

Supporting Civil Society and Women's Rights Organisations in Fragile and Conflicted-Affected Contexts

Somalia Report¹

1. Introduction

As part of a consortium of member organisations of Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS), including Women for Women International, Women's International Peace Centre, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Nigeria and Womankind Worldwide, Saferworld and the Somali Women Development Centre (SWDC) conducted a mapping exercise of the challenges and opportunities faced by women's rights organisations (WROs) and other civil society organisations (CSOs) working on issues relating to Women, Peace and Security in Somalia. As part of this project, the consortium also mapped WROs and CSOs across diverse regions in [South Sudan](#) and [Nigeria](#). The main aim of these mappings and consultations is to learn more about the landscape and range of WROs' and CSOs' experiences, challenges and opportunities, and make recommendations to donors working in and on these countries in order to better partner and support them.

In Somalia, a total of 71 organisations were mapped, in an effort to bring to light which organisations are working on Women, Peace and Security, what kind of funding they have access to, where they operate, what themes they focus on and who their targets are.

A further 25 organisations (13 WROs and 12 CSOs) were consulted as key informants across the different federal member states: four in Puntland, four in Jubaland, five in Southwest, two in Hirshabelle, three in Galmudug and seven in the Banadir Regional Administration. None of them work at the national level, but most work in multiple federal member states within Somalia. Two were registered as networks while the majority (23) were registered as organisations.

SWDC carried out a mapping exercise of the 71 WROs and CSOs in Somalia through virtual interviews and meetings. The following are the key findings of the mapping, looking into where are they based, where they operate, how much and what kind of funding they have access to, and what topics and targets they focus on.

Banadir Region has the highest concentration of WROs and CSOs (25%), followed by Puntland, Jubaland and Southwest. WROs and CSOs are concentrated in major cities and towns in more established federal member states with less presence in recently formed or emerging states like Galmudug and Hirshabelle. Only three of the organisations mapped work at the national level, with the rest working in one to four regions. At least 36% of the organisations are women-led or WROs, while the rest work on broader humanitarian, development or peacebuilding issues. Slightly more than half of them have an organisational status (56), followed by eight networks and five associations, and all of them are officially registered.

The majority (29) of the CSOs consulted in this mapping have an annual income of over \$501,000; 3% of these are WROs. It is important to note that this is an average annual income and keep in mind that CSOs' income can fluctuate much more than that of INGOs. After this, there is a 30% split of those who have an annual income of up to \$20,000, between \$21,000 and \$50,000, or between \$51,000 and \$100,000. The rest (11%) get between \$101,000 and \$500,000. The organisations that receive the least amount of money are registered as associations and mainly based in Jubaland and Puntland. The vast majority of organisations (75%) have project-specific funding, with 25% only receiving this type of funding. Only two organisations have access to core funding, both from the Banadir region; one is a women's organisation. 54% of the organisations have access to short-term funding, while 36% have access to long-term funding (though this is project-specific); the majority are in the Banadir region. There is a lack of diversification in terms of funding: CSOs and WROs rely

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entirely on funding from donors, the UN, international organisations and partners. The majority of the WROs interviewed indicated that they need capacity strengthening on resource mobilisation.

The large majority of organisations work on violence against women and girls (VAWG), followed by humanitarian response and participation. Almost half work on security and justice. While few work on countering violent extremism, only one works on peacekeeping. No organisation works with sexual and gender minorities. The vast majority works with women, although only 14% work with rural women, youth and girls, and women and girls with disabilities. 83% work with refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) and 70% with religious and ethnic minorities, which in Somalia mainly refers to minority clans.

Somalia has not ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and has signed but not ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). In addition, Somalia has not yet created a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security².

Unequal access to rights and opportunities between women and men in the social, economic and political spheres, as well as gender norms and cultural biases that prioritise men over women in all levels of decision-making, were among the challenges identified by this research. The latest UN Human Development Report for Somalia ranked it as the 4th most unequal country globally, and Somalia is not currently included in international gender rankings.³ Going by the national data on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (gender equality), the country falls behind in gender-related targets like ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, as well as ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Following the adoption of an electoral quota of 30% for women in the 2017 national elections, 24% of those elected to the Lower House and 22% of those in the Upper House were women.⁴ While this is an important achievement, the quota was not met and women remain considerably underrepresented in political processes and public offices, including in the cabinet and legislative and administrative bodies across the country. Furthermore, the quota has not been enshrined in law and currently WROs are campaigning for its inclusion in the Constitution and for the quota to be met in the 2021 elections. These inequalities around representation are greater among poor and rural women and those from marginalised groups, such as minority clans and IDPs, across all federal member states within Somalia.

A major challenge to achieve women's rights in Somalia is the high prevalence of VAWG. The Somali Health and Demographic Survey (SHDS), published in April 2020, presents grim data: 11.9% of women who have ever been married women and girls aged 15 years or older were subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence in the 12 months prior to the interview.⁵ Particularly at risk are displaced women and girls with 83% of reported VAWG incidents nationwide involving IDPs.⁶ In addition, female genital mutilation (FGM) is still highly prevalent in Somalia with an estimated 99.2% of women aged 15–58 years having undergone the procedure.⁷

WROs and CSOs have always been first responders to crises and emergencies, and are at the forefront of improving communities' wellbeing and reducing violence and tensions, filling the gaps of central government and federal member states when they cannot fully manage crises. They have an unparalleled knowledge of the context, trust from communities and leaders, and they are best placed to understand the gender dynamics that both fuel violence and conflict and hinder women and girls' rights in their communities.

Current improvements in South-Central Somalia's security situation are creating more opportunities and better access for local and national WROs and CSOs to work towards meeting people's immediate needs, reducing conflict and advancing human rights and access to justice, all core areas of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Their in-depth knowledge and decades of experience give them an ability to be conflict sensitive and gender transformative in a culturally sensitive way, and to be led by women and communities.

The ongoing institutionalisation in Somalia, and opportunities for long-lasting change presented by the upcoming election and current political debates in parliament and within the national discourse on areas related to Women, Peace and Security, are all pivotal opportunities to advance women's rights, increase women's meaningful participation and build inclusive peace in Somalia.

² National Action Plans (NAPs) are an important vehicle for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. NAPs show how states prioritise different aspects of the WPS agenda and provide information on how the WPS activities are governed, funded, and monitored.

³ UNDP (2012), 'Somalia Human Development Report 2012: Empowering Youth for Peace and Development'.

⁴ Amnesty International (n.d.), 'Somalia 2017/2018' (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/somalia/report-somalia/>)

⁵ Federal Government of Somalia (2020), 'The Somali Health and Demographic Survey', April. (<https://somalia.unfpa.org/en/publications/somali-health-and-demographic-survey-2020>)

⁶ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2018), 'Somalia Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019', (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Somalia_2019_HNO.PDF)

⁷ Federal Government of Somalia (2020), 'The Somali Health and Demographic Survey', April. (<https://somalia.unfpa.org/en/publications/somali-health-and-demographic-survey-2020>)

This sense of opportunity and the belief that WROs and CSOs are the best actors and platforms to lead Women, Peace and Security work came out strongly in the research. The existence of a pool of women activists, lawyers and political leaders presents a unique opportunity for WROs and CSOs to take advantage of the current climate and advance what they have identified as key agendas in the country: to increase women's representation in the next election, adopt the 30% quota in the Constitution, lobby for the development of a Somali National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security, and advance legal reform in key areas, including the passing of an unaltered Sexual Offences Bill.

Despite this potential, participants raised the immense challenges they face which are preventing them from advancing women's rights and Women, Peace and Security at all levels:

- The mapping highlighted how funding trends and immediate protection needs drive most organisations to work on VAWG response and humanitarian response. Participants highlighted the need for donors to invest in other areas of Women, Peace and Security, such as conflict prevention from a gender perspective, peacebuilding, women's participation, and Women, Peace and Security policy, advocacy and awareness raising. Most of the participants outlined the need to come up with an integrated approach to Women, Peace and Security programming rather than stand-alone projects that address violence prevention and social norm change, service provision (including gender-based violence response), women's empowerment and participation separately. These need to address social and gender norms and other root causes of conflict and discrimination while strengthening access to basic services, so that issues pertaining to women and girls' rights and gender equality can be addressed holistically at all levels.
- One of the biggest challenges facing women and girls in Somalia that research participants identified was inadequate protection services and weak regulatory frameworks, especially in terms of law and unequal access to justice. The organisations consulted emphasised how the provision of such services can be an effective way to achieve concrete results for individuals – but that these need to be accompanied by programmes that will have a systematic impact on transforming the root causes of these issues, including by ensuring that responses of formal and informal justice actors and institutions are more inclusive of and responsive to the needs and demands of women, girls and other marginalised groups.
- The consulted WROs and CSOs, especially those who support programmes focusing on women and girls, noted various difficulties in accessing international donor funding. Participants identified that on many occasions, donors put forward calls for proposals that were not fully in line with local and national Somali priorities or with the needs of women and communities. Other challenges in accessing funding were identified as follows: calls for proposals use highly technical and foreign language; complex funding proposals and online systems do not work with organisations' bandwidth constraints; there is poor dissemination of calls for proposals at national but mainly local and rural levels; short application deadlines; lack of feedback for unsuccessful applications; and gaps in core functions' capacity.
- Due to funding trends, systems and fund "projectisation", WROs and CSOs' biggest challenge is to generate and access core funding that will allow them to build organisational core functions in the long term, and hire and retain staff with core organisational capacities, such as monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), finance, fundraising, compliance and due diligence, management and operations. Participants communicated that often donors and INGOs operate under the assumption that WROs and CSOs do not have 'capacity' to deliver and/or manage big projects nor manage large funds, when this is not the problem – participants believe that instead, some WROs or CSOs may simply not yet have the know-how on donor and INGO-specific procedures, policies, systems and methodologies and, above all, that their capacity gaps are a consequence of the way the funding trends and systems operate.

The findings demonstrate that a move towards localisation and shifting power to WROs and CSOs is right and is needed in Somalia. Donors need to approach funding as a way of increasing the ability of local actors and organisations to rapidly address evolving conflict dynamics in the long term, by supporting flexible funding and local partnerships as a more sustainable and flexible solution to instability, conflict and crises – rather than project-by-project funding to INGOs.

For these opportunities to be seized, women's organisations and advocacy networks require targeted support: increased, long-term and more flexible funding models earmarked for WROs and CSOs, their agendas and identified needs; less burdensome compliance, due diligence and reporting requirements; and investment in their core funding and capacity strengthening linked to core functions, as identified by WROs/CSOs themselves.

Participants requested capacity strengthening in key areas like MEL, fundraising, governance structures, proposal development, financial and narrative reporting, donor requirements, due diligence processes and procurement management. However, they noted this capacity strengthening should not come in the form of project-based training, but through core and long-term support from donors and through more equal partnerships with INGOs.

International partners (UN and INGOs) have a key role to play here: investing in two-way, equal and long-term partnerships when working with WROs/CSOs, and co-designing programmes and budgets, as well as advocacy initiatives that reflect the priorities of national NGOs. By focusing on a solidarity and accompaniment approach, INGOs will be providing a space for CSOs/WROs to lead the change they and the communities they work with want to see.

2. Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Opportunities: WROs and CSOs have the expertise and capabilities to drive sustained, long-term and gender-sensitive conflict prevention and Women, Peace and Security efforts. This expertise needs to be recognised and supported by increasing core funding and more flexible funding models, and by strengthening WROs and CSOs' capacity in organisational areas, to advance Women, Peace and Security in Somalia. Current improvements in security, as well as national debates on women's participation, are creating a unique momentum that the sector should seize upon. To enable local and national leadership on this front, donors should increase funding to WROs and CSOs, and make it more accessible and flexible.

They should also prioritise WROs, CSOs and networks' national advocacy on Women, Peace and Security – including the adoption of a NAP on Women, Peace and Security, women's meaningful participation in decision-making and conflict prevention (including the constitutional quota), access to justice, and women's and girls' rights.

Recommendation 2 – Priorities, themes and type of funding: Donors should increase support to underfunded and priority areas of Women, Peace and Security. This includes: access to justice programming, women's meaningful participation, conflict prevention, and integrated Women, Peace and Security approaches as well as women and girls' rights and Women, Peace and Security policy and advocacy. Donors should also invest in holistic women's rights, protection and empowerment programmes, and expand the Women, Peace and Security agenda by recognising key linkages between Women, Peace and Security and other areas.

Funding should be context-specific as well as flexible enough to respond to emergency situations, allowing organisations to respond to immediate needs as well as work on conflict prevention and address root causes of gender inequality and conflict in the longer term. This should take precedence over narrow donor priorities. Donors should also diversify their funding portfolio to go beyond humanitarian response and gender-based violence and protection funding.

Donors should increase long-term funding to invest in programming that allows for better quality, impact and sustainability. In addition, it should include a minimum of 10% for organisational development to support WROs and CSOs in strengthening their core functions and capacities. WROs and CSOs should be allowed to implement their self-defined priorities that often address multiple themes, rather than those outlined to them by donors – particularly in a context like Somalia where, due to a prioritisation of preventing violent extremism and counter-terrorism strategies, donors might condition WROs and CSOs' agendas.

Recommendation 3 – Equal partnerships: INGOs should adopt a partnership approach that is based on principles of solidarity and accompaniment of CSOs/WROs, by building mutual, equal, respectful and committed partnerships with WROs/CSOs and focusing on strengthening each organisation's capacities, giving up space for WROs/CSOs to lead the change they and the communities they work with want to see.

To achieve this, INGOs should invest in and commit to long-term partnerships, which go beyond specific projects, and support the growth of a strong, active and independent civil society that represents the views of people affected by conflict and advocates for their rights and interests. This approach involves co-designing all programmes and budgets, providing financial resources for national NGOs' organisational development, facilitating their access to direct funding, and ensuring that programmes respond to the changes they have identified as being necessary.

Recommendation 4 – Capacity strengthening: Capacity strengthening should focus on areas outlined by WROs/CSOs. Donors should increase support to strengthen the capacities of WROs and CSOs, especially around core functions such as resource mobilisation and fundraising, finance, programme design and development, operations and compliance, and MEL.

This should be done by directly funding core function support as well as including capacity strengthening in project funding, responding to a capacity assessment and prioritisation led by CSOs and WROs themselves.

Donors and INGOs should allocate the necessary funds, human resources and methodologies to prioritise long-term relationships with WROs/CSOs and support their organisational development through capacity strengthening, depending on the needs of CSOs that they identify themselves.

Recommendation 5 – Accessibility/application process: Donors and multi-lateral institutions should make direct funding to WROs and CSOs more accessible in Somalia. Funding should be tailored to their structures and needs, in line with global commitments on Women, Peace and Security and because national WROs and CSOs have a strong expertise and know the context better than INGOs.

Donors should consider targeting WROs/CSOs with specific calls, and simplifying their application processes, formats and requirements, as well as strengthening CSOs and WROs' knowledge of application frameworks and systems on an ongoing basis.

They should provide timely and clear information regarding the application process, eligibility and criteria, disseminating this at local, federal and national levels and through CSO networks and UN clusters, including those outside Banadir region (Mogadishu). Donors should give at least four weeks' notification of application deadlines and the dissemination should be done in advance of the publication.

INGOs should acknowledge their dual role as partner and donor in many cases, and adopt many of these recommendations in their programme design and partner selection processes. INGOs should also share information on funding opportunities with partners on an ongoing basis and in a timely manner, promoting participatory programme design and moving towards long-term partnerships.

Recommendation 6 – Compliance/due diligence: Donors and INGOs should lessen and harmonise due diligence requirements by graduating due diligence processes and criteria according to the capacity of national CSOs and the amount of funding being applied for; for example WROs/CSOs should have lesser due diligence requirements than INGOs competing with them. Donors should invest in harmonisation and a common capacity assessment to ensure local and national NGOs do not have to complete endless due diligence requirements. Donors should also provide funding to allow WROs/CSOs to invest in core staff who can easily deliver due diligence and compliance requirements, particularly in a context like Somalia where prioritisation of preventing violent extremism and counter-terrorism strategies limits Somali WROs and CSOs' access to funding.

Recommendation 7 – Proposals (narrative and budget): Donors should develop simpler proposal templates that are easier and quicker to complete, accessible in terms of language and the platforms they are shared through, and most importantly flexible enough to respond to the needs of women and girls, women's organisations and communities, as well as relevant national/state-level strategies and policies, instead of just to donor policies and priorities.

WROs and CSOs should be able to tailor proposals to the communities' needs or they should be consulted to ensure proposals are in line with these. Earmarking funds for national organisations would also be supportive of the ongoing work and priorities of WROs and CSOs. Budgets should be flexible enough to allow for the inclusion of overhead and administration costs of WROs and CSOs.

Recommendation 8 – Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL): Donors and INGOs should prioritise funding of MEL staff in WROs and CSOs as core and sustained functions, and not just "projectised" posts, as well as strengthening capacity of MEL staff in general, and not just on data collection and analysis based on donors and INGOs' tools and approaches.

MEL frameworks that have already been developed by WROs/CSOs should be prioritised and new frameworks should be designed together with WROs/CSOs. Learning how to use MEL data on programme design is an area that CSOs would like more support on and resources.

MEL should align with government policies/frameworks when these line up with the objectives of CSOs/WROs and community needs, and should be undertaken in a participatory manner that also involves beneficiaries and programme participants. There is also a need for flexible funds for contingency planning for emergencies – like COVID-19 – linked to MEL efforts and analysis.

Recommendation 9 – Reporting (financial and narrative): Donors and INGOs should develop standardised reporting formats (financial and narrative) and systems that are accessible, transparent and robust with less paperwork. Donors and INGOs should consider moving away from monthly reporting to, at most, bi-annual and annual reporting. Reporting could also be simplified if done through other less formal channels such as phone calls, meetings or visits.

Donors and INGOs should provide support to partners with training on donors' reporting requirements and procedures.

3. Recommendations and Evidence

Recommendation 1 – Opportunities:

WROs and CSOs have the expertise and capabilities to drive sustained, long-term and gender-sensitive conflict prevention and Women, Peace and Security efforts. This expertise needs to be recognised and supported by increasing core funding and more flexible funding models, and by strengthening WROs and CSOs' capacity in organisational areas, to advance Women, Peace and Security in Somalia. Current improvements in security, as well as national debates on women's participation, are creating a unique momentum that the sector should seize upon. To enable local and national leadership on this front, donors should increase funding to WROs and CSOs, and make it more accessible and flexible.

They should also prioritise WROs, CSOs and networks' national advocacy on Women, Peace and Security – including the adoption of a NAP on Women, Peace and Security, women's meaningful participation in decision-making and conflict prevention (including the constitutional quota), access to justice, and women's and girls' rights.

Recommendation for: donors, multi-lateral institutions, government and civil society.

Improvements in the security situation in South-Central Somalia are creating more opportunities and better access for local and national WROs and CSOs to work towards meeting people's needs and to work on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and Women, Peace and Security programme areas.

Current national events – namely the upcoming elections and ongoing institutionalisation in Somalia – present crucial opportunities to advance Women, Peace and Security in Somalia. Somali women, WROs and networks are currently strongly advocating to ensure the 30% quota in the upcoming 2021 elections,⁸ and have long called for this quota to be enshrined in the Constitution as well as for the adoption of a NAP on Women, Peace and Security. Furthermore, WROs have been tirelessly advocating for the passing of the Sexual Offences Bill, which has been met with huge backlash in parliament (with an altered version being denounced by local, national and international organisations).⁹

This sense of opportunity – with debates currently taking place in parliament and within the national discourse on areas related to Women, Peace and Security – came out strongly in the research. WROs and CSOs believe they are the best actors and platforms to lead Women, Peace and Security work in the country.

In addition, their unparalleled knowledge of the context and therefore their ability to be conflict sensitive and gender transformative in a way that is culturally sensitive and led by women and communities places them in an excellent position to take the identified gaps of the Women, Peace and Security agenda forward in Somalia. The existence of a pool of women activists, lawyers and political leaders presents a unique opportunity for WROs and CSOs to lobby for the government to fully adopt a Somali NAP on Women, Peace and Security and advance legal reform in areas of political participation and gender-based violence.

However, WROs and CSOs feel held back by challenges which will be explored in the following recommendations. For these opportunities to be seized, women's organisations and advocacy networks require flexible and targeted support: long-term and more flexible funding models, earmarked funding for WROs and CSOs within common funding pools to advance their agendas and identified needs, less burdensome compliance, due diligence and reporting requirements, and investment in their core funding and capacity strengthening linked to core functions, as identified by WROs/CSOs themselves.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants said areas that present huge opportunities are women's representation in parliament and women's leadership on Women, Peace and Security, as there are increasing numbers of active and educated women including lawyers who can offer legal services. Conflict prevention programmes should call for stronger inclusion of women and WROs in their design, implementation and MEL. In addition, continued support to WROs and CSOs to provide support to communities is needed.

⁸ Reuters (2020), 'Somali women demand guarantee of 30% of parliament in 2021 election', October (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-women-politics-trfn-idUSKBN27D1S9>)

⁹ Reuters (2011), 'Outrage as Somali parliament drafts law permitting child, forced marriages', August (<https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-women-rights/outrage-as-somali-parliament-drafts-law-permitting-child-forced-marriages-idUSKCN257200>)

In **Galmudug** state, participants outlined cultural and clan diversity, good educational backgrounds, collaboration with community members on conflict and violence prevention, and good rapport with government organisations at different levels as opportunities for strengthening work on inclusive peace and Women, Peace and Security.

In **Jubaland** state, participants outlined a willingness from donors to fund gender-specific programming and a good working relationship between the national and state government as grounds for WROs and CSOs to increase women's participation in the political process and at all levels of decision-making.

In **Puntland** state, participants outlined how the government has supported an increasing number of women in business and youth who are technologically savvy as some of the opportunities available for WROs/CSOs to bridge existing inequalities. In addition, community awareness around equality for women, girls and boys and good rapport between host communities and IDPs creates a unique environment for ensuring the inclusion of marginalised people.

In **Southwest** state, participants outlined community acceptance through leadership structures, the availability and willingness of the international community to fund projects, and a good relationship with the government as factors that make it easy for them access funding and carrying out their work.

Recommendation 2 – Priorities, themes and type of funding:

Donors should increase support to underfunded and priority areas of Women, Peace and Security. This includes: access to justice programming, women’s meaningful participation, conflict prevention, and integrated Women, Peace and Security approaches as well as women and girls’ rights and Women, Peace and Security policy and advocacy. Donors should also invest in holistic women’s rights, protection and empowerment programmes, and expand the Women, Peace and Security agenda by recognising key linkages between Women, Peace and Security and other areas.

Funding should be context-specific as well as flexible enough to respond to emergency situations, allowing organisations to respond to immediate needs as well as work on conflict prevention and address root causes of gender inequality and conflict in the longer term. This should take precedence over narrow donor priorities. Donors should also diversify their funding portfolio to go beyond humanitarian response and gender-based violence and protection funding.

Donors should increase long-term funding to invest in programming that allows for better quality, impact and sustainability. In addition, it should include a minimum of 10% for organisational development to support WROs and CSOs in strengthening their core functions and capacities. WROs and CSOs should be allowed to implement their self-defined priorities that often address multiple themes, rather than those outlined to them by donors – particularly in a context like Somalia where, due to a prioritisation of preventing violent extremism and counter-terrorism strategies, donors might condition WROs and CSOs’ agendas.

Recommendation for: donors, multi-lateral institutions and government

Organisations mapped work mainly on gender-based violence, humanitarian response and participation. However, their focus on one area over another may respond more to donor trends and priorities rather than to community needs or national or organisational priorities, as mentioned in the previous section.

When asked about priority areas for funding, participants cited unequal access to rights and opportunities between women and men in the social, economic and political spheres, and gender norms and cultural biases that prioritise men over women in all levels of decision-making. Within these, inadequate protection services and weak regulatory frameworks, especially in terms of the law and unequal access to justice, were some of the biggest challenges facing women and girls in Somalia that research participants identified. The organisations consulted placed special attention on how the provision of such services can be an effective way to achieve concrete results for individuals – but that these need to be accompanied by programmes that will have a systematic impact on transforming the root causes of these issues, including by ensuring that responses of formal and informal justice actors and institutions are more inclusive of and responsive to the needs and demands of women, girls and other marginalised groups.

In line with this, most of the participants outlined the need to come up with an integrated approach to Women, Peace and Security programming rather than stand-alone projects that address violence prevention and social norm change, service provision (including gender-based violence response), women’s empowerment and participation separately. These need to address social and gender norms and other root causes of conflict and discrimination while strengthening access to basic services, justice and protection. They mentioned that funding consortiums or WRO/CSO networks working on different Women, Peace and Security thematic areas would allow for collaboration and advance Women, Peace and Security policy at local and national levels.

Participants also mentioned how a lack of core staff (not linked to project implementation) – staff who could strengthen operational, fundraising and financial capacities and core organisational capacity – is a main barrier to working on priorities and accessing funds. Donors need to increase support to core funding for WROs and CSOs if they are to strengthen their capacities to deliver on competing needs and priorities and achieve an equal balance of power between WROs and INGOs working in Somalia – contributing to building a system that will eventually provide a safe space for WROs in Somalia to lead the changes they have identified as being necessary.

Participants also identified short-term funding as a massive obstacle in organisational capacity and sustainability, but also in programme quality, impact and sustainability. They requested long-term financial support to women’s organisations rather than small projects of shorter duration (3–6 months) that do not result in sustainable change. They also mentioned that funding should include a minimum of 10% for organisational structure development and capacity strengthening for staff.

Additional areas to support Women, Peace and Security and women’s meaningful participation are for donors to require more women to be employed as staff in NGOs and CSOs, including in management positions, and to monitor gender pay gaps and Safeguarding policies.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants noted that donors are more interested in humanitarian response, especially gender-based violence and protection, human rights issues and access to basic services like healthcare. One participant mentioned the need for more conflict resolution projects, and another indicated that the specific areas to be funded depend on the donor's interest and areas of opportunities as opposed to the actual needs of the beneficiaries. They also spoke about how areas of focus are stand-alone and not integrated, which is not reflective of people's lives and needs, and which limits provision of comprehensive service packages or holistic programmes.

In **Galmudug** state, participants mentioned themes like VAWG, protection and conflict prevention as areas where they find it easier to receive funding.

In **Hirshabelle** state, participants found it easier to secure funding in the areas of VAWG, protection and conflict resolution. They attributed funding for VAWG and protection due to the absence of strong government institutions, especially in the justice system and security sector. In addition, they stated that conflict resolution is also funded due to rampant clan conflict.

In **Southwest** state, participants indicated that health, nutrition, protection, VAWG and human rights are easier to fund. Nutrition and health areas were regarded as life-saving interventions that are critical. Participants noted the siloed approaches of these programmes, and said that by integrating these components, interventions could provide a comprehensive package of services that is critical to addressing the needs of women and GBV survivors.

In **Puntland** state, participants indicated that VAWG, conflict resolution, peacebuilding and women empowerment are areas that are easily funded. Conflict resolution is funded because it is resource-based, and clans often fight each other leading to loss of life, injury and displacement. One of the participants pointed out that areas/themes that are funded are donor-driven and not necessarily based on beneficiaries' needs, and that despite needs some donors do not prioritise humanitarian support.

In **Jubaland** state, participants found it easier to get funding for themes that focus on health, nutrition, livelihoods, VAWG, protection, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Recommendation 3 – Equal partnerships:

INGOs should adopt a partnership approach that is based on principles of solidarity and accompaniment of CSOs/WROs, by building mutual, equal, respectful and committed partnerships with WROs/CSOs and focusing on strengthening each organisation's capacities, giving up space for WROs/CSOs to lead the change they and the communities they work with want to see.

To achieve this, INGOs should invest in and commit to long-term partnerships, which go beyond specific projects, and support the growth of a strong, active and independent civil society that represents the views of people affected by conflict and advocates for their rights and interests. This approach involves co-designing all programmes and budgets, providing financial resources for national NGOs' organisational development, facilitating their access to direct funding, and ensuring that programmes respond to the changes they have identified as being necessary.

Recommendation for: INGOs, donors and multi-lateral institutions

WROs/CSOs and networks are often best placed to understand and address the priorities of the communities they work with, and the gender norms and inequalities that hinder women's safety and participation in their communities. They also have a deep contextual knowledge (most of the time they are part of the communities they work with) and the trust and flexibility to adapt and provide services in a way that government entities often cannot, allowing them to fill critical gaps during both crisis and recovery. For initiatives to be sustainable and ensure women's rights and women's participation, they need to be able to provide long-term and regular accompaniment and support to the communities they work with, always led by their priorities.

Throughout the research, participants referred to INGOs adopting similar practices, funding models and due diligence MEL and reporting requirements as international donors. They talked about "projectised" funding and relationships, and about receiving training from INGOs to allow them to fulfil INGOs' models and reporting requirements instead of defining long-term capacity strengthening initiatives that respond to WROs and CSOs' needs and priorities. They discussed how many INGOs do not share core, overhead or administration costs with them, weakening their organisational capacity. They called for INGOs to acknowledge their double role as partner and donor in many cases, and move towards more transparent, equal and long-term partnerships based on solidarity.¹⁰

INGOs should prioritise investing in two-way, equal and long-term partnerships when working with CSOs and WROs, co-designing programmes and budgets, and sharing budgets and overhead/administration costs more equally, as well as advocacy initiatives that reflect the priorities of national NGOs. Tools, activities and methodologies that national NGOs have in place are usually more contextually relevant, and should be prioritised, rather than developing "new" ones or using the methodologies already developed by INGOs. In addition, INGOs should make sure that they can provide the necessary resources to support the organisational development of their national partners in the areas identified and prioritised by them. This could be in the form of trainings, learning and experience exchanges that are defined by CSOs and WROs' priorities and needs – or joint trainings and exchanges – and core organisational funding. Similarly, INGOs should also assess their own capacity gaps and identify how partners can help to strengthen them, for example, through paid trainings. This way of working not only strengthens national CSOs, but also allows for the decision-making power over what programming is needed in a particular context to be equally shared. Furthermore, it can encourage reflection on the added value of each partner and contribute to a stronger approach that builds on the strengths of national NGO and INGO partners.

National NGOs' agendas should be prioritised and supported. This should be reflected in partnership agreements, activities and budgets that are co-designed with NNGO partners, in recognition of their contextual knowledge and expertise. Participants also mentioned that supporting/funding consortiums or CSO/WRO networks working on different Women, Peace and Security thematic areas (in addition to providing funding individually to WROs/CSOs) fosters collaboration amongst national CSOs and can contribute to more effectively advancing Women, Peace and Security policy at local and national levels.

¹⁰ Due to the sensitive nature of some of this content, the findings in this section have been aggregated and will not be presented by region.

Recommendation 4 – Capacity strengthening:

Capacity strengthening should focus on areas outlined by WROs/CSOs. Donors should increase support to strengthen the capacities of WROs and CSOs, especially around core functions such as resource mobilisation and fundraising, finance, programme design and development, operations and compliance, and MEL.

This should be done by directly funding core function support as well as including capacity strengthening in project funding, responding to a capacity assessment and prioritisation led by CSOs and WROs themselves.

Donors and INGOs should allocate the necessary funds, human resources and methodologies to prioritise long-term relationships with WROs/CSOs and support their organisational development through capacity strengthening, depending on the needs of CSOs that they identify themselves.

Recommendation for: donors, multi-lateral institutions and INGOs

Participants outlined that often donors and INGOs operate under the assumption that WROs and CSOs do not have the “capacity” to deliver and/or manage big projects, when this is not the case. Instead, WROs or CSOs may not yet have the know-how on donor and INGO specific procedures, policies, systems and methodologies. Participants said that they prefer to think of “capacity strengthening” instead of “capacity building”.

Because of fund “projectisation”, local and national organisations’ main challenges are related to hiring and retaining staff with core organisational capacities, such as MEL, finance, fundraising and other core functions (such as management, or operations). In many cases, when a project ends, technical MEL or finance staff can no longer be kept on and leave, for example.

Rather than including specific capacity requirements per project, it is important to invest in organisations’ core capacity to build up and sustain technical staff beyond projects’ lifespans, supporting and working with WROs/CSOs to strengthen their core capacities and identify areas where INGOs can complement their work.

Participants requested capacity strengthening in programmatic, technical and structural areas like MEL, governance, fundraising, proposal development, financial and narrative reporting, donor requirements, due diligence processes and procurement management. This should be supported on an ongoing basis, ahead of proposals and during project implementation.

A move to core funding would allow each organisation to spend some of their funding on the areas identified and to spend funds where they need them the most. If donors and INGOs provide CSOs/WROs with resources on a longer-term basis to help them strengthen their capacities, this will help CSOs and WROs to contribute fully to the change they and the communities where they operate wish to see.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants identified capacity gaps in areas of proposal writing, reporting (financial and narrative), financial management, budget management, MEL and due diligence requirements. One of the participants identified capacity assessments as the first step to establishing trainings needs and gaps in skills before doing any capacity strengthening for CSOs. In addition, another participant said that organisations need to identify and recruit qualified staff for technical positions like MEL, fundraising and financial management, and should then undergo training to strengthen their capacity. Furthermore, one of the participants also identified due diligence requirements and proposal writing as key areas for capacity strengthening.

In **Galmudug** state, participants identified proposal writing, report writing, MEL, budget management, financial systems, due diligence requirements and skills development as main gaps that need to be strengthened. One of the participants also noted that their organisation has the necessary manuals on finance, procurement, human resources, and child protection, but that they need to be updated.

In **Hirshabelle** state, participants identified report writing, MEL, budget management, financial systems and proposal writing as gaps in training. In addition, participants suggested that staff from CSOs should attend the same training to share their experiences.

In **Jubaland** state, participants identified MEL, proposal writing, budget management and financial systems as areas where staff need to be trained. One of the participants also identified special projects that focus on democracy, good governance, human rights and peacebuilding as some of the areas that staff need to be trained on.

In **Southwest** state, participants identified proposal writing, financial management, report writing, MEL, financial systems, due diligence requirements, advocacy, fundraising and procurement. One of the participants also identified gaps in coordination between the CSOs and recommended establishing coordination networks. Furthermore, one participant recommended training on online reporting systems.

In **Puntland** state, participants identified proposal writing, report writing, fundraising, MEL and budget management. One participant identified governance and entrepreneurship as areas requiring capacity development.

Recommendation 5 – Accessibility/application process:

Donors and multi-lateral institutions should make direct funding to WROs and CSOs more accessible in Somalia. Funding should be tailored to their structures and needs, in line with global commitments on Women, Peace and Security and because national WROs and CSOs have a strong expertise and know the context better than INGOs.

Donors should consider targeting WROs/CSOs with specific calls, and simplifying their application processes, formats and requirements, as well as strengthening CSOs and WROs' knowledge of application frameworks and systems on an ongoing basis.

They should provide timely and clear information regarding the application process, eligibility and criteria, disseminating this at local, federal and national levels and through CSO networks and UN clusters, including those outside Banadir region (Mogadishu). Donors should give at least four weeks' notification of application deadlines and the dissemination should be done in advance of the publication.

INGOs should acknowledge their double role as partner and donor in many cases, and adopt many of these recommendations in their programme design and partner selection processes. INGOs should also share information on funding opportunities with partners on an ongoing basis and in a timely manner, promoting participatory programme design and moving towards long-term partnerships.

Recommendation for: donors and multi-lateral institutions and INGOs

Organisations consulted noted difficulties in accessing funds from international donors. Most WROs/CSOs stated they did not have sufficient information on funding application processes and how to contact prospective donors. This was mentioned especially in relation to donors who support women-centred programmes. Participants also felt that international donors only give funds to those organisations already known to them and that it is difficult for organisations without knowledge or experience of working with a particular donor to navigate their applications, requirements and systems. Conversely, some organisations did contact international donors on their own or through their INGO partner, who they know has easier access to international donors. This puts them in the position of having to partner with INGOs to get funding.

Participants mentioned that different international donors require that they have very specific experience or skills and have different due diligence requirements. Stringent eligibility criteria to access funding, such as heavy and cumbersome due diligence processes and strict donor regulatory frameworks - that oblige them to be registered or certified by authorities or international organisations - mean that many small and medium WROs are excluded from the application process at the onset. International organisations and donors have different approaches to capacity assessments and passing one does not automatically make an organisation eligible for another. Some of the assessments are expensive and time consuming. This process potentially prevented some national NGOs from accessing funding as they could not afford the assessments or did not have the in-house capacity to conduct them. The lack of follow up by INGOs to support capacity development for needs identified in assessments means that the capacity assessments merely became a contracting tool rather than part of a longer-term process to develop a stronger civil society in Somalia.

Furthermore, participants mentioned that calls for proposals often require them to conform to a certain organisational structure and have specific financial systems (usually one similar to that of an INGO) in order to access funding. This leaves WRO and CSO networks and social movements with little or no room to access some funding streams unless they partner with an INGO. However, participants mentioned that INGOs are reluctant to partner with national NGOs as they are not confident that the local institutions have the capacity to manage larger projects or finances, or to address the needs of their communities. However, they emphasised that national NGOs, as first responders, have a strategic understanding of the contexts they work in and communities they work with and should represent their communities and development in Somalia while international organisations should take a supportive role.¹¹

To address these concerns, recommendations include donors making direct funding to WROs and CSOs more accessible in Somalia, including by targeting or prioritising different types of organisations such as networks that may vary in structure and legal entity. Donors should simplify their application processes, formats and requirements, and tailor them to the needs of the communities by consulting WROs and CSOs' agendas. This would also mean recognising that WROs and CSOs have an invaluable expertise and knowledge of the context they work in.

Clearer information and dissemination of application processes, eligibility and criteria, were found to be key elements needed for national NGOs to access funding. Dissemination should be increased at local (federal member state) and

¹¹ Humanitarian Leadership Academy (2017), 'Dialogue for Action on Aid Localisation in Somalia', May (<https://www.humanitarianleadershipacademy.org/dialogue-action-aid-localisation-somalia/>)

national levels and CSO networks and UN clusters outside Banadir region (Mogadishu) should be targeted. Furthermore, participants noted that relevant clusters like gender-based violence or protection clusters do usually share information on funding by advertising on their websites. However, due to the siloed ways in which 'aid' funding and programming works, this is mostly gender-based violence prevention and response funding, and does not always include funding for other areas of Women, Peace and Security programming, such as conflict prevention or women's participation. Donors are encouraged to share calls proactively with other networks working on gender equality, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, development and humanitarian 'aid'. Donors should give at least four weeks' notification of application deadlines and they should notify of the opportunity in advance of the publication of the Call for Applications.

To address gaps in knowledge on specific donor frameworks, donors should invest in capacity strengthening with WROs and CSOs on application procedures and formats and donor regulatory frameworks. (see recommendation 3 on capacity strengthening). Capacity strengthening sessions should be held as webinars on an ongoing basis and should not be linked to specific calls. Participants pointed to the fact that these challenges are often reinforced by transactional relationships with INGOs, in which they are treated as implementers for time-bound projects, instead of as long-term partners and thus there is no investment in strengthening their ability to navigate some of those donor-specific requirements.

To address this, INGOs should share information on funding opportunities with partners on an ongoing basis and in a timely manner, regardless of whether they will partner with specific WROs or CSOs for a particular call. They should also provide ongoing support to navigate the complex guidelines that are attached to funding calls until donors simplify the process. Co-creation processes should engage local partners meaningfully and long-term partnerships should invest in local organisations' capacities to write proposals and submit them independently.

Finally, participants mentioned that due to low band internet subject to connection issues in many areas proposals should be accepted via email or through the post (with donors paying the mail costs) rather than complex online systems.

Regional evidence highlights

Participants from WROs based in **Banadir** emphasised the importance of having prior knowledge of opportunities, donors' frameworks and priorities, etc. to access international donor funding. They believe most donors give priority to INGOs who can more easily meet the criteria, requirements and knowledge of their frameworks and funding schemes. They noted that many INGOs have either their headquarters or offices in the host country of most donor, facilitating networking, long-standing relationships and a sustained knowledge of how to interact with and access funds from these donors. They pointed to the fact that INGOs' international experience, highly skilled and experienced staff and strong accountability, financial and MEL systems gives them an edge over national and local NGOs.

In **Galmudug** state WROs/CSOs mentioned that some donors do send calls for proposals directly to local and national organisations, who then share with others. Galmudug participants also spoke about difficulties related to technical skills and proposal writing, especially when there is short notice to respond to bids from donors. This leaves them with the only option to partner with INGOs who can secure the funds and with a track history of successful implementation of projects.

In **Jubaland** state, most of the organisations noted that they access international donor funding through regional fundraising links, UN clusters and UN fundraising systems. They also said that they have the experience, technical skills, a longstanding history as local and national CSOs, and a good rapport with the communities they work with, which are factors that have helped them to win some bids. However, participants also agreed that there are challenges as donors ask for specific and different proposal writing requirements, and that donors still give preference to INGOs instead of national or local NGOs.

In **Southwest** state, participants agreed that in most cases competition from INGOs makes it difficult for them to access funds directly and some felt that they still grapple with lack of human resources and technical capacity when developing proposals that have an urgent deadline. Participants also indicated one challenge with online application systems like the Humanitarian Response Plan managed by UNOCHA is that the system can stall at critical moments during the application

Recommendation 6 – Compliance/due diligence:

Donors and INGOs should lessen and harmonise due diligence requirements by graduating due diligence processes and criteria according to the capacity of national CSOs and the amount of funding being applied for; for example WROs/CSOs should have lesser due diligence requirements than INGOs competing with them. Donors should invest in harmonisation and a common capacity assessment to ensure local and national NGOs do not have to complete endless due diligence requirements. Donors should also provide funding to allow WROs/CSOs to invest in core staff who can easily deliver due diligence and compliance requirements, particularly in a context like Somalia where prioritisation of preventing violent extremism and counter-terrorism strategies limits Somali WROs and CSOs' access to funding.

Recommendation for: donors, multi-lateral institutions and INGOs

Complex due diligence processes with short deadlines, a substantial amount of paperwork, and requirements that are difficult to fulfil due to bureaucratic complications, can significantly affect and delay the implementation of humanitarian, peacebuilding and women and girls' rights programmes and exclude WROs and CSOs from participating in projects or being identified as potential partners.¹² In the current 'aid' system, there are requirements for both national and international actors to comply with strict compliance and due diligence rules. These differ from donor to donor and should be harmonised. In Somalia, due to a prioritisation of preventing violent extremism and counter-terrorism strategies, donors are stricter than in other contexts and averse to funding local and national NGOs directly, which has put Somali WROs and CSOs at disadvantage.

Donors and the Somali government, to create an enabling environment for all, should establish a comprehensive risk management policy governing both national and international NGOs. Common and unified capacity assessment standards should also be established to govern capacity audits for any national NGO seeking funding from either a donor, UN agency or an INGO. All capacity assessments and due diligence processes should equally be fulfilled by INGOs operating in Somalia.

WROs' and CSOs' limited core funding and human resources should be taken into account when designing due diligence and compliance processes. With little funds they are left with a choice of investing in staff who can deliver the actual project implementation or other core support staff to deal with finance, compliance, and due diligence, reporting, etc. They also do not have enough funds to hire external consultants in bid preparation and therefore staff who are fully employed to do programme implementation have to also take on bid writing, due diligence and compliance and budget preparation. As INGOs have more resources to hire and hold on to staff dedicated to meeting due diligence and compliance requirements, national NGOs are edged out when competing for the same call or bid.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants noted the tough requirements of donor compliance and that most of them have problems submitting relevant full documentation due to time constraints, the amount of paperwork required and the bureaucratic channels these involve. This coupled with national organisations' weak capacities on this front make it difficult to access funding from the international community.

In **Galmudug** state, participants noted their organisations lacked the technical staff needed to ensure all due diligence processes are addressed and that it is difficult to understand and comply with these from so far away. They pointed to their lack of physical presence in the donor headquarter and regional office locations as a barrier for them to become familiar and able to comply with the numerous donor requirements.

¹² Inter Agency Standing Committee (2016), 'Donor Conditions and their implications for humanitarian response' (<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/donor-conditions-and-their-implications-humanitarian-response>)

Recommendation 7 – Proposals (narrative and budget)

Donors should develop simpler proposal templates that are easier and quicker to complete, accessible in terms of language and the platforms they are shared through, and most importantly flexible enough to respond to the needs of women and girls, women's organisations and communities, as well as relevant national/state-level strategies and policies, instead of just to donor policies and priorities.

WROs and CSOs should be able to tailor proposals to the communities' needs or they should be consulted to ensure proposals are in line with these. Earmarking funds for national organisations would also be supportive of the ongoing work and priorities of WROs and CSOs. Budgets should be flexible enough to allow for the inclusion of overhead and administration costs of WROs and CSOs.

Recommendation for: donors and multi-lateral institutions

Developing proposals (narrative and budget) that are appealing to the donor priorities and language, technically sound and in tandem with national and local needs, priorities and policies remains one of the greatest challenges faced by WROs and CSOs in Somalia.

Participants felt that in most cases the application process and templates, written in a technical and often non-Somali language, requiring an expertise in sector-specific policy frameworks, paired with the related due diligence requirements, led to INGOs being chosen or taking the lead as opposed to national, local and grassroots organisations. Funding trends show that most donors prefer funding INGOs as opposed to national NGOs, CSOs and WROs.¹³

Calls, funds or platforms should not tie WROs and CSOs into partnering with INGOs. Instead, they should simplify access to funds and earmark funds for local and national organisations within common funding pools to prevent them from being locked out of the funding through the cluster review committees, which are seen as having to respond to various political interests and trade-offs. INGOs should acknowledge their position of power, their double role as partner and donor and adopt the necessary measures to shift it, including the recommendations in this report.

Donors should consult WROs/CSOs in Somalia on what type of funding would work best to tackle a particular issue and whether working with an INGO would help, and then design the funding calls accordingly. If the proposal includes a partnership between an INGO and a national WRO/CSO, applying participants should be asked to clearly specify how they will ensure it is an equal partnership in all phases of the programme and at all levels of decision-making, and how will the budget reflect that. Donors should give priority to proposals that put forward equal partnerships.

Donors should develop simpler proposal templates that are easy and quick to fill in, translated into Somali, accessible in terms of limited technical language/jargon, and designed so that they are responding to local needs assessments and federal member state and national policy frameworks, as well as donor priorities.

Most importantly, on the women, peace and security agenda, funding priorities and calls for proposals should focus on women's' girls' and women's organisations needs and priorities, instead of focusing on donor priorities. For example, by consulting WROs/CSOs prior to writing calls for proposals and by supporting existing policy and programming efforts. Participants mentioned the need to support advocacy on Women, Peace and Security related issues and on developing a national action plan on Women, Peace and Security, as well as enshrining the women's quota in the Constitutions and passing the sexual offences bill.

Participants mentioned that when partnering with an INGO, they often find that they cannot voice their needs nor tailor the proposals to the needs of the community instead, INGOs decide on the content. Local organisations also felt that communicating through an intermediary "international organisation" denies them the chance to explain their funding needs, resulting in a breakdown in cooperation. Furthermore, when partnering with INGOs, local or national NGOs overhead and administration costs are often not factored in.

Donors should also be flexible in the amount of funding provided and accept that it can be shared across different WROs/CSOs, as large amounts of funds automatically exclude small WROs/CSOs from applying. Tailoring this to the size and capacity of WROs can allow for a wider range of them to access funding. An alternative way of supporting WROs is through small grants and unrestricted funding which increases the impact of change in a specific context and its sustainability.

Budgets should be flexible enough to allow for the inclusion of overhead and administration costs of WROs and CSOs. They should also take into account that in many cases WROs and CSOs are being asked to do more than they can deliver with the limited resources they have access to and given the security and operational difficulties they face and work to

¹³ Local to Global Action (2019), 'Funding to local actors still far from Grand Bargain Commitments' (<https://www.local2global.info/research/the-humanitarian-economy/gb19>)

prevent this. Instead, it is important to reflect on how much donors can adapt their own requirements and funding schemes to enable WROs and CSOs to deliver within a budget that allows them to work in a fair, sustainable and long-term manner. When partnering with WRO/CSOs, INGOs should make sure that WRO/CSOs receive the majority - - or at least enough - of the budget to ensure they don't overwork and they can advance organisational development.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, most of the organisations noted gaps in capacity when it comes to proposal writing as their main weaknesses. Some organisations also raised concerns on the use technical language within proposals as a barrier especially when technical words or jargon are used by donors that are difficult to translate. Donors should simplify language so that organisations can better understand it.

In **Hirshabelle** state, participants pointed out gaps in capacity on proposal development as their main area of concern.

In **Puntland** state, participants' reactions were mixed. While some pointed out that they face challenges when it comes to proposal writing as they don't have staff with the technical capacities, others were of the contrary opinion that they have the right staff with technical skills and are best suited for writing proposals. The latter were the ones whose capacities have been developed over time, particularly on proposal development by INGO partners, demonstrating the importance of long-term partnerships and accompaniment.

In **Galmudug** state, participants indicated lack of staff capacity and/or budget to hire consultants to develop proposals as an issue for them as most do not have technical staff. The donors and partners' template also requires technical expertise.

In **Jubaland** state, participants pointed out that defined donor templates with word and character limits makes it difficult for community needs to be defined properly. Funds given to national organisations are also limited even when the scope of the intervention is large.

Recommendation 8 – Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL):

Donors and INGOs should prioritise funding of MEL staff in WROs and CSOs as core and sustained functions, and not just “projectised” posts, as well as strengthening capacity of MEL staff in general, and not just on data collection and analysis based on donors and INGOs’ tools and approaches.

MEL frameworks that have already been developed by WROs/CSOs should be prioritised and new frameworks should be designed together with WROs/CSOs. Learning how to use MEL data on programme design is an area that CSOs would like more support on and resources.

MEL should align with government policies/frameworks when these align with the objectives of CSOs/WROs and community needs, and should be undertaken in a participatory manner that also involves beneficiaries and programme participants. There is also a need for flexible funds for contingency planning for emergencies – like COVID-19 – linked to MEL efforts and analysis.

Recommendation for: donors, government, multi-lateral institutions, INGOs and civil society

Most of the participants noted that they have MEL units in place, but instead of setting up their own systems, methods and requirements, they focus on meeting donor and partners’ requirements. They also mentioned that most CSOs do not include MEL expenses in the project budget, because most international organisation they partner with prioritise these funds for their own MEL work and units, which results in weak and ineffective CSOs MEL systems.

Participant organisations mentioned that they face a lack of staff with technical MEL skills, due to a lack of funds, and have requested for capacity strengthening on MEL from donors and INGOs. On this basis, WROs and CSOs at the grassroots level should be financially supported by donors and INGOs to have MEL staff as core staff and not just linked to projects. They should work closely with other units especially the programme design unit, as well as a well-defined MEL framework developed in a participatory manner.

Donors and INGOs should prioritise using MEL frameworks already developed by CSO/WROs, instead of imposing their own MEL systems. If WROs/CSO do not have MEL systems already in place, donors should consider developing and co-designing systems together with CSO/WROs, based on how CSOs and communities monitor their initiatives (which might not be programmes or projects) and adapt to that rather than the other way around. This is particularly important in a context like Somalia where few donors have access to communities, and where MEL is done remotely. Supporting core MEL capacities in WROs and CSOs would help build trust and confidence where donors and INGO access is limited.

MEL indicators should align with the National Development Plan (NDP) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the localisation of the 2030 Sustainable Development goals, indicators and targets.

While most of the participants have noted they use of MEL tools to comply with donor requirements, they also mentioned that the emphasis should be put on the learning aspect so that they can improve their programming, as well as learn from other CSOs.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants noted that they have MEL in place but in most cases it is defined by INGO partners or by donor requirements. It is critical to consider alignment with the government (both national and state level) as captured in the national government Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.¹⁴ MEL staff are usually trained by INGO partners’ on their tools and local NGOs have to collect information to assess progress of projects/programmes. The report they generate is then shared with the partners (INGOs) and some also post it on CSOs’ website or their Facebook page. Some of the participants noted staff capacity gaps in MEL and requested for capacity strengthening on MEL that goes beyond data collection and reporting for specific INGO or donor tools.

In **Galmudug** state, participants stated they do not have MEL staff due to lack of budget and stressed the need to have MEL staff in place to identify progress, measure overall performance and assess its impacts, especially those on women’s rights. In addition, even if routine monitoring (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) is conducted by staff from grassroots organisations, INGOs conduct the periodic monitoring (bi-monthly, quarterly etc.) with their own tools and often without the information collected by CSOs. Information is subsequently shared with CSOs. This could be reversed so that all monitoring is conducted by CSOs with their own tools and at their own pace and then shared with INGOs. Another participant in similar situation stated that they do not have budget to hire MEL staff. This affects the independence and

¹⁴ The Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development (2019), ‘Somalia National Development Plan 2020 to 2024’, December (<https://mop.gov.so/index.php/ndp/somali-national-development-plan/>)

impartiality of the monitoring exercise, which is conducted by the same staff who implement the project, as well as impairing learning and evidence-based programming.

In **Hirshabelle** state, participants indicated that they have a MEL unit in place and staff conduct MEL tasks but encounter challenges due to skill gaps on the technical aspects of MEL.

In **Jubaland** state, participants mentioned the existence of MEL unit with staff who usually use tools to conduct internal monitoring which is a requirement from both partner and donor. However, one of the participants noted that they include learning to inform design of projects. In addition, another participant also indicated that they developed a template in close collaboration with the State Ministry of Women and Human Rights. Most of the partners in this state did not have gaps in MEL skills like the other states.

In **Puntland** state, participants stated that they have a MEL unit and use partners' template to carry out internal monitoring with minimal external monitoring done by consultants. One of the participants indicated that partners sometimes use third party monitoring to assess progress of activities and MEL compliance. One of the participants representing CSOs implementing peacebuilding programmes in the state has noted the importance of learning processes in their programming.

Southwest state participants were the ones who had strongest MEL capacities, which is unsurprising given most of these are larger organisations based in Mogadishu. Participants mentioned that they have MEL units with qualified staff and incorporate learning. One of the organisations who partner with an INGO carries out two types of learning: regional and national level per year. Regional level with learning stakeholders from different countries and presenting what have been achieved or not, the similarities and differences, the gaps and how to overcome them. The second type is national level learning for stakeholders. During the process, they discuss national or state level achievements, differences and similarities and the gaps identified and how to overcome the gaps by using the budget and same planned activities. Through these learning events, the CSO shares information with and learns from the stakeholders. For instance, while they did not have a budget for COVID-19 response, through these learning events there were contingency plans made to curb it. Furthermore, one of the participants indicated that they have joint monitoring with other stakeholders like government and partners.

Recommendation 9 – Reporting (financial and narrative):

Donors and INGOs should develop standardised reporting formats (financial and narrative) and systems that are accessible, transparent and robust with less paperwork. Donors and INGOs should consider moving away from monthly reporting to, at most, bi-annual and annual reporting. Reporting could also be simplified if done through other less formal channels such as phone calls, meetings or visits.

Donors and INGOs should provide support to partners with training on donors' reporting requirements and procedures.

Recommendation for: donors, multi-lateral institutions and INGOs

WROs/CSOs are sometimes required to undergo reporting for both the partner INGO and the donor, duplicating the information and creating a strain on local and national organisations, as shared by the participants from different federal member states and Banadir. Support, including financial support, should be provided by donors and partners to staff with training on the donors' requirements and reporting procedures. Reporting should be accessible and transparent with reporting periods better spread out (6 months at most but annually is preferable) and less time consuming. Narrative reports should be a short (maximum four page) template that requests a report of key activities, outcomes, impact and changes. Narrative reports should be a breakdown of spend versus budget with explanations only required for anything above a 20% variance between projected and actual budget. Receipts should only be required for expenditure over £200. This will significantly reduce the administrative burden on WROs and could lead to a more trusting relationship between organisations and donors. This will also allow CSOs to spend more time working towards their objectives rather than focusing on administrative/compliance/reporting requirements that can compromise the time they have for core work.

Regional evidence highlights

In **Banadir**, participants pointed out that the current reporting procedures and processes are cumbersome, and it would be better to reduce the paperwork, automate reporting and make it concise and brief, while retaining specificity in terms of details. One of the participants noted that it is important donors fund the translation and publication of periodic narrative reports in English and Somali to reach larger audiences. Participants also noted that monthly reporting is too time consuming and resource intensive and proposed quarterly, bi-annual and annual reporting instead.

In **Jubaland** state, participants asked for narrative and financial reporting to be automated with less paperwork and asked for capacity development for their staff on reporting. One of the participants outlined that the UN financial reporting system is preferred as it involves less paperwork and is more efficient and concise as opposed to the USAID and EC systems which are restricted and require a lot of supporting documents.

In **Southwest** state, participants noted different reporting templates for donors and partners in a same project are cumbersome and suggested that there should be one standard template that can be used for reporting to minimise duplication. In addition, one of the partners recommended training for staff of the CSOs on partners' requirements and reporting procedures.

In **Puntland** state, participants requested training on partners' reporting requirements and procedures. One of the participants recommended the use of a computerised online system for easy reporting of both narrative and financial reports. Furthermore, they suggested donors and INGO to develop easily accessible and understandable reporting formats and platforms for grassroots WROs/CSOs.

In **Galmudug** state, one of the participant stated that donors and partners should develop a periodical online reporting system. Similarly, in **Hirshabelle** state, participants stated that there is need for an online reporting system to be developed by the donors and partners, but once this is developed then the staff of the WROs/CSOs should be trained on the new format.

4. Partners

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity. We are a not-for-profit organisation working in 12 countries and territories across Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Somali Women Development Centre (SWDC) is a non-governmental and non-profit making organisation that was established mid-2000. Since then, SWDC has worked with a range of partners, donors and governments that include UN agencies and INGO, grantees to implement programs and activities that promote equal rights for women to ensure they have an active role in the Somali community through enhancing their social, political, economic and cultural participation.

Gender Action for Peace and Security (GAPS) is the UK's Women, Peace and Security civil society network. GAPS is a membership organisation of NGOs and experts in the field of development, human rights, humanitarian response and peacebuilding. GAPS was founded to progress the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The role of GAPS is to promote and hold the UK Government to account on its international commitments to women and girls in conflict areas worldwide.