



SOMALILAND STATE- BUILDING BOOK DISCUSSION SERIES – SESSION TWO

CDG Session Report

Date: 28 June 2026

Venue: CDG Dialogue Center, Hargeisa

Time: 4:30 PM – 7:40 PM

Host: Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG)

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	2
2. Opening and Overview	2
2.1. Welcome and Opening Remarks.....	2
2.2. Overview of the Book <i>Somaliland State-Building</i>	3
3. Discussion on Chapter 5: Perspectives for Women's Political Participation and Elections in Somaliland.....	5
3.1. Opening Remarks.....	5
3.2. Plenary Discussion.....	11
4. Discussion on Chapter 8: A Way Forward for Somaliland's Political Future: Issues and Solutions 13	
4.1. Opening Remarks.....	13
4.2. Key Reform Areas Identified in Chapter 8	14
4.3. Geostrategic Importance and International Recognition.....	20
4.4. Plenary Discussion	22
5. Key Reflections and Recommendations	23
5.1. On Women's Political Participation (Chapter 5)	23
5.2. On Constitutional and Institutional Reforms (Chapter 8)	24
6. Closing Remarks.....	25
7. Annexes	25
7.1. List of Participants.....	25
7.2. Agenda	26

1. Executive Summary

On the evening of 28 June 2026, the Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) convened the second session of the Somaliland State-Building Book Discussion Series/Tour at the CDG Dialogue Center in Hargeisa. The session brought together a diverse group of stakeholders (including academics, government officials, political party representatives, civil society leaders, and traditional elders) to critically examine two chapters from Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani)'s book, *Somaliland State-Building*.



The discussions centered on two of the most pressing challenges facing Somaliland's political future: -

- a. The persistent barriers to women's political participation and elections (Chapter 5), and
- b. The comprehensive constitutional and institutional reforms required to address the competing forces of democracy, clan, and Islam (Chapter 8).

Participants engaged in robust dialogue, identifying root causes of marginalization and tribalism while proposing actionable solutions. The event concluded with a series of concrete recommendations for policymakers, political parties, and civil society organizations.

2. Opening and Overview

2.1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Lead - Executive Director, CDG- Abdirahman Warsame



The Executive Director of CDG welcomed participants and underscored the importance of the book discussion series as a platform for evidence-based policy dialogue. He noted that Somaliland's state-building journey, now spanning 34 years, offers valuable lessons that must inform the country's vision for 2030: *A Stable, Democratic, and Prosperous Nation where people can enjoy a High Quality of Life*. He

emphasized that the series aims to bridge the gap between scholarly analysis and policy practice, ensuring that the complex interplay of democracy, clan, and Islam is addressed through informed public discourse.

2.2. Overview of the Book *Somaliland State-Building*

Lead - **Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani), Author**

Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani) provided a comprehensive and illuminating overview of his seminal work, *Somaliland State-Building*, explaining that while he led the authorship of the book, it was a collaborative effort with contributions from other scholars and researchers who brought diverse perspectives to the project. The book represents a culmination of extensive research, observation, and analysis of Somaliland's unique state-building journey over the past three decades, offering both a historical account and a forward-looking policy framework for the country's political development.

Dr. Mohamed emphasized that the book focuses on five key domains that are inextricably linked to Somaliland's governance and state-building experience: clan, Islam, political systems, culture, and democracy. He explained that these five pillars form the foundation upon which Somaliland's hybrid state has been constructed and continues to operate. The author noted that Somaliland represents a distinctive case study in post-conflict reconstruction and state-building, as it functions as a hybrid state where modern state institutions coexist and interact with traditional governance structures. This hybridity is not merely a transitional feature but a fundamental characteristic of how Somaliland has managed to maintain peace, security, and relative stability for over three decades despite the absence of international recognition.



The author elaborated on the complex nature of these five domains, explaining that they are all subject for debate and interlink in ways that are both practical and impractical. He noted that some aspects of these domains are practical and have been successfully integrated into the governance framework, while

others remain impractical and continue to pose significant challenges to effective state-building. For instance, the clan system has proven practical for conflict resolution and social cohesion at the grassroots level, yet it becomes impractical when it undermines merit-based recruitment, distorts democratic processes, and perpetuates inequalities within state institutions. Similarly, Islamic principles have been practically integrated into the legal and social fabric of the nation, yet tensions arise when interpretations of Sharia clash with democratic principles, international human rights standards, and the constitutional guarantees of equal citizenship.

Dr. Mohamed identified women's participation, democracy, and Islam as among the most contentious topics that remain under active debate in Somaliland's political discourse. He observed that the relationship between democracy and Islam has been particularly challenging, as democratic principles such as individual liberty, equality before the law, and popular sovereignty sometimes appear to conflict with Islamic teachings on governance, leadership, and social organization. The author noted that Somalilanders are deeply committed to their Islamic faith and cultural identity, yet they also aspire to build a modern democratic state that respects human rights, upholds the rule of law, and ensures political participation for all citizens. Navigating this complex terrain requires careful balancing, contextualization, and a willingness to engage in honest and sometimes difficult conversations about the kind of state Somaliland wants to become.

In addressing the question of international experiences and lessons, **Dr. Mohamed** highlighted that there are many Muslim countries that Somaliland can learn from; countries that have successfully accommodated both traditional and modern systems in a hybrid setting. He specifically cited Indonesia and Malaysia as exemplary cases of Muslim-majority nations that have built modern, stable, and democratic states while strategically managing cultural and religious differences. These countries have demonstrated that it is possible to integrate Islamic values and traditions with democratic governance, economic development, and institutional modernization. The author suggested that Somaliland could draw valuable lessons from these experiences, particularly in areas such as constitutional design, the accommodation of religious law within secular legal frameworks, the promotion of women's political participation, and the management of ethnic and cultural diversity within a unified state structure. He emphasized that the philosophy behind finding a form of governance that respects religion but does not undermine tribal-based injustice is critical to Somaliland's long-term stability and prosperity.

Regarding the chapters under discussion, **Dr. Mohamed** provided specific insights into their content and significance. He noted that Chapter 5 focuses on women and their political participation, a topic that is not commonly discussed by many authors in the context of Somaliland's political development. He observed that women's issues have often been marginalized or treated as secondary concerns in political discourse, despite women constituting more than 50% of the population and playing vital roles in peacebuilding, economic development, and social cohesion. The author emphasized that having the opportunity to discuss and debate these issues is in itself a step forward for Somaliland's democratic development. By bringing women's political participation to the forefront of academic and policy discussions, the book aims to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms, stimulate public debate, and advocate for concrete policy measures to enhance women's representation and participation in decision-making processes.

As for Chapter 8, **Dr. Mohamed** explained that it addresses reform across eight dimensions, providing a comprehensive framework for Somaliland's political future. These eight dimensions encompass

constitutional reform, institutional reform, judiciary reform, political party reform, House of Guurti reform, decentralization, the search for international recognition, and the Somaliland-Somalia talks. Each of these dimensions represents a critical area where Somaliland must undertake meaningful reforms to address the structural challenges that have accumulated over 34 years of state-building. The author emphasized that reform is not merely an option but an urgent necessity if Somaliland is to achieve its vision of becoming a stable, democratic, and prosperous nation by 2030.

Throughout his overview, **Dr. Mohamed** stressed that modern politics cannot be detached from social reality. For state-building to be successful, there must be continuous dialogue between social sectors (including traditional leaders, religious scholars, political actors, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens) to build public institutions that are trusted by the public. He argued that the role of culture and religion cannot be neglected in the state-building process, but must be managed in a modern way based on principles of justice and equality. The book ultimately urges audiences to strategically look at the state-building process, recognizing that while Somaliland has made remarkable progress since 1991, and significant challenges remain that require collective effort, political will, and a commitment to inclusive governance.

The author concluded his overview by reiterating that the book is intended not as a definitive statement but as a contribution to an ongoing conversation about Somaliland's political future. He expressed hope that the discussions generated by the book would contribute to a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic Somaliland by 2030. He also noted that the documentary produced by the Center for Democracy and Governance (CDG) takes an in-depth look at the challenges and interactions between modern state-building, tribe, culture, and Islamic religion, complementing the book's analysis and expanding its reach to broader audiences.

3. Discussion on Chapter 5: Perspectives for Women's Political Participation and Elections in Somaliland

3.1. Opening Remarks

Lead - **Sadia Muse – Women Advocate**



Sadia Muse delivered a comprehensive and insightful critical reading of Chapter 5, which examines the multifaceted barriers that prevent women in Somaliland from fully participating in political processes and elections. Her presentation provided a thorough analysis of the chapter's central argument: that despite women's indispensable contributions to Somali society (including their pivotal roles in family management, economic development, peacebuilding initiatives, and the fostering of social cohesion through inter-marriage and kinship ties that unite clan families) they remain systematically excluded from political decision-making arenas. She emphasized that this marginalization is not

incidental but deeply embedded in the country's social, cultural, religious, and political structures, creating a complex web of obstacles that have proven remarkably resilient over decades of state-building.

Sadia Muse structured her presentation around the key barriers identified in the chapter, offering detailed explanations and examples for each category. She began by noting that the chapter draws attention to the stark contrast between women's visible contributions to society and their near-total absence from formal political structures. Despite Somaliland's progress as a democratic nation since the restoration of sovereignty in 1991 (including the establishment of a multiparty system, competitive elections, and peaceful transfers of power) women's political participation has been consistently overlooked. This oversight represents a fundamental flaw in Somaliland's democratization process, contradicting both international commitments to women's rights and the constitutional guarantees of equality enshrined in the country's founding document.

a. The Clan System

Sadia Muse explained that the clan system represents the first and perhaps most formidable barrier to women's political participation in Somaliland. She elaborated on how the deeply entrenched clan structure favors male dominance in all aspects of social and political life, viewing women as fundamentally unfit for clan representation and decision-making roles. Traditional leadership positions (including Sultans, Aqails, Boqors, Ugaases, and other customary authorities) are exclusively male, reflecting the deeply patriarchal nature of Somali social organization. Political parties, which serve as the primary vehicles for electoral competition, receive their support from clans, and these clans never put forward female candidates. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion where women are systematically denied the opportunity to compete for political office.

Sadia Muse further explained that women face a particularly challenging identity dilemma due to the practice of inter-marriage between clans. When a woman marries into another clan, her loyalty is often questioned and her identity becomes ambiguous; she is no longer fully considered a member of her birth clan but is not fully accepted into her husband's clan either. This identity confusion has profound political implications, as political representation in Somaliland is organized along clan lines, and women cannot reliably claim representation from either their birth clan or their marital clan. This ambiguity is weaponized by male political elites who argue that women's loyalties are unpredictable and therefore they cannot be trusted with political responsibilities. One participant in the discussions powerfully articulated this point, noting that "when a woman gets married, her loyalty changes to her husband's clan," and this perception, whether accurate or not, is used to justify women's exclusion from political processes.

The presenter highlighted how the clan system extends its influence into every aspect of political life in Somaliland. Political parties rely heavily on clan support for candidate selection, voter mobilization, and financial backing. In the traditional system, decisions are made through consensus among adult males in clan assemblies known as *Shir*, where women have no formal voice. The clan system also perpetuates a traditional division of labor that assigns specific tasks to women (predominantly domestic and caregiving roles) while relegating those to subordinate positions in social and political matters. This unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities, based on Somali customs, weakens women's social and political potential and reinforces patriarchal power structures. Sadia Muse observed that the clan system's influence is so pervasive that even when women succeed in business or civil society, they find it nearly impossible to translate that success into political power, as political office remains the preserve of male clan elders and their chosen representatives.

b. Economic Constraints

The second major barrier identified by Sadia Muse relates to the severe economic constraints that women face in their efforts to participate in politics and elections. She explained that women have significantly limited access to family wealth and inheritance, creating profound disadvantages when it comes to funding political campaigns. The Somali customary system, often reinforced by patriarchal interpretations of Islamic inheritance laws, favors male heirs in the distribution of family assets. Land, buildings, livestock, businesses, and other valuable properties are predominantly inherited by sons, leaving daughters with minimal economic resources. This unequal distribution of assets creates socio-economic conditions that directly and negatively affect women's political involvement and campaigning capabilities.

Sadia Muse elaborated on how economic power is inextricably linked to political power in Somaliland's electoral system. Political campaigns are expensive endeavours that require significant financial resources for voter mobilization, transportation, media engagement, and other essential activities. Male candidates have vastly superior access to resources from their families, clans, and the state itself, making it extraordinarily difficult for women to compete financially in elections. Even when women manage to raise some funds, they are often outspent by male candidates who can draw on extensive clan networks and financial support. This economic disparity was particularly evident in the May 2021 parliamentary and local council elections, which were more competitive than previous elections and required additional resources for voter registration and mobilization.

The presenter noted that women's economic marginalization extends beyond campaign financing to the broader political landscape. State resources are overwhelmingly distributed through male-dominated networks, and women are excluded from accessing these resources because they are not part of the political system. Women also face significant restrictions on their ability to raise funds for political campaigns, as sociocultural norms limit their access to financial networks and their capacity to engage in the informal business and political negotiations that often underpin campaign financing. Even when women are successful in business and the private sector (and Sadia Muse acknowledged that women's involvement in business is gradually increasing, thanks in part to skills and innovative ideas brought back by women of the diaspora) this has not yet reached the level of prosperity and property ownership enjoyed by men. The economic and financial disparities faced by women remain major obstacles to their political participation and electoral prospects.

c. Religious Perspectives

Sadia Muse explained that religious perspectives on women's political participation are deeply contested, with conflicting interpretations of Islamic Sharia creating a complex and often hostile environment for women seeking political office. She outlined the two main schools of thought that exist among religious leaders and scholars in Somaliland.

On one side, some religious leaders strictly oppose women's political participation, citing the moral vulnerability of women and their potential to be a source of *fitna* (discord or social disruption). These leaders argue that women's primary responsibilities are domestic and familial, and that their involvement in public political life would lead to the intermixing of men and women in ways that violate Islamic principles of modesty and gender segregation. They maintain that women cannot even travel without a male guardian (*Maxrim*), and this restriction extends to all forms of public political engagement. These

scholars often cite the absence of women governors during the time of the Prophet Mohammed and the early Islamic caliphs as evidence that political leadership is reserved for men.

On the other side, Sadia Muse noted that other religious leaders argue Islam does not forbid women from participating in decision-making roles below the presidency. They point to the active roles played by the Prophet's (SAW) wives, such as Aisha and Umulsalama (RA), who advised the Prophet during critical moments and contributed to the early Muslim community's development. For instance, Umulsalama's advice during the difficult period of *Umra* to Mecca (when the Prophet (SAW) followed her counsel, enabling Muslims to return to a normal situation) serves as a powerful historical example of women's wise counsel being valued and heeded. These scholars argue that the skills and knowledge of educated women should not go to waste but should be utilized in a manner compatible with Islamic Sharia. They note that women can be doctors, engineers, political scientists, and other specialists, and that their expertise should be accessible for the benefit of society.

Sadia Muse also highlighted that examples of prominent Muslim women leaders in other countries (including Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) demonstrate that Islam can accommodate women in high political positions. These examples challenge the notion that Islam inherently prohibits women's political participation and suggest that cultural interpretations, rather than religious doctrine per se, are often the primary barriers. She noted that in Somaliland, the combination of culture and Islamic religion makes the women's case more difficult and resistant to change. Women's rights advocates in Somaliland often find themselves caught between conservative religious interpretations and the practical needs of democratic governance, creating significant challenges for advancing women's political participation.

d. Constitutional Contradictions

The fourth barrier identified by Sadia Muse involves the inherent contradictions within the Somaliland Constitution itself, which creates legal uncertainty and provides convenient arguments for those opposed to women's political participation. She explained that Article 8 of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens, explicitly stating that "All citizens of Somaliland shall enjoy equal rights and obligations before the law, and shall not be discriminated against based on color, clan, birth, language, gender, property, status, opinion, and alike." This provision appears to provide a solid constitutional foundation for women's equal participation in political life.

Furthermore, Article 10 of the Constitution accepts international conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, committing Somaliland to uphold international human rights standards. This provision should compel the state to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other international instruments that promote women's political participation. In theory, these constitutional provisions should guarantee women's rights to political participation on an equal basis with men.

However, Sadia Muse pointed out that in practice, parliament has repeatedly rejected women's quota proposals, claiming they are unconstitutional. When the women's quota was debated in September 2020, MP Balaki, the chairman of the subcommittee responsible for drafting the electoral law, discovered that it was not feasible to include provisions addressing the women's quota in accordance with the constitution. The draft law provisions concerning the women's quota were subsequently eliminated. This decision was strongly criticized by some members of parliament, such as Abdiqadir Jirde, who argued that "we are here

to emphasize the importance of increasing women's political participation. As a state, we should allocate a quota for women at the regional level." However, these voices were not sufficient to overcome the opposition to the quota.

The presenter explained that the constitutional contradictions are further complicated by the supremacy given to Islamic Sharia in the Constitution. Article 10(1) states that Somaliland "recognizes and acts in conformity with the United Nations Charter, international law, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." However, Article 21(2) states that articles relating to fundamental rights and freedoms should be interpreted in a manner consistent with international conventions; but only insofar as they do not conflict with Islamic Sharia. This creates a legal environment where religious interpretations can override international human rights commitments, and conservative religious leaders have effectively used this provision to block women's political participation initiatives. The constitution's recognition of Sharia supremacy creates conflicts with international human rights instruments and provides a legal basis for excluding women from political decision-making.

e. Electoral and Political Challenges

Finally, Sadia Muse examined the specific electoral and political challenges that women face in Somaliland's political system. She provided stark statistics to illustrate the scale of women's marginalization: women's representation in decision-making positions is less than 2.6%, meaning that more than 97.4% of elected and nominated positions in the Somaliland government are occupied by men. This level of underrepresentation is extraordinary even by regional standards and represents a fundamental failure of the democratic system to deliver inclusive governance.

The presenter detailed the specific parliamentary decision that rejected the women's quota in the September 2020 election bill. Despite the presence of MPs like Ibrahim Rayte who argued that "the women's quota should not be undermined or politicized in the current stage of the electoral draft law," the parliament ultimately removed the quota provisions. Even a joint letter from political parties to donors in September 2020, which sought to reaffirm their commitment to women's representation, appears to have been motivated more by a desire for international sympathy and support than by genuine commitment to women's political participation. The final results of the May 2021 elections were striking: only 27 women candidates were fielded out of 993 seats, with 13 women candidates for parliament and 14 for local councils. This represents a tiny fraction of the total candidates and illustrates the profound failure of the political system to create opportunities for women's political participation.

Sadia Muse also explained how the electoral system itself disadvantages women compared to men. The open-list electoral system, where voters can choose individual candidates rather than party lists, creates significant challenges for women candidates. In this system, candidates must build individual name recognition and personal networks, which is more difficult for women who lack the clan-based political networks that male candidates can mobilize. Women's advocacy groups have strongly advocated for a closed-list electoral system, where voters choose between political parties and the parties' lists determine which candidates are elected. In a closed-list system, political parties can include more women on their lists, and voters can support the party's list rather than individual candidates. This would theoretically create more opportunities for women's election, but political elites have resisted this change, preferring a system that maintains their control over candidate selection.

Additional Observations by Sadia Muse

Beyond her structured presentation of the chapter's content, Sadia Muse offered several additional observations that enriched the discussion and provided valuable context for understanding women's political marginalization in Somaliland. She emphasized that many communities embrace modern systems in various aspects of their lives (including education, healthcare, technology, and economic activities) while simultaneously still adhering to traditional norms when it comes to conflict resolution, social organization, and political decision-making. This dualism creates a complex environment where women navigate between modern aspirations and traditional constraints, often finding themselves caught in the gap between these two worlds.

Sadia Muse made a particularly powerful observation that all systems (whether modern or traditional) place women at a disadvantage point, where women are either underrepresented or not considered at all in decision-making processes. She argued that the modern democratic system, despite its formal commitment to equality and human rights, has failed to deliver meaningful representation for women in Somaliland. The traditional clan system, which operates on patriarchal principles, has proven remarkably resilient and continues to dominate political life even as the country has embraced democratic institutions. Religious institutions, likewise, often serve to reinforce patriarchal norms and limit women's public roles. This multidimensional marginalization (where women are disadvantaged in modern, traditional, and religious systems simultaneously) creates a particularly challenging environment for advancing women's rights and political participation.

The presenter highlighted that countries like Uganda are really improving on women's representation, and she argued that Somaliland should learn from their experiences. She noted that Uganda has implemented affirmative action policies that have significantly increased women's representation in parliament and local government, creating a model that could potentially be adapted to the Somaliland context. She suggested that Somaliland could benefit from studying the mechanisms through which Uganda has achieved these gains, including constitutional provisions for women's representation, the role of women's movements in advocating for change, and the political commitment that has sustained these efforts over time. She also noted that other regional countries, including Kenya, have implemented electoral reforms and quota systems that have improved women's representation.

Sadia Muse also observed that there are very few women movements in Somaliland, and she emphasized that this needs to be improved to create stronger advocacy for women's political participation. She noted that while women have been active in peacebuilding, economic development, and social welfare activities, these efforts have not translated into strong, organized political movements that can effectively advocate for women's rights and representation. The lack of strong women's movements means that women's issues are often marginalized in political discourse and decision-making processes. She suggested that strengthening women's organizations, building coalitions across different sectors of society, and developing sustained advocacy strategies would help overcome some of the barriers that women face in political participation.

Sadia Muse further observed that women in Somaliland face significant challenges in organizing and mobilizing for political change. The clan system, which divides women along clan lines, makes it difficult to build unified women's movements that transcend clan divisions. Women who advocate for political rights often face social ostracism, accusations of violating cultural norms, and even threats from male political

elites who perceive their advocacy as a challenge to established power structures. Despite these challenges, Sadia Muse expressed hope that the gradual increase in women's education, economic empowerment, and exposure to international experiences would eventually contribute to stronger women's movements and greater political participation.

She concluded her presentation by emphasizing that women's political participation is not just a matter of justice and equality but also a matter of practical necessity for Somaliland's democratic development and state-building success. She argued that excluding half the population from decision-making processes undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of political institutions, perpetuates inequality and injustice, and limits the country's ability to address the complex challenges it faces. She called for sustained efforts to address the multiple barriers to women's political participation, including through constitutional reform, electoral system changes, economic empowerment programs, and the strengthening of women's movements and advocacy organizations. She emphasized that progress requires integrating women's issues into state institutions rather than treating them as external projects, and she noted that religious and traditional leaders show signs of gradual progress, with more acceptance of women's education and participation in peripheral roles, even as substantial change requires collective efforts to harmonize traditional laws, constitutional provisions, and international commitments.

Recommendations and Outlook from Chapter 5

- *Progress requires integrating women's issues into state institutions rather than treating them as external projects*
- *Constituency-based elections can improve candidate quality and reduce tribalism*
- *Learning from regional examples like Kenya's and Uganda's electoral systems*
- *Addressing the fundamental cultural and economic barriers that prevent women's political participation*
- *Religious and traditional leaders show signs of gradual progress, with more acceptance of women's education and participation in peripheral roles*

3.2. Plenary Discussion

Moderator - Sadia Muse

The plenary discussion generated robust engagement from participants, including representatives from the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, the Academia sector, civil society organizations, political parties, and the House of Guurti.

Some Key Themes Raised

- a. **The Quota Debate** - Several participants expressed frustration over the parliament's nullification of the women's quota in the election bill. The argument that the quota was "unconstitutional" was challenged by academics who pointed to Article 8 of the Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender. One academic noted that the constitutional provisions on equality should be sufficient to justify affirmative action. A member of the House of

Representatives acknowledged that the rejection of the quota was politically motivated, driven by male contenders who fear losing their political power and influence.

- b. **The Clan System as the Primary Obstacle** - Participants overwhelmingly agreed that the clan system is the most significant barrier to women's political participation. Women activists noted that clans never put forward female candidates because they believe women's loyalties are unpredictable when they marry into other clans.
- c. **Externalization vs. Domestication** - A recurring theme was the perception that women's political participation is a "Westernized" agenda imposed by international donors. Participants debated whether this perception undermines domestic advocacy efforts. Some argued that the language of "gender equality" and "gender development" needs to be decontextualized to align with Somali cultural and Islamic values. Others cautioned that dismissing international support risks isolating women's issues from global human rights frameworks.
- d. **Economic Empowerment as a Prerequisite** - Representatives from the private sector emphasized that economic empowerment is a prerequisite for political participation. They noted that women's growing presence in business and the diaspora's contributions are gradually shifting the economic landscape, but state resources remain overwhelmingly controlled by men.
- e. **Religious Leaders' Divided Perspectives** - A participant and a religious scholar present at the discussion acknowledged that there are two conflicting groups of Sheikhs regarding women's political participation. The first group believes that women should not be allowed to participate in decision-making bodies and elections. The second group holds that women can participate in decision-making and elections as long as it is compatible with Islamic Sharia.
- f. **Education as a Catalyst** - Several academics highlighted the significant progress in female education over the past decade. With more women attending universities than men, there is optimism that the next generation of female leaders will be better equipped to challenge existing barriers.
- g. **Problematic Terminology** - Participants discussed how terms like "gender equality" and "gender development" cause societal irritation and stigma. Many recommended reviewing and redefining the language and approaches used to address women's issues in politics.

4. Discussion on Chapter 8: A Way Forward for Somaliland's Political Future: Issues and Solutions

4.1. Opening Remarks



Lead - Dr. Nasir Mohamed Ali

Chapter 8 was opened briefly by the author, Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud, who set the context for the discussion by emphasizing the chapter's central importance to the book's overall argument. He noted that Chapter 8 represents the culmination of the book's analysis, offering a forward-looking framework for addressing the structural challenges that have accumulated over 34 years of state-building. He explained that the chapter addresses reform across eight dimensions, providing a comprehensive and actionable agenda for Somaliland's political future. Dr. Mohamed emphasized that the chapter is not merely an academic exercise but a practical guide for policymakers, political leaders, and citizens who are committed to building a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic Somaliland. He stressed that the reforms proposed in the chapter are urgent and necessary if Somaliland is to achieve its vision of becoming a stable, democratic, and prosperous nation by 2030.

Dr. Nasir M. Ali then took over the session and delivered a comprehensive critical reading of Chapter 8, drawing on his deep expertise in governance, constitutional law, and political reform. Dr. Nasir began by situating Chapter 8 within the broader context of Somaliland's state-building journey, noting that the country has made remarkable progress since 1991 but continues to face significant challenges that threaten its long-term stability and development. He emphasized that the chapter's analysis is grounded in a realistic assessment of Somaliland's political realities, acknowledging both the achievements and the shortcomings of the past three decades. Dr. Nasir noted that the chapter is structured around a careful examination of the root causes of tribalism and a comprehensive reform agenda that addresses the multiple dimensions of Somaliland's political system.

Dr. Nasir summarized the chapter's examination of the root causes of tribalism, explaining that the chapter identifies seven main causes that have contributed to the entrenchment of clan-based politics in Somaliland. These include bad governance, corruption, poverty, high illiteracy rates, persistent conflicts and civil wars, the clan-based social structure, and the colonial legacy of British indirect rule. He explained that each of these factors has reinforced the others, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of tribalism that

undermines state institutions, distorts democratic processes, and perpetuates inequality and injustice. Dr. Nasir emphasized that addressing these root causes requires comprehensive and coordinated reforms across multiple dimensions of the political system, and he structured his presentation around seven key reform areas that the chapter identifies as essential for Somaliland's political future.

Dr. Nasir emphasized that constitutional reform should include quota provisions for women's representation, arguing that constitutional reform provides the foundation for all other reforms and must address the systemic inequalities that have marginalized women and minority groups. He noted that the constitution, which was drafted and developed between 1997 and 2000 when the country was more fragile and political debates had little influence on the political process, now requires comprehensive review and amendment to address the challenges that have emerged over the past three decades. He explained that constitutional reform would serve as a foundation for reviewing the country's political trajectory based on positive and negative experiences, and would provide a framework for addressing power-sharing concerns, regional representation issues, and the functioning of state institutions.

4.2. Key Reform Areas Identified in Chapter 8

a. Constitutional Reform

Dr. Nasir provided an extensive analysis of the constitutional reform imperative, explaining that there is strong public demand for constitutional reform to address multiple interrelated challenges. He noted that the constitution currently contains significant ambiguities and contradictions that have created confusion regarding the mandates of state branches, the relationship between state and non-state actors, and the balance between democratic principles, Sharia law, and traditional norms. These constitutional ambiguities have enabled the clan system to exert disproportionate influence over state institutions, undermining the rule of law and eroding public trust in the political system.

Dr. Nasir explained that constitutional reform would address several critical issues, including political stability, inclusivity, power-sharing, regional representation, restructuring government branches, resolving constitutional ambiguities, and promoting women's and minority political participation. He emphasized that the constitution already outlines the process for amendments in Articles 125, 126, and 127, and that there is a clear legal pathway for undertaking the necessary reforms. He noted that the growing concerns about power-sharing and regional and clan representation highlight undeniable trends in Somaliland's statehood and democratic processes that must be addressed through constitutional reform.

The presenter elaborated on how constitutional reform would clarify the working relationship between state and non-state actors, determining how their cooperation can support the country's progress in political, economic, and institutional development. He noted that one possible approach is to utilize the House of Guurti, which functions as both a bicameral parliament and a traditional and religious institution, and to legally develop it into a hybrid political body that aligns some of its mandates with the roles and responsibilities of traditional and religious authorities. Dr. Nasir emphasized that constitutional reform would help Somaliland resolve confusion regarding the mandates of state branches, enhance

checks and balances for state actors, and promote political participation among women and minority groups.

Furthermore, Dr. Nasir explained that constitutional reform would contribute to realigning and improving other crucial institutions such as the Central Bank, National Broadcasting Media, Auditor General, Anti-Corruption Commission, Civil Service Commission, National Electoral Commission, Police Commission, and Human Rights Commission. These institutions need to be constitutionally prepared for full autonomy, including ensuring strict security of tenure. He emphasized that these institutions must enhance their functions, legitimacy, independence, and capacity, which would result in increased state accountability, transparency, and checks and balances, ultimately improving the oversight, efficiency, and effectiveness of the state bureaucracy.

Dr. Nasir concluded his discussion of constitutional reform by noting that the reforms would help state institutions understand how to fill national positions with reference to defined criteria that promote merit, track records, integrity, qualifications, and experience. He emphasized that constitutional reform is not merely a technical exercise but a fundamental political undertaking that requires broad consultation, inclusive participation, and a shared vision for Somaliland's future. He noted that the process of constitutional reform must engage scholars, researchers, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens to ensure that the reforms reflect the aspirations and needs of the Somali people.

b. Institutional Reform

Dr. Nasir provided a detailed analysis of the institutional reform imperative, emphasizing that institutional reform should focus on the system rather than just policies and infrastructure only. He explained that Somaliland's state institutions are currently skeletal and operating under precarious systems, with institutions that are not functional or progressing as productive and capable arms of the government. This has resulted in widespread public frustration and despair, with many people demanding drastic and comprehensive institutional reforms to address public demands.

To illustrate the systemic nature of the institutional challenges, Dr. Nasir gave a concrete example of investors who face significant challenges due to bureaucratic policies and procedures. He explained that investors in Somaliland encounter complex, time-consuming, and often contradictory regulations that discourage investment and hinder economic development. These bureaucratic obstacles are not merely the result of inadequate policies or poor infrastructure but reflect deeper systemic problems, including the lack of coordination between government ministries, the absence of clear procedures, and the prevalence of informal practices that undermine formal processes. He noted that addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that go beyond updating policies or improving physical infrastructure to fundamentally transform how government institutions operate and deliver services.

Dr. Nasir elaborated on the specific areas where institutional reform is most urgently needed. First, the Executive branch needs to reform all internal structures, such as Ministries, Security Agencies, and other government departments. Restructuring these internal systems would help enhance capacity development and service delivery, allowing citizens to have a more coherent, coordinated, and monitored view of the Executive branch's activities following its constitutional mandate. He noted that state institutions are currently shrinking, and the Executive branch, particularly the central government, is only functioning symbolically, as all decisions are centralized under the President's Office. This centralization

undermines the effectiveness of governance and creates bottlenecks that impede service delivery and public accountability.

Second, **Dr. Nasir** explained that after conducting a structural review, human capital emerges as the most crucial factor for institutional reform. He noted that it is widely known, although not officially acknowledged, that recruitment of new employees is not based on merit or qualifications but rather on tribalism and favoritism. This has resulted in excessive staffing, with state institutions becoming the biggest employers in the country, while government service delivery has fallen far behind public expectations. He noted that political circumstances have historically prevented state institutions from considering merit-based recruitment, and this has created a civil service that is overstaffed, underqualified, and unaccountable.

Dr. Nasir acknowledged that the current civil service reform, funded by the World Bank, has contributed to improving recruitment processes and identification of public servants. However, he cautioned that this reform is insufficient to satisfy the public's desire for significant changes. He emphasized that these reforms should not be led by international entities but rather based on the national agenda committed to by the President or ruling party at the time. He called for serious and effective civil service reform where filling national posts must be credible and meet the track records and qualifications needed in that post, including Ministers, Director Generals, Ambassadors, National Commissions, and security personnel.

Third, Dr. Nasir noted that improving the physical infrastructure of state institutions must be an integral part of the reform initiative. He explained that the current environment in state institutions does not encourage meaningful reforms due to the lack of progressive design in government infrastructure and bureaucratic systems. He called for investments in physical infrastructure that would create a conducive environment for effective governance and public service delivery.

Fourth, Dr. Nasir emphasized that the reform of institutions must evaluate all public policies developed in the last few decades. He noted that these public policies have complicated the entire government system, as foreign individuals contracted by government ministries have designed many of them. Numerous public policies remain undefined, lacking contextualization, and incapable of addressing citizens' needs and aspirations. He called for drafting and developing public policies that create a more open and conducive environment for public engagement and that are based on nationally led needs assessments.

c. Judiciary Reform

Dr. Nasir provided an extensive analysis of the judiciary reform imperative, explaining that the judiciary faces significant challenges that undermine the rule of law and erode public trust in the justice system. He noted that the Somaliland constitution re-established the country's justice and judiciary system, protecting and guaranteeing citizens' rights and citizenship. However, there are conflicts related to outdated penal code laws, including criminal law, criminal procedure law, civil law, and civil procedure law, all of which were created by colonizers before independence. Somaliland courts still rely on these outdated laws today, creating significant inconsistencies and contradictions within the legal system.

Dr. Nasir explained that the contradiction between the parallel legal systems of statutory law, sharia law, and customary law is blamed for impeding the effectiveness of the justice system. Many cases go through

all three systems, leading to delays in justice and confusion about which legal framework applies. The formal courts in Somaliland include the Supreme Court, the regional appellate courts, the regional courts, the district courts, and the courts of the national armed forces, but these courts operate within a legal framework that is inconsistent and contradictory.

The presenter highlighted that the judiciary sector has faced accusations of a lack of independence due to the strong influence of the executive branch. He identified three main reasons for this lack of independence. First, the President has the constitutional authority to propose the appointment and dismissal of the Chief Justice and to appoint or relieve constitutional court judges. This gives the executive branch significant influence over the judiciary's leadership and creates a perception that judicial decisions may be influenced by political considerations. Second, the attorney general and the Ministry of Justice are part of the judiciary sector, further blurring the lines between the executive and judicial branches. Third, the judiciary sector should be more independent according to the constitution, but in practice, the executive branch exerts considerable influence over judicial appointments and decisions.

Dr. Nasir called for constitutional amendments to strengthen judicial independence, including protections for judicial tenure and the removal of executive branch influence over judicial appointments. He explained that the constitutional provisions regarding the judiciary branch, particularly Articles 97-108, provide insufficient explanation and guidance, and this can only be resolved through constitutional amendments. He emphasized that reforming the judiciary sector would play a crucial role in the country's democratic process, accessibility of politicians, accessibility of the justice system, and protection of individual citizens' rights.

d. Political Party Reform

Dr. Nasir provided a detailed and critical analysis of the political party reform imperative, making the striking observation that in political parties, there is no ideology, but rather ownership and shares within the party structure. He explained that political parties in Somaliland have become vehicles for clan competition rather than platforms for democratic governance, party ideology, and policy development. The party system is characterized by a lack of internal democracy, with party financing controlled by chairmen and their clans, no regular membership recruitment or fees, and dictatorial candidate selection processes.

Dr. Nasir elaborated on the structural challenges facing political parties, noting that the political system is based on multiparty rules, and the constitution outlines the general democratic principles and values that these political parties must adhere to. However, in practice, political parties have failed to internalize democratic principles and have instead become instruments of clan power and personal ambition. The selection of candidates for parliamentary and local council elections is dominated by clan considerations, with clans negotiating with parties to accept their chosen candidates. This has resulted in a political system where candidates are selected based on clan affiliation rather than merit, competence, or commitment to democratic values.

The presenter explained that political parties require urgent reform due to several interconnected problems. First, there is a lack of internal democracy within political parties, with the chairman and a small inner circle manipulating party decisions and suppressing participation. Second, party financing is controlled by the chairman and his clan constituencies, who provide financial support during elections and thereby gain disproportionate influence over party decisions. Third, there is no regular membership

recruitment or fees, meaning that parties lack a sustainable membership base and are dependent on clan-based financing. Fourth, candidate selection processes are dictatorial, with decisions made by the chairman and inner circle rather than through democratic processes. Fifth, there is growing mistrust between parties and citizens, with voters increasingly disillusioned by unfulfilled promises and lack of accountability.

Dr. Nasir outlined several key recommendations for political party reform. First, he called for reforming political party laws to promote institutionalization and ensure proper formation, as well as the legality of political platforms and interventions. This law should include establishing a regulatory body responsible for monitoring political parties' compliance with legal requirements and standardizing their internal bylaws and codes of conduct. Second, he recommended implementing constituency-based elections to reduce tribalism and improve candidate quality, allowing competent candidates to counteract and eliminate the negative effects of clanism. Third, he suggested switching from the open-list to the closed-list electoral system to enhance the quality of candidates, build trust in parties, reduce clan-based competition, and break tribal influences. Fourth, he emphasized the need to enhance internal party democracy, including transparent financing, regular membership recruitment, and free competition for candidate selection.

Dr. Nasir also discussed the tensions between Islam and democracy, noting that while Islam and democracy share common values such as anti-corruption, accountability, and justice, tensions persist regarding individual liberty, the divine nature of Islamic law, and restrictions on eligible voters. He noted that Somalilanders have unanimously agreed that the democratic system practiced in the country must conform to Islamic principles, but reconciling these parallel ideals remains challenging.

e. House of Guurti Reform

Dr. Nasir provided a thoughtful analysis of the House of Guurti reform imperative, emphasizing that the Guurti (upper house) is our culture and cannot be removed. He explained that the Guurti has deep historical and cultural roots in Somali society, serving as an institution that bridges traditional governance structures and modern state institutions. He noted that the Guurti has been working well to resolve issues, and while it can be reviewed separately, its cultural and traditional legitimacy should be preserved.

Dr. Nasir explained that the House of Guurti functions as both a bicameral parliament and a traditional and religious institution, and that it has played a crucial role in Somaliland's peacebuilding and state-building efforts. The Guurti has been instrumental in resolving conflicts, mediating disputes between clans, and providing a link between traditional authorities and the modern state. Its members, who are drawn from traditional leadership positions such as Sultans, Aqails, and other customary authorities, bring deep knowledge of Somali customs, traditions, and conflict resolution mechanisms that complement the formal state institutions.

However, Dr. Nasir noted that the Guurti requires reform to adapt to changing circumstances and to address concerns about its representativeness, accountability, and effectiveness. He outlined several suggested reforms. First, he recommended streamlining the Guurti's membership, reducing it to no more than 60 members, with each of the six regions obtaining 10 members. This would create a more manageable and efficient body while ensuring regional representation. Second, he called for adding nominations for minority clans and women to ensure that the Guurti is more representative of Somaliland's diverse population. Third, he emphasized that members should be evenly distributed among

the six main regions of the country to ensure geographic balance. Fourth, he suggested that members should come from diverse backgrounds, including traditional, religious, intellectual, and scholarly backgrounds, to bring a range of perspectives to the institution.

Dr. Nasir also discussed the need to review the mandate of the House of Guurti and consider either adopting a model similar to the House of Senate in the United States or the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, or creating a unique Somaliland model. He noted that most countries worldwide have two houses of parliament that are not equal in number, with the upper house typically having fewer members than the lower house. For example, in Kenya, the lower house has 349 members, while the Senate has only 65 members. He suggested that Somaliland could learn from these examples while developing a model that is appropriate for its own cultural and political context.

f. Decentralization

Dr. Nasir provided a comprehensive analysis of the decentralization imperative, explaining that power is currently concentrated in the capital city, Hargeisa, causing regional marginalization and inequality. He noted that the eastern regions have been plagued by prolonged conflicts due to underdevelopment and the deficient performance of state institutions. The government has had to allocate significant funds to restore peace and resolve conflicts among the clans residing there, funds that could be better used for development if state institutions were more present and functional at the regional level.

Dr. Nasir explained that the distribution of power and the geographical organization of Somaliland are two essential factors that need careful attention to meet the needs and expectations of its people. Currently, power is concentrated in the capital, leaving many regions and districts on the outskirts neglected. This has caused inequality and injustice across Somaliland, as state institutions mainly focus on the capital. The lack of capable regional leadership is one reason many areas are marginalized, as all problems are referred to the capital and central government.

The presenter outlined several recommendations for decentralization. First, he called for devolving ministries to regions and districts, particularly ministries related to agriculture, livestock, fisheries, industries, civil service, immigration, national identity cards, voter registration, and social services. These ministries should set up branches in various regions and districts with full authority to deliver social essential services. Second, he recommended electing regional governors with democratic mandates to manage local issues and provide leadership at the regional level. Third, he called for implementing tax decentralization to empower regions to deliver social services effectively. Fourth, he emphasized that regionalization must align with the priorities of the national development plan, allowing the central government and international development partners to participate in development.

Dr. Nasir emphasized that decentralization would not only promote resource sharing but also boost peace, security, political stability, and national unity. By bringing state institutions closer to citizens, decentralization would enhance accountability, improve service delivery, and reduce the sense of marginalization that fuels conflict in the eastern regions. He noted that the regions eagerly anticipate delegations from the capital city, but the projects carried out in the regions lack local adaptation and decentralization, as there are no ministers present to announce or lay the foundation stone.

g. Somaliland-Somalia Talks

Dr. Nasir provided a detailed analysis of the Somaliland-Somalia talks, emphasizing that Somalia and Somaliland should resume talks, as international mediation is essential for a two-state solution. He explained that the political dispute between Somaliland and Somalia is more complicated than many other cases in Africa and beyond for three main reasons. First, Somaliland's push for independence has unique characteristics in its political history and current status, as Somaliland was an independent state before merging with Somalia in 1960. Second, it is important not to portray Somaliland as a breakaway region or secessionist, but rather to recognize that Somaliland met all the criteria for statehood before merging with Somalia. Third, the Somaliland situation cannot be compared to cases like Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sudan and South Sudan, or even East Timor and Indonesia, but is more similar to the cases of Gambia and Senegal, as well as Syria and Egypt.

Dr. Nasir explained that the worsening relations between Somaliland and Somalia have had profound effects on development, security, and political stability in the region. The international community can no longer take a wait-and-see approach; intervention is necessary to facilitate a peaceful separation, address the political and social trends of loyalty and commitment, and protect Somaliland's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He noted that by ignoring the realities on the ground and their well-documented consequences, the international community has a vital role in resolving this decades-old political conflict between Somaliland and Somalia to maintain peace and stability in the region.

The presenter traced the history of the talks, which began with the international community's endorsement at the 2012 London Somali conference. However, the international community subsequently failed to take a more active leadership role in the talks. Meetings held in London, Dubai, Djibouti, Ankara, and Istanbul between 2012 and 2021 did not produce a comprehensive outcome. Türkiye primarily hosted the key direct talks between the two sides in Ankara and Istanbul from 2013 to 2014. During these talks, the sides reached an understanding on several critical issues, such as the co-management of airspace control and revenue-sharing, but Somalia failed to take care of these agreed points. Due to the lack of pressure from the international community, Türkiye failed in its moral obligation to hold Somalia accountable to the agreement or denounce it for renegeing on the agreed terms.

Dr. Nasir emphasized that Somaliland insists that international mediation is the only way to restart dialogue, as Somalia's political leaders do not fulfill their part of the responsibility to honor and implement agreements reached by both sides. He noted that the main goal of the talks on the Somaliland side is to reach a two-state solution, and that the politically devastated and disintegrated Somalia presents a significant challenge for the talks to continue and be productive.

4.3. Geostrategic Importance and International Recognition

Dr. Nasir provided a comprehensive analysis of Somaliland's geostrategic importance and its quest for international recognition, highlighting that Somaliland's position is a strategic geopolitical position which attracts big powers. He explained that the Horn of Africa's geopolitical importance has fueled intense competition among regional and international powers, and Somaliland's strategic location along the Gulf of Aden, with its 850-kilometer coastline from Zeila in the west to Elayo in the east, positions the country as a key player in regional and international affairs.

Dr. Nasir elaborated on the legal basis for Somaliland's recognition, noting that Somaliland meets the international law criteria for statehood under the Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of

States of 1933. He explained that the convention establishes four core principles of being a sovereign state: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. He noted that the Republic of Somaliland fulfills all these requirements, and that from an international law perspective on the rights and responsibilities of states, recognition of Somaliland is valid, genuine, and clear.

The presenter also highlighted the findings of the African Union fact-finding mission in 2005, which identified and clarified three main issues regarding Somaliland's legal and political case. First, the merger between Somaliland and Somalia was not ratified and failed immediately in 1960. Second, the Siyad Barre regime committed acts of injustice and genocide against the people of Somaliland. Third, the AU discovered and redefined the legal existence of Somaliland's borders, which are based on international treaties. As a result, the Republic of Somaliland should not be faced with reopening Pandora's Box, which would involve the delineation and revocation of existing borders.

Dr. Nasir then outlined the four major drivers that will contribute to Somaliland's journey towards international recognition:

h. Democratic Credentials

Dr. Nasir explained that Somaliland's democratic credentials and its state-building journey will impact its attainment and recognition on the world political and diplomatic stage. Promoting democratic and multiparty political rule, and holding competitive, free, fair, credible, peaceful, standardized, and timely elections will help Somaliland appear as a responsible, reliable, and credible state. He noted that international observers have reported and commended the elections in Somaliland for being peaceful, credible, and orderly, putting Somaliland in the international spotlight and improving the country's participation in regional, continental, and international efforts to counterterrorism and promote regional stabilization.

i. Peace and Security Contributions

Dr. Nasir explained that promoting peace and security is essential in the fight against terrorism, and this can be achieved by implementing standardized countermeasures to prevent any insecure activities within the country's borders. Somaliland has earned recognition and respect both regionally and internationally for effectively eliminating terrorism, including groups like Al-Shabaab, from its territory. By securing its borders with neighbouring countries and working with global organizations, Somaliland plays a key role in maintaining peace and security, cooperating in fighting terrorist groups and other international crimes, and combating organized crime such as human trafficking, transnational crimes, piracy, drug trafficking, money laundering, and illegal fishing.

j. Economic Hub Potential

Dr. Nasir explained that Somaliland is well-positioned to leverage its geostrategic importance in transnational trade and its commitment to regional and continental economic integration, development, connectivity, and establishing world-class economic infrastructure that fosters free trade. The Berbera corridor has now become one of the largest in the region and is expected to play a key role in connecting Africa to the rest of the world through a highly developed Berbera port and free zone. The Berbera port has recently become a leading maritime hub in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank Index 2023. Somaliland possesses the largest share of the Gulf of Aden waters, second only to Yemen, and its

850-kilometer coastline positions it as a key gateway for trade between Africa, the Middle East, China, and Europe.

k. Archaeological Heritage

Dr. Nasir explained that Somaliland has a wealth of archaeology and heritage that is not comparable to the rest of Africa and the world. The historical significance of the artifacts found here is undeniable, including the 7,000-year-old Laas-Geel rock shelter paintings and other sites representing the prehistoric and pre-Islamic eras. These sites serve as significant tourist attractions, highlighting Somaliland's interconnectedness with the world. Researchers have proven that Somaliland served as an entry point to Africa, which should lead to increased exposure, appreciation, and collaboration for Somaliland.

Dr. Nasir concluded his presentation by noting that Somaliland's recognition by Israel on 26 December 2025 and the Memorandum of Understanding with Ethiopia in 2024 have significantly increased global awareness of Somaliland's legitimate case for international recognition. He emphasized that the international community can no longer ignore Somaliland's cause, and that the country's strategic importance, democratic credentials, peace and security contributions, economic potential, and rich heritage make it a compelling partner for regional and international cooperation.

4.4. Plenary Discussion

Moderator - Dr. Nasir M. Ali

The plenary discussion on Chapter 8 was particularly lively, with participants from government ministries, political parties, the academia sector, and traditional institutions engaging deeply with the reform proposals.

Key Themes Raised

- **Political Decay and Lack of Responsiveness** - Professor Mubarik raised serious concerns about political decay in Somaliland, noting that the government cannot respond to the needs of the citizens. He expressed doubt about how Vision 2030 will be achieved at the current rate. He gave a concrete example of the Somaliland ID card, where citizens must pay US\$20 to obtain an ID. He noted that many countries cover this cost, especially for youth entering adulthood. He also highlighted the lack of transparency in government structures and emphasized the need for community awareness.
- **The Clan-Democracy Tension** - Several participants acknowledged that the clan system remains the most significant obstacle to democratic consolidation.
- **Ownership in Political Parties** - Mustafe, the Vice Chairman of KAAH, shared his perspective as one of the founder members of KAAH. He explained that his role as a founder creates a sense of ownership, which makes him one of the decision-makers within the party. This highlighted the challenge of internal party democracy, where founding members often dominate decision-making processes.
- **Decentralization as a Priority** - Representatives from the eastern regions strongly advocated for decentralization, arguing that the concentration of power in Hargeisa has fueled marginalization and conflict.

- **Corruption and Accountability** - A participant from the Ministry of Finance acknowledged that corruption is a major threat to governance and development.
- **Judiciary Independence:** A legal expert from the Ministry of Justice acknowledged that the judiciary's lack of independence is a major concern.
- **The Role of the House of Guurti** - There was significant debate on whether the Guurti should remain a traditional institution or evolve into a formal upper house of parliament. Most participants agreed with Dr. Nasir's observation that the Guurti is our culture and cannot be removed, and that it has been working well to resolve issues.
- **International Recognition** - A representative from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs appreciated on Somaliland's international recognition efforts.

Participants' Suggestions for Improvement

- **Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU** - Several participants who read the two chapters suggested to the author to mention why the Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU failed and not to leave the topic hanging in the book. They noted that the MOU has been a significant development in Somaliland's international relations and deserves analysis.
- **Learning from Botswana** - One participant mentioned that Somaliland should learn from Botswana, which has successfully maintained political stability and democratic governance in Africa.
- **The Malaysian Example** - Another participant raised the example of Malaysia, which operates under a hybrid system similar to Somaliland and yet has achieved remarkable success. They suggested that Somaliland could draw lessons from Malaysia's experience in balancing traditional and modern governance systems.

5. Key Reflections and Recommendations

Moderator - Executive Director, CDG

The moderator synthesized the key reflections from both sessions and presented the following recommendations: -

5.1. On Women's Political Participation (Chapter 5)

- a. **Adopt a Women's Quota** - Despite the parliament's rejection of the quota in 2020, participants recommended reintroducing the quota through constitutional amendments or political party-level commitments. Quota representation should be included under constitutional reform, as suggested by Dr. Nasir.

- b. **Learn from Regional Examples** - Somaliland should learn from countries like Uganda, which have made significant progress in women's representation, as well as Kenya's electoral system.
- c. **Strengthen Women's Movements** - Sadia Muse noted that there are very few women movements in Somaliland, which needs to be improved. Civil society organizations should strengthen advocacy and coalition-building among women's groups.
- d. **Recontextualize Advocacy Language** - Civil society organizations should review and redefine the language used in advocacy for women's political participation.
- e. **Economic Empowerment Programs** - The government should develop targeted programs to enhance women's economic empowerment.
- f. **Engage Religious Leaders** - Proponents of women's political participation should engage religious leaders in constructive dialogue to address misconceptions.
- g. **Consider Closed-List Electoral System** - Women's advocacy groups strongly advocate for the implementation of a closed-list electoral system.

5.2. On Constitutional and Institutional Reforms (Chapter 8)

- a. **Address Political Decay** - Professor Mubarik's concerns about political decay and the government's inability to respond to citizens' needs must be urgently addressed. The lack of transparency in government structures and the need for community awareness should be prioritized.
- b. **Reduce ID card Costs** - The government should cover the cost of ID cards, especially for youth entering adulthood, as many countries do. This would reduce the financial burden on citizens and promote inclusivity.
- c. **Institutional Reform Focus on Systems** - Dr. Nasir emphasized that institutional reform should focus on systems rather than just policies and infrastructure. Bureaucratic procedures that hinder investors and service delivery should be streamlined.
- d. **Political Party Reform** - As highlighted by Mustafe, the issue of ownership and shares within political parties needs to be addressed. Parties should move beyond clan-based ownership and develop clear ideologies, internal democracy, and transparent financing mechanisms.
- e. **Preserve the Guurti** - Participants agreed with Dr. Nasir that the Guurti is our culture and cannot be removed. It has been working well to resolve issues, and while it can be reviewed separately, its cultural legitimacy should be preserved.
- f. **Address the Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU** - The author should address why the Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU failed in future editions of the book, as several participants noted this is a significant development that deserves analysis.
- g. **Learn from Successful Hybrid States** - Somaliland should learn from Malaysia's experience in operating a hybrid system successfully, as well as from Botswana's political stability and governance.

- h. **Resume Somaliland-Somalia Talks** - Dr. Nasir emphasized that Somalia and Somaliland should resume talks, with international mediation to facilitate a two-state solution.
- i. **Leverage Geostrategic Importance** - Somaliland should capitalize on its strategic geopolitical position, which attracts big powers, to advance its international recognition agenda.

6. Closing Remarks

Lead - Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani), Sadia Muse, and Mr. Abdirahman Warsame

The session was closed with a few remarks from the speakers

Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani), Author

Dr. Mohamed thanked all participants for their valuable contributions and engagement with the book. He acknowledged the suggestions made by participants, including the need to address the Ethiopia/Somaliland MOU in future editions. He reiterated that the book aims to stimulate debate and discussion on Somaliland's political future, and he was encouraged by the depth and quality of the dialogue. He emphasized that discussing and debating these issues is in itself a step forward for Somaliland's political development.

Sadia Muse, Chapter 5 Presenter

Sadia Muse expressed gratitude to the participants for their insights on women's political participation. She reiterated that all systems place women at a disadvantage, and that learning from countries like Uganda is essential. She called for strengthening women's movements and ensuring that women's issues are integrated into state institutions rather than treated as external projects.

Mr. Abdirahman Warsame

Mr. Abdirahman Warsame delivered the final closing remarks, thanking CDG for organizing the event and all participants for their contributions. He emphasized that the discussions reflected the collective commitment of Somalilanders to building a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic state. He noted that the recommendations generated from the session would be compiled and shared with relevant stakeholders, including the Presidency, Parliament, political parties, and civil society organizations.

He concluded by reiterating that Somaliland's state-building journey is a collective endeavor that requires the active participation of all citizens; men and women, traditional and modern, religious and secular. He expressed hope that the discussions would contribute to a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic Somaliland by 2030.

7. Annexes

7.1. List of Participants

Category	Representatives
Host Organization	CDG Secretariat, Executive Director
Author	Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani)
Chapter 5 Presenter	Sadia Muse
Chapter 8 Presenter	Dr. Nasir Mohamed Ali

Political Party Representative	Mustafe, Vice Chairman of KAAH (one of the founder members)
Academia	Professor Mubarik and other professors and researchers from the University of Hargeisa and other academic institutions
Civil Society	Women's advocacy groups, human rights organizations, NAGAAD representatives
Religious Leaders	Sheikhs and Islamic scholars
Private Sector	Business leaders
Others	Others
Closing Remarks	Mr. Abdirahman Warsame

7.2. Agenda

Time	Programme	Lead
4:30 – 4:45 PM	Arrival, Registration and Networking	CDG Secretariat
4:45 – 4:55 PM	Welcome and Opening Remarks	Executive Director, CDG
4:55 – 5:20 PM	Overview of the Book <i>Somaliland State-Building</i>	Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani)
5:20 – 5:35 PM	Critical Reading of Chapter 5: Perspectives for Women's Political Participation and Elections in Somaliland	Sadia Muse
5:35 – 6:25 PM	Plenary Discussion on Chapter 5	Moderator & Participants
6:25 – 6:35 PM	PRAYING TIME	ALL
6:35 – 7:00 PM	Critical Reading of Chapter 8: A Way Forward for Somaliland's Political Future: Issues and Solutions	Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani) & Dr. Nasir Mohamed Ali
7:00 – 7:40 PM	Plenary Discussion on Chapter 8	Moderator & Participants
7:40 – 7:55 PM	Summary of Key Reflections and Recommendations	Moderator
7:55 – 8:00 PM	Closing Remarks	Amb. Dr. Mohamed A. Mohamoud (Barwaani), Sadia Muse, & Mr. Abdirahman Warsame