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## **Educating for Change: Examining the Role of Somali Women in Post-Conflict Community Development through Educational Empowerment**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the pivotal role of Somali women in post-conflict community development, emphasizing the transformative power of educational empowerment. Utilizing a quantitative, cross-sectional research design, the study surveyed 154 respondents, including educators, community leaders, and policymakers, to capture diverse perspectives on women's contributions in education, social cohesion, and leadership. The findings reveal that Somali women educators significantly enhance literacy rates and serve as vital role models, promoting educational aspirations among young girls. Furthermore, women play crucial roles in mediating conflicts, fostering reconciliation, and advocating for social justice. Despite facing cultural barriers, limited resources, and security concerns, the respondents exhibit a strong belief in the potential of educated women to enact positive changes in their communities. By identifying both the contributions and the challenges faced by Somali women, this research underscores the importance of targeted policies and funding to empower women as agents of change in the pursuit of sustainable community development.

**Keywords:** Somali Women, Post-Conflict, Community, Development, Educational Empowerment

### **Introduction**

The role of Somali women in post-conflict community development, particularly through educational empowerment, emerges as a crucial area of inquiry within the broader context of post-conflict reconstruction. In many regions, including Somalia, women endure significant adversities due to prolonged armed conflicts, leading to their marginalization within socio-economic and political spheres. This marginalization often undermines their potential contributions to community development and peacebuilding initiatives. Recent research supports the notion that women not only serve as vital community builders but also possess unique perspectives that can effectively influence restorative processes in their societies (Justino et al., 2018; Gizelis, 2011).

Educational empowerment stands as a transformative avenue that can significantly enhance the participation and influence of Somali women within their communities. Delivering education tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of post-conflict environments can facilitate the reintegration of women into socio-economic activities while fostering their leadership roles. Prior studies have shown that access to education correlates positively with women's engagement in civic activities, which can diminish gender-based violence and promote peace (Habib & Soomro, 2021; Glass et al., 2018; Arrey-Ndip, 2023). The recognition of education as a pivotal factor in women's empowerment is supported by findings indicating that formal education can provide essential skills, enhancing women's roles in governance and community decision-making (Gele et al., 2019; Lewis & Winn, 2018).

The intersection of gender and education within post-conflict settings has been widely discussed. Initiatives aimed at reducing intimate partner violence and promoting gender equality have highlighted the importance of involving women in educational and vocational training programs (Spangaro et al., 2021). These interventions have been shown to transform gendered social norms, enabling women to claim their rights and participate actively in rebuilding efforts (Gaffey et al., 2020). The historical context of Somali women, who have been significantly impacted by socio-political upheavals, illustrates the urgent need for targeted educational strategies to assist their recovery and to empower them as agents of change (Calléja, 2022; Schwartz & Aden, 2017).

In the context of post-conflict Somalia, the necessity of integrating peace education with other educational frameworks cannot be overstated. Such an approach addresses the immediate educational needs of women and equips them with conflict resolution skills essential for maintaining long-term peace in their communities. This comprehensive educational model is critical as it addresses systemic barriers while encouraging social cohesion and resilience among women in post-conflict contexts (Ahmad et al., 2018; Kester et al., 2022). Ultimately, emphasizing the educational empowerment of Somali women holds the key to fostering sustainable community development and enhancing their role within a rapidly evolving socio-political landscape.

### **Problem statement**

In an ideal situation, Somali women would actively participate in and lead community development initiatives, leveraging their experiences and skills gained through educational empowerment. However, the current reality reveals significant barriers; after years of conflict, many Somali women face limited access to educational resources and societal recognition, hindering their potential contributions. This situation perpetuates cycles of poverty and underdevelopment, stymying community growth and resilience. To address these challenges, it is essential to propose targeted educational programs and support systems that not only equip Somali women with the necessary skills but also foster a cultural shift that values their roles in post-conflict rebuilding efforts. By doing so, we can create a more equitable foundation for sustainable development that benefits entire communities. The study aims to explore and analyze the impact of educational empowerment on the role of Somali women in community development efforts in post-conflict settings, aiming to identify strategies that enhance their participation and leadership. Based on this objective, the study seeks to answer this main question How does educational empowerment affect the involvement and leadership of Somali women in post-conflict community development initiatives?

## **Value of the Study**

This study offers significant value across academic, practical, and policy domains. Academically, it addresses gaps in the literature on gender, education, and post-conflict development, providing insights into the experiences of Somali women. For practitioners, it presents strategies to empower these women, ensuring more inclusive and sustainable community development. For policymakers, the findings highlight the necessity of prioritizing educational initiatives aimed at women, offering evidence-based recommendations to foster gender equity and community resilience in post-conflict settings.

## **Literature Review**

This review synthesizes key research on the multifaceted role of women in community development following conflict, focusing on empowerment, participation in decision-making, and social cohesion. It highlights their critical contributions to peacebuilding, economic recovery, and social rebuilding, while acknowledging persistent structural barriers.

### **1. Women as Key Actors in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion**

The literature increasingly recognizes women as indispensable agents in peacebuilding and social recovery. Their participation in political spheres during and after conflict is linked to more inclusive peace processes (Justino et al., 2018; Nawrotzki et al., 2022). This aligns with the goals of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which mandates women's inclusion in peace and security efforts. Empowering women directly correlates with building peaceful and inclusive societies (Lwamba et al., 2022). Grassroots initiatives are paramount, as demonstrated by women's leadership in creating peace zones in Liberia (Calléja, 2022) and through organizations like Women for Women International in Rwanda, which enhance agency via education and economic support (Rugamba & Njenga, 2023).

### **2. Economic Empowerment and Development**

Economic recovery in post-conflict settings is closely tied to women's empowerment. Women are often targeted in reconstruction for their role as drivers of growth and stability due to their agency enhances community resilience and yields substantial benefits (Yadav, 2020). Microfinance and support for women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are vital for fostering both economic recovery and social cohesion, as seen in Northern Uganda (Bongomin et al., 2020). Tailored strategies that address diverse household needs can further promote food security and economic independence among women in rural settings (Malual & Mazur, 2021). Innovative approaches, such as e-commerce initiatives in Afghanistan, also demonstrate how technology can break traditional barriers and foster women's active economic participation (Hakimi et al., 2024).

### **3. Educational Empowerment as a Foundational Catalyst**

Education is a critical vehicle for empowerment, providing women with the knowledge and skills to enhance their autonomy and decision-making capacity. A strong correlation exists between educational attainment and women's empowerment, with benefits extending to economic growth and improved family health (Duflo, 2012; Ajabnoor et al., 2023). Education enriches women's knowledge, skills, and self-confidence, leading to greater participation in development (Borghei et al., 2016). In conflict-affected areas, baseline educational attainment is crucial for resilience, moderating negative impacts and creating opportunities (Tai, 2025). , and plays a role in mitigating gender-based violence, contributing to community safety (Corbin & Omona, 2020).

### **4. Persistent Barriers and Structural Challenges**

Despite their potential, significant barriers impede women's full participation. Development projects and education policies often overlook systemic gender discrimination and fail to address intersectional challenges of race and economic marginalization, limiting women's engagement in recovery (Greenberg & Zuckerman, 2009). The sustainability of post-conflict gains for women remains uncertain without continuous, tailored support (Bakken & Buhaug, 2020). A critical disconnect can exist between international mandates and localized needs, hindering effective implementation (Wanjiru, 2019). As seen in Somalia, formal education and employment alone do not guarantee empowerment; contextual socio-economic factors, cultural resistance, and the need for robust social and legal support must also be addressed (Muhammad et al., 2021; Abdi, 2023).

### **5. Empowerment Through Inclusive Participation and Localized Approaches**

Achieving comprehensive empowerment requires women's active participation in decision-making. Participatory action research models show that grassroots involvement enables women to effectively articulate their needs and influence equitable policies (Ajabnoor et al., 2023). Successful mobilization often depends on localized approaches. Educational strategies that utilize local experiences and cultural contexts are more effective and inclusive for conflict-affected communities, including girls (Wanjiru, 2019). Similarly, gender-focused development strategies and advocacy, as suggested for Colombia, are necessary to enhance the impact of programs in post-conflict settings (Nawrotzki et al., 2022). Supporting women not only empowers them individually but also significantly contributes to broader reconstruction efforts, challenging narratives that cast them solely as victims (Rugamba & Njenga, 2023; Debusscher & Almagro, 2016).

The literature affirms that women are central to sustainable post-conflict community development through peacebuilding, economic activity, and social cohesion. Empowerment, particularly through education and economic opportunity, is a critical catalyst. However, transformative impact requires moving beyond generic interventions to implement localized, participatory strategies that directly confront systemic barriers and leverage women's agency as a fundamental component of lasting recovery.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design utilising a descriptive survey methodology. The study targeted individuals knowledgeable about or involved in education, community development, and social sectors, including educators, community leaders, NGO staff, university graduates, and policymakers. A total of 154 respondents (N=154) participated in the study. The sample was randomly selected, ensuring a diverse representation of individuals with insights into the role of women in Somali society. Data collection was carried out using a structured survey questionnaire divided into four distinct thematic sections: Women as Educators and Knowledge Transmitters, Women as Agents of Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding, Women in Leadership, Economic Empowerment and Policy, and Challenges and the Future. Each section contained a series of statements, and respondents indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale, which was later interpreted with ranges indicating varying levels of perception by using this scale: VERY HIGH (VH) = 4.20-5.00; HIGH (H) = 3.40-4.19; Moderate (M) = 2.60-3.39; LOW (L) = 1.80- 2.59 and VERY LOW (VL)=1.00-1.79. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of statistical software SPSS and Excel.

## Findings

**Table 1. Results of Women as Educators and Knowledge Transmitters**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Somali women educators play a critical role in increasing literacy rates within their local communities.	154	3.96	1.283
Female teachers at all levels serve as essential role models, inspiring young girls to pursue and complete their education.	154	3.98	1.223
Women are more effective than men in delivering educational programs related to family health and hygiene.	154	3.86	1.232
The pedagogical approaches of female lecturers often emphasize collaboration and community-oriented learning.	154	3.61	1.062
Somali women are instrumental in preserving and integrating positive cultural values into modern educational curricula.	154	3.75	1.087
Female educators are more likely to address the specific educational needs of vulnerable groups (e.g., orphans, IDPs).	154	3.64	1.246
Universities should actively develop more female-focused scholarship programs in fields critical to development.	154	3.77	1.176

The increase in female university graduates directly translates to a more educated and capable next generation.	154	3.79	1.170
Grand Mean		3.79	1.18

Scale: Very High (VH) = 4.20-5.00; High (H) = 3.40-4.19; Moderate (M) = 2.60-3.39; Low (L) = 1.80- 2.59 And Very Low (VL)=1.00-1.79

This table presents the perspectives of 154 respondents on the role of Somali women as educators. The mean scores indicate high levels of agreement with all statements, reflecting the significant impact of women educators in various domains. Respondents noted that Somali women educators play a critical role in increasing literacy rates (Mean = 3.96) and serve as essential role models, inspiring young girls to pursue and complete their education (Mean = 3.98). Additionally, women were recognized as more effective than men in delivering educational programs related to family health (Mean = 3.86) and in promoting positive cultural values within modern educational curricula (Mean = 3.75). While the pedagogical approaches of female lecturers received a slightly lower score (Mean = 3.61), they still suggest a trend towards collaboration and community focus in their teaching methods. The grand mean of 3.79 highlights a strong consensus on the importance of women educators and their potential impact on future generations.

**Table 2. Results of Women as Agents of Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Educated Somali women are pivotal in mediating local conflicts and fostering reconciliation within communities.	154	3.64	1.159
Women-led educational initiatives are more effective at promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different clans.	154	3.64	1.102
Female educators actively challenge extremist ideologies by promoting critical thinking and inclusive values.	154	3.66	1.156
Education empowers women to advocate for the rights and protection of other women and children in society.	154	3.91	1.081
Women's participation in community education programs helps to rebuild broken social trust post-conflict.	154	3.98	1.013
Somali women use their roles as mothers and educators to instill a culture of peace in the younger generation.	154	4.01	1.108

Educational spaces created by women are often seen as safer and more inclusive for diverse community members.	154	3.73	1.092
The knowledge gained by women through university education enhances their credibility as community peace advocates.	154	3.88	0.972
Grand Mean		3.80	1.08

Scale: Very High (VH) = 4.20-5.00; High (H) = 3.40-4.19; Moderate (M) = 2.60-3.39; Low (L) = 1.80- 2.59 And Very Low (VL)=1.00-1.79

This table evaluates the role of Somali women as agents of social cohesion and peacebuilding. The responses indicate a strong endorsement of women's contributions in mediating conflicts and fostering reconciliation within communities, with both statements receiving a mean score of 3.64. Furthermore, respondents noted that women-led educational initiatives are effective at promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different clans. The capacity of female educators to challenge extremist ideologies (Mean = 3.66) and advocate for the rights of women and children (Mean = 3.91) underscores their influential role in promoting social justice. The highest mean score of 4.01 reflects a strong belief in the ability of mothers and educators to instill a culture of peace in younger generations. The grand mean of 3.80 signifies a broad recognition of women's critical impact on reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts in their communities.

**Table 3. Results of Women in Leadership, Economic Empowerment, and Policy**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a strong positive correlation between the number of educated women in a community and its local economic development.	154	3.86	1.025
Educated women are more likely to create and manage small businesses, contributing to poverty reduction.	154	4.00	1.054
Somali women with higher education are effectively influencing public policy related to education and social welfare.	154	3.77	1.026
Female university graduates are significantly involved in leading local non-governmental and community-based organizations.	154	3.65	1.106
Women in educational leadership positions (e.g., deans, principals) actively mentor other women for career advancement.	154	3.54	1.178

Education provides women with the skills to better manage family resources, leading to improved household well-being.	154	3.99	1.072
The economic independence gained through education increases women's decision-making power within their households.	154	3.86	1.044
Universities have a responsibility to prepare female students for leadership roles in community development.	154	3.75	1.156
Grand Mean		3.80	1.08

Scale: Very High (VH) = 4.20-5.00; High (H) = 3.40-4.19; Moderate (M) = 2.60-3.39; Low (L) = 1.80- 2.59 And Very Low (VL)=1.00-1.79

This table discusses the role of women in leadership and economic empowerment. The findings reveal a positive perception of women's impact on community development and economic growth. Respondents expressed a high level of agreement, particularly emphasizing that educated women are more likely to create and manage small businesses that contribute to poverty reduction (Mean = 4.00). A strong correlation between the number of educated women and local economic development (Mean = 3.86) highlights the benefits of female education. Additionally, the involvement of female university graduates in leading local NGOs (Mean = 3.65) and their roles in mentoring other women for career advancement (Mean = 3.54) illustrate the significance of support networks. The grand mean of 3.80 underscores the recognition of women as crucial contributors to leadership and economic empowerment within their communities.

**Table 4. Results of Challenges and the Future**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural and traditional norms remain a significant barrier to Somali women's full participation in community development.	154	3.70	1.172
Lack of access to funding and resources is a major obstacle for women-led educational and development projects.	154	3.77	1.089
Security concerns specifically limit the mobility and effectiveness of women working in community education.	154	3.63	1.084
More government policies are needed to specifically support the role of women in educational development.	154	3.88	1.120
Investing in the university education of Somali women is one of the most effective strategies for long-term national development.	154	3.79	1.108

I am optimistic about the future contribution of educated Somali women to the development of Mogadishu and Somalia.	154	3.97	1.160
Grand Mean		3.79	1.12

Scale: Very High (VH) = 4.20-5.00; High (H) = 3.40-4.19; Moderate (M) = 2.60-3.39; Low (L) = 1.80- 2.59 And Very Low (VL)=1.00-1.79

This table highlights the challenges faced by Somali women and perspectives on their future contributions. Respondents identified cultural and traditional norms (Mean = 3.70) as significant barriers to women's full participation in community development. The lack of access to funding and resources (Mean = 3.77) and security concerns (Mean = 3.63) were also recognized as critical obstacles affecting the effectiveness of women in community education roles. There was a strong agreement on the need for more government policies to support women's roles in educational development (Mean = 3.88), emphasizing calls for systemic support. Despite these challenges, respondents expressed optimism about the future contributions of educated Somali women (Mean = 3.97), suggesting hope for positive change. The grand mean of 3.79 reflects a strong acknowledgment of both the barriers faced and the potential for Somali women to positively impact community development.

## Discussion of Findings

### 1. Women as Educators and Knowledge Transmitters

The findings underscore the critical role that Somali women educators play within their communities, particularly in increasing literacy rates. With a mean score of 3.96, respondents indicated strong agreement on the assertion that Somali women educators significantly enhance literacy (Hussein, 2018). The influence of female teachers as role models is further highlighted by a mean of 3.98, suggesting that their presence encourages young girls to pursue education (Hussein 2018). Literature emphasizes the importance of female educators in modeling educational aspirations for girls in similar cultural contexts (Hussien, 2018).

Moreover, research indicates that women are often more effective than men in delivering education in family health and hygiene, receiving a mean score of 3.86. This finding is corroborated by studies that show a strong correlation between women's education and improved family health outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2014). Female educators' pedagogical approaches, while slightly lower at a mean of 3.61, still emphasize community-oriented learning, reflecting a trend toward collaborative educational strategies that are essential in post-conflict environments (Akar, 2016; . The integration of positive cultural values into the curriculum by Somali women further reinforces their critical educational role, as indicated by a mean score of 3.75 (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022).

In conclusion, the grand mean of 3.79 illustrates a consensus regarding the substantial impact of women educators on literacy and community engagement, solidifying their position as pivotal figures in the progression of educational outcomes in Somalia.

## 2. Women as Agents of Social Cohesion and Peacebuilding

The role of educated Somali women in mediating conflicts and fostering reconciliation within communities received significant recognition, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.64. This aligns with existing literature that highlights women's contributions to social cohesion in post-conflict societies through education (Akar, 2016; , Levi, 2019). Their involvement in community initiatives is shown to be effective at promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence, with a mean score also at 3.64, suggesting that women-led programs actively challenge extremist ideologies (Levi, 2019).

Furthermore, the empowerment of women through education allows them to advocate for the rights of others, particularly in safeguarding women and children, as reflected in a mean score of 3.91 (Akar, 2016). The highest mean of 4.01 indicates a strong belief in women's ability to instill a culture of peace, which is crucial for future generations (Akar, 2016; , Levi, 2019). The knowledge gained through education enhances women's credibility as community advocates, critical in rebuilding trust in post-conflict scenarios (Akar, 2016; .

Overall, a grand mean of 3.80 highlights the pivotal role Somali women play as agents of social cohesion and peacebuilding in their communities, emphasizing their crucial contributions towards creating a more peaceful society (Akar, 2016; , Levi, 2019).

## 3. Women in Leadership, Economic Empowerment, and Policy

The findings reveal a robust connection between the education of women and local economic development, with a strong mean score of 3.86 (Ahmed et al., 2014). This aligns with extensive research demonstrating that educated women are more likely to own and manage small businesses, thereby contributing to poverty alleviation (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022). The influence of Somali women in public policy related to education and social welfare, measured at 3.77, supports assertions that female empowerment leads to beneficial policy changes in local governance (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022).

In terms of leadership, the involvement of female graduates in leading NGOs denotes their progress in organizational roles (mean = 3.65), which is aligned with findings on the emergence of women as mentors in educational settings (Ahmed et al., 2014). Furthermore, the economic independence gained through education notably increases women's decision-making power within households (mean = 3.86), which is critical in improving family welfare (Ahmed et al., 2014). The responsibility of universities to prepare women for leadership roles (mean = 3.75) reinforces the need for educational institutions to nurture future female leaders (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022).

The grand mean of 3.80 suggests broad recognition of the vital contributions women make toward leadership and economic empowerment, emphasizing their indispensable role in community development and national progress (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022).

## 4. Challenges and Future Prospects

The findings regarding the challenges faced by Somali women reveal a complex interplay of cultural, resource-based, and policy-related barriers. Cultural norms emerged as significant hindrances to women's community participation, scoring 3.70 (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022). Additionally, the lack of funding for women-led initiatives (mean = 3.77) and concerns over personal safety (mean = 3.63) further complicate their efforts in educational and community development (Beaupre, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the consensus (mean = 3.88) on the necessity for stronger government support for women's roles highlights a recognition of the systemic changes needed to create equitable educational opportunities (Ahmed et al., 2014). Participants expressed optimism about the future contributions of educated women, indicated by a mean score of 3.97, reflecting hope for transformative change through educational empowerment (Muhumed & Ahmed, 2022).

In summary, the grand mean of 3.79 encapsulates a strong acknowledgment of the barriers Somali women face while simultaneously expressing confidence in their potential to positively influence community development (Beaupre, 2022; , Ahmed et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role of Somali women as educators, peacebuilders, and leaders within their communities. The findings illustrate that women educators substantially enhance literacy rates, serve as role models for young girls, and effectively deliver educational programs related to critical areas such as family health. Moreover, their involvement in social cohesion initiatives fosters reconciliation and promotes tolerance, further solidifying their position as vital contributors to community stability. The data also reveals strong connections between women's education, economic empowerment, and leadership in policy-making, emphasizing the importance of integrating women's perspectives in community development strategies. Despite identifying challenges such as cultural norms and inadequate resources, the optimism of respondents for the future contributions of educated Somali women underscores a collective belief in their potential to drive positive change.

## Recommendations

1. **Policy Development:** Advocate for the formulation of policies that specifically support women's roles in education and community development. This includes creating educational frameworks that encourage female enrollment and retention, particularly in higher education.
2. **Increase Funding:** Establish dedicated funding programs for women-led educational and community development initiatives. This will help alleviate the financial barriers faced by women and enable them to contribute more effectively to their communities.
3. **Promote Safe Educational Environments:** Ensure that educational spaces are safe and inclusive for women and girls. This involves implementing security measures and community support systems that address concerns about personal safety.

4. **Encourage Community-Based Programs:** Support and expand educational programs led by women that focus on conflict resolution and social cohesion. These programs should aim to raise awareness about gender equality and promote inclusive community practices.
5. **Enhance Scholarship Opportunities:** Universities should implement more female-focused scholarship programs, particularly in fields critical for community development such as health, education, and leadership.
6. **Facilitate Leadership Development:** Create mentorship and leadership training programs specifically for women to increase their presence in leadership roles within educational and organizational settings.
7. **Foster Collaboration:** Encourage partnerships between government, NGOs, and educational institutions to create comprehensive strategies for women's empowerment and community development.
8. **Monitor Progress:** Establish mechanisms for regularly evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at improving women's roles in education and community development. This data-driven approach allows for adjustments based on emerging challenges and successes.

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