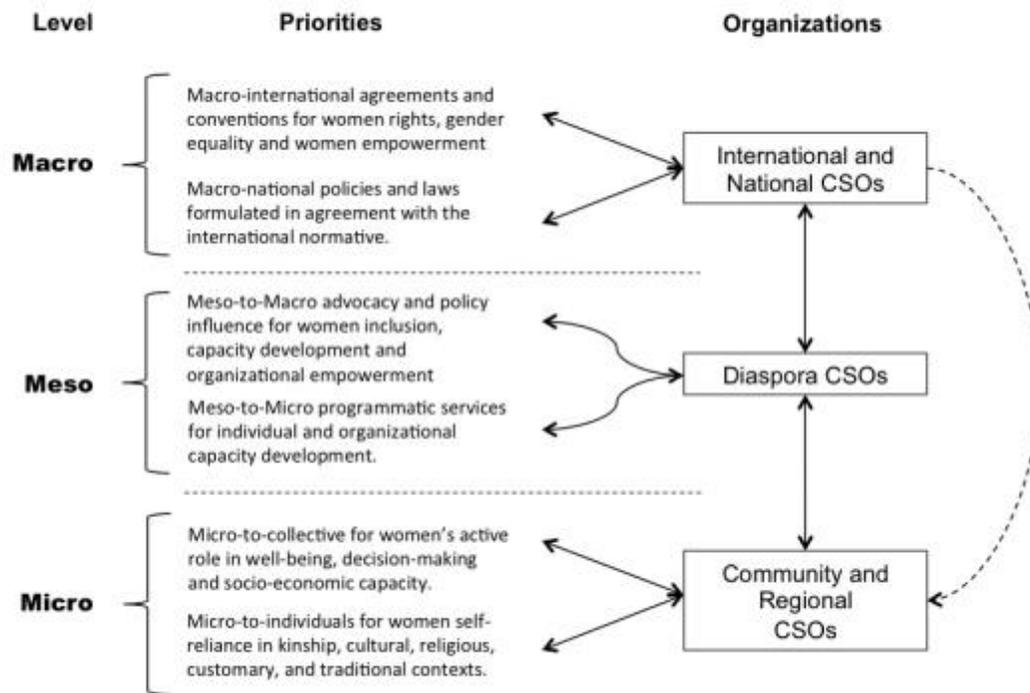
During this transitional period, the role of the Somalia diaspora has clearly emerged as very important for both economic and social capital development. Following the end of the interim mandate of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the flow of social remittances intensified after the Federal Government of Somalia was established on August 20, 2012. In addition to the value added by economic remittances, social remittances represented the skills, capacity and renewed identities that Somali people successfully established overseas, and then shared with their compatriots at home. These social remittances were key to changing attitudes and the roles of women in society through which women in the diaspora became transnational agents of renewed identities (Falah and Nagel, 2005).

The ‘meso’ level of capacity development

The meso-level of capacity development provides a vital link between international development efforts and the local population who are striving to improve their daily lives. The Somali diaspora, with their understanding of local culture and mores in addition to their experience living abroad provide a link to both cultures. Empowerment and capacity development efforts include both macro-level national and international institutions and micro-level individuals and families. But, empowerment initiatives that focus only at these two extremes risk being culturally incompetent and unsustainable. The Somali diaspora community non-profit/non-governmental organisations are best placed to bridge these macro-micro gaps by providing culturally competent programmes and internationally aligned priorities. This recognition of the positive contributions of SD-CSOs suggest that international development policies and project criteria should prioritise this investment in diaspora communities. Surprisingly, the meso-level contribution is still missing in many programmes. This happens in spite of the international development challenges associated with bridging the gap between macro-level policies and micro-level local community organisations (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Easterly, 2006; Fowler, 1997). While linking up, networking, building connections and strengthening interactions are still vital components in international development programmes, capacity development directed specifically to organisations located between macro-level institutions and local communities remains crucial to the empowerment process (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Empowerment processes, capacity development approaches and social inclusion policies need to be clearly linked to this crucially important meso-level (Fukuda-Parr and Lopes, 2012).

The following illustration demonstrates how this SD-CSOs can work at this meso-level of intervention and outlines the programmatic priorities between the individual and the policy levels of capacity development for women’s empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

Figure 2: The meso-level model for organizations



Source: Elaborated by Tavanti from various sources

Supported by empowerment findings in development literature and also by promising examples of meso-level organisational partnerships, we argue that meso-level organisational development can provide such a bridge between international and local civil society organisations, and are vital for successful, socially integrated empowerment and capacity building. This is particularly urgent in the context of Somalia today, where numerous internationally funded official development assistance programmes are present, operating under low levels of accountability and little evaluation regarding the achievement of initial objectives. The SD-CSOs in the few cases shown below constitute a strategic advantage in developing internationally aligned, culturally competent and sustainable empowerment solutions in Somalia's reconstruction process.

Somali civil society in diaspora

The Somali diaspora, although scattered across the globe, keep in touch via telephone, internet, and travel. These activities, which strengthen the diaspora network, are both political and economic (United Nations Development Programme, 2009:5, 7). Financial remittances constitute 24% of household income and about 80% of start-up capital for small and medium enterprises (United Nations Development Programme, 2009:19). The diaspora remains a bridge between the adopted countries around the globe and Somalia's economic, social, and political stability and future development. Somali diaspora communities are valuable assets that could be

the subject of investment for peace, empowerment, development and country reconstruction. The consequences of not involving them may be that the changes that are promoted are not culturally intelligent changes or leave a vacuum for radical recruitment and transnational repercussions of conflict to fill (Hoffman et al, 2007).

Studies have shown that the Somali diaspora, in spite of the human suffering due to separation and adaptation, has also provided opportunities for social integration, changing social values, and the creation of a borderless Somali identity (Abdi, 2015; Farah, 2000; Kusow and Bjork, 2007; Kapteijns, 1993). The diaspora's established CSOs, along with its existing and potential relationships with Somalia-based CSOs, provide an opportunity for increased organisational capacity and the establishment of a link between macro policies and local cultures. The SD-CSOs can fill a gap by implementing much needed meso-level programmes for women's empowerment that are both locally viable and internationally acceptable. When supported by larger partnership mechanisms, SD-CSOs are well positioned to implement culturally competent programmes. SD-CSOs are contextually knowledgeable and internationally poised, and therefore possess valuable dexterity required to expertly navigate international expectations, domestic agendas and Somali contexts.

We propose that the Somali diaspora also represents a positive force for governance leadership development that has been barely used thus far. Diaspora Somali women, often through education abroad and transformations in their gender relationships have developed leadership capacity for public service administrative positions (Abdi, 2014). The international community could profitably recognise and invest in the pioneering leadership role of these Somali women in the post-colonial and post-conflict reconstructions (Ingiriis, 2015).

With an increasing returnee population coming from Europe and America, Somali diaspora members now occupy key positions in the new government. For example, the last three governments had prime ministers who returned from North America and several current ministerial positions have citizens who returned from England, United States and Canada. These returnees are playing key roles in the reconstitution of governance in Somalia. The diaspora's remittances also continue to be a lifeline for millions of Somalis aiding both in day to day survival and developmental projects in the country.

Somali diaspora CSOs and their contribution to women's empowerment: some examples

Somali CSOs working in the United States, United Kingdom, Kenya and the Horn of Africa have played an important part in Somali women's empowerment. These civil society organisations are based in large Somali communities such as Minnesota, Ohio and Nairobi, Kenya. These organisations work at the meso-level and strive to empower diaspora women's education, employment, financial literacy, political representation, and health.

The Center for Somali Women Advancement, the Somali Women's Study Center, and the Somali Women Education Network demonstrate how meso-level SD-CSOs impact Somali women's empowerment both in the diaspora and in Somalia. These examples of Somali diaspora organisations engaged in women's empowerment strategies exemplify diverse levels of engagement and priorities ranging from education, health and wellness to policy, leadership and political participation. They represent diverse but interconnected levels of women's empowerment at the micro, meso and macro levels of the interpersonal, community, societal

and political decision making. Each of these organisations has leaders based in North America with maintained linkages and activities to developmental initiatives in Somalia. The leaders's transnational connections make their organisations potential models for other initiatives that might emerge from the diaspora community.

The Center for Somali Women's Advancement (CSWA)

CSWA is a Columbus, Ohio based non-profit organisation serving the needs of girls and women in the United States and the Horn of Africa. Their programming aims at organising policy forums and community conversations on topics related to women. Its mission is "to provide hope for Somali women and girls everywhere by offering women the tools they need to build secure and positive living environments and healthy relationships at all levels of society" (Center for Somali Women's Advancement, 2013). Ms. Khadra Mohamed, President of CSWA, explains, "Somali women are the matriarchs of our families. When our husbands are away from home, we keep the family together and ensure that our children learn the Koran. We want to guarantee that our Somali culture be preserved. At the same time, we want to join with our husbands, fathers and decision makers to define our future in the United States and Somalia" (<http://www.centerforsomaliwomen.org/>). CSWA asserts the demand for space for women in the public forum, and acknowledges women's important contributions to society. Ms. Mohamed's promotion of Somali women as actors within the public sphere led to CSWA developing crucial links and collaborations with Ohio state officials in Columbus County. This advocacy for the recognition of Somali women's many contributions to society, challenges the division of private and public space that many gendered discourses use to justify the marginalisation of women. Consequently, this advocacy and activism has the possibility to evolve into an instrument for social change, building on the support and resources available to these organisations through their established links and networks both within the diaspora and also within civic organisations in Somalia (Center for Somali Women's Advancement, 2013). In discussions between Ms. Mohamed and author Cawo Abdi, Ms Mohamed stated that the goal of this advocacy work was to help the organisation become active both in the United States and Somalia and to utilise the know-how and organisational skills gained in the U.S. to contribute to the advancement of Somali women's issues in Somalia.

The Somali Women's Study Center (SWSC)

Nairobi based SWSC strives to bridge the micro-macro gap in the realisation of women's empowerment. As of January 2015, there were 462,970 Somali refugees in Kenya that received assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2015). SWSC acts as a catalyst for positive change by focusing on advocacy, education, training, research development and increasing women's leadership and political representation. SWSC addresses the struggle for gender equity in governance. A SWSC's leader earned a Ph.D. in Women's Studies from a Canadian university and hopes to develop the organisation's research capacity so that they can help with both the micro and macro-levels of support. They want to help with local organisation efforts often hampered by a lack of resources and networks at the micro-level and help international workers at the macro-level workers who are supportive of women's empowerment but lack the cultural understanding and local networks necessary to support educational and advocacy projects (Somali Women's Study Center, 2013). Thus, the organisation can be instrumental in bridging the cultural, linguistic and religious barriers that might arise between macro-level international funders and actors and micro-level local activists

and organisations.

Somali Women's Education Network

SWEN is based in Minneapolis, Minnesota and provides educational services to young Somali women. Founded by Fardowsa Yousuf in 2009, SWEN's mission is to empower and build strong families through education. SWEN's approach is based on self-help and communal self-reliance for capacity development. They recognise the interdependence between their work with women in the diaspora and women in Somalia. Ms. Yousuf is now based in Kenya but often travels between the United States and Somalia. Her experience of Somali community development and women's empowerment work in Minnesota is helpful in transferring leadership skills to benefit women in Somalia. The organisation's successful mentoring programming would need to be adapted in Somalia. For example, programmes for women's empowerment in career development and community engagement are rare in Somalia, especially in Southern areas where the presence of extremist militants limits young women's physical movements and access to schools and participation in sports activities. Therefore, Somali returnee women such as Ms. Yousuf, who are advocating for young women's roles in all spheres of society, can gain support from both local and international actors, with lessons learned from the macro and micro practices merging to produce programmes that are effective and sustainable. Ms. Yusuf has already taken initial steps to get Somali women in Mogadishu interested in her projects.

Discussion

The organisations briefly described above represent culturally intelligent models for women's empowerment. While advocating changes and promoting women's capacity, SD-CSOs are also considerate of Muslim values and cultural norms in the diverse groups of Somalia. More importantly, their "insiderness" facilitates trust and connection with the local communities, whose views of non-Somali interventions are plagued with suspicion of imposing foreign ways to African and Muslim cultures. Their cultural proximity to local culture along with their cultural transformations due to exposure to Western and non-Muslim values, make of them well suited to bypass local suspicion for changing cultural practices like FGM/C (Berg & Denison, 2013). In other words, the Somali diaspora, if well integrated in the Somalia's sustainable development and transitional justice process, can be an agent for consciousness raising and cultural transformation (Haji-Abdi, 2014:47-48).

The experiences of the diaspora, especially those in democratic European and American societies provide Somali women the leadership capacity to create organisations and programmes which respond to the needs of Somali communities both at home and abroad. CSWA, SWSC and SWEN are SD-CSOs examples of organisations and programmes at the meso-level which have the ability to provide empowerment support for Somalia's political, social, economic and cultural development and reconstruction (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2005:11). These SD-CSOs and other organisations like them demonstrate the strategic opportunities available to invest in the local community and diaspora at the meso-level of empowerment. These women and their organisations developed the cultural competence to work effectively between two distinct cultures. They have the ability to collaborate with international development organisations at the macro-level and collaborate

with local women's cultural groups at the micro-level. These SD-CSOs are uniquely qualified to help bridge the discussions about women's engagement in decision-making, socio-economic and personal community capacities. With proper support and a diverse spectrum of partnering organisations, SD-CSOs can implement meso-level programming for gender equality and women's empowerment in Somalia. Projects implemented without such SD-CSO involvement risk a lack of local legitimacy or misalignment with international norms such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

One key challenge to keenly monitor is the potential for conflict and competition between Somalia-based civil society organisations and diaspora activists and their initiatives in Somali. Somali civil society organisations may perceive diaspora and returnee initiatives as a threat to their own existence. For example, Somali diaspora leaders may be perceived as having more cultural capital to access resources from international developmental institutions. In consequence, we argue for what Alan Fowler (2000) describes as a "fourth position" for non-governmental development organisations; not a position of neutrality but rather the responsibility to create effective cross-partnerships and collaboration at the meso-level, representing the rights of civil society (grassroots local CSOs) and articulating programmes aligned with the priorities of public and private actors. Such a carefully designed system of partnerships, along with participation in decision-making processes, and monitoring and evaluation could provide capacity, accountability, and communication. Concerns about Somali diaspora people and organisations could be countered by this "fourth position" strategy as long as diaspora based civil society groups as well as returnee gender activists were able to be more inclusive as well as cognisant of this potentially harmful power dynamic, without which their contributions to the women's empowerment in Somalia and elsewhere will be hampered.

Along with the role played by the diaspora in Somalia's reconstruction, both civil society organisations and the international community can do more to advocate for the empowerment of women. First, in the reconstruction process, the international community must provide political, economic and social aid at the macro-level. International agencies recognise the many challenges facing the gender equity process in Somalia. Somali leaders and the Somali state require constant promotion of the rights of women and girls and support striving for gender equality.

Second, initiatives by SD-CSOs at the meso-level can impact on, and supplement the successes of social aid provided by the international community. Representation of women in development and peace-building programmes is critical, as even well intended policies can be gender blind. Failure to include women in policy design and implementation at the macro-level may lead women to be further marginalised, albeit unintentionally. Finally, Somalia should affirm the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations Development Programme, 2012:24).

Conclusions

Throughout this chapter we have argued that SD-CSOs have a critical role to play in establishing culturally relevant and transformative women's empowerment programmes in Somalia. We have presented a meso-level approach that is inter-organisational, centred on civil

society and its organisations. This model links macro-level policies and micro level empowerment programmes. Developing such a model should be a strategic priority for the achievement of women's empowerment projects and for international development and capacity development programmes in Somalia.

International development agencies operate from the position that gender equality and women's empowerment permeates every aspect of capacity development. Somalia is no exception. Yet, its past history as a failed state, the on-going conflicts, humanitarian crises and chronic poverty require policies that promote women's empowerment initiatives, planning and operations within this context. To be effective and to achieve a sustainable impact, Somali women's empowerment programmes must be both culturally viable and internationally congruent, while also integrating issues of governance, rule of law, human rights, development and human security.

The Eight Point Agenda for Somali women's empowerment provides a comprehensive approach, integrating notions of well-being, governance and sustainability with security, participation and capacity development. The points reflect the agenda of MDG 3 and the need to implement programmes for the achievement of women's empowerment, targeting health, education and decision-making. Through the mediation of multi-stakeholder groups, the implementation of such programmes will be more culturally acceptable when integrating Somali civil society organisations in the country and abroad. Gender equality and women's empowerment programmes in Somalia must be contextually competent, yet able to achieve standardised targets for assessing women's empowerment. These include; ensuring universal access to health services, accessing education opportunities and eliminating gender inequalities in accessing assets, employment and social mobility opportunities.

Our suggestion is that meso-level organisational engagement and programming strategies should be integrated with the macro and micro levels; and planned, managed and evaluated through partnerships and associations with multiple stakeholders. SD-CSOs can play a role in the establishment of legitimate and representative fora with local women leaders and government representatives for the purpose of evaluating the feasibility and impact of international development programmes. Such fora promote more legitimate and competent levels of self-governance.

Our study suggests that the Somali diaspora, working at the meso-level can be more locally competent while maintaining internationally agreed covenants of gender empowerment. SD-CSOs present an opportunity for partnership in the creation of a competent international capacity development sector that could be instrumental in creating sustainable, inclusive and human development in Somalia. Although not all SD-CSOs have the organisational capacity to engage in this level of cooperation, they are inter-culturally competent, contextually knowledgeable and internationally exposed entities that can effectively mediate women's empowerment process in Somalia. They can do so while understanding cultural contexts, cooperating with authorities and integrating international expectations. The priorities for SD-CSOs and diaspora-contextual intervention need to be operationally viable (culturally intelligent, politically grounded and socially acceptable) as well internationally aligned (for economic sustainability, international relations and intercultural dialogue).

Gender equality and promotion of Somali women's empowerment positively impacts

Somalia's human, social, economic and political development. The inclusion of women in the political process positively contributes to Somalia's conflict management and peace building in the long term. These changes will take many years and at this point potential for change is all that exists. However, these models are based on the assumption that the diaspora is instrumental in this transformation because it relates to all levels of local empowerment actors with a cultivated awareness of international standards. The meso-level approach channelled through SD-CSOs' engagement in Somalia can be expanded in relation to other international mainstreaming initiatives. Replication efforts elsewhere similarly require the consideration of culturally specific nuances prior to implementation. Although informal social remittances in the micro-level allow for some communication, international partnerships provide established, formal channels through which expertise can be transmitted. The engagement and closer collaboration of diaspora programmes for gender empowerment and gender democracy with organisations in the homeland could be instrumental in establishing, expanding and advancing Somali women's political representation and engagement in socio-economic development and peace-building.

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