

# **WOMEN DO NOT BELONG UNDER THE ACACIA TREE<sup>i</sup>**

## **Gender in Crisis: Women in Somaliland's Informal Economy**

**A report by SIHA Network**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the Horn of Africa (HoA), war and the cross-border movement of peoples, alongside periodic drought and rapid rural to urban migration have all resulted in the massive expansion of women in the informal economy. While in some parts of the world this expansion has had positive effects on social and economic development, in many cases in the Horn, the proliferation of female populations in the informal sector over the past three decades has not led to

any significant change in terms of their position in society. State collapse and the failure of nation-building projects across the HoA have provoked the emergence of new (and in some cases old) hurdles to women's advancement. This includes the reversion to traditional structures and the rise of new, more militant forms of authority that have materialized to take advantage of the space provided by the breakdown of state. Consequently, women find themselves caught between the pressures of globalization and modernization on the one hand, and conservatism and tradition on the other. They are trapped somewhere between positive forms of role change produced by their swelling numbers in the informal economy and stagnation. As other research has pointed out, they are empowered and impoverished<sup>iii</sup> and lauded and castigated at once.

The purpose of this report is to shed light onto the conditions of urban poor women and female informal laborers in Somaliland's capital, Hargeisa. As part of a three country study involving Somaliland, South Sudan and Uganda, the Strategic Initiative for the Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) wishes to highlight the contributions of Somali women to the local economy, their communities and their families, while at the same time calling attention to the risks and challenges that they face in trying to make a livelihood, as well as strategies and coping mechanisms that women engage in for their own economic and physical protection. More specifically, it attempts to grapple with the myriad ways in which Somaliland women try and navigate the incongruous landscape that has resulted from war, state collapse and globalization. The report shows how women's increasing engagement in the public spaces of the informal sector is punctuated by violence, marginalization and censorship and reflects on their day-to-day experiences in the home, with their customers and with the "state" and its authorities, in order to identify entry points for supporting Somaliland's urban poor women, specifically those working in the informal economy.

Today, women continue working selling tea, *khat* (a mild amphetamine), jewelry, cosmetics, used clothes, textiles, household items and food stuffs on the street and in the market and in some instances have established small restaurants and shops in Somaliland cities like Hargeisa. However, they are being kept at the margins. They have battled their way into the public spaces of the markets and streets of urban areas and towns in Somaliland in order to meet their basic needs only to be kept there and denied opportunities and access to economic mobility and decision-making. The growing significance of political Islam and more conservative, radical currents of 'Wahabism,' or Salafism<sup>iii</sup> coupled with a weak state and the prominence of clan structures that have had difficulty adapting to an urban context<sup>iv</sup>, have meant that women in the informal economy in Somaliland remain incredibly vulnerable to violence, extraction, coercion and abuse – unable to influence decisions at the household, community and national level. As observed elsewhere in the HoA, although there have been profound changes to women's position in the economy, specifically in the informal sector, the gendered division of labor in women's private life remains the same, as do the patriarchal attitudes and practices that keep women on the edges of socio-economic life.<sup>v</sup> Rapid change has created a crisis in gender relations where men are trying to hold onto a glorified past version of Somali masculinity with males as the sole decision-makers and providers, which is often violently imposed on women. They are trying to retain their once elevated position and status in Somaliland society and fight against changes to the gendered hierarchy that have taken place in the war.<sup>vi</sup> As a result, women's gains in Somaliland have been limited at best.

## Methodology

SIHA realized that although there is a large body of academic and policy-related literature on women in the informal economy, there is a lack of information on the extent of urban poor women's marginalization and exclusion in Somaliland<sup>vii</sup> - the understanding of which, as other research has highlighted, is necessary if interventions are to be able to actually promote inclusive growth and sustainability livelihoods for vulnerable groups.<sup>viii</sup> Indeed, across the HoA there are a number of non-governmental organization (NGO) programs that are said to not responsive to the socio-cultural and economic conditions of participants in project sites.<sup>ix</sup> In keeping with SIHA's research tradition of primarily qualitative documentation for advocacy purposes the report focuses on chronicling the lived experiences of women and girls in the informal economy of Hargeisa. The main vehicle through which data collection occurred were questionnaire guided interviews and focus-group discussions (FGDs) with a broad range of participants, including government officials, civil society groups, including grassroots women's activists, international NGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies, Somali academics and intellectuals, customary authorities, such as clan elders, internally displaced persons (IDPs), minority clan members, female informal laborers themselves, youth and men. SIHA worked with their local partners in Somaliland to identify participants in different areas of the city and help facilitate contact with informal laborers and those who interact with them. It was felt that this was the best strategy for providing a more nuanced and contextualized description of urban poor women's coping mechanisms and vulnerabilities in a Somaliland context.

Along these lines, the assessment concentrated on obtaining background information on informal sector women, their career aspirations, their opportunities for economic advancement, their responsibilities to the household and the community, their participation in different levels of decision-making, the circumstances that pushed them into this work, the challenges and risks they deal with on a day-to-day basis in trying to earn a livelihood, their interaction with state authorities like the police and their protection and coping mechanisms. The researcher also made space for participants, male and female alike, to narrate and discuss their experiences and perspectives on women's participation in the economy and general socio-cultural and economic issues facing Hargeisa residents.

## CONTEXT

The situation of urban poor women and female informal laborers in contemporary Somaliland cannot be understood without due consideration to the history of protracted conflict and state and economic collapse that have been cited as contributing to the generation and strengthening of the informal economy.<sup>x</sup> In fact, the modern Somaliland "state" was the product of the insurgency by the Issaq clan dominated Somali National Movement (SNM) in the northwest of Somalia that battled the harsh, repressive policies of the Said Barre regime in the late 1980s before unilaterally declaring the independence in 1991. The war against the Barre government led to massive displacement and casualties amongst Somali populations in the area that is now known as Somaliland, with the number of estimated deaths to be between 50,000 and 100,000 people in Hargeisa alone.<sup>xi</sup> It also destroyed any existing economic infrastructure, including the closure of market centres and main ports, while at the same time disrupting traditional modes of pastoral

life.<sup>xii</sup> Coupled with the entrance of men into war-related activities, women increasingly involved themselves in more visible forms of labor.<sup>xiii</sup> As one scholar pointed out:

“...the burden of labour [for women] shifted to tasks such as queuing up for food rations, fetching water from distant sources and engaging in petty trade to supplement their incomes.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The war against Said Barre not only caused civilian destruction, it also created a space for the emergence of traditional forms of authority as clan structures stepped in to provide citizens with security and protection, which the Mogadishu government was unwilling and unable to provide. In Somaliland specifically, clans also played a critical role in the formation and maintenance of the SNM and helped to pave the way for peace in the northwest through local initiatives aimed at creating harmony between competing clans post-1991. The vacuum established by the collapse of the Somali state under Barre also meant the end of secularism as many people turned to political Islam as a way to vent their frustrations with “the failure of secular nationalist ideology to unite Somalis and overcome clannism.”<sup>xv</sup> During the war, religious militancy gained a footing as an alternative to both the failed attempt at nation-building, as well as patronage-based clannism. As stressed in other works on the Somaliland region, however, this process also entailed the reversal of the gains that women had made legislatively under Barre in terms of bettering their structurally subordinate position in Somali society.<sup>xvi</sup> Still, once the war ended and Somaliland’s main clans were able to overcome the fractious divides that resulted in widespread internal violence between rival groups in the early 1990s, the region largely stabilized. Nevertheless, as has been well documented in other research, formal state institutions remain incredibly weak with clan-dominated patronage structures presiding over politics and the economy.<sup>xvii</sup> Under these circumstances, the central government has been hardpressed to deliver services to its citizens.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **One step forward, two steps backwards**

As indicated in the introduction, although women have struggled for their rights, their gains have been limited. While women have been able to vote in Somaliland’s elections, they are seriously underrepresented. They also have unequal access to education and other services. In 2006, for instance, only around thirty-three per cent of female children attended school, compared to around forty-six per cent of male children.<sup>xix</sup> Furthermore, only half as many adult women can read and write compared to men.<sup>xx</sup> Although the dramatic entrance of women into the informal economy during the war against Said Barre and the internal violence in Somaliland that followed enabled women to attain some semblance of economic independence and leverage in household decision-making,<sup>xxi</sup> women are still denied inheritance in customary law and are not well invested in, creating a number of obstacles to economic mobility.<sup>xxii</sup> This keeps women in petty trade and low-paying positions in the informal sector. With record setting levels of unemployment, many men are said to be unwilling, or unable to engage in the sort of low-wage work that women do.<sup>xxiii</sup> As one key informant mentioned during the field research, there is a perception amongst Somalilanders, particularly men that:

“...managing small businesses is for women and the big ones are for men” with “men see[ing] themselves as above these small shops [because of] men’s pride.”<sup>xxiv</sup><sup>xxv</sup>

Conflict and state collapse might have engendered changes in the roles of Somali men and women, but the way that people conceptualize “gender” in Somaliland still lies in the patriarchal ideals inculcated in a pre-war era where women were supposed to be responsible for the household and men responsible for activities outside the home, including income generation. In practice this means that most women do not have the chance to work in the formal sector and as a result remain “caught in a web of poverty” with limited access to financial assistance, such as micro-credit.<sup>xxvi</sup>

One of the reasons for the continued subordination of women is the significance of the clan system and kinship in Somaliland, particularly in the context of a weak central government where people are forced to rely on clans for support and protection. While men are treated equally in the clan system, women are valued less,<sup>xxvii</sup> which is exhibited in customary solutions that cap compensation for women at half that of men. Women are also excluded from decisionmaking and clan-based forums for voicing their interests and concerns. As women’s clan loyalties are presumed to be less strong than men since their clan alliances can be easily transferred through customary marriage practices, women also have difficulty utilizing the clan based social and economic networks for financial assistance.<sup>xxviii</sup> Hence, although women have earned a new economic status in the informal economy as breadwinners for their families, this has not translated into any real political power.<sup>xxix</sup> The clan system was also developed in the context of pastoral rural life in the Somali region and thus not well adapted to an urban context.<sup>xxx</sup> As past research has noted, while clans had become more influential in politics nationally, their role in rectifying other issues pertaining to women’s human rights has been undermined by processes of urbanization as clan elders can no longer draw on local knowledge and lack detailed understandings on local incidences in the same way they used to<sup>xxxi</sup> – something that is sometimes attributed to the financial incentives amongst clan elders when it came to resolving disputes in an economically uncertain environment.<sup>xxxii</sup> When it comes to the urban economy, including the informal sector, as emphasized in other research on Somaliland, the provisions and precedents that do exist are about governing access to water and grazing areas for livestock and has no sense of private property rights integral to business relations.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

It is not only the clan system that is responsible for women’s subordination, either. As indicated in the introduction, there is also the growing influence of political Islam in the Somali regions as a whole and there appears to be what one author called a:

“...confrontation between emerging gender issues and the rising importance of political Islam, formerly contained under Siad Barre [where]...[t]here is a tension between progressive genderoriented policy-makers and conservative political Islamists.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

To be sure, since Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from the rest of Somalia in 1991 more radical versions of political Islam have come to the forefront, precipitating a shift to stricter interpretations of gender roles, including the role of women working outside the home in the informal economy. Influenced by trends in the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, there has been a rise in Wahabism, or rather Salafism,<sup>xxxv</sup> which as illustrated by Al Shabab’s discrimination against women entering labor market,<sup>xxxvi</sup> extremely disadvantageous women in the realization of their economic rights. People in Somaliland used to observe the more moderate Shafi’i sect of Sunni Islam. Now, however, many people we spoke to said that Wahabis control

the economy and education through the funding of Madrassas/schools and have built a number of more radical mosques across Somaliland that were said by those we interviewed to be preaching about more restricted roles for women. Participants pointed to a growing sense that women working outside the home were somehow “polluted,” specifically those whose jobs entail more constant interaction with the opposite sex, such as khat sellers and tea sellers, who are viewed as “sexually open” with some women apparently charged with “ruining the society and structure.”<sup>xxxvii</sup> A female civil society activist even said that in “recent years there are...cultural barriers” with Islamic Sheiks apparently saying that women could only “hold shop” if “under the supervision of males.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

As has been emphasized in past commentary on Somaliland, the spread of Wahhabism could actually be quite threatening to Somaliland, which has a secular constitution and democratic institutions - “threaten[ing] not to upset the balance of power within Somaliland, but to topple its very foundations.”<sup>xxxix</sup> As Somaliland prepares for another election in 2017 many of SIHA’s informants talked about Islamic leaders being directly involved with the political parties and more visibly in politics than ever before. As Somaliland youth become increasingly disaffected due to unemployment and lack of recognition, the factors that had kept Al Shabab and Islamic extremism at check in the past could quickly erode with Al Shabab becoming more and more of a threat to the region. Many people said that while Al Shabab had a quiet presence in Somaliland supposedly only recruiting from the area (at least since the last terrorist attack in 2008), with the limited opportunities that Somaliland’s de facto independence have given youth, there could be a deterioration of security. It was noted by some of the respondents that what prevents people in Somaliland from engaging in the same sort of violence witnessed in southcentral Somalia, such as Mogadishu, is Somaliland’s quest for independence and their need to maintain some kind of peace and stability when compared to the rest of Somalia. Yet, as Somaliland continues to go unrecognized in terms of international recognition and the juridical components of statehood – that is the kind of recognition from the international community needed to become a “state” in the legal sense, youth are seeing few benefits to peace and stability, which they could begin to violently resist – especially with the upcoming elections. Additionally, as SIHA’s past research revealed many Somaliland youth are being exposed to contradictory gender discourses – the strict Islamic conservatism associated with the spread of more radical currents of Salafism that script how men and women should behave according to extraordinarily patriarchal practices and the more progressive gender ideologies and changing gender roles produced by conflict as women become the primary breadwinners for families and communities.

Along these lines, unemployment and the absence of international recognition are both considerable challenges to the long-run sustainability of the idea of “Somaliland” that initially kept its citizens satiated. Because Somaliland is unrecognized there are few opportunities for international development aid that many neighboring countries rely on as a large share of their gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>xl</sup> Most people rely instead on remittances sent by Somalilanders living abroad, which assumed great importance against the backdrop of the collapse of the formal economy during the civil war.<sup>xli</sup> The consequence is that there are very few jobs available with many people living in poverty, which has been made worse by the government posture that has made recognition a priority over the wellbeing of the population.<sup>xlii</sup> The private sector is now dominated by micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs)<sup>xliii</sup> and the few job opportunities that do exist tend to be those available with national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and

international NGOs, or government positions that are usually awarded on the basis of patronage and clan connections. Of the three Somali regions, Somaliland also has the highest level of youth unemployment at eighty four per cent with overall unemployment at an astonishing seventy per cent – one of the highest rates of joblessness in the world.<sup>xliv</sup> Frustration has, therefore, been bubbling to the surface. Again, in SIHA’s past research in Somaliland, youth recognized the connections between their hardships and the lack of recognition, for instance, not being able to travel outside the country without a passport issued from Mogadishu, or having an internationally acknowledged education, preventing them from getting jobs outside of Somaliland, which itself has no jobs, or no capacity to spur job creation through external investment and the development of industry. Yet, as mentioned above, men view working in the informal sector and the SMEs that dominate the Somaliland economy, particularly in Hargeisa as beneath them, somehow not suitable for men, which intensifies the burden on women to earn an income to support their families in terms of basic needs.

## **WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL ECONOMY IN HARGEISA**

Hargeisa, itself is the capital city of Somaliland located near the Ethiopian border. Like other cities in the HoA, it is a place of contrast where modernity and tradition meet sometimes peacefully and sometimes not. But there is also a fleetingness to the city and a sense of transience – whether it be in the buzzing generators that power many of the big buildings, or the make-shift shacks and structures that are scatter the various streets and dirt roads. In many ways it represents the state of Somaliland itself and is a microcosm for the wider plight of the Somaliland national project - initially a successful story of peace and statebuilding, now faltering without international recognition and a government who continues to seek acceptance at the expense of its residence. As female internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing in Hargeisa told us:

“[w]e don’t care about recognition. If we have safety and peace we don’t care about recognition. It is good to go outside and be recognized as other countries, but still our political parties are not being clear”<sup>xlv</sup>

A group of khat sellers state how:

“[i]f recognition comes then our work will be limited because will not find a suitable job to help our kids. If recognition comes no one will help us and we will suffer as women...we are blessed, we don’t care about recognition.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

**Box One. Drivers of Women’s Participation in the Informal Economy**

1. Poverty
2. Survival
3. Supporting children/family
4. The irresponsibility of Somali men/husbands
5. Lack of education
6. Lack of access to capital

Women are caught in the middle. Like the rest of the Somali regions, Hargeisa is dominated by micro SMEs, most of which are run by female informal laborers. They are pushed off the streets and subject to routine evictions as part of the effort to “beautify” the streets and modernize the city, but marginalized to such an extent that they do not have an opportunity to work in positions outside of the informal economy, which are conventionally reserved for men. Women who do work outside of the informal sector in Hargeisa tend to work in government positions in

the ministries, or with national, or international NGOs. Yet, government positions for women tend to just be symbolic postings, a token box for the central government to check and while NGOs have given women a platform for inclusion and having their voices heard, much like the ministries that exist in Hargeisa, women are not fully incorporated.

Against this backdrop, one of the few options available for urban poor women in Somaliland is to enter the informal economy. With limited opportunities for economic mobility and access to education and financial resources, many of them end up getting stuck there with no prospect for economic advancement. As one respondent declared:

“[m]ost of the women never choose to do this kind of job. It is the only thing they can do. There is no investment in women to do anything bigger...whatever benefits they get go back to the family and then they don’t make money to save and have larger businesses.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

Coupled with the patriarchal norms and practices connected to traditional gender roles in Somali society and the clan structures and conservative tenants of Islam that have restricted women, most women set up so-called “micro-businesses” that are informal, irregular and have relatively small profit margins.<sup>xlviii</sup> In fact, on average the women we spoke to said they made no more than 30,000 Somaliland Shillings per day (\$3.50). Due to the lack of any semblance of social welfare, or for that matter, any services to the urban poor, women end up engaging in petty trade and low-wage work in Hargeisa’s marketplaces out of necessity. According to a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) study, the most common types of work/sales for women were: non-food items, such as food, or firewood; dry food rations; milk products; fruits and vegetables; small tea shop owners; livestock; khat; meat and fish; second hand clothes; petroleum products.<sup>xlix</sup> Below we have listed the main types of work that the informal laborers we spoke to involved themselves in:

Milk	Water	Livestock	Perfume/toiletries	Used clothes/tailoring	Food items
Small shops	Small restaurant	Money exchange	Jewelry	Khat	Vegetables/fruits



Many of the women in the informal economy were said to be mothers between the age of thirty-five and sixty years old. With the exception of one woman we spoke to who had no children, the women interviewed had between two and thirteen children. Though many urban poor women have been in the informal sector since the war, a younger generation of Somaliland women expressed having inherited their roles as informal laborers from their mothers and grandmothers, such that urban poor women have become trapped in a cycle of inter-generational impoverishment and marginalization. Other women have migrated from rural areas of Somaliland in search of income-generating activities, made worse by severe droughts over the past year or so. Whether they be IDPs displaced by drought and violence in other parts of Somaliland, war in south-central Somalia, or migrants from Ethiopia trying to earn a living, however, most of these women are the agents of male suppliers, at the end of the supply chain for goods sold on informal markets, which makes them more vulnerable economically in terms of market shocks and more susceptible to abuse by both their customers and wholesalers.

The rationale for entering the informal economy was grounded in the need to, first and foremost, feed their children with secondary considerations such as the absence of educational opportunities and the “irresponsibility” of Somali men as other driving forces. As one group of Goboys participants (a minority clan) in Somaliland said when asked why women enter the informal economy:

“...most of the women in Somaliland when they get married [they move]...outside their natal kin...and go...to the husbands home and they has to sit and take care of the kids and some of them, yes, they work outside because their husbands are irresponsible. Most of them want to take care of their children.”<sup>1</sup>

Another Goboys woman declares:

“...we don’t work in the formal economy because it is just to survive in our low economic market because we have no opportunities...*Iftin* is the oldest one in her family and because of the lack of money and lack of business...she chose to work outside of the family to survive and even that is a problem because of the school fees and dress of the school and transportation...is now very expensive.”<sup>li</sup>

Box one on the above page catalogs some of the main drivers of women’s participation in the informal sector as discovered during the research process. Not surprisingly, given the survival imperative that informs most urban poor women’s decision to engage in the kinds of informal and irregular work mentioned above, the majority of women’s earnings goes directly back into the household to pay for food, clothing, school fees and medical bills with little left over for women, themselves.

### **Economic Mobility and Access**

Economic advancement is usually about access to loans and assets, education, skills training, business-related information and business networks.<sup>lii</sup> Yet, Somali women remain cut off – their economic mobility and access is dependent on their interactions within the dominant patriarchal

systems, including male, clan, religion and so on. In Somaliland, men are oriented outwards, charged with managing the politics of the clan. Outside of the home, their social life is structured around interactions with other men.<sup>liii</sup> For instance, in Hargeisa men's lives revolve around their relationships with fellow men, whether it be chewing khat together in so-called khat cafes, or drinking tea, which provides Somaliland men with a substantive amount of access to social and economic networks.<sup>liv</sup> This is in contrast to women who are oriented inwards towards the home, and as such, do not have the same opportunities for social and other forms of networking, curbing their ability to utilize connections for business opportunities and financial assistance – often supplied through the clan. Since women's clan affiliations are considered to be less significant than those of men with women's loyalty to the clan sometimes questioned as their loyalties shift during marriage, their exclusion economically is compounded.

This is exacerbated by the lack of education for women. As discussed previously, the adult literacy rates for women are at about half that of men and primary school enrollment rates for girls are far lower than that of boys.<sup>lv</sup> As a group of khat sellers remarked mentioned:

“[w]e don't know anything else that we can do because we don't have any education and it is an easy job and easy way to get money because it is a drug and everyone is eating it...we would like a different job - to be a business woman and go through business to sell clothes and other things. But because we have no education we cannot do anything.”<sup>lvi</sup>

Many participants described the lack of basic skills training available to women as one of the causes of their entrapment in the informal sector.

On top of the absence of formal education and vocational instruction for female populations in Somaliland, women do not have ordinary access to micro-credit. Unlike men who are oriented outwards to the clan and society and can borrow money from friends and clan members, women are isolated from these systems of informal financial support. To the extent that there is formal banking infrastructure in Somaliland in the form of Dahabshil, women are ordinarily not offered loans and many of female participants expressed fearing not being able to pay them back. While it might not be an explicit policy of financial institutions to shut out urban poor women, it is said that the predominant lending institutions do not have loans that could help allay some of the anxieties of female populations,<sup>lvii</sup> for instance, demanding collateral for loans that women could not have with customary laws that limit women's inheritance rights and access to resources. Akin to Somaliland's central government, much financial assistance was also said to be awarded on the basis of clan-based patronage, not only isolating women, but also minority clans who have little hope of being able to obtain micro-finance not available through NGOs. And as UNDP pointed out, the election process for NGO beneficiaries of micro-credit programs can also be clan-based and easily manipulated by individuals who take advantage of funding.<sup>lviii</sup> **Big** businesses in Somaliland, including Telesom and Dahabshil were also cited as only accommodating a small number of female employees, conventionally in the positions of secretaries and cleaners. One government official we spoke to also indicated that within the Ministry of Commerce there was no “Gender Office” and business licenses for women were expensive, ranging from 150 to 1000 US Dollars (USD). Though civil society has been pushing for equal (or any) participation of

women in the Chamber of Commerce, economic support to women that would allow them to become empowered in a concrete way is seriously lacking.

### Gender in Transformation

The absence of opportunities for mobility amongst urban poor women are made worse by the so-called “irresponsibility of men.” Narratives about men neglecting their conventional obligations to their families were ubiquitous throughout the research. In fact, “family neglect” was cited to be a major issue with a number of cases of women reportedly taking their husband to the customary (and in some cases statutory) courts because of their alleged disregard of their duties to the home, specifically income generation. Female respondents appeared frustrated that they preserved their conventional roles in the household in terms of bearing and rearing children, but had to fill in the gaps left by their husbands who were seemingly unable, or unwilling to work. As one clan elder noted:

“...a woman came to me and asked me that and said...her husband didn’t recognize the kids...  
‘whose child is this’ he said. He is very irresponsible.”<sup>lix</sup>

Instead, “most of the men are chewing khat so that all of the time they are asleep, or they are chewing.”<sup>lx</sup> According to respondents, this “irresponsibility” originated in the history of state and economic collapse during the civil war against the Barre regime and the internal conflicts in Somaliland that followed in the early 1990s. As a Rift Valley Institute (RVI) report pointed out there is a “belief in a God-given all-male, all-encompassing responsibility,” but many Somalis felt that since the disintegration of the Somali state (including the economy) men had a hard time “being men.”<sup>lxi</sup> People may still ascribe to pre-war gender roles of men as the providers of the family and women as the bastions of home life, but the ability of males to live up to these gender roles is circumscribed in a post-war context distinguished by widespread unemployment. As youth focus group discussion participants commented:

“[t]he man is being created by god and he is the leader in the house and the household and he is the one who makes the decisions that is how we can define a man. Men are responsibility for the family and community...there is a chapter in the Quran that is talking about women and it says that she has to obey her husband.”

In another report, male youth stated feeling like they were being held captive to traditional modes of masculinity without being provided with the chances to perform and pursue those modes of masculinity.<sup>lxii</sup> Additionally, as mentioned in the above section, with state collapse and the space that it provided for both religious militancy and clan-based forms of authority, male youth have been exposed to contradictory gender discourses – the strict conservatism of clan structures and radical Islam and the more progressive gender ideologies and changing gender roles generated by war. What’s more, urbanization appears to have significantly undermined traditional, nomadic ways of life, which were more conducive to upholding the idealized gender roles in Somali society where women gained access to resources through marriage and bride wealth and men worked

outside the household and sustained familial and communal camels and livestock. As a minority clan member proclaimed in a focus group discussion:

“[t]he men before the civil war...were working and...inheriting animals and camels and getting married with a number of camels and women will gain access to camels. But, now everyone comes to the city to get a better life and that is what makes people to not get fair jobs...that is why men are kept in homes and irresponsible and...why us, as women we want to work.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

Men, as discussed earlier, feel like they are above working in the informal sector in low-wage and irregular jobs because of “pride.”<sup>lxiv</sup> They continue to see themselves as part and parcel a divine and “all-encompassing responsibility,”<sup>lxv</sup> but are reluctant to compromise when it comes to taking jobs that exist at the margins of society, in part, because they would supposedly be chastised and stigmatized for accepting low profit margins that should only be acceptable for women. As one person put it when discussing why men were not as visible in the informal economy as women:

“[it is] because of the dignity of the man who works in similar informal work – the men of his family will make fun of him and call him a ‘lady,’ ‘why do you go to this informal work, it is better for you to go home and chew khat than go out and do this work’.”<sup>lxvi</sup>

This is not to say that *all* men have shirked their obligations to their families, as RVI noted, there are areas where men continue to own businesses and work.<sup>lxvii</sup> Many men also rely on remittances sent by Somalilanders living abroad to support their children.<sup>lxviii</sup> But, in an effort to reserve the remaining elements of some idealized past version of Somali masculinity, a lot of males were described as chewing khat and sitting idly rather than maintaining their family by taking advantage of economic opportunities in the informal sector.

Accordingly, khat was seen as one of the central motivations, as well as a symptom of men’s “irresponsibility.” For the elders that SIHA spoke to, the genesis of men’s overreliance on khat (again, a mild amphetamine) lay in their displacement in Ethiopia during the last war. Under the Barre regime, khat was considered contraband and it was said that with the exception of a few military and political elite in the Somali government who chewed, it was largely prohibited. While displaced in Ethiopia and elsewhere in the African Horn, however, male populations allegedly started using khat as a way to cope with the trials and tribulations of life as refugees with khat becoming one of the primary means for dealing with the disintegration of the Somali state and nomadic ways of life. Now, the use of khat is ubiquitous in Somaliland society. Both male youth and older men are said to spend the mornings deciding whom to chew khat with as part of a sort of a social ritual and then after lunch they meet up together and chew into the night, rendering much of the urban male population unproductive by the early afternoon.<sup>lxix</sup>

Though some of the participants connected khat addiction amongst males with the trauma of the civil war citing that “they are all traumatized,”<sup>lxx</sup> when asked why men had become “irresponsible,” many people cited unemployment as the primary cause of so-called “irresponsible manhood.” Somewhat understandably, many male youth who have finished university and could

not find a job in the formal sector in businesses, government, or NGOs, would rather remain unemployed than accept petty work in the informal sector. As one youth announced:

“I went to university and don’t want to take any job. You see, a lot of women who are responsible, don’t care about the proudness.”<sup>lxxi</sup>

For non-university educated men, they see the informal economy as a “small thing” and hence beneath them as discussed above. Most men wanted jobs in construction or larger-scale trade in the formal sector, which they said were not as widely available. However, this leaves women in a particularly precarious position. Urban poor women do not have access to education, basic skills training and capital in the forms of loans and micro-credit. They also lack the same networks of financial support that men can lean on due to their more disenfranchised position in the clan structure and their orientation inward towards the home. An IDP woman puts it quite poignantly:

“[it is] because of khat and cigarettes that they [men] don’t care about anyone. It is the two children that men have – khat and cigarettes. But, because of lack of education we need men. If we had education we could be independent by them because we don’t care about them...Because of lack of education even if husband is beating her...she fears that the children are not protected from him and because of her children she is patient – they are fearing going outside.”<sup>lxxii</sup>

Women remain trapped somewhere in between positive forms of role change produced by their increasing participation in the informal sector and stagnation. As the aforementioned RVI report made clear, decision-making is still dominated by men.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Although women may have some leverage in deciding how their income is allocated in terms of food, school fees and other basic needs, most participants recognized that:

“[i]t is always the man who makes decisions as far as he is the leader. Even when he is sleeping inside the room...he is the one who...makes decisions and only consults with men.”<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Another women living in Daami B in Hargeisa noted how:

“...with our kids, we take the decision, if they are going to the school and if the school needs the parents we are the ones to go. But, outside he the one who is responsible.”<sup>lxxv</sup>

Although people said that the stigma for women working outside the home had dissipated since the war with most people recognizing the contributions of Somaliland women, this appears to only exist on the surface. More specifically, there is a contradictory relationship where on the one hand, women need to work in order to generate income, and on the other, there are conservative Islamic precepts and exclusionary clan structures that restrict women’s advancement outside of the informal economy such that they can work outside the home so long as they limit their interactions with males with people adopting largely ideologically convenient positions with respect to women’s role change. Indeed, many of those that SIHA spoke to talked about the previously discussed diffusion of Wahabism and Salafism as one of the foremost reasons why women had,

yes, been able to step into public roles outside of the home in the informal sector, but had not been able to progress further than that. As one INGO representative expressed:

“[t]here are a lot of things that contribute to this. One is the culture that men...[are] responsible. There is also confusion about how people understand the religion. Wahabism is making it seem as though...men are the only ones who can participate in decision-making. But, it shouldn't be a dictatorship.”<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Though the stigma for women working in public spaces has been reduced considerably over the years due in part to the recognition of women's integral role to familial survival and the in many ways the sustenance of the larger economy (though not entirely as discussed in more detail below), women are still regarded as the custodians of the household. As has been well documented in the literature on women's economic participation in the developing world, this leads to a double burden where women are responsible for both income generation, as well as the domestic duties associated with maintaining the home and bearing and rearing children. The upshot, however, is that women do not have the time to expand beyond subsistence level employment at the margins of the economy.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Insofar as women have left their homes to work in market places and so on, they have been kept in low-wage, irregular and informal jobs that only enable them to survive and support their family. And even then, some of the women we spoke to said that the older men in their families were against them working, with one woman stating that the father of her husband even offered her money to not work. This was illustrated in another study on women's rights in Somaliland where it was found that while there were “thousands” of Somali women engaged in micro and small businesses, men retained control of decision-making.<sup>lxxviii</sup> It was said that if a man were to endow his wife with influence in the home, his masculinity would be questioned by the entirety of the community<sup>lxxix</sup> - similar to the sort of peer-to-peer emasculation and stigma that goes on for men who work in the informal economy.

### **Violence, Coercion and Exploitation**

What's more, gender norms in Somaliland that are reiterated and reproduced through patriarchal clan structures and reactionary and radical versions of Islam, which contain strict scripts about the interaction between the sexes in society such that men and women are not meant to socialize with one another prior to marriage. These gendered scripts have been rigorously interpreted in Somaliland so that unmarried young men and unmarried young women are not able to speak to each other publicly. For this reason, some urban poor women whose work demands that they have dealings with men, such as khat sellers and tea sellers are viewed as “sexually open.” In fact, khat sellers that SIHA interviewed expressed “shame as a woman who is being near a man every night and selling khat and drugs.”<sup>lxxx</sup> They continued by saying that:

“Everything can happen, people can harass you and take your khat and people will just steal the khat. Because you are interacting with a man you will face a lot of challenges...if you don't give them khat they will insult you.”<sup>lxxxi</sup>

Verbal harassment against those who continuously interface with men was said to be a routine part of their experience in the informal sector. In line with the above, youth articulated that part of the reason had to do with the fact that business transactions in the informal economy were one of the few avenues that males had to engage with women openly. As one male youth noted: "...my friends take...tea [and say] lets go to the beautiful lady, she is very beautiful and sexy.

Men are always talk to men – take from me you are beautiful.”

It is not just flirtation and sexual harassment, however. As illustrated in the statement by the khat sellers above, there is a significant amount of stigma and indignity for some informal laborers. One respondent even said that they were referred to derogatorily as *qaadley* – a Somali word purportedly used to describe women who sell khat. They also face quite a few financial risks, which can open them up to other forms of abuse. Customers who are under the influence of khat sometimes feel as though they do not have to pay, yet, the khat dealers frequently collect money from the women retailers the next day. This puts women in what one scholar referred to as the “khat trap” unable to pay the wholesalers who are almost exclusively men and, therefore, powerless to leave the khat selling business.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Owing to the fact that decision-making continues to be dominated by men even in the home, domestic violence was also deemed to be a substantial issue for women. Though massively underreported in Somaliland society since domestic violence is commonly viewed to be an exercise of prerogative, rather than a criminal act, some of the women we spoke to said that if they withheld their earnings from their husband, their husbands would retaliate by beating them. As one woman in Daami B disclosed:

“[h]e takes my money by force [and] he beats me. We have to give them money because he [men] is like a kid, you have to survive to not be beat by your husband even if he is irresponsible.”<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

Unwilling, or unable to work, themselves men still feel the previously referenced god-given responsibility over all matters, including the allocation of income earned by their wives. For women, resisting the authority of men in the household can lead to violence as their husbands and male relatives try to violently reinforce their power and control in the face of a collapsing sense of Somali masculinity.

The exercise of violence and control against women working in the informal sector not only holds for their customers, wholesalers and intimate partners. Informal laborers also face considerably risk from strangers, particularly robbery, beating and sexual assault. Though sexual assault in the form of rape and gang rape was said by participants to have declined since 2014/2015 when it was widely cited to be a significant issue, the risk of sexual and other forms of abuse still exists for women, especially for more vulnerable segments of the urban poor population, such as IDPs, minority clans and migrants from elsewhere in the HoA, including Ethiopia. One IDP woman living in ‘State House’ IDP camp narrates her experience with theft as follows:

“I do breakfast for my restaurant in the morning. I start sometimes at 4:30am and put out the tea and the food and there were two thieves that come to me and say every time you are outside your

door, they put a torch in my eyes and I yell the name of my son and he came hurrying and they ran away. They were around 35 years old.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

While most people agreed that the youth-perpetrated sexual violence characteristic of 2014-2015 had decreased because of police action against some of Hargeisa’s larger gangs, specifically Arsenal and ‘Duuffaan’ (the Somali word for storm), respondents noted that youth idleness still propelled youth into engaging in criminal activities often against women in the informal sector. There was one gang that some focus-group discussion participants talked about in particular, ‘Chabani’ who had apparently been around since 1999 that they saw as posing a threat to urban poor women’s security. Below we have detailed some of the main risks that Somaliland informal laborers face as enumerated by our respondents, as well as the groups that are most susceptible to such risks.

Main Risks	Vulnerable Groups
Robbery Rape/sexual assault Verbal harassment Beating Domestic violence	IDPs Migrants from neighboring countries, especially Ethiopia Minority clans

Most of the informal laborers and other participants we spoke to said women were most at risk in the early hours of the morning, or late at night when they were returning from work. Women also have to travel long distances from their place of residence to where they “set up shop” in the marketplaces and other areas. With Hargeisa’s inadequate, and often costly public transportation system, they are left exposed to the predatory behavior of male populations seeking to take advantage of their isolation, which is made worse by the lack of lighting throughout the city. Knowing that women who work in the informal sector will be returning late at night with cash in hand, thieves were said to stalk women and then rob them when the opportunity arose. In one instance we heard about in Daami B, a woman was selling jewelry in the market. When she was returning home, she was followed by two assailants who hit her in the neck when trying to steal from her, ultimately killing her. In a similar incident from June of this year, a Goboye woman was walking down a dark street and there was a “gang group” who tried to rape her and when she tried to fight back they hit her with a stone killing her.

The Somaliland “state” and its agents have done little to reduce the risks faced by female informal laborers and through extraction and coercion, strengthen the marginalization and exclusion of female informal laborers. The central government might be too weak to efficiently tax populations, especially outside of urban centres like Hargeisa, but as UNDP found, Somalis tend to comply with an “informal patchwork of taxation,” of which urban poor women are said to be the largest contributors.<sup>lxxxv</sup> In prioritizing independence and recognition over the wellbeing of its citizens, the Somaliland government is between a rock and a hard place. Without the investment and large streams of development aid that would accompany recognition, formalizing the economy, including revenue collection will continue to be a difficult undertaking. Just the same, all of the women interviewed conveyed having to pay a daily tax of 1000 Somaliland Shillings. And while those in more lucrative businesses, such as khat selling may not have had difficulty paying these



levies, other urban poor women we spoke to communicated significant financial strain when it came to having to pay a tax that would lessen their already tiny profit margins for that day. People thought it was unfair that a woman who sells water on the side of the road in Hargeisa would have to pay the same amount of tax to municipal authorities as someone who owned a small shop. As another Goboye woman stated when asked whether the government was supporting them in the informal sector:

“[n]o, we don’t like the government. They are taking taxes without caring about that you are the poor. When we are in the market and we come over to the road, the local government puts everything we have in the street, they harass and beat us and this is not good for us.”<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

As has been well-documented in other research on Somaliland, minority clan women are “doubly marginalized”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> as being from a minority clan means that they have difficulty demanding their rights from dominant clans, specifically compensation, enhancing their vulnerability by making crimes and discrimination against them a lesser offense. Similar to IDPs, they are often segregated from the rest of the population and relegated to a diminished status, which excludes them from the full benefits of citizenship, including freedom from harassment from local authorities. Although the 2001 Constitution technically recognizes that discrimination on the grounds of clan affiliation should be prohibited, the Somaliland government continues to neglect the victimization of groups like the Goboye, Tumul and Yibir and law enforcement who are already sometimes unwilling to take seriously the claims of informal laborers are even less likely to respond to crimes committed against minorities

Furthermore, there are no legal protections, or official recognition of the rights of street vendors and informal laborers, which has manifested itself in violent harassment and evictions by police and municipal authorities.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Many Somalilanders are hesitant to speak openly about their lack of confidence in the police given that the government is overly concerned about their current image as a beacon of stability. Still, participants that we talked to said that police were unlikely to deal with complaints by urban poor women with many female respondents fearing that if they went to police to deal with a disturbance by a customer, the police would tell them to pack up their things and leave since they were not legally registered, and did not have business licenses, which as mentioned in a preceding section sell for around 400 US dollars. Both the Hargeisa police and municipal government were alleged to tell women that they had to rent formal shops if they wanted to continue with their micro-businesses. Yet, as is the case in other post-conflict countries, rent and land prices in general are exorbitantly high in Hargeisa and according to participants only increasing. It is, therefore, unlikely that urban poor women would be able to expend the money needed to set up something other than a make-shift shelter and still be able to provide for themselves and their children. The situation is especially bad for minority clans who face a sizable amount of discrimination. Goboye women chronicled how they were hounded on the street with police saying “you are Goboye, what are you doing here?”

This lack of recognition for the plight of informal laborers also provides police with the liberty to evict and destroy the property of women, which has adverse consequences by forcing women to restart the cycle of building up capital they already have a hard time accessing.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Police were said to come and flip the shelters of women, confiscate the products that they were selling and sometimes beat them supposedly in a bid to clean up the city and aid in the “beautification” of

Hargeisa. In many ways this is just a larger symptom of women's precarious position in Somaliland society highlighted in the introduction – caught between the competing pressures of modernization and urbanization on the one hand, and conservatism and tradition on the other. Women are the cornerstone of the Somaliland economy and the mainstay of familial and communal survival. However, as is common in other parts of the African Horn, their visibility as street vendors and shop owners in public spaces is threatening to the image of what it means to be a “modern” city in an increasingly globalized world. At the same time, whether it be domestic and intimate partner violence by male relatives, or coercion, extraction and conviction by police and the municipal government, gender roles that keep women at the margins of the socioeconomic order in Somaliland are often violently reinforced. **Coping and Protection**

Not surprisingly, urban poor women (like many other Somalilanders) rarely rely on the state for protection. Instead, most people rely on protection from their clans. But, clan-based protection is based on deterrent mechanisms, rather than protection as such. That is, because of the contractual arrangements between clans, known as *xeer* there is an obligation to resolve acts committed by, or against one of the clan members. As is the case in other pastoralist societies, these contractual arrangements are intended to prevent the spiraling of inter-clan tensions through reciprocal targeting that can lead to violent escalation – meaning that there is an incentive to deal with disputes through the payment of *dia*/blood money. Within the clan there is also a mutual duty amongst members to support each other during times of economic hardship. Yet, according to customary clan law, women are only worth half the value of men, which has been historically represented through the payment of 50 camels for a violation against a woman, versus 100 camels for a violation against a man. This makes transgressions of women's rights, including their economic rights less of a concern than those carried out against men. The anonymity in urban areas also lessens the effectiveness of clan-based mechanisms by making it difficult to identify perpetrators. As SIHA discovered in 2014/2015, there also appears to be somewhat of a loophole for indiscriminate criminal activities. Since *xeer* holds the entire diapaing group collectively responsible for a crime perpetrated by one or more of its members there is no sense of individual criminal liability and since compensation is paid out by the collective clan unit, perpetrators of crimes against women get to escape punishment. For group offenses, because compensation is the same irrespective of how many people are involved, offenders can also ensure that compensation is diffused amongst them, making gang-related violence more economically feasible than individual acts of criminal violence.

This leaves women with few means of physical security. Reflecting the cultural prepositions respecting women walking alone, or unaccompanied, the majority of respondents say that urban poor women rely on some form of “protective accompaniment” by male members of their family who walk with them going to, and returning from the market, or their shops. Owing to the absence of affordable and reliable transportation options in Hargeisa, informal laborers depended on their husbands and sons to escort them, without which they were forced to walk alone, opening them up to the risk of different kinds of violence. This puts female-headed households and widows at a unique risk since they do not always have men to protect them. Culturally, since it is viewed as inappropriate for women to walk alone at night with unaccompanied women perceived of as “sexually open” in the same way that female khat sellers and tea sellers are, this makes them incredibly vulnerable since violations against them are understood in light of, and justified on the basis of their alleged immorality. Some women attempt to get around this by hiring transportation

to drop them off in the morning and at night. However, the transportation was quite costly at around fifty cents per day, which comprised almost half of women's daily earnings. Box two lists the main ways in which women in the informal economy tried to protect themselves, and limit risk.

Beyond the methods that women rely on for physical protection, they have also set up informal rotating savings funds to support one another financially. As has been well documented, rotating savings and credit associations (ROCAs) are the most repeatedly found type of informal financial institution in the developing world.<sup>xc</sup> In Kenya, for example, around fifty-seven per cent of households had at least one person who participated in some kind of rotating savings scheme and on average people contributed just over twenty per cent of their individual income and thirteen per cent of household income to such savings groups.<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup> People usually put in some predetermined amount, say 1000 shillings per day into a pot, which is then shared with one member when they are in need. Though such saving associations take on a variety of forms, in Somaliland the most common form is said to be a *hagbad*, an association that collects money from its members with the 'pot' of earnings allocated to a different member in turn.<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup> In an environment where formal banking infrastructure is lacking and where women have limited access to loans and micro-credit, either through banks like Dahabshil, or fellow clan members, ROCAs serve as one of the few means of financial assistance for informal laborers and the urban poor. Ordinarily conceptualized as "self-help groups" many NGOs have tried to take advantage of these pre-existing informal financial institutions, "formalizing" them by providing capacity building and technical support in the form of financial literacy classes and the management of member contributions. Even so, NGO programming aimed at economic empowerment through enhancing the informal systems that supply women with opportunities for economic mobility they might not otherwise have can only have so much reach and are unlikely to have an immediate effect on addressing the patriarchal structures of power that have kept women at the margins of the economy and decision-making at different levels of Somaliland society. This is why women across the HoA have been fighting for institutionalization. It brings women equality with men that they would not otherwise have in society. Restricting women's advancement outside the informal sector through the maintenance of patriarchal clan structures and increasingly conservative sects of Islam is merely part of the battle for a symbolic and physical space in politics and the economy and a (male) resistance to a changing gendered hierarchy.

## **KEY OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

State and economic collapse in the Somali region in the late 1980s and early 1990s thrust women into the public sphere selling tea, *khat*, jewelry, cosmetics, used clothes and other items on the street and in the market and in Hargeisa. Nonetheless, as referenced throughout this report, there have been few modifications to women's structurally subordinate position in Somaliland society, without which they will remain trapped between positive forms of role change and stagnation, simultaneously empowered and disempowered – kept at the margins of the economy and society. Although Somalilanders acknowledge the significance of women's dramatic entrance into the informal sector during and since the war against the Barre regime, it seems that such an entrance is only acceptable so long as they remain in informal, irregular and low-wage work while also maintaining their conventional position as custodians of the household. The Somaliland state has been reluctant to extend women their full rights and enable them to advance legally in terms of

protection. Despite continuous discussions about a women's quota in the government since the 1990s, for instance, a quota has yet to be granted (even as south central Somalia has increased the number of seats available to women). Notwithstanding the sustained advocacy of Somaliland civil society and grassroots women's rights activist, the Sexual Gender Based Violence Bill, which would provide women some form of legal protection against the kinds of physical security risks discussed in the report, has yet to be passed. Women are also markedly underrepresented in the Chamber of Commerce, further limiting their access to business networks and information. Notwithstanding the fact that the Ministry of Trade and Industry was said to have employed female lawyers to help women access trade licensing, contracts and so on, as mentioned before the few formal banks in Somaliland do not contain women-friendly lending, or micro-finance schemes, leaving the government dependent on the sorts of NGO "self-help" and women's economic empowerment programming for the micro, small and medium enterprises mentioned above.<sup>xciii</sup>

Comparable to other conflict-affected settings in the African Horn, the minimum legal protections and government policies that exist for female informal laborers constitutionally are seldom implemented.<sup>xciv</sup> Though legal recognition and policies for female informal laborers are important to preventing the kinds of ad hoc extraction and coercion in the form of evictions and intimidation for those working in the informal sector is crucial, the continued ascription of men, in particular, to pre-war gendered ideals, coupled with exclusionary clan structures and rising political Islam is not just threatening to reverse women's gains (however slight), it already has. In some ways, no matter how many NGO programs, or newly introduced legislation tries to address their position as the second sex, without addressing the social underpinnings of women's marginalization, female populations in Somaliland will never be able to achieve equality in education, employment, business, health and political participation.<sup>xcv</sup>

Ever since the 1990s, women's economic empowerment in the informal sector through micro-finance and micro-enterprises has been seen as critical to "poor-pro growth" and a panacea for increasing livelihoods and self-reliance for urban poor women.<sup>xcvi</sup> As sub-Saharan African countries modernize and urbanize, however, female informal laborers remain incredibly vulnerable to the pressures of globalization and the need to develop cities, pushing them further into the periphery as governments try to create a conducive investment climate outside of the so-called "shadow" sector. In response to globalization and rapid change, which in Somaliland has been produced by protracted conflict and state collapse, there has also been turn towards more conservative and strict interpretations of gender roles as part of the effort to hold onto some glorified past. In Somaliland, this is evidenced in the persistence of customary clan laws and structures, as well as the spread of political Islam and with it, more regulated and circumscribed roles for women. Of course, this reactionary dynamic against change is not exclusive to Somaliland. The past few years have seen shifts towards "traditionalism" occurring around the globe, including the allegedly liberal West. But, without due consideration to these competing pressures, programmes seeking to empower women economically are likely to fail.

As a recent UNDP report on women in the private sector in the Somali regions revealed, although there is much funding going towards vocational training and business management, capacity building and small grants to individual women and cooperatives, such "...programs are still riddled with flaws. Inappropriate beneficiary selection, lack of market research, little or weak monitoring procedures, small grant sizes, all...have had no real economic impact."<sup>xcvii</sup> Even with the realization that it is impossible to detach economic from social development,<sup>xcviii</sup> it seems as though

little has been done to conceptualize the linkages between the conventional elements of economic advancement for the poor, such as access to loans and assets, education, skills training, business-related information and business networks, and the way that gender relations are structured. Part of the reason that women lack access to business networks is because of their orientation towards the home, which limits their interaction with those who could provide them information and financial assistance. Customary laws, including the framework for property ownership and inheritance, furthermore, check women's ability to take out loans from formal banks since they lack access to the kinds of collateral required by such institutions, effectively entrapping them in the informal economy. Addressing barriers to women's market access not only means providing them with small loans, but also means addressing the structural conditions that have limited their economic mobility and access, such as the lack of networks, lack of information and absence of literacy training and educational opportunities.

The way Somalilanders think of gender roles for men and women lie in a pre-war era where women were responsible for the maintenance of the household and men responsible for decision-making. The authority and control of men over women's productive and reproductive capabilities has only been amplified by the spread of political Islam, which has intensified the view that men have a divine obligation to rule. This means that when women return home with their earnings, they usually have to relinquish them for men. As specified in one of the foregoing sections, if women refuse, they can be beaten as men try to violently reinforce their influence over decision-making. Raising women's economic independence can, in some instances, promote changing societal attitudes towards women, but in the immediate term, they can also bolster the status quo by failing to stimulate deeper social and cultural change.<sup>xcix</sup> As highlighted elsewhere, facilitation of open dialogue about the contributions of women economically in Somaliland and debates about sexual and gender based violence can begin to challenge dominant perceptions. Since peer-to-peer emasculation is what in some cases prevents men from engaging in the same low-wage work that women do, while at the same time justifying and fortifying their influence over decision-making in the household, having men's groups that address what appears to be a collapsing sense of masculinity for men, is critical. There are high expectations for male members of Somaliland society, but few opportunities for men and boys to pursue those expectations. Engaging in discussions about what it means to be a man in Somaliland would give males an avenue outside of violence against women to voice their concerns about not being able to live up to idealized gender roles. Given the growing influence of political Islam, engendering dialogue between moderate Islamic leaders and male segments of the population can help "dismantle the image of militant interpretations"<sup>c</sup> of women's role in the socio-economic order of Somaliland and help people to "unlearn" the gender inequitable attitudes and behavior that have precluded women from realizing their rights. This is also important to closing the space that has been created for religious militancy, which youth turn to with limited economic opportunities and a growing sense of frustration against the Somaliland government, which has not been able to deliver on the initial sense of hope that its unilateral declaration of independence in 1991 provided. For the reasons referenced throughout this report, women remain trapped in a cycle of inter-generational poverty with almost no chances to leave the web of disempowerment. And while more conventional micro-credit and savings association programmes can have important benefits to women's economic independence, more fundamental change is needed and the crisis of gender and really the Somaliland "state" addressed.

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