

# Stories from Girls and Women of Mogadishu



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**“Stories from Girls and Women of Mogadishu”**

Edition 2017/2

Published by CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli  
(*International Committee for the Development of People*) – Nairobi

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Printing: Executive Printing Works Ltd, Nairobi

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## Definitions

**Internally displaced person (IDP):** (*noun*) someone who is forced to flee his or her home but who remains within his or her country's borders. Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government—even though that government might be the cause of their flight. As citizens, they retain all of their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law.

**Refugee:** (*noun*) According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 Geneva Convention), a refugee is a person who is outside their country of citizenship because of a well-founded grounds for fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and that person is unable to obtain sanctuary from his or her home country or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail herself of the protection of that country. A variety of international refugee laws—mainly the 1951 Geneva Convention and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa—and the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provide the main framework for protection and assistance for refugees. Refugees are also protected by general human rights law, and if they find themselves in a state involved in armed conflict, by international humanitarian law.

**Forced repatriation:** (*verb*) is the process of returning a person to their place of origin or citizenship. This includes the process of returning refugees or military personnel to their place of origin following a war.

**Returnee:** (*noun*) A person who returns after a prolonged absence, particularly a refugee coming back to his or her homeland.

**Diaspora:** (*noun*) The movement, migration or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland. Also, a group of people who live outside the area in which they lived for a long time or in which their ancestors lived.

**Migrant:** (*noun*) Any person who lives temporarily or permanently in a country where he or she was not born, and has acquired some significant social ties to this country.

**Non-governmental organisation (NGO):** (*noun*) A not-for-profit organisation that is independent from states and international governmental organisations.



## Foreword

The first time I visited Mogadishu was in 1983. CISP was a newborn non-governmental organization and Somalia was one of the first countries where we started carrying out development activities. After having identified existing health needs, we began providing primary health care and health education to vulnerable groups in the Middle Juba region.

During the last thirty years of conflict, political instability, insecurity, massive displacement, violence and natural disasters we never stopped supporting the Somali people; and we maintained a long-lasting friendship with local communities and diaspora too.

In all these years, the Somali people have suffered greatly, with hundreds of thousands of Internally Displaced People (IDP) expelled from their territories due to conflicts, inter-clan warfare and famine. Mogadishu is, in fact, where – according to the UN – more

than 300.000 displaced people gathered, 70 per cent of them women and children, victims of marginalization, gender-based violence and abuse.

Today Mogadishu is experiencing a period of relative peace, though it remains one of the most insecure cities in the world, with complex political and social phenomena.

Particularly challenging is the evolution of female identity, caught between cultural tradition and unequal gender power relations. It is here, precisely in this controversial city, that – thanks to the interviews collected in this book, we get to know these Somali women and girls and gain admission into their lives.

The result is a kaleidoscope that depicts the complexity of the Somali female identity, gives us a scent of Mogadishu of the old days and of today's reality.



What impresses me is the strength of those women living in Mogadishu, who fight for a better future for themselves and envision a new era of peace for their country.

All the stories of these women and girls are connected; they wish for a peaceful society, new opportunities for themselves and freedom. Their dreams are often poetic showing a great love for their country.

CISP, as stressed in the Declaration of Intent, gives priority to the needs of the female population, considering the inclusion of women as a precondition to reach peace and human development. I feel grateful to all women and girls of Mogadishu that with their strength and hope in a better future confirm our commitment for women's rights and a peaceful future in Somalia.

**Maura C. Viezzoli**  
CISP Vice President

## Introduction

I've always believed people collide at opportune moments when time and place intersect in the most present, perfect manner. Whether we sit next to someone in a crowded subway car, bump into them in the street accidentally or come together under the belief of a united purpose, these collisions are the essence of our humanity. There is no more of a divine moment than when the right people seamlessly find each other out of the billions of others inhabiting our mother Earth.

Meeting Francesco and Rosaia from CISP (International Committee for the Development of Peoples) proved to be a numinous union. It happened on a day that was supposed to be one of the proudest days of my life: The day I was to present *50 Women, Book One* at the NGO Commission on the Status of Women panels of the fifty-ninth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. A day, in fact, I'd waited six years to experience; a day that appeared to be a wash of mishaps from the start.

It was raining that morning in New York City and my clothes ended up soiled and damp. There was a minor gas leak on the subway and my route was delayed 30 minutes. The laptop hosting my presentation slides would not start so they were not retrieved. Two of our group's panelists were lost in the city and we feared they would not make it on time to present.

Even the venue hosting our panel was a dark room, draped in navy curtains and resembling a crevasse. The microphone system appeared to be the latest and greatest technology of 1979. By the time our attendees filed into the room and I took centre stage to speak about The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and *50 Women, Book One*, it had stopped working altogether and I had to practically shout at the crowd.

Yet so much beauty is often born from chaos.

It turns out, because I had to shout, Francesco and Rosaia heard me clearly and a spark ignited in both of them. If I had compiled a book of testimonies featuring the stories of 50 women from 30 countries, couldn't CISP-Somalia create a similar initiative for women and girls in Mogadishu? Both knew it had never been done before and that was all the more reason to begin the ambitious project.

Mogadishu always fascinated me. While there exists an abundance of material discussing the city's poverty-stricken conditions, corruption, civil war and criminal gangs, less exists that focuses on the entrepreneurship and development efforts of her citizens, healthcare professionals, aid workers, government representatives and youth.

To much of the world, the notion of Somalia, particularly her capital Mogadishu, is that of a shattered antique flower vase. She is "that place" from another era, the one that was once so captivating, enticing, exotic and boasting of a vast industry of tourism and recreation, now by all appearances stripped and voided of her promise and dreams.

*Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu*, proves the contrary—that so much more exists.

The thing about human-interest stories is they shake your perceptions of groups of people, times in history and places. They rattle your mind, your stereotypes and your engrained beliefs via the most deep, aha-shaking revelations. The thing about people who have stories to share is you, as the compiler and researcher, experience a fulfilling feeling expanding in your core as you listen to them. You come to understand the geopolitics, armed conflicts, famines, health crises and developments occurring in the world through their experiences and words. A first-person account is the best history available. It is the most authentic accord you will find.

Oral history is a very near and dear aspect of Somali existence and in so many other cultures worldwide. I'd not considered the significance of it until after completing *50 Women, Book One* and *50 Women, Book Two*. For the participants, their children and extended families will always have the books available to them as documented accounts of family history. Society will also always have an eyewitness view into living experiences beyond the statistics and headlines.

As CISP consultant Sagal Ali and I began our work on *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu*, one central idea governed our methodology: this was to be a project owned by Somalis in Mogadishu, compiled with the participation of a dedicated team of Mogadishu-based researchers conducting interviews with their own people in the Somali language and encompassing various cultural elements such as traditional poems, artwork and songs. It was of utmost importance to CISP-Somalia that *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* belong to the citizens of Mogadishu and be inclusive of each team member and participant who has shared his or her story with us, contributing to its birth and subsequent life.

*Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* was designed to serve as a representation of the women and girls who grace Mogadishu's streets, cook her traditional foods, recite her beloved poetry and become inspired in her schools. We owe this book to the future generations of Mogadishu, as it's a living accord of how their foremothers navigated unprecedented challenges, each as her own intricate part of the movement of citizens cultivating solutions. I see a unique fire in each of the participants. I see it in Waris, who despite having problems with her vision, continues to excel in her studies. I see it in the Five Stars group, who pooled their money together and started a science lab. I see it in Khadija, who after becoming widowed, rose to be a thriving businesswoman teaching other women how to become entrepreneurs.

Through reading this luminous tapestry, you will be touched by solutions to persisting unemployment, the scholastic aspirations of several girls, the dedicated health workers on missions to improve access and quality of healthcare

and testimonies shared by those who have returned home to the city from far-flung places.

For those of you outside of the East Africa region and those who may know little about Mogadishu, I hope *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* opens your eyes to the rich cultural core of her inhabitants. I hope you can come to empathize with the rhythm of their lives in relation to your own. Through their stories, I have come to learn the most important aspect of human nature: whether we live in a brash conflict zone or in a cosmopolitan city dominated by skyscrapers and luxury shopping, every last one of us can do better than to simply give up. There are always solutions if we persevere through our circumstances.

**Jessica Buchleitner**





## Heritage and Home

I was raised up with a strong sense of being 'Somali' despite growing up in Denmark and later migrating to the United Kingdom to study and work. My siblings and I were encouraged to only speak Somali at home, we were taught how to read and write Somali and our mother would read Somali poetry to us and tell us Somali folktales at bedtime. The idea of being 'Somali', though it keeps changing

throughout the years in my life, has been a firm element of my identity.

There is something to be said for full circles in reflecting on one's own identity. Having not been raised in Somalia, I have 'returned' as it were to my 'homeland', as a woman, a Somali woman.

Co-authoring this wonderful book has given me the pleasure to collaborate with some amazing and inspiring Somali sisters. The strength and resilience of Somalis is something

often mentioned, however, seldom does one hear about the intimate and sometimes conflicting dynamics of those characteristics. I hope this book offers a bit of an insight to the Somali female identity.

The aim of this book was also to explore some of the different realities for Somali women in Mogadishu – in their own words. Through the hopes and dreams the girls and women in this book shared, I have learned and borne witness to the constant negotiation of what being "a Somali wom-

an" means to nearly the 100 women involved in all areas of this book. My deepest gratitude goes to the girls and women who shared their stories with us, whom we were not able to feature in the end, due to common limitations of any project.

Finally, as a Somali woman, I too hope, dream and wish for a better Mogadishu and for Somalia to become the country we can all be proud to call home.

**Sagal Ali**



# When a Somali Girl Becomes a Woman

“ I believe if a girl is a grownup she will develop shyness when she sees people looking at her. She will wonder why all those people are busy looking at her. She may even think something is wrong with her or feel that she is stupid or naked. When she sees a man she will cover her mouth and feel timid. She will avoid going to places she used to go before. She will become more timid because she developed parts of her body she did not have before. She will think they are shameful and try to hide them but they cannot be hidden. Though I believe these things are something God has planned for me to develop, I am still shy. Shyness is a real and a new thing to me. That is how I know I am becoming a woman.”  
—Maymuna, 13-year-old schoolgirl.

“ A girl becomes a woman when she is physically grown and that also depends on the family's economic background. A family who raises their children well may have their girls getting their monthly periods earlier than those who are raised in hardships.”  
—Halima.

“ Somali girls are always women. Somali girls work hard to do what they are told to do and become self-confident. They can be called women when they take on both family responsibilities and when they discipline their children to good standards and to fear God.”  
—Sadia, Gender Director in the Ministry of Gender and Human Rights.

“ Womanhood can manifest itself in many ways including the menstrual period. The time the girl gets married and takes responsibility or gives birth to a child is the time she becomes a woman. Marriage has a great meaning for her as she feels that she is no longer single and now carries responsibilities. She is probably also a mother. Her situation will be as though she is part of an established government where the husband is like the president and she is the minister who is in charge of all the matters of household. In order to do this, she will have to grow up to be a woman.”  
—Aeyni, Ministry of Finance, the Federal Government of Somalia.

“ Womanhood to me means being a human being, being independent, authentic and real, having something to say, but also knowing your place. Traditionally for a Somali girl, as soon as she receives her menstrual period, she is automatically referred to as an adult. This is sad because some girls receive it too early, others receive it late. Once she receives it she is a viable candidate for marriage, while the reality should be that she is supposed to be in school and not married off. Since there isn't an identified legal age for marriage, girls end up suffering at an early age. I think that a female should be both mentally and physically ready to get married because marriage is not a joke. You don't wake up one day and just decide to get married. You should be aware of the duties, sacrifice, and the consequences.”  
—Rodo, a diaspora returnee to Mogadishu.

“ Becoming a woman means people were once responsible for you and now you are responsible for others. This could be when a girl becomes a wife or when she studies at university and becomes a learned person. Responsibility is what defines womanhood.”  
—Ifrah, Ministry of Information, Department of Human Resources, the Federal Government of Somalia.

“ Womanhood means being female, being sensitive, being able to nurture, being strong, being authentic and being able to share your ideas as part of a society. When a girl can do these things, she is a woman.”  
—Khadra, a diaspora returnee to Mogadishu.

“ A Somali girl becomes a woman when she is born because she is a female created as such by God. From the time she is born, she is a woman. There is no need for recognition or consideration of age to determine womanhood. In the same way we do not need any occasion to mark a transition from being a girl child to womanhood, since God prepares them to be women in the wombs of their mothers.”  
—Hiis, humanitarian aid worker.





CHAPTER ONE

# My Greatest Gift





## My Mother Is My Heart

Maryam

*"By seeing my mother in such a vulnerable state, I realised how much I want to be educated, become knowledgeable and self-reliant so I can support my mother and siblings and remove the difficulties in their lives."*

My name is Maryam and I am 13 years old. My worst worry yet my greatest inspiration came when my mother got very sick. I feared that she would die and I didn't want to lose her since I do not have a father who cares about me. She underwent an operation and I was crying and in shock the whole day while we waited at the hospital, despite everyone telling me that she would be okay. She was taken to the procedure room in the morning. The doctor said no one could go in the operating room with her so I was prevented from being by her side. This broke my heart. My only option was to wait and pray for her recovery. After a while my mother was brought out. She could not talk. I did not think she was conscious; I thought she was dead. I thought other people in the hospital next to me were not crying because she was not their mother. I thought they did not understand my fear and my pain. Thinking I'd lost her, I ran away sobbing. The hospital staff chased after me and asked me to come and see her because she would start talking. When I held her hand I started crying again, but this time with happy tears. Today she is much healthier and her strength through the surgery is one of the most inspiring things I have witnessed.

By seeing my mother in such a vulnerable state, I realised how much I want to be educated, become knowledgeable and self-reliant so I can support my mother and siblings and remove the difficulties in their lives. My mother does casual work and pays my school fees. Sometimes I also sell ice cream after school to help her. I love my mother and will do anything for her. My sisters and I do everything we can to help her any chance we get. She is my greatest gift.

*"I Now I am old but I still hope to live a better and longer life. I hope the same for our city. I hope to become a grandmother who gives guidance and counselling to young people."*





## The Little Light

Waris

*"When I am successful I vow not to forget my past or where I came from."*

My name is Waris and I study at the Al-Bilad School.

Although both of my parents are alive, we are a poor family living in a refugee camp that has nothing. My parents cannot afford to cater to the needs of us seven children. We cannot afford electricity and other utilities that girls my age have. We have one toilet shared by many people that sometimes causes health problems. Our family also does not have bedding to sleep on. Three girls, including me, share one mattress, which is in poor condition as it is very rough and not nice to look at. The other members of the family sleep on mats. My father does not have a job and my mother sells fabrics. Despite our situation, I have never seen my mother and father fight over anything. They are together through it all. We do not realise that we are poor because they make us forget our poverty through their love.

I don't get money for break time snacks at school that other children get because my parents cannot afford to give me any. Sometimes I do not get breakfast in the morning. I don't ask my parents for anything since they do not have anything to give me.



Fortunately I received a scholarship to attend school and that is a blessing from God. I have eye problems and cannot see well. I worry the problems can cause issues for me in the future. I can't take part in many things that I like and I can't see what is on the blackboard well. Sometimes I can't play with the other children nor can I tease and joke with them because I am afraid to be called names like "*indagaduud*<sup>1)</sup>". When I tell stories with the other children they ask me what happened to my eyes. I hesitate to answer for a while and then give them the short answer just telling them there is pain in my eyes. Then they say, "May God give you relief" and I say "amen" and we continue with our stories. Then I tell myself that God will give me good health because I believe in Him. My mother always tells me that I am going to be okay and that I should just continue with my studies. She also assures me that I will not be left unable to pay the school fees because she will work hard and get the money from wherever she can. My father recites the Quran to me and tells me that I will be fine. Mom and Dad encourage me by telling me to try my best and to continue to rely on God whenever I find difficulties.

I wish, despite their wonderful intentions, my family could take me to an optician to get eyeglasses for studying. I would also like to be bought new beautiful clothes during *Eid*<sup>2)</sup> celebrations but we cannot afford them. Living in a nice house like every other young girl would also be a gift since our house is rundown and small. I fetch water from far away and carry it on my back sometimes because we can't get tap water in our house, so I am often late going to school. After receiving the gift of my education, I want the same for my siblings. Whenever I see other students going to school with their siblings I feel worried for my own. Without an education they will never advance in life.

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1 Indagadud means "red eyes" in Somali.

2 Eid is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims. It marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting.

It is my intention to complete my university studies. This is the only way I can achieve good fortune and help my parents. I would like to become a teacher in both schools and universities; a famous lady who is knowledgeable and is a renowned professor training the Somali people. Teaching is a sociable activity allowing you to make many friends. When I am successful I vow not to forget my past or where I came from. I want to help elevate others who are in my situation, especially those who are refugees. I would like to establish free schools to teach those who are weak and cannot afford to pay for their education. In the future I want people to refer to me as the lady who helps others.

In school, I have always studied very hard, especially mathematics, for many reasons. It's a less popular subject, as many are afraid to study it. I want to be among those few people who do. When I am in school, I like imitating the teacher so I ask my mathematics teacher questions freely. He tells me not to fear him and ask him about anything I don't understand. I also participate in competitions, winning most of them. I am always in the first position in class. Students whose families have more money than mine offer to buy me break time snacks if I help them with their homework. I never accept their gifts; I just practise how to teach them and how to help them with their homework. They always wonder why I am willing to explain everything to them and never accept any gifts. As a result of my willingness to help, students have become my friends and I like them too. When I get sick they visit me and bring me gifts. They say that someone very important is absent from class when I am not there.

Some time ago, an organisation gave out solar lamps to families like mine. I was lucky to be among those who received one. The little light filled me with so much joy because I was able to study at night. In a sense, it helped me move forward with my studies. Recently, our mother also started a small business, something we thought she could never do. It filled us children with inspiration to see her succeed. This business gave us hope.

My life goal is to become the best teacher to imitate and become knowledgeable like my teacher Ifrah, whom I admire the most. I also like another teacher who lives in the neighbourhood, because he always encourages us by carrying very big books. Some say he taught at university. I always tell my friends I want to be like him.

*"I would like to study and learn about children's programmes. I love to learn specifically about programmes that keep children busy, especially the ones on television. I want to write and host these programmes."*



# My Knowledge Is My Power

Nasra

*"When I compare my previous life to my current situation, I realise I was just as ignorant as the animals I looked after."*

My name is Nasra Dheer and I have been in school for one year. I came here to stay with my uncle who lives in Mogadishu so that I could go to school. My family lives in a rural area called Goday, where I grew up. Both Goday and Mogadishu are nice places. Each place has its own attractions. The city is a place you can study, there is development and people are busy. In the countryside, there is no studying and everybody looks after animals.

In rural culture, the houses are made of plant-based materials. The house is partitioned into two rooms: a place to cook and eat and another to sleep and rest. Outside the house there is an enclosure used to keep livestock at night. The animals include goats, camel and cattle. Camel can withstand thirst and hunger for a month and they are used for transportation when moving from place to place; they carry all the utensils and the shelter. They are a reliable asset. Camels are also used to pay dowry for girls that are valued. I used to take out our goats and sheep for grazing but not our camel and cattle. My brothers used to look after the camels. Boys begin to take out camels for grazing when they are 10 years old, but girls look after goats and sheep when they are as young as 7 years old.

Although my siblings are happy with their pastoralist lives, they can't read or write. I would have liked for them to be educated. But the uncle I stay with cannot afford to bring and educate so many children in Mogadishu. Education is not free. I don't know when their lives will improve, but God willing, they will.

I used to hear that Mogadishu was a great place because people don't just stay idle—they study! I always wanted to be one of the people living in the city in order to become knowledgeable about its ways. I would like to understand everything that city residents do and adapt to the behaviour of city people. They are so fancy! They are knowledgeable, have excellent manners and wear the most beautiful clothes. I love being in the city, though I sometimes miss life in the countryside. I tell myself that I need to go home to see the cattle, camel and goats just for a holiday. When it rains the countryside is very beautiful. Despite the memories I hold dear in my heart, I choose to stay in the city for the rest of my entire life.

Why? Because just one year ago, I was ignorant. Now I have worked hard to learn mathematics and the Somali language. I was also never able to write my name before but now I can read and write. I will continue to put in more effort to grow my knowledge. When I compare my previous life to my current situation, I realise I was just as ignorant as the animals I looked after. I wondered whether I would ever be able to be in school and keep up with the lessons. So far I am doing well. I aspire to learn the English language now that I have learnt to read and write in Somali.

When I was new to Mogadishu, everybody looked at me in a demeaning way. When I talked to them, they responded as though they were upset with me. I didn't understand why but now I think it's because I am from a rural area. I also wondered why it was that all bad persons are referred to as "rural people". I feared asking people since I am also rural girl. I just kept quiet and thought about going back home because I failed to un-

derstand people. I became sad. After some time, I started to understand people and I found myself getting better. Now I have friends here in the city and I tell them the stories that we used to tell back home.

I want to live a similar life like the girls in this city, who are educated and work for their people. All the educated, successful Somali ladies can be role models to me.



## Lullabies

**Mano**

*"I want to create child welfare centres that help give them access to education."*

My name is Mano and I am an orphan. I was born in the Wadajir District of Mogadishu. I am 13 years old and I started school this year for the first time. I live with my sister who is married. My mother and father died so I am lucky to have my sister. I know she can't be my mother but she still gives me all I need. Sometimes I call my sister "mother" and she considers me her daughter. She is the only mother I know and such an inspiration! She's a university graduate and she teaches us after we come back from school in addition to helping us with our homework. She's also a good friend with the neighbours so our house is always full of guests. She helps the poor and will give what she has to others. She inspires me more than anyone in this world!

She always wanted me to be educated so first she took me to Quranic school and asked me to finish studying the Quran before she would take me to a formal school. When I started at the normal school I was tested and I qualified to join class seven! I was very happy for this and I studied hard. I was not a beginner since the Quranic school gave me the foundation for school and taught me my ability to learn. Now I love to learn and to teach young children everything I know. My sister even promised



to give me a present if I became the best student in my class so I worked hard to get the reward. My sister and my friends have made my life beautiful so I am a happy young girl.

When I become an adult I want to be knowledgeable about children-related activities like playing, storytelling and specifically television programmes for children. I want to write and host these programmes like one of the famous personalities, Fartun Ladan, who hosts children's programmes on Fridays. I liked her show so much on the day it aired, I did not want to do anything else because I loved to listen to her! I love to listen to radio programs and practise them too. I want to direct Somali children and help them understand everything in the world and I want to create child welfare centres that help give them access to education.

I like anything that makes children happy. I gather my nephews and nieces often and play with them to keep them busy. On such days we talk about many things and I teach them games. We even do some math quizzes and they like the challenge. I feel like I am inspiring them and teaching them important things they will need for the rest of their lives. I even collect stories that children like so I can share with them and make them happy. Their joy makes me happy as well. When I take care of very young 2-year-old babies, I sing Somali lullabies to them and watch as they fall asleep in peace.

My friends love me because I take care of kids. On days I am absent from school, they tell me my absence is felt because school is boring without me. This is because I am a happy person and people feel that. I respect others and receive their respect.

*"I wish to take part in my country's peace-building initiatives so that my children and I can live a secure and decent life."*





## Learning Humility

**Maymuna**

*"When we are victorious, I learn to be proud  
but humble of my ability to win.  
When I lose I learn to have humility."*

My name is Maymuna. I was born in Mogadishu in Sinai village. I go to school and live with my parents in a middle class neighbourhood of Mogadishu.

In the past my family was very poor and lived in a camp, in houses made of sticks and thatch. Sometimes we got our daily meals and sometimes we didn't. My parents put a lot of effort into the education of their children and into bettering our lives. Our father does everything for us because he loves and takes care of us. He would never allow his children to be bullied. He also says that his children should do what they want for themselves.

I was taken to school when I was 6 years old. Now I am 13 years old. I am the youngest to be taken to school among my brothers and sisters. Before I joined school, I had a good understanding and use of the language, but after I began my studies, I started stammering and could not state or spell some words clearly. When I presented classwork at school, kids would laugh at me. My doctor said that I have a problem with my tongue. I tried to stop focusing on it. When I hear people who stammer

talk, I wonder if I sound like them. Despite my stammering, I have now made quite a number of friends through school and athletics. Because I am a talented athlete, my peers think I am inspiring.

I love football and participating in athletic competitions. Although we mostly practise in Mogadishu, I have travelled to India to take part in athletic events. Sometimes we win and sometimes we are defeated. Despite no guarantee of winning, I always have fun and learn a lot—whether in victory or defeat. When we are victorious, I learn to be proud but humble of my ability to win. I have learnt that winning is a gift from Allah so I always say thank you to him. When I lose I learn to have humility. Losing can teach many lessons. I believe when we lose, we are meant to learn from the loss.

Once I got to travel to India with seven boys. I was the only girl on the team, but that didn't bother me. I knew all the boys because they were from my neighbourhood. My mother was not comfortable with me going as the only girl, so I began to hesitate at first when I saw my mother was not happy about it. No matter what her worries were, everything turned out all right because I came back safely. I yearned to explore the world and travel. Now I am very proud of myself for travelling and experiencing a new place. I am the only one in my family who has travelled on a plane so I was anxious the day I was flying to India. I asked myself what would happen to me once the plane was in the air. It was scary for me to travel alone. I could not sleep the night before—I had such butterflies in my stomach and my heart was pounding.

My mother told me she would pray for me so that made me feel much better! I made so many foreign friends from different countries in India! Now I feel that I'm used to travelling.

After all the good feelings I gained from participating in athletics, I want to train other girls so they will be active. I also want to understand and

participate in sports that are culturally acceptable to my people. I have many close friends who I train together with and we discuss things, love and share a lot. Although we live in different locations, we always come together and visit each other. In the future we want to be very well-known instructors in sports and culture in Somalia. We want to compete with many different countries. We want to be recognised as leaders. I have tried to bring my desire to compete in athletics to my classroom.

I love mathematics too and also want to be an accountant and work in an office. I tutored other students in my school and therefore improved my skills as well. Other times I have volunteered to teach. Even though I stammer, I still taught classes and everyone listened without making fun of me.

One of my role models, besides my mother and father, is lady Khadija, my teacher. She is the only lady I have come across as a teacher who has taught many students. She manages a school that produces many students pursuing further studies in different universities. Lady Khadija is popular and is known in the village where she lives. She has travelled to many countries to accompany students to sports games and competitions. She is knowledgeable, as if everything is easy for her. She is always happy and loved, and she supports the poor. She is an amazing woman. She has many friends and wins prizes locally and in other countries. One day, I want to be like her and also be an athletic coach.



CHAPTER TWO

## Going Home





## Our Beautiful Palace on the Beach

**Samiya**

*"My grandfather was my best friend, my hero and my role model. He inspired me in so many ways and I admired him because he was a man of love and generosity."*

My name is Samiya Ali. I was born in Somalia in a small town called Merca along the coast. I remember as a child playing on the shores of the beach with the beautiful white sand. I lived with my extended family, which consisted of my parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends of the family. Visitors were very welcome in our home and it was a big house next to the beach that I almost would call a palace of our own. As a child I was a very curious kid and I would ask a lot of questions, which sometimes got me in trouble. I remember once I asked my grandmother why only girls do the house chores and the boys go out to play, since I loved playing. My grandmother got very angry and scolded me saying that men don't go to the kitchen and have no business doing house chores; they were a woman's job. As a kid I couldn't understand that our culture labelled basic tasks to different genders and that broke my little heart. I had to deal with things that I didn't like doing, such as cleaning and learning how to cook because I was born female. I also came from a culturally religious family and a lot of things were thought of as taboo and shameful, like playing with boys. I was expected to only play with other girls.

My grandfather was my best friend, my hero and my role model. He inspired me in so many ways and I admired him because he was a man of love and generosity. He was passionate about poetry and culture, and he loved colours. He used to draw in a sketchbook that he used in his free time. I was privileged to see some of his work, as he used to keep the sketchbook to himself and never show his art to anybody except me. He was patriotic and loved his country dearly. He was a council member of the clan, where he was tasked with settling disputes and hosting gatherings.

One of my favourite occasions back then was when a feast would be held and children would be left to play outside while the adults would prepare the meals and sing songs of praise to God. They would clap, cheer and offer charity to community members. In the evening the women would leave to go to their houses since they had other tasks to complete while the men would be served tea, coffee and some snacks, as they sat together in a circle and discussed matters affecting the community and come up with possible solutions.

In Merca everyone was part of the community. It was a small town and everyone knew everyone or at least someone you knew would know someone else you knew. I remember being happy in Merca, a feeling I have never experienced in all the places I have been in my life. My parents were both working, so we didn't get to see them a lot, especially my father who used to work with the US Marines and my mother used to work with the government as a civil servant.

We had an amazing life. Before the war broke, life was a perfect combination of living in a beautiful town with a very nice community of loving, caring relatives. It was almost like bliss, but the sad reality is that we had to leave all those memories behind. For me, my once-vivid memories of what life was like then are fading now.

As a child I was really disappointed and sometimes wished I was a boy so that I could play with the rest of them. However, I was my grandfather's favourite granddaughter and this position came with extra benefits, like going with him to the market to his small shop where he used to sell traditional clothes, paintings and utensils like pots and wooden spoons, and also traditional bead necklaces, earrings and bracelets. His shop was filled with things that symbolised our culture. He loved his shop and I don't think I have ever come across someone who loved what they did like him. All the traditional things, especially the ornaments, were very beautiful. I used to admire them in the hope that someday I would grow up and wear them, because I wasn't allowed to wear them as a kid. I used to accompany him when I didn't have school and madrasa.

Oftentimes I would be off duty since my grandfather was telling me stories, while the other girls did the chores. I equally loved and adored him as he was my hero. He gave me a lot of freedom and I used to make him laugh, as I could be very mischievous at times. One day in the evening my grandfather was having tea outside the veranda. He was enjoying the view from the beach. He sent me for sugar in the kitchen and I brought him back sand from the beach. For some weird reason I thought it was sugar, and I asked him, "Grandfather, why are you sending me to the kitchen for sugar when I can get it from outside?" I then put the handful of sand in his tea.

That incident became the joke of the century and I still have some family members reminding me of it until today. Unfortunately, the civil war broke out and the beautiful days of playing outside became nightmares as there were gunshots and fear was widespread. It reached a point where we not allowed to go out anymore. We were not going to school, there was no food at home and we were lucky if we had one meal in a day.

One day we had to leave our home and flee in order to save our lives. It was around five in the afternoon when we left Somalia for Yemen and sadly my grandfather died on the way. He got sick and became weak as there were no hospitals and no medicines, and we had to keep praying to God for him to get better. That was really the saddest day for me as a kid.

He died from a bullet injury he got after a group of missiles were fired at the car we were in. My grandfather didn't make it to Yemen; and this got everyone sad and for weeks nobody would talk to each other. We reached Yemen in early 1992, at a refugee camp where we stayed for a few months. We didn't understand the language of the locals and the place didn't feel like home. Somehow we hoped to return home to our beautiful palace. The days felt like months and months felt like years in the camp. Every time we heard news from home, we realised things were only getting worse. We had to line up for food, water and some other basic necessities. Everyone in the camp was sad and hoped to return back home.

In 1993 we left the camp and were told we would be taken to another country called Australia. I didn't know where that was, but I was tired of staying in Yemen, so the trip was very exciting for me. I could not understand why we had to leave our home as a kid; it was a troubling thought I carried for quite some time.

We were given new clothes and I remember it was very early in the morning on a Tuesday when we were taken in a big bus that had a capacity of almost 50 people. The bus was filled and a couple of the officers who worked in the camp accompanied us. I sat on a seat next to the window and I was very excited as we drove past some tall buildings and beautiful traffic lights. As I kept admiring the city, the bus came to a stop and we were told to descend and that people were being given some documents. When it was our turn my mother was given some

papers with our pictures and she was given some instructions. Another bus came and it took us near the plane. After a short while everyone was in the plane. It was very big and nothing like I had seen before. Then a lady came and helped us with the seat belts and off we went.

After moving to Australia life changed completely. My siblings and I went to school. After finishing high school I decided to go to Canada to live with my uncle and continue with my studies. I graduated from the University of Windsor as a petroleum engineer in 2013.

I had carried a feeling, a passionate feeling about coming back to Somalia all along. I wanted to give back to my country. I returned in February 2014 and I have since been living and working in Mogadishu. I am not disappointed for having returned. The memories I had about when my family and I fled are totally different now and the picture is getting better.

I knew the possible risks of returning, but the truth is that Somalia is our true home no matter how far we travel to other lands. I personally believe that it's our responsibility to take part in rebuilding our country in whichever possible way. When I came back there were various assassination attempts at people from the government, explosions at different buildings and fear was still evident, but I also believe there isn't any place in the world today that can be called safe. That's what motivated me to stay.

It means a lot to me to be able to come back to Mogadishu. I only have a few memories of visiting Mogadishu as a child. I also remember being very happy here. That's a feeling that I haven't had for a long time while I was away from my country, and I have been curious about how life is over here.

Just a few years ago there were no direct flights to Mogadishu from Europe, Australia or even North America. Now there are. This is a huge



accomplishment for Somalia. Coming back to Somalia, I didn't know if it was possible to really come back. The media portrays Somalia as the most dangerous place in the world. But I always believed there was another untold side of the story, because there are people who have never left and have been here all along. I wanted to see what it was like from my own perspective and not just what the media says. It remains too risky to go to Merca, where I have many childhood memories and once knew as my home, in our beautiful palace, and I haven't been able to visit. Hopefully in the coming year or so I will be able to visit.

Through my return, I hope to contribute to an improved Mogadishu in many ways. Not that I am anyone special, but I believe we can all contribute. I am currently working with government-related policies, but in the near future I will be able to hopefully exercise my profession, as Somalia is a country rich in petroleum and many other valuable resources, which corresponds with my education.

It means a lot to my family for me to return to Mogadishu. My uncle and I are the only ones who have returned. He is an entrepreneur of small businesses and has created employment opportunities for many Somali youth in Mogadishu. My parents are happy that I'm here trying to make a difference and contributing towards a better Mogadishu, in spite of the security issues. My parents are also very worried, but at the same time they look up to me as the courageous Samiya who went back home and is trying to contribute. I think it's kind of cool to be seen that way.

*"I aspire to see my business expanding, to open up branches in many countries. I wish to open a girls' business training centre where many girls can be trained to realise their dreams for greater business successes."*



## A Journey to Answer Questions

**Khadra**

*"Coming back to Mogadishu for me wasn't about any kind of contribution, but it was rather a journey for the many questions I had."*

Coming back to Mogadishu for me wasn't about any kind of contribution, but it was rather a journey for the many questions I had. I knew coming back and seeing it for myself was the solution. I didn't have a grand plan to save the world or even contribute to any cause but when I came I saw opportunities and embraced them. I hope to be a good law-abiding citizen, and hopefully contribute towards improving the economy through small-scale business investments for now and maybe in the future larger ones. I hope to contribute to decreasing unemployment in this sense too. I believe business makes a difference. I hope to be a part of the gradually improving trade and commerce sector. It means a lot to my family for me to return, especially my father. We haven't seen each other for so long; my siblings and my relatives too. It would mean the world to my mother if she would be here also; I'm sure she would be very happy to see her grandchildren once again, to see them all grown-up. She would be excited to hear all their stories and she would tell them old stories from the ancient times, stories about culture, religion, myths and much more.





## Something Missing

Rodo

*"I remember being happy here."*

My name is Rodo and I was born in Mogadishu, I left Mogadishu when I was very young. I am the firstborn in our family. I have a younger sister and brother. I don't have a lot of memories of Mogadishu as a kid, but I remember we had a beautiful house. We didn't have a lavish lifestyle, but we were happy and comfortable. Both my parents used to work and we had a cat that I used to enjoy chasing around the house. I also loved playing with the neighbours' kids. I remember being happy here.

Unfortunately the civil war broke out and we had to leave. We migrated to Kenya and ended up in Utanga refugee camp in 1991. The camp was burnt down, but luckily no one in my family was hurt. My parents were not home and my siblings and I were in school when it happened. We were in Kenya for about two years until late 1992, when we ended up in the United States<sup>1</sup>. I attended my primary, secondary, college and university education in the United States. I went to the University of

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<sup>1</sup> United States of America.

Minnesota for my undergraduate degree where I studied global health and history. For my master's degree I studied public administration and graduated in 2013.

I first came back to Somalia in 2009, first to Hargeisa and then Berbera <sup>2)</sup>. I really liked it and I enjoyed my stay. What made me return is not one thing in particular, as I have always wanted to come back. Although I had been happy in all the places I had lived, I always felt there was something missing. I was sort of curious about life here in Somalia and I needed a change, especially from my life in the United States. I was interested in seeing the situation on the ground and seeing how I could fit in and help. Since 2009 I have been on and off in Mogadishu working with various NGOs, until I started working in my current job with the government in 2014. I never believed everything that the media said about Somalia. I felt that as long as people were still able to live here, I wanted to experience the memories of my childhood as an adult, memories that were more feeling than concrete.

It means a lot to me being able to come back to Mogadishu where I was born and lived as a young kid. It's definitely different from the United States and I am closer to my Somali culture now. I now know what it's like here in terms of the land, places, food and traditions.

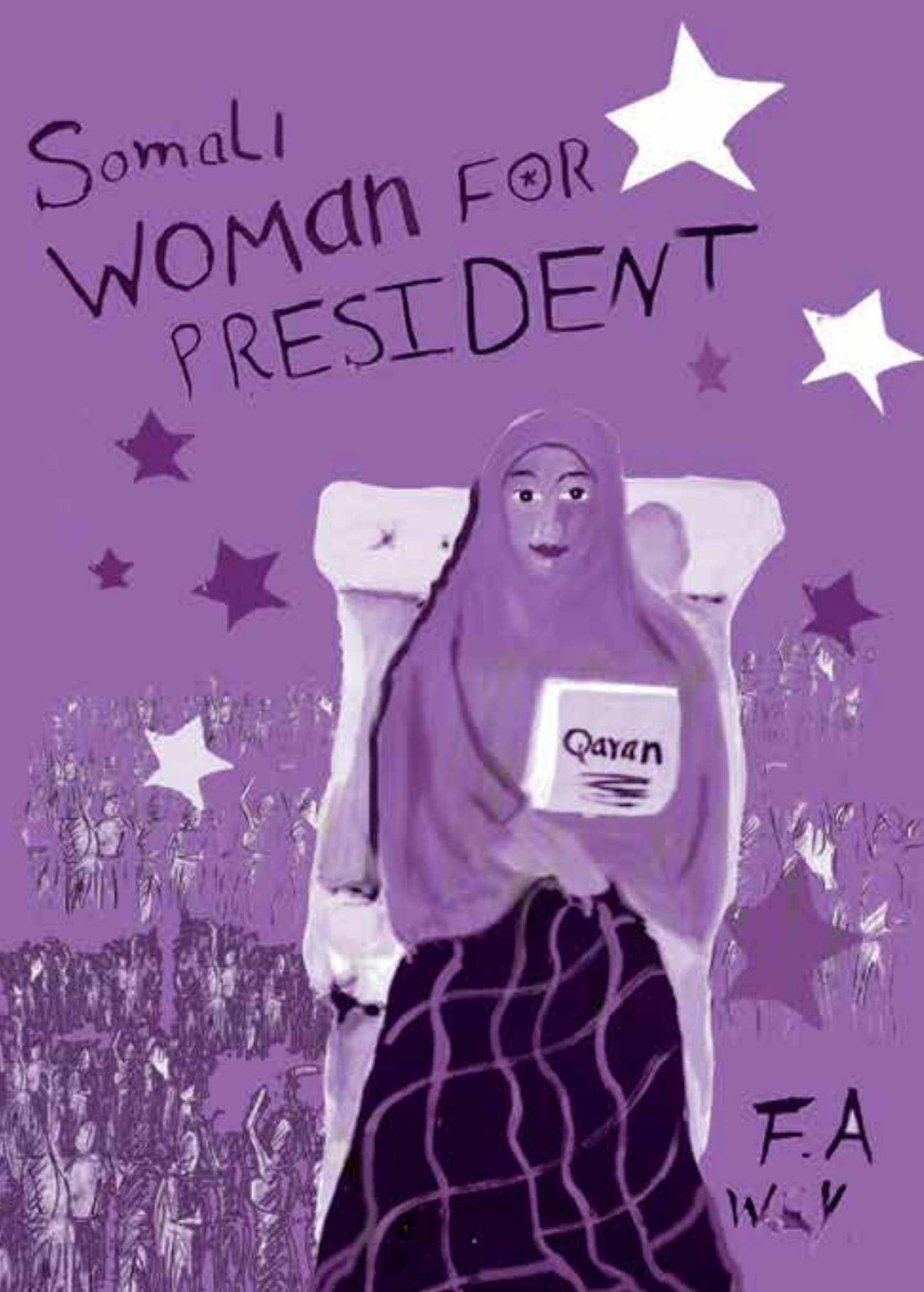
Hopefully I can contribute to a better future for Mogadishu by being a good citizen. Hopefully by coming back, I can, in a small way, be part of the processes that are gradually changing the country's political stage. As a diaspora, I feel we have to be respectful of the people that have been here all along and the systems that are in place.

For my family this return is both an exciting and scary prospect. Bad news travels so fast; but insecurity is not only an issue for Somalia, but

the whole world. The media portrays Somalia dramatically, so much so that it raises unnecessary concerns at times. I am happy I am here trying to survive by myself. My mother is really supportive and I can understand her concern because she is a mother. My siblings are supportive, especially my younger sister. She thinks I am great because I was brave enough to move to Somalia and she thinks that's cool. I am really happy about that as younger siblings usually don't think that you are cool let alone amazing!

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2 Berbera is a city in the northwestern district of modern-day Somaliland.



## CHAPTER THREE

# Stars





## One Dollar for The Future

**Hawo-lul**

*"People used to say that we cannot continue."*

My name is Hawo-lul Mohamed Adan and I am a humanitarian aid worker. I chose to be an aid worker because I'm an academic whose country has collapsed and was destroyed. I wanted to be of use. The health and well-being of the people then became the responsibility of the humanitarian aid workers and the business people to fill the void created by the absence of a strong central government.

With a post-graduate diploma in the management of gender-based violence, in addition to health management and women empowerment courses, I believe I am armed with the requisite know-how and experiences necessary to accomplish my job as a humanitarian aid worker to help my people. I will continue with this work until my people become self-reliant.

The strongest feeling of encouragement for me in my work emanates from the need to at least help alleviate the suffering of a person affected by endless wars. The first time you see a person in such suffering, you thank God for the blessing of health He endowed on you. Thereafter,



you feel obliged to try and help a fellow human being under severe pain. The more I help people, the more I feel spurred on to continue assisting others in need.

When you are working in a bank, you may not feel the bounty of healthiness Allah has bestowed on you because, every morning, you deal with people who are fit and dressed well. Therefore, you will not be keen about health-related issues. My perspective is completely different. When I enter the door of a hospital where I work, the first thing my eyes catch is a person whimpering and wiggling in pain, sickly persons and others suffering from deadly diseases. This is when one will appreciate the strength and fitness Allah has endowed them with.

I mostly deal with women and children. Sometimes at work I will see an 18-year-old pregnant with twins, unable to walk, being pushed in a wheelchair, and then I ask her of the whereabouts of her husband; she replies that he divorced her. Yet you see her writhing in labour pain, with no husband around to take care of her in her hour of need. That makes me really sad. Then I extend my support to her, to help her with all that I can from the delivery period to medication. When you treat patients, they appreciate your benevolence and thank you for your help. You feel relieved and inspired. When someone thanks me for what I did for him or her, I feel I did a great job and feel happy. It is gratifying to see patients out of their pains with your assistance. They come and say thank you. It really pleases me.

One of the most difficult things to take is seeing the dire condition of a person whose situation you can do nothing to reverse. That makes me feel powerless. When you ask her what happened to her baby and she answers you that she was forced to deliver before its time, you can imagine how the future of that baby was put in jeopardy. One painful experience was treating a child with terrible malnutrition from the Lower Shabelle, a very fertile and rich area that produces a greater percentage of the country's food basket where there is a river. Fruits

and vegetables of all kinds come from there. Perhaps the home that child came from was just next to the river. It is painful to see that people might have precious things, yet be oblivious to their importance and not make use of them. Or worse still, that they might not have access to them. That really moved me.

When you accomplish your task in a difficult situation, you feel happy. When you see a mother whom you sensitised in the awareness programmes apply the message she learnt, it makes you happier and gives you more reasons to continue with your noble job.

When I was studying, it was hard for my family because we were not financially stable. I would go and do some part-time jobs so that I could support them. After completing my high school, I participated in a scholarship examination. I passed my exams well and was lucky to be given a scholarship. That was a happy day for me. I was studying in a medical laboratory at Plasma University. The university allowed me to study in the morning so I got free time in the evening to help my mother in her work, so I could also help contribute to supporting our family.

After starting university, we organised to establish a group of five girls and we called our group the "Five Stars". We believed we could collaborate and help each other in our studies. I felt the need for medical labs which were hard to get in our country and city. I got the idea and I shared it with my group. I suggested to them that since there was no science lab, that we should create an account called "One Dollar for the Future" where all of us would contribute one US dollar daily. I was the treasurer who kept the collections. We were students who didn't get a lot of money. Nonetheless, we used to deduct the contributions from our pocket money.

We put the money in the account daily. After two years of collections, the money was marvelously significant. Just imagine—we bought a complete modern laboratory from the money in the account, one with

all requisite equipment and tools for its operation. Imagine how collecting one dollar at a time could buy a complete laboratory with microscopes, other necessary tools, furniture and everything else apart from the chemicals. One can imagine what cooperation can do for people if they are serious. What we gained from “One Dollar for the Future” was a big amount of money that you cannot imagine! We also bought a minor lab that could work in the medical centres in the districts of Mogadishu, which could handle all basic medical tests.

Time never waits for anybody. It is only you who can make good use of time and what you have. We rented a house, a suitable place where we can practise freely, where we installed the laboratory. We opened the lab when we gathered enough knowledge from university. We used to assist people by having a doctor come there. Our “Five Stars” group was a wonderful thing. We officially opened the lab one evening where we invited members of the public. We wanted to show the people that girls could matter. People used to say that this is just a one-off case and that we could not continue, but we proved them wrong. Women can do great things and even be ahead in education and creativity.

We completed university in the academic year 2012–13. We all hold master’s degrees and we still work together. We as the “Five Stars” group are determined to pursue our studies even further, even to PhD level. Maybe each one will go her way if we get married, though the family issue for us has not yet been decided and remains uncertain.

Everybody has problems, but people are different in how they tackle their problems.

When I was starting my humanitarian work, I terribly needed money and my family needed me. I have been working now for five years. My mother has taken a break from work. With my job, I am able to satisfy the needs of our family and my siblings. I am now a person who’s well placed and liked within society. I command respect as I’m seen to be an

important person in our community, distinguished among the young people of my age.

This work has changed my life because I am embedded in the society as I work with many people. If I have ever had a tendency to get bad tempered before that is now all gone. I forgot how to get angry, as I work with different people of different tempers. The job has changed my life in that aspect. I have gained experience from the colleagues and the people I work with.

Mogadishu has many challenges for humanitarian workers. We hope to get people with a sense of patriotism into the sector, as we don’t have enough patriotic people. That is one thing we are missing. We are short of people with a good sense of being Somali and an understanding of humanity. We Muslims are not supposed to despair, especially from the grace of God. There should be people with good patriotism and that is what can make us develop. We should sit down together and talk about the past 26 years of war.

You will find people arguing that they do not need a government, which is a totally improper notion to nurse. It was my family who were responsible for my education and no government assisted me in that though I needed the assistance of government. I used to walk for 3 kilometres daily while I was still young. I did not get any government assistance and I still believe things would be a lot better if there was a more structured government in place. I am a patriotic citizen. It is my country and I believe that change begins with me.

When talking about society, I must say, that the basis of everything is the mother. We are the heart of society. Somali girls are the ones who can lead the country out of the problems it has been facing. I hope that the people of Mogadishu will fully appreciate and equally utilise the potential of the Somali woman.



## One of My People

Hiis

*"I restored her hope and now she can work for her future and take care of herself."*

One day an old lady who was wounded in the war came to us in a bad situation with a leg broken badly and lacking medical attention because she could not afford to go to a private hospital. When she came to me that morning, I was nervous about her situation but did not make her feel hopeless. I started treating her and was with her for a year. At last, thanks to God, I saw her walking with her own legs, cleaning her compound! I never thought this old woman would one day walk with that leg. I used to visit her in her house, encourage her and give her the medicines she needed for her recuperation. A shiver of excitement ran down my spine when I saw her walking towards me. She regularly narrates the story to others. I was really very pleased with that as I came face to face with the fruit of my work. She came to thank me and reminded me how I restored her hope and how now she can work for her future and take care of herself. I treated her as if she is one of my people and therefore changed the hopeless and painful situation she was in to one of optimism. If we do things of that sort more often, then we can say that what we are doing is changing the country and its people.





## I Sold My Baby

Fardowsa

*"One morning, I was at the beach and I got arrested by a soldier on the pretext that I wanted to kill the baby."*

There is one story that I will never forget that left me with painful scars. It happened one evening when I had just come home from my job. There was a young girl in the family whom I used to leave with my children whenever I went to work. On that fateful day there was another girl at home whom I didn't know. I asked the girl in the family about the new girl, but said she didn't know her either and suggested that she must be a person with a problem. As she sat outside, I invited her to come into the house and asked her about her story. She was a 16-year-old girl and she told me she had just delivered a baby 14 days before. When I asked her where her child was, she said that she sold it! I was shocked. I probed her further and this is what she had to say: « One morning, I was at the beach and I got arrested by a soldier on the pretext that I wanted to kill the baby I was carrying. He took me to a cell where a woman, a man and the same soldier came to me. They asked me to sell the child to them and asked me to settle for one hundred dollars. They gave me the hundred dollars, took away the baby and the soldier released me. When I came out I didn't know where to go. » Having heard her, I assisted her by looking for a job for her and fortunately found her one. I took her to a lady who is my friend and who she now works for as a maid.



## Police Woman

**Samira**

*"I am dedicated to saving the lives and the property of the Somali people because I grew up here. This is my land."*

I am a police officer at the Bondhere District jurisdiction. I love the work that I do because it is so significant for two reasons: first, I am a model citizen for Mogadishu and second, because I am a woman in a law enforcement role.

I come from a poor family who could not afford to educate me. I enrolled in a private school when I was young so I could at least learn to read and write the Somali language. I managed to develop a close relationship with the district administrator where I live and got a general cleaning job at the district administration headquarters. I worked there for a long time, allowing me to learn about the different departments. Finally they encouraged me to become a police officer since they felt that my capacity and character were ideal for that of a police citizen. I had no other work experience other than cleaning jobs so I knew working in the police force would give me better aspirations. The police commander liked my work, my humility, my capability and my ambition so he sent me to Halane Camp for police training and I attended for more than one month. Afterwards, I was appointed as a police officer



working at the Bondhere District Police Station. That is how I got my current post.

As a policewoman I am an assistant and informant, helping people with their domestic and community issues and acting as an informant about any suspicious activity in my city. My work injects a great deal of hope into my life when I see the change I make in people's lives. Of course my work comes with a fair amount of risk, but I opted to serve the public despite the current insecurity in the city.

I want my role as a police officer to bring the necessary elements to Mogadishu that will make this city beautiful and safe. Why? First and foremost, the policing work that I do is important for every city in the world. If we get the right assistance, the right people and the goodwill of those who feel pity for their country and want to join hands with us, we can contribute to the restoration of law and order in Mogadishu, especially when contingents of police like us are deployed to the city instead of the military that is now on each street. I am dedicated to saving the lives and the property of the Somali people because I grew up here. This is my land. I endure the cold and forgo the comfort of staying in my house every day and night to protect Mogadishu and its people.

Becoming a policewoman inspired me as an individual and encouraged me to continue my education. Young girls look up to me in this role. Being a good policewoman is not only about ensuring safety, but also about growing your mind and spirit to become a well-rounded person. I should not think that I am now too old to learn. I also have to educate my children so that they can avoid going through what I have gone through. They should not be illiterate and work as cleaners. I also have to advance my career by joining the administration of the police station in order to create awareness for women and girls to overcome their fears and share their problems with the security centres. In the past they have not done this for fear of retaliation or shame, especially when the crimes

are ones of gender-based violence. As an administrator I want to make sure they do not have these fears and that they trust our police officers.

In order to get to this level, I plan to enroll in an adult school and continue to study until I qualify to pursue a university degree. Our police commander is very happy with my ambition for greater education. He always encourages me to advance in my career. All of the people in my neighbourhood know me. They contact me any time they suspect something or someone of doing something wrong. I then link them up with the police station so my neighbourhood security is cared for. That is why I am often awake. I hope we will get mobile camps in the neighbourhoods so that security can be beefed up. I have forwarded my suggestions to the commander of the department and I hope they listen, God willing.



## One Does Not Rise on Her Own

**Hawo**

*"I always imitate her way of life as she is my inspirational personality."*

I want to mention a very important person to me. As you know, a person does not just rise to a higher status easily; but there must be much work done, in addition to guidance and inspiration, to help propel a person. There was a lady who has been my role model from 1967 to date. She helped me in every aspect of my life until I became a self-confident person. Her name is Halima Abdi Arush. She is a great person who used to encourage me to achieve my dreams. At this time I am an old woman, but the garden and the plants that you see around my compound is what I learnt from her. I always imitate her way of life as she is my inspirational personality.





## My Dream

**Balkisa**

*"My dreams have come true."*

My personal story is an interesting one that helps me understand people in need. A long time ago while I was still young, my father passed away. I was the eldest child in the family. There was no one to help our family. I was taken to an orphanage at the age of 5 years old where I learnt the holy Quran and had my basic education. I got out of the orphanage around the age of 13 years old and started secondary education. I was then able to interact with more students in high school, neighbourhoods and the family that I had been away from for a long time.

During my time in secondary school, when girls my age dressed well in beautiful clothes, I never felt jealous because I was focused on more important issues. My family needed me, our father was dead and our mother could not afford to support us. I used to tell myself that I will be successful and that I will one day tell my family's tale.

When I completed secondary school, as my age-mates looked for higher education, I looked for a job. It was my dream to see myself working

one day to support my mother and siblings. I found a youth programme and after training, I was appointed as a trainer of trainees with a salary of 200 US dollars, which was really enough for me and my family at the time. After working for three years and after building a house for the family, I decided to join university and study in the evenings while still working. Now, I have graduated from university. My dreams have come true. My plan is to continue my studies to attain a post-graduate degree somewhere, God willing.

*"My greatest hope and dream in life is to lead a decent life for my children and myself, so that we can forget all the past hurdles and difficulties and reach self-reliance, where we can live on our own without depending on anyone. I also wish for my young children to get an education and to work in big offices so that I can forget all the past problems; these are my prayers to Allah."*







# Setting the Scene

## A BRIEF LOOK AT SOMALIA'S PAST AND PRESENT

“Somali women, whether nomadic or urban, have never been submissive, either to natural calamities or to social oppression.”<sup>1)</sup>”

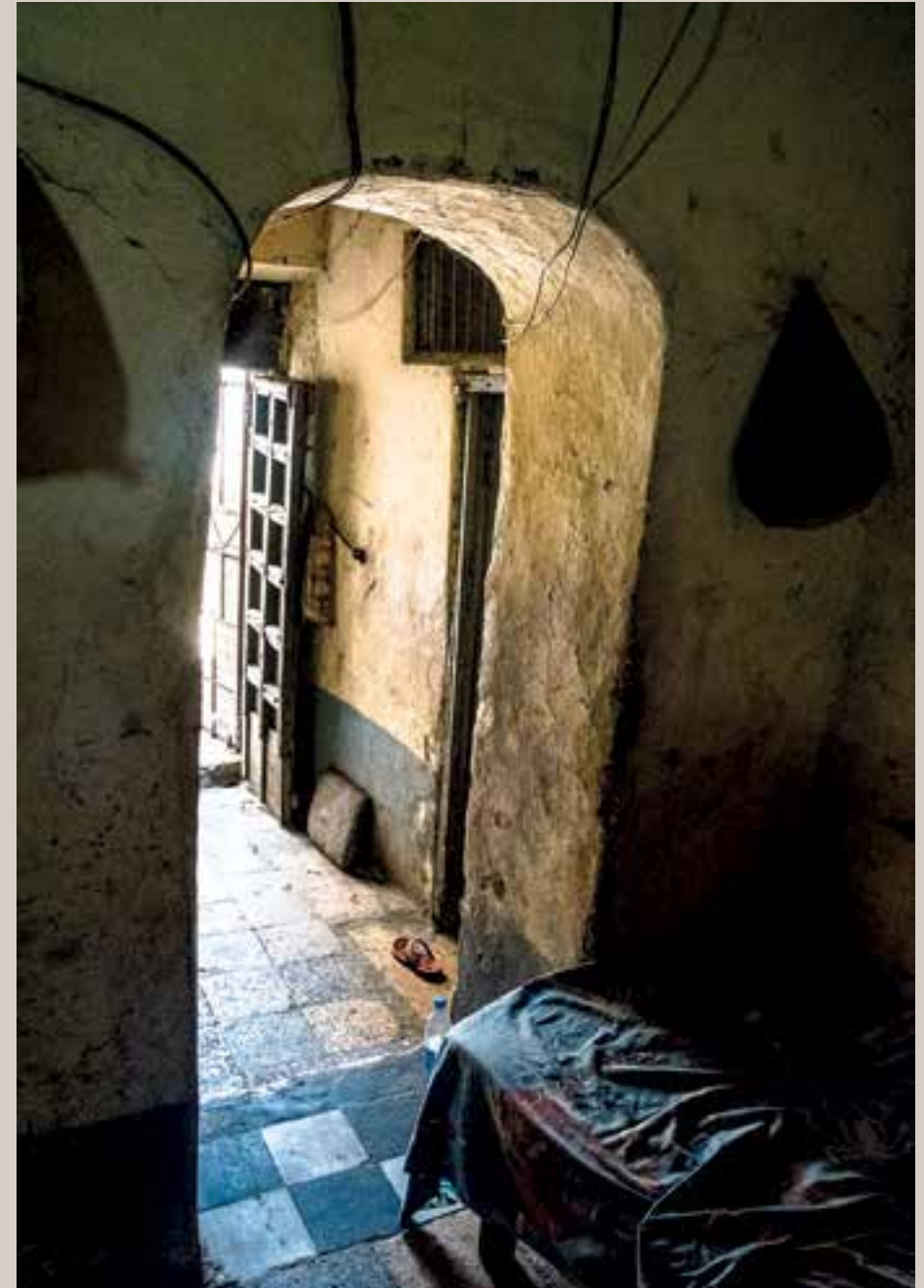
Somalia today is ranked one of the worst places in the world to be a woman or a girl, and “the worst place on Earth to be a mother”<sup>2)</sup>. This is in striking contrast to the 1970s when Somalia’s uptake of Scientific Socialism was at its height and the country was at the global forefront in terms of legislating for women’s equality. As this unique collection of firsthand accounts from women and girls currently living in Mogadishu illustrates, however, Somalia’s wealth in terms of female courage and resourcefulness is bountiful.

Among the contributors are students, teachers, an athlete, health workers, a midwife, a humanitarian aid worker, civil servants, businesswomen and seamstresses. They range from the well-off to the very poor and include incomers from the rural areas and the diaspora as well as those born in Mogadishu. Among them, their stories include moving descriptions of daily hardship and insecurity, exposure to rape and forced early marriage, experiences which have indeed characterised the lives of too many Somali women and girls since 1991. But these dark moments are sharply contrasted by the deep humanity and compassion expressed in almost every story, and upbeat accounts of what they are doing to change the situation and make life better—for themselves, their families and their wider community. Their joy at success, however small, leaves a strong impression. Aid worker and academic contributor, Hawo-lul, sums up the mood when

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1 Dahabo Farah Hassan, Amina Adnan and Amina Warsame, “Somalia: Poetry as Resistance Against Colonialism and Patriarchy,” in *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*, Saskia Wieringa, ed. (London: Zed Books, 1995).

2 Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra, “The impact of war on Somali men and its effects on the family, women and children,” Rift Valley Institute Briefing Paper, February 2016 [citing Save the Children, “The Urban Disadvantage: State of the world’s mothers 2015,” Report (2015)].



she declares, "Women can do great things...girls are the ones who can lead (Somalia) out of the problems it has been facing".

Experiences and reflections where love, as a sustaining and or driving force, is helping women and girls transcend the present are threaded throughout the book. Whether that is feeling loved or giving love to others, or simply both, it almost doesn't seem to matter. A mother's love would seem paramount but we hear from Mano that after the death of her mother it has been her sister's love and care that has sustained her. For Samiya it is vivid memories of her grandfather's love when they lived together in Merca. Her parents' love for her, her "heroes", has sustained Nathifo after surviving the loss of her baby, rape and the shame of divorce. But it is Waris's account which gives us the most insight into the power of love. Waris is a schoolgirl with big visions for her future; but her eyesight is so bad she can barely read and her family is so poor they barely have enough food to eat let alone money to take her to an ophthalmologist.

What we glimpse here through the contributors' stories is the emotional dynamics and inner momentum that seems to bring strength to the weak and transforms fear into courage and hope. Love, its absence or abundance, is a universal need but it is never a focus in outsider accounts of conflict-affected communities nor is it ever listed as a concern for policy makers in plans to address the needs of a displaced or refugee community. Perhaps *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* will help to change this!

In capturing these inner emotions, and the positive actions they give rise to such as caring for others, this collection of vivid and inspiring stories puts a human face on Somali womanhood. "This achievement is an important and vital counter to the stereotypical presentation of Somali women as victims and passive actors in a tragedy not of their making".

The main purpose of this entry is to contextualise the stories for readers who are unfamiliar with Somalia and to highlight the host of inspiring qualities and characteristics they illustrate.

Their city, Mogadishu, is stunningly situated, nestled across low hills and along the coastline at the edge of the sparkling blue sea. A once beautiful and cosmopolitan metropolis with Italian and Swahili architecture of special interest, it was admirably known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean. Sadly, its importance as an international port, commercial and administrative centre made it the target of much of the fighting in the war as opposing sides fought over its control. Since the fiercest period of the war in the early 1990s, Mogadishu has become synonymous with images of bombed-out and shot-up buildings, warlords and armed gangs, and suffering women and children. What is the reality today? The answer, as we learn from the contributors, all of whom currently live in the city, partly depends on who you are and where you are from. But one thing is sure: despite war-damage the city is once more a thriving commercial centre. For some, like 62-year-old Anab and 58-year-old Asha, it is also a much-cherished lifelong home. And for almost everyone, despite its ongoing insecurity it is seen as the place of opportunity – for education and for work. For Nasra brought up in the rural area and longing to go to school, being in the city brings her close to educated women who can be her role models and inspire her to a successful future. Ganiyow, a young girl whose family were forced to leave their farm due to drought, would rather be back in her pasturelands but says "life in Mogadishu...is better", for even though she is poor there is the chance to find odd jobs.

And the increasing number of diaspora Somalis, young and old, who invest in and have chosen to return to the city is an optimistic sign of a return to cosmopolitan life. Despite resentment from their compatriots who never left, many of these diaspora returnee women, like Rodo and Khadra, are responsible for seeding the new ideas and initiatives that make Mogadishu the city of choice for many young Somalis.



## Being female in Somali society

In Somali society *all* children are considered a blessing from God. However, it is a deeply patriarchal and patrilineal clan-based society where greater symbolic value is placed on a male child, who will add to the numerical supremacy of the clan, than a female child whose destiny is to be “lost to the clan”, i.e., she will marry into another clan. From birth, being female confers inferior status. In the culturally determined allocation of roles and responsibilities, girls are assigned tasks that require them to be in and around the home such as cleaning, preparing food and child-minding, whereas boys are expected to follow their father’s footsteps

and “stay out of the kitchen”. Their tasks, if they have any, are performed outside the house allowing them ample opportunities to explore and find entertainment. Samiya, now a petroleum engineer, recalls with passion how she “wanted to play with the boys” but was prevented by this strict gender division of labour that “broke my little heart”.

All Somalis are expected to marry and produce children. As the contributions in the section titled “*When a Somali Girl Becomes a Woman*” describe, girls are considered “adults” and assigned adult responsibilities when they start menstruation. Before the war, early marriage (under 18 years) was strongly discouraged and indeed forbidden by law, and the average

age of marriage, for women and for men, was early to midtwenties. With the collapse of the state and widespread lawlessness combined with chronic poverty, in poorer families in particular it is now not uncommon for parents to seek to marry off their daughters before they reach 18, sometimes as young as 13 or 14.

If he has income a husband may make a bride-payment to the parents to seal the marriage but more importantly it is expected that he will now be responsible for protecting and providing for their daughter – freeing up the family’s scarce resources for other members of the family and helping to keep her safe from being raped. Sadly, as Hawo-lul, who works with gender based violence survivors, has witnessed, the outcome of early marriage is all too often pregnancy followed by divorce and either a return to one’s family or destitution. Nathifo’s and Maryan’s accounts illustrate how unless he provides her with an armed guard even a caring husband is unable to protect his wife from rape 24/7 in a society where sexual violence has become normalised and many perpetrators prey in gangs, and carry weapons. Women and girls know this. These same accounts are testimony to the dignity of rape survivors and the extraordinarily brave way women are confronting their awful predicament and the stigma that it carries.

No social stigma is attached to earning income and traditionally Somali women have always been able to earn income for their own use whilst the husband is responsible for meeting the family’s financial needs. The war has resulted in many men dying, fleeing or becoming otherwise unable to provide for their families. Men still dominate politically and economically but across the country women and girls have had to become the breadwinners of the family. The responsibility this carries is evident throughout all the stories in *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu*, and so too is the sense of satisfaction and pride, anticipated or real, that comes with fulfilment; this is particularly evident from the younger women’s and girls’ accounts. Hawo-lul for example is rightly proud that with her NGO job she is “able to satisfy the needs of our family”.

## Education

Somalia has some of the lowest literacy rates in the world. And despite the strong hunger for learning that resonates throughout this book, being female in Somalia makes it significantly less likely you that you will have the chance to go to school than if you were born male. As Anab, now in her 60s, tells us, parents do value education; and Khadija, a mother of seven children, notes her greatest achievement yet is being able to send her son to university in India. But as we hear from Mano, Maryam, Maymuna and Nasra, all under 18, many obstacles stand between girls and formal learning. Not least is the cost, for almost all schooling is private since the collapse of the state.

Many of the contributors are working to pay for their children or their siblings to go to school. It is a sad fact that as a girl in Somalia today, if you do get to school then the chances of you staying on into secondary or managing to go to university are lower if your family is dependent on your mother as the main breadwinner. This is because you are likely to be needed by your mother to work with her or cover her household duties. However, as Balkisa's dream-come-true story shows, there are girls like her who were not able to continue their studies but who defy the odds and find a way eventually to return to school through sheer determination.







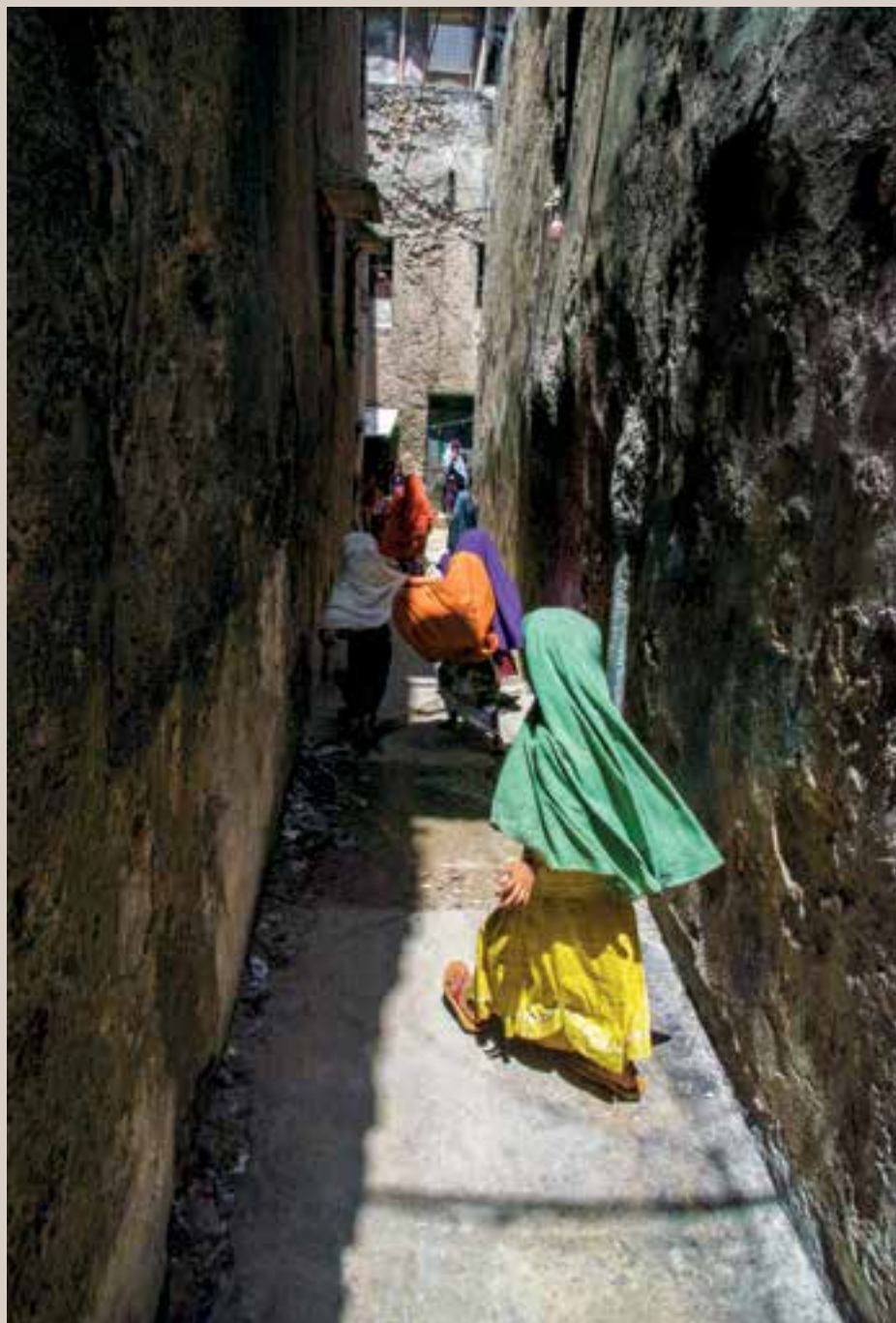
## Somalia's nomadic, pastoralist and poetry-loving culture

Somalia is not a homogenous society as is often thought – important ethnic and subcultural groups include the riverine Bantu communities in the south, and the coastal communities descended from Swahili, Arabian and Portuguese traders. However, no introduction to Somalia would be complete without mentioning the nomadic/pastoral way of life that still has such a strong influence on Somali culture and society, and is attributed for the personal qualities and characteristics that are socially most admired, in women and men, including courage, dignity and resourcefulness.

Located in the Horn of Africa, much of Somalia presents some of the harshest human living conditions on earth – semi-desert with little vegetation and scarce water resources. Before the 1960s the majority, but not all, of the Somali-speaking region were nomadic or seminomadic. After independence from Italy and Britain in 1960, and particularly during the 1970s and early 1980s, Somalia went from being a “land of nomads” to becoming a modern socialist state with one of the fastest growing urban populations in Africa. Even

so, today over 26 per cent of Somalia's 12 million population remain nomadic or seminomadic, dependent on their livestock for survival. Somalia's female pastoralists produce some of the country's finest material artefacts.

One of the youngest contributor's, Nasra, 13, grew up in a rural pastoral household but moved to the city to go to school. She recalls being insulted for coming from a rural family. This response may be typical in Mogadishu but elsewhere the pastoral way of life still occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of many Somalis. Ganiyow, a young displaced mother of 18, exemplifies this in her story when she describes her feelings about having had to leave her rural way of life due to the drought: “While it does break my heart that I left my beloved pastureland behind, I will always carry memories of it in my heart. I will always hear the wind blow through the grass and remember how it felt on my skin.”



## The war and its impacts

The Somali state disintegrated in 1991 after a decade-long civil war finally engulfed the capital, Mogadishu, and ended the 22-year military dictatorship of Mohamed Siad Barre. Overnight, fierce fighting broke out across the city, within days the government collapsed and all public services like healthcare, education and policing stopped being available – leaving a shocked and severely traumatised population to fend for themselves. Within months of Mogadishu's fall Somalia had split into two parts: Somalia (south central) with Mogadishu at its centre and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland in the northwest. By 1998 with conflict still ongoing in the south, Somalia had a further split when the people of the northeast declared a separate federal state they called Puntland. Citizens of both Somaliland and Puntland managed to achieve peace and relatively good security, unlike Mogadishu and large areas of the rest of the south and central regions which to this day continue to be beset by armed conflict. And until now Somalia remains without a fully functioning central

government capable of ending the war and protecting its people.

Although only a few of the stories makes slight references to this conflict, it's important to note how, in the past decade, it has developed a new dimension, with serious implications for women's rights and equality. An armed radical Islamist group is fighting for control of the country. Currently it has control over large areas of the south and central regions, and encroachment in Puntland and Somaliland is a recognized threat. Islamic belief is of central importance to almost all Somalis, the vast majority of whom are Muslim, but the strict rules the radical jihadist militants enforce in the areas they control are extreme and not welcomed by the majority of older Somalis who were brought up in more open-minded and tolerant times, when as Halima recalls "we were free to put on clothes of our choice". Another contributor said she went with her husband to his official meetings because "men were proud of their wives", meaning both their beauty and intelli-



gence. The new strict rules include bans on music and mobile phones, veiling of women and girls and their confinement in the home, and separation of the sexes in public spaces.

Over the 26 years since 1991, war, famine and drought have wreaked havoc with the lives of millions of Somalis. No family will have been unaffected. Fearing for their lives many Somalis have been forced to leave their homes and livelihoods to survive, often on multiple occasions. Not all had the means or the need to go as far as Rodo's and Samiya's families who ended up in other countries across the world. Millions had to build new lives within the insecure conditions inside Somalia's borders. This was the case for Ganiyow's and Waris's families, and for Maryan and her children who now live in temporary "camps" within Mogadishu. In *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu: Stories from the Girls and Women of Mogadishu* we learn about the tremendous challenges and hardship these girls/young women have endured, including gang rape and the loss of loved ones, and yet, remarkably, they all, as Maryan says, "look at the future with high hopes". Fartun was one of hundreds of thousands of Somalis who crossed into neighbouring Kenya or Ethiopia to find refuge. She was forcibly returned to Somalia with her six children

after 20 years as refugees in Kenya. Like Ganiyow she has no time for despair. Despite feeling like a refugee in her own country, she is determined to be the architect of her own future. Having successfully set up a small business when she was in the Kenyan refugee camp in order to feed her family, she is confident that "we must look for the opportunities...(that way) you create the best kind of life".

Many Somali women, not only those who have been displaced, share this determination. Driven by the knowledge that it is up to them, no one else is going to take responsibility for their families' needs and future.





## Earning a living

Although Mogadishu remains a war-zone where no one's safety can be guaranteed, it is a vibrant and buzzing economic and cultural centre. Women hawkers, traders and businesswomen are found in every downtown street and market and in far greater numbers than before the war. Veteran trader Dahabo refers to the fact that markets are common targets for bomb

attacks when she comments how business-women like herself keep on trading despite their worries about whether they will make it home alive or not.

Theoretically, few careers are beyond a woman's reach in Somalia, but in practice, education and cultural norms hold women back in public and political life. Highly

sought after public sector jobs tend to be controlled by men and allocated to other men. Having said this, as many contributors to *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* show, there is no shortage of career ambition among women and girls. Some of the contributors are already successful women embarked on professional careers, like Sadia and Ifrah, who hold ministry positions,

and Samira who has overcome illiteracy to become a policewoman with ambition to attend university and gain promotion.



## Women at the forefront of Somalia's recovery

Not only have women become family providers but collectively through their agency women have put the wind in the sails of Somalia's recovery.

Female agency, or the actions that women have taken since 1991 in order to achieve change at community level is a noted phenomenon across South Central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland. And reading

*Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* helps us to understand what motivates those who dedicate their time and energy to helping others – regardless of age and background there is a consistent and impassioned expression of public-spiritedness, compassion, and desire to contribute towards rebuilding Somalia. For women's and girls' lives, as well as their husbands', brothers' and sons' to get



better, society at large needs to improve and be made safer.

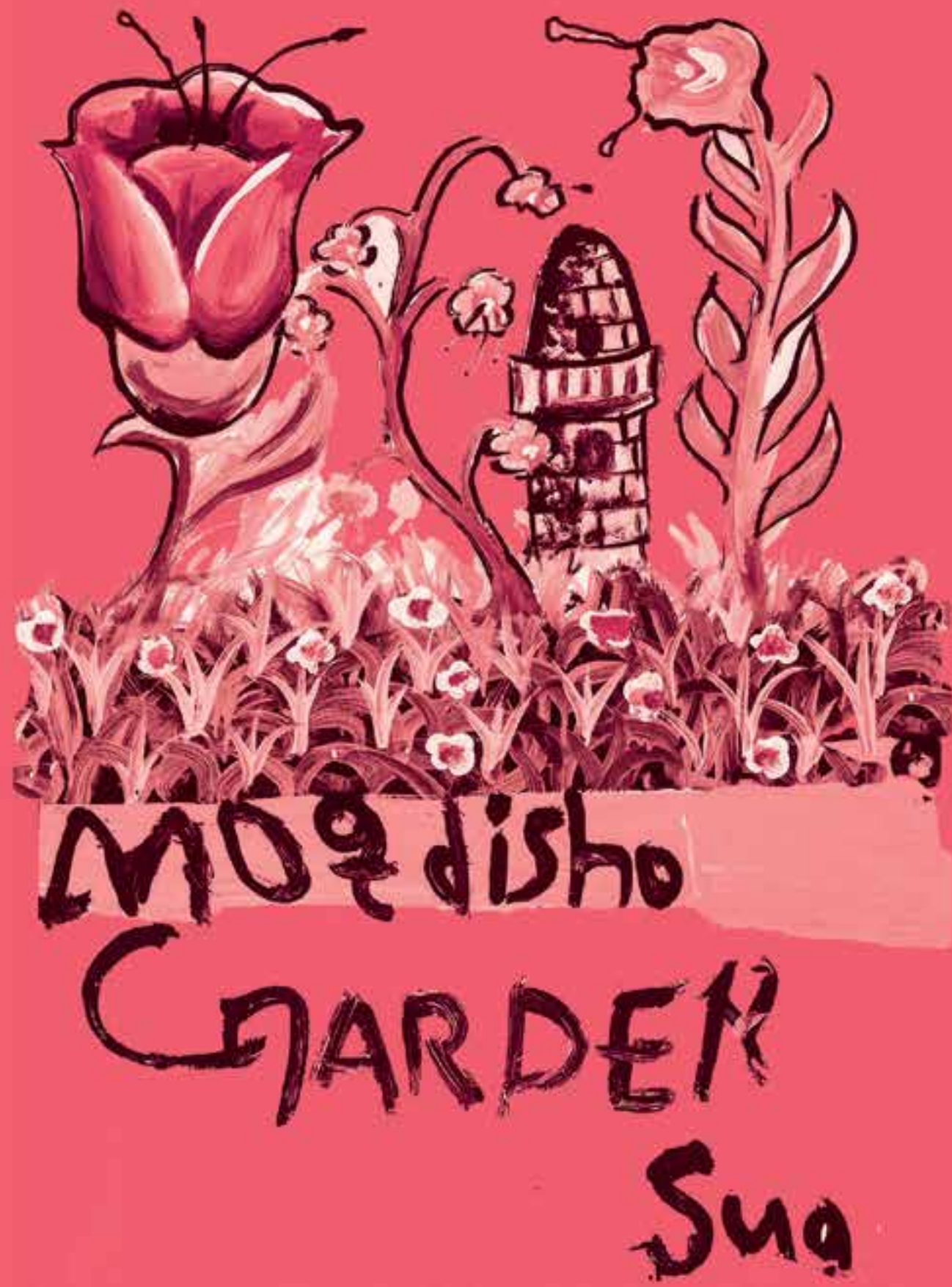
The war has created many dangers and constraints for men that mean women are more able to more safely navigate social and even physical boundaries where men cannot safely pass. This is particularly the case in areas where communities are divided by inter-clan conflict. In such places women can play vital roles that help to build peace in their communities. And over the past two decades, as individuals and through their membership of self-help and community action groups women have been at the forefront of community-level recovery and humanitarian response bringing positive change to the lives of many fellow citizens.

Through the stories of contributors to *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* we gain an insight into what drives so many Somali women to use their agency

for the public good. Not only do the efforts sometimes reap great outcomes, like Hawo-lul's account of the *Five Stars* initiative that raised money for laboratory facilities, but also the individuals involved feel good as a result of seeing what they have helped to achieve. There is also the sense of solidarity – women working together on a shared challenge – which contributes to the powerful sense that as Hawo-lul, a trained health manager puts it, in Somalia women "are the heart of society".

Overall, *Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu* illustrates the important role women have as bearers and producers of culture from one generation to the next.

**Judith Gardner**  
Somalia Gender Specialist



CHAPTER FOUR

## Memories





## I Shed Tears

Anab

"I have special memories of the theatre in Mogadishu. I loved the plays and concerts that were performed there."

My name is Anab Mohamed Ahmed and I was born in the *Bondhere District*<sup>1)</sup> of Mogadishu, 62 years ago. I never really left the city, even during the civil war. My clearest memories of Mogadishu are from around when I was 10 years old, some years before I hit puberty. I remember Mogadishu as a small and peaceful city.

In some of the oldest districts like Shangani, Hamar-Weyne, Bondhere and *Abdiaziz*<sup>2)</sup> stood ancient buildings, such as mosques and theatres. At that time, most of the people used kerosene lamps for lighting and those who could not afford kerosene used candles. There was no fear of thieves and the weather was pleasant. People walked wherever and whenever they wanted to. We even had very clean drinking water.

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1 One of the districts in the southeastern part of the Banaadir region, of which Mogadishu is the capital.

2 Each of the mentioned districts lies within the Banaadir region.



What I can remember most vividly about my childhood is the peace and tranquility we enjoyed. I remember walking from *Yaqshid*<sup>3)</sup> to Hamar-Weyne alone and without fear.

I also remember fondly the sporting activities we used to take part in. On Fridays I would go swimming at the beach and I sometimes visited *Daljirka Dahsoon*<sup>4)</sup>, which was a national monument in Mogadishu, where children would gather to play and sometimes take part in many of the fascinating sporting activities held there.

As I got older I developed a keen interest in theatre. That was when I got my first job at the National Theatre in Mogadishu. I have special memories of it. I loved the plays and concerts that were performed there. In particular, I enjoyed the love plays, like *Shumeey*<sup>5)</sup>.

Many colourful ceremonies used to take place back then. One of them, the revolution day, was held on 21 October in celebration of the *Siad Barre* coup<sup>6)</sup>. On this day, people sang patriotic songs praising the government for its achievements in the country. October 12 was the National Flag Day, when people would greet each other with congratulatory messages. For these events, people would go to Mogadishu stadium to welcome the leaders and the heroes of the country. I remember people would even camp out in the stadium at night so they could watch

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3 Also within the Banaadir region.

4 Known as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, this is a monument built in honour of the Somali men and women who died in defence of the Somali Republic. It's popularly known as *Daljirka Dahsoon*, which translates to "unknown patriot", and it is an important landmark in Mogadishu.

5 A prominent romantic play popular at that time.

6 Mohamed Siad Barre (6 October 1919–2 January 1995) was the President of the Somali Democratic Republic from 1969–91. The Barre-led military government came to power after a coup d'état in 1969.

the national leaders giving speeches. During those days, everyone was equal and there was no tribalism or superiority of any person.

All citizens had many freedoms, which they exercised and enjoyed. No one's rights were censored or limited. There were no violations or abuse of power then.

Prior to the 1970s, there were some economic challenges; people were mainly illiterate and the country was recovering from the effects of colonisation. There was no written national language or officially sanctioned curriculum in schools. The economy was small, as the government was not strong. The Somali community had always been dependent on farming and animal husbandry.

Nonetheless, after the 1970s lots of resources were pumped into the country from the government and from trade with other countries. Back then we could all feel the economic boom and the Somali shilling gained in value.

When I was young girl in Mogadishu, my mother had a large restaurant in Hamar-Weyne, which my sister and I used to help run. My sister and I were the only girls in the family, so we assisted mainly with the household chores. This meant that there was not much time to run around and play.

I attended evening school at Sheikh Hassan Barsane. I loved school; we were getting educated, disciplined and patriotic. I stayed in school until I completed my secondary education. We took interesting subjects like playwriting, music, poetry and storytelling. I was very interested in geography, but I wasn't good at mathematics; I was busy at the restaurant the whole day and had no chance to do the math exercises and homework after my evening classes.

My family members expected me to study so that I could help them when I completed my education. They also expected me to help my mother bring up my younger siblings.

However, after high school, I got married and did not proceed to university. The reason I married so early was that there were many ladies in our neighbourhood who were married and they would be driven around by their husbands. I envied their lifestyle and I loved their *Land Cruisers*<sup>7)</sup>, so I ended up marrying a government official.

At the time the civil war started in Mogadishu, I was working at the National Theatre. I still remember the first night I heard the sound of gunshots in Mogadishu. *Shumeey* was playing at the theatre that night. As we were watching the show, we heard gunshots everywhere, such loud and scary sounds. Though there had been the signs of civil unrest brewing before the gunshots started that night, we were still shocked.

The city suddenly changed. There were rumours all over and the cost of living became high. The government felt there was a public uprising and people became divided along tribal lines. Indiscriminate killings began, dead bodies started piling up everywhere and everyone fled the city including the government leaders. This violence had an enormous effect on me and it changed my life. I don't like to talk about it because it was horrendous. I lost everything I treasured in the war and it left very bad memories with me.

Now, I miss the beauty of Mogadishu. What a beautiful city it was. Tourists were coming here, there were fish in the sea and the hotels were always full. We had extremely fascinating buildings and architecture.

I miss the old Mogadishu, when I would go to Hamar-Weyne in the evening, putting on my best outfits and greeting everyone who came my way.

There are some places in Mogadishu I can't even look at now because I will shed tears, places special to me like the National Theatre.

These days, I am in a stage of devotion and engaged in acts of worship so that I can be nearer to my creator, Allah.

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7 A type of a four-wheel drive car. The Land Cruiser's reliability and longevity has led to huge popularity since the production of the first Land Cruisers in 1951.



## Close to My Father

Halima

*"My father used to take me around the city when I was young and I can remember how beautiful it was."*

In my childhood, I was close to my dad because I was the first to survive; the first seven children before me had died at birth. My father used to take me around the city when I was young and I can remember how beautiful it was. We used to go to the Hotel Juba and the National Theatre. We used to walk everywhere; there was freedom to walk around with no fear at all. We were free to put on clothes of our choice. At the time, there was no tribalism and I strongly believe, if it were not for the brutal civil war, Mogadishu would have been better than most cities in the world today.

My father had started working in Italy at a young age. After working there for a while, he enrolled in school. My father owned a factory to manufacture sisal products, while mom worked in a bakery. We had a prosperous life. We also owned livestock and as a result of our prosperity, many relatives lived with us at home. People were generous and worked hard then.





## From Yemen to Somalia

**Asha**

*"I miss the open streets and roads. Today everywhere is closed, there is no movement at night and people are suspicious of each other."*

My name is Asha Ahmed and I am a 58-year-old mother of six children. I was born in Shangani but was raised by my grandmother in Hamar-Weyne. I was taken to my grandmother's home to help her with household chores. My grandmother was a very kind person; she never scolded or punished me while I stayed with her. She also did not circumcise me like other Somali girls.

My grandmother was originally from Yemen and she married my grandfather while he was working there. They later moved to Mogadishu. My family members mainly speak Arabic and Somali. Mostly people mistake me for a Yemeni because of my physical appearance.

My best memories of Mogadishu are from when I used to go to the beach as a child and also when I would walk around in the city with my family or friends. There were lights everywhere, tall buildings and the roads were tarmacked and washed clean every night. People were nationalists and they worked in unity.

At the time, there were 12 districts in Mogadishu. I remember there were competitions between the districts on hygiene, education and

culture, and exhibitions were held at the National Assembly building. We wore traditional dresses to these events and sang traditional songs. Mogadishu was the mother of the nation. Mogadishu was a place for everybody.

The city was very peaceful and ladies wore expensive jewellery as they freely moved about in the city without fear. I remember going with my husband to official meetings because at the time, men were proud of their wives; today you will not see any husband going with his wife to social gatherings. Citizens had great freedoms and there was no aggression.

Life was also good on the farms; people grew maize, beans and vegetables. Businesses too were booming. Hunger or malnutrition was unknown at the time. In fact, I had never even heard of anything like that during that time.

However, during times of drought, dates, biscuits and milk relief were given to the populations affected by the government.

People would go fishing in the sea, bring back their catch and sell it at the market. There was even a day reserved for selling fish in the market when no other kind of meat was sold. It was prohibited to export vegetables and charcoal and bananas outside the country. Those household goods were in any case cheap.

As a young girl I attended *Dugsi*<sup>1)</sup> in the Hamar-Weyne District. I completed the Quran up to the third *juz*<sup>2)</sup> and then dropped out. I did not

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1 An Islamic school or Quranic school, where pupils are taught about Islam and where they learn how to recite the holy Quran, the religious text central to Islam.

2 A section in the Quran. The Quran is divided into 30 *juz*.

join the formal school because I was assisting my grandmother, making things like bread, cakes, sweets and pancakes to sell.

I got married at the age of 14, so I never got the opportunity to attend school later either. My family were very religious and not that interested in the secular education, only *Dugsi*. Suitors prefer girls from religious family background for marriage. I was the third girl in my family and people say I was the most beautiful. I was married in the Shangani District. My husband and I had four children together. We had no problems and conflicts between us. Although he married a second wife, he was not a bad person. He left Mogadishu during the civil war for Europe. Now he lives in *Hargeisa*<sup>3)</sup> with some of the children and the rest of his children live in different parts of the world.

I first witnessed Mogadishu in flames when the civil war reached the *Wardhigley* District<sup>4)</sup>, just behind the State House. When fighting began there, everything exploded. When the war broke out, widespread looting, killings and raping of girls and women occurred. Women suffered most; some were even forcefully married. Everyone, including women, children and the elderly fled the city.

In the war, my family lost our grandmother; a mortar shell hit her while she was praying *Asr*<sup>5)</sup> prayer. We also lost nephews and nieces. The war had devastating effects on our family. We dispersed and fled to different

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3 The capital of modern-day Somaliland since 18 May 1991. Prior to that, Hargeisa was the administrative capital of the northwestern Somalia part of the Somali Democratic Republic.

4 One of the districts in the southeastern part of the Banaadir region, of which Mogadishu is the capital. In 2012, this district's name was changed to Warta Nabada.

5 The *Asr* prayer is the afternoon prayer recited by practicing Muslims. It is the third of the five daily prayers, which together constitute one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

places. I fled to Merca<sup>6)</sup> and on the way I lost 150 g of gold jewellery and money. Hamar-Weyne was the worst area hit by the fighting and many families' properties were looted and destroyed.

What I miss most about the Mogadishu I grew up in is the public celebrations and the tourism. I miss the open streets and roads. Today everywhere is closed, there is no movement at night and people are suspicious of each other. I miss the beautiful flower gardens of the once stunning city. Now everywhere is just dust and barren. With no good rain, even the wildlife and marine resources are depleting.

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6 Merca ("Marka" in Somali) is an ancient port city in the southern Lower Shebelle region of Somalia.

*"I need a good life and a peaceful place to live until I die. I hope my children will get good jobs and succeed in life."*





CHAPTER FIVE

## A Model Citizen



## Young Minds

**Maano**

*"I rely on my profession to educate young minds that I know one day will be part of these conversations."*

I have loved teaching since my childhood and that's because at school we were taught the music of the prominent Somali musicians. I wanted to be a teacher so I could teach the young generations and continue to tell the stories of the most renowned Somali singers like Sayid Mohamed and Ismail Mire, for example. These are important elements of the Somali culture and it is my duty as an educator to teach them to the new generations.

I have faced daunting challenges during my studies to become a teacher, not limited to being an orphan child living alone. The school was very far from where I lived and it would take me about two hours to walk from home to the school and back. As a result I used to miss many classes and I had to depend on my friends for notes and homework. Hunger was the other problem I faced; no one was there to take care of me, and I would go to school hungry every day. There was no lighting in the house and I used to study using a kerosene lamp, which was very difficult and dangerous for my health. Nonetheless, I still became a teacher. I hope my challenges can inspire the students I teach to overcome anything to achieve their dreams.

When I review my lesson plans, I am filled with the satisfaction of taking part in the rebuilding of Mogadishu through my work. It is difficult for me to participate in public discourse because of my clan, so I rely on my profession to educate young minds that I know one day will be part of these conversations. I take responsibility for the girls I educate; I care for them as my own children. I therefore feel I should help nurture girls and educate them because women are the first teachers of new generations.

*"I hope to change the situation for women and girls in Mogadishu and continue to advocate for them."*





## Gender Warrior

**Sadia**

*"I want women and girls to be in solidarity with each other, work hard and study. I want them to be patient with the problems they face and also be able to move on from hardship."*

My current position is Gender Director in the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, though I have worked in different capacities. Initially I worked as a journalist for radio stations managed by community associations where I served as the producer of the social affairs programmes. I also worked for IRAN radio owned by the United Nations in the Somali language section, and with human rights groups that work on child protection where my job was to register child abuse cases.

I joined the Women's Ministry in 2013 as a gender officer and then at the beginning of 2015, the ministry promoted me to the position of Gender Director, which I hold to date. I joined this ministry during challenging times when the security of the country was less than favourable. Anyone working for the government, especially the ministry, is a "marked person" and a target for the insurgents. It is not easy but I would like to continue working with the ministry and not flee just because of my fear and insecurity. There are so many things going on in this country that motivated me to join the government. This country has gone through internal conflict and I am among those who were born during the

conflict period. The conflict has personally affected me significantly: My father was killed in front of me and a bombshell hit my grandmother's house. During this incident we lost both people and livestock. Many Somalis have experienced similar incidents of violence. I think bearing witness to these acts encouraged me to continue my government work.

In my role, I give voice to the happenings in the city instead of waiting for outsiders to do it. I have never left the country and I am hoping not to leave for the rest of my life, God willing. Staying with the community is important for me because I feel the effect of the problems personally and from the community's perspective so working on solving them is part of my responsibility.

I chose to work for the government ministry after acquiring much information from community-based organisations about development initiatives for women and children. The society is doomed when women and children are targeted, but if they are cared for and empowered a lot will improve in the city. I believe they are our future.

I hope to remain in this position for a short period and then I want to move on to be a member of parliament or a minister in the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development. It is through these positions I can continue to engage civil society to protect women and children.

Being in my position means I want women and girls to be in solidarity with each other, work hard and study. I want them to be patient with the problems they face and also be able to move on from hardship. Mostly what girls face is a lack of encouragement and oppression from men, so I expect them to create awareness among themselves. I want them to see their own abilities to do so many things because there are few girls in the ministry who are directors or assistant directors.

*"I hope to have the freedoms and rights to do whatever I want to do. I would like to join politics and one day become the president, speaker of parliament or the prime minister or any other leadership position I qualify for."*





## 4 O' Clock

**Khadija**

"I wish to open a girls' business training centre where many girls can be trained to help them improve their skills for business."

I am a mother of seven children and live in the Shibis District of Mogadishu. I sell women's cosmetics and different types of women's garments such as *abayas*<sup>1</sup>, skirts and other fashionable items. I also sell women's jewellery such as earrings, bracelets, watches and necklaces. I import goods from India, Dubai and Kenya and I sell them in two ways: first, by distributing some of the goods among some premium customer merchants who resell them, and second, by selling the remaining goods in my retail shop. I joined the marketplace in 2008 when I became a more prominent businesswoman. Thanks to Allah, everything is currently running smoothly for me.

I used to be a tailor and I operated my tailoring business from home. Customers used to come to my house where I would sew the clothes for them for a fee. Later I was employed by an NGO as a tailoring and cooking instructor. While I was doing this job, my husband was killed. This

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<sup>1</sup> A long-sleeved full length dress worn by many Muslim women.



left me to shoulder more responsibilities of fending for myself and educating my seven children. Because of this, I thought of starting a small business and opened a small shop in the Taleh neighbourhood where I lived at the time. In the morning I worked as an instructor and in the afternoon I worked in my shop and also operated my tailoring business right in front of my shop.

Working the long hours meant I had to struggle and make sure that my children were getting similar support as those in town and were thus not lagging behind. Now, I thank Allah, my children are not in any lesser status compared to their peers. I can even argue that mine are in much better situation than many other children in town. The fact that my older children are not only receiving schooling but also help me run the family business, especially when I travel abroad for business trips, is a clear sign to me of my success. Now I have sent my eldest son to university in India to study IT. Had I not struggled hard but tried to rely on others for survival, I would not have even dreamt of attaining this achievement today.

Of course it is a huge responsibility raising children, doing household work and running a business at the same time. I managed this by working hard and making sure that I fulfilled my responsibilities without any shortcomings. I would wake up at 4 o'clock in the morning and prepare breakfast for all the children, both the ones who were going to Quranic studies and the ones who were going to school. I would then cook lunch, clean the house and leave for my place of work. I taught my children to be responsible and help one another without giving preferential treatment to some over the others; daughters and sons would get equal attention. Any one of them who came home first, regardless of their gender, would do the household work.

In the evenings, when I came back home, I would ask them about their studies. I would also contact their teachers frequently to try and mon-

itor their performances and discipline. This made my children very responsible so they can stand by my side and support me physically and emotionally to the extent that I can leave them with the house and the business all by themselves. It takes an industrious woman to be able to balance the responsibilities of family and to run a business at the same time.

When I started my business, I of course faced some challenges. There is no dream free of impediments. In the beginning I did not have any startup capital so I started with borrowed money. Initially, I could not get a business venue or a shop because the landlords would ask for a down payment that was equivalent to a year's rent, which I could not raise for obvious reasons. People can also come to extort money from me by telling me to pay taxes and if I resist, my business can be looted. At times, roads have also been closed, makes it impossible to access the venue; and other times activities of war close the venue for some days. Sometimes the markets themselves present challenges for us business owners. For example, you import expensive goods and others may also import similar goods and then they deliberately reduce the prices just to challenge you. This makes it harder for you to sell the goods faster. You must either withstand and face the challenges or quit and close shop.

I hope my business can contribute a lot to the city of Mogadishu because it is a city with not many other economic activities so it depends mostly on income from the businesses. My business extends to the neighbouring countries where I normally import and export goods. There are many business people who are not able to import goods; in that case I import the goods they need and distribute to them at fair prices. That is how I make available the goods to the town, depending on the existing demand, which in turn contributes to the economy of the city. On the other hand, the Somali government has limited sources of income. Therefore, it depends largely on local business activities, both wholesale and retail. That is why I hope the Mogadishu business

community can unite and prosper and abandon cutthroat prices and unhealthy business competition. I want to see people shun dishonest activities such as importing poor quality goods for local consumption. I also hope that they cooperate, work in groups and formulate rules and regulations to advance their businesses and regulate their operations.

I think that women need to be able to own more businesses. If, for example, a mother has children and the husband has either died or divorced her, she has to take up the responsibility of fending for herself and her children as I did when I lost my husband. She has to take care of the future of her children, feed them and educate them. Because of this, women need to be self-reliant, independent, empowered, active and progressive both in terms of self-attainment and future prosperity. The businesswoman needs to be courageous, resilient, patient, and have the capability of managing her business. There are many women who have the passion to start a business but cannot due to lack of funds. Similarly, in this city there are many women who are university graduates who are unemployed and find it difficult to find employment due to a stigma towards them by virtue of being women. Employers consider women to be weak in the workplace, and view them as unable to travel frequently. But in owning one's own business there are no restrictions or stigmatisation. You are free to carry out your activities on your own terms.

Overall, the economy of Mogadishu depends on the different types of businesses. That is how it used to be in the past though even now, you can see people coming back to the country and investing and helping in its post-conflict reconstruction. This is improving both the image and the economy of the city, so it helps a lot and can contribute much in this regard.

Personally, I aspire to see my business expanding, whereby I manage to open up branches in many countries. I wish to open a girls' business training centre where many girls can be trained to help them improve

their skills for business and realise their dreams for greater business successes. I believe this will help create a prosperous future for the citizens of Mogadishu.



## My Voice Is Your Voice

Ifrah

*"Communication and media are where society can be made or broken. Media shapes and controls the public opinion."*

I was born in the great city of Mogadishu, where now I live in the district of Hodan. I'm employed with the Ministry of Information, Department of Human Resources. My role holds much significance to me because it allows me to be visible in the community as a woman working in the ministry, especially in an important department like human resources. I am in the position to establish justice and fairness among people and workers, which is key.

Our community thinks most of our workers are reporters, musicians or similar roles, but there is much more to the area of government than people realise. I chose to work here because of difficulties that were in the country. It is not easy for a woman to get a job and employers have negative attitudes towards us. This is further made difficult by the rampant scourge of corruption. Fresh female graduates do not have the financial muscle or connection to persons of influence and have to take what comes their way. That is why my position means so much to me. I am a living example of what other women can do while adding value to Mogadishu and its residents. For example, communication and media



are where society can be made or broken. Media shapes and controls the public opinion. One can safely say it is the place where the entire community is controlled. My position promotes security, which can be a tool for unity, democratic ideals, state rebuilding, reconciliation, peace and harmony and the rallying of Mogadishu dwellers in returning the beauty and glory to the town.

The main issues I want to improve involve increasing the skills and the knowledge of the workers through more training; improving fairness among them to ensure they maintain their rights because they don't always receive what they are entitled to (like their salaries) since there is a lack of money in most offices. One of the main plans we have implemented so far involves sending more people for training. I consult top managers in our office so that they can assist me, and I always take them ready-made plans so they can help me with what they can. Changes don't come at once, but gradually. Changing individual behaviour or people is the most difficult challenge I have met in my job. I constantly have to think of new ways to implement change.

Through my work, I hope to become a successful person holding a senior position in this ministry that allows me to make a difference for the citizens of Mogadishu. It is the best hope I can have.

*"My greatest wish is for my beloved grandmother to be able to take a walk along the beach shore; the weather is perfect here throughout the year and she doesn't have to wait for summer, her favourite season."*



## Working for My Country

**Aeyni**

*"The fact that I live in Mogadishu and serve my nation instead of leaving my country is important. If the educated people leave the country, it will be difficult to implement an effective development agenda."*

Serving the public means a great deal because I am working for my country and my people. I am always happy to serve the community; it is the responsibility of educated people to do so. Women make up 20 per cent of the public sector and serve in different capacities and in different offices in the government. I would like to see more women hold government roles in the future.

I hope that my position will enhance the performance of duties with transparency and accountability in the management of revenue and expenditure in Mogadishu and in the country. The fact that I live in Mogadishu and serve my nation instead of leaving my country is important. If the educated people leave the country, it will be difficult to implement an effective development agenda.





## CHAPTER SIX

# Foreigner At Home





## Great Architects of our Own Future

**Fartun**

*"We have to build from what we have in our own land,  
and make that land suitable to our needs."*

My name is Fartun and I was born in Garbaharey, the regional capital of the Gedo<sup>1)</sup> region. My family fled to Nairobi in 1998 and lived in a refugee camp in Dadaab, in Garissa County, Kenya, for over 20 years. I have six children from three husbands.

It was after the death of my first husband I decided to leave for Kenya. We crossed large swathes of land in several regions in Somalia before arriving at the Somalia/Kenya border several days later. It was a harrowing journey and I felt feverish and sick the entire way. I longed for safety and security, worrying about my children every second so much that I could not rest.

On the Kenya side, we settled at Dadaab where the refugees were given food rations twice a month with the exception of vegetables, milk and other basic needs, which were given daily. I opened a small shop in the

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<sup>1</sup> An administrative region in southern Somalia.

camp where I started selling a variety of small things so that I could afford to supplement what I was receiving. Luckily the children were given free education, and most importantly, the camp was peaceful. That peace provided my family relief and stability. The camp truly became our new home until it was announced that the Somali refugees would have to return to Somalia.

When we came back to Mogadishu, it was very difficult for us to adapt to the environment. People seemed strange to us since we had been away for nearly 20 years. We restarted our life from scratch again, there were no jobs, we had nothing, and there was hardly anyone we could run to, as everyone was struggling with their own issues. The weather is also very hot, and we live under an iron-sheeted roof since we cannot afford to rent a concrete house. We suffered from ailments like the common cold, bronchitis and stomachaches. Food was another problem as it wasn't simple to adapt to the cuisine and the flavors and everything seemed different. As a result of this, we developed allergies.

My children had difficulties coping with their peers in Somalia due to language barriers. They speak English and Swahili while their peers speak Somali. Most of the time we feel like refugees in our own country.

While returning was challenging, I know a foreign land cannot help us forever. We have to go home and face our own reality. We have to build from what we have in our own land, and make that land suitable to our needs.

I wish lasting peace for everybody in Mogadishu and the availability of a variety of jobs to the public, for children to get free education and similarly for the poor to receive affordable and secure shelters to live in. Before the civil war and social strife, there was peace where people could get jobs depending on the level of education one had. Rarely would an educated person or people with skills miss job opportunities.

We are getting there again. I am confident of that. We just have to look for ways to build and continue building. Like Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu, we must look for the opportunities. When you look for the ways to get better, you create the best kind of life.



## Foreigner at Home

**Ramia**

*"Let's give men and women livelihood skills and then market these skills. Invest in them in different ways..."*

I initially left Somalia because of insecurity and joblessness. I was also hit by a bullet on the arm but was lucky enough that the bullet did not fracture any bone. My biggest worry after healing was the sound of guns. I was always afraid to walk in the city and knew that my fear meant that my family and I could not lead a comfortable life in Mogadishu along with other citizens. Prior to our departure, my husband was not working and I had two children to feed. We could not afford their milk or bread.

Saudi Arabia was comfortable, because whether you work or not, you never fail to have food on your table to feed your children. You can pay the electricity and rent if you work for only one week. I would love to go back to Saudi Arabia, but now we can't go back, as we were deported and fingerprinted, and I need a visa to stay in the country. So owing to these reasons, I now live in Somalia.

Since I came back to Somalia last year there were two explosions that took place near my premises. In one of the explosions, the target was a



nearby hotel, and the whole building was brought down to ashes. The hotel staff was fortunate as no one was present at the time. Only two ladies who were guests there sustained injuries. The issues that made me flee the country before are still prevalent, but changes are happening now.

What I would like which would boost my living standard is the prevalence of lasting peace first, and second, job creation for those with an education and also those without so that each and every family's needs are met in Mogadishu. For example, let's give men and women livelihood skills and then market these skills. Invest in them in different ways, such as training men on mechanical skills and then buying a small car or a bicycle for them so they can work. Then take a percentage of the proceeds they earn and deposit the balance in a savings account. This is something that can boost one's living standard. Similarly, if you train girls to acquire skills such as working in a beauty salon, they can make earnings to sustain themselves.

I also wish that our children will receive free education and lead good and prosperous lives. Many of Mogadishu's citizens, such as myself, have wasted all of their lives in fleeing the country. Let's all go home and make our home a bright, cheerful place. If not for ourselves, then for our children. I want them to have a brighter future.

*"Among my dreams is to first of all improve my knowledge and the living standards of my children, and for me to keep a good reputation, which has allowed me to progress, God willing."*



## Bare Land

Ganiyow

*"Overall, we depend on what Allah gives us.  
No matter our circumstances, we have hope in life."*

My name is Ganiyow and I was born in 1997 in the town of Ooflaaw situated in the Dinsor District of the Bay region in Southern Somalia. I am the fourth child in our family of five.

I am now 18 years old with a 3-year-old boy and just out of maternity with my second child. My family fled from Ooflaaw when I was 3 years old because of severe drought. We were pastoralists and also practised farming by harvesting beans and sorghum. We were always careful to store some of the harvest in granaries for future consumption during droughts. We also kept camels and cattle as livestock to assist us with farming. Our farm life was peaceful and simple. The seasons were exquisitely beautiful to experience. It was a calm life.

The drought in Ooflaaw sadly resulted in the deaths of almost all our animals. The once abundant pasturelands fell barren, much to my devastation. There were hardly any rains for many consecutive years and there were no crops since our farms were dependent on the rains and rivers. Many children died of diseases such as severe diarrhea and malnutrition

as our food supply dwindled. It was heartbreaking to see the young boys and girls wither away until their bodies were but tiny frames.

That day we left Ooflaaw we sold the only camel that was left and used the funds for our transport. Our beloved and reliable companion animal was basically sold at a throwaway price. My father, mother and four siblings boarded a car from Dinsor alongside other displaced persons. We settled on bare land on the outskirts of Mogadishu until we were rescued by locals who generously hosted us for a few days. We later went to Mogadishu to look for some humanitarian assistance and ended up living in several IDP camps until we relocated to the Karan District and settled there. The farms we left behind have now become uninhabitable due to the growth of big trees, so we can't even go back home. While it does break my heart that I left my beloved pastureland behind, I will always carry memories of it in my heart. I will always hear the wind blow through the grass and remember how it felt on my skin.

When I compare life in Mogadishu, however, to life in *Ooflaaw*, I often say that it is better despite the fact that we are not better off. At least in Mogadishu we can find something to eat if we beg for food. Living in a drought region offered us absolutely no sustenance.

In our situation now the young and strong can sustain their lives by doing laundry work or other odd jobs. Women sometimes work as maids for the well-to-do families, although they run the risk of being accused of theft at times. Despite what many like to say about Mogadishu, there is much more opportunity here than in the pasturelands now.

Overall, we depend on what Allah gives us. No matter our circumstances, we have hope in life.

*"I would like to help bring back rule of law, fairness and equality so that unity and nationhood is attained. I want to live a decent and great life."*





## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Resilience



## Gunmen in the Forest

Maryan

*"I left my firewood at the place where they attacked  
us"*

I am Maryan, I am 28 years old and I live in an IDP camp <sup>1)</sup> in Bondhere, Mogadishu.

I was a married woman and I have five children. My husband was a businessman and a good man who cared for my family. I loved him, but he was sadly killed by unknown men while he was at his workplace. When I heard of my husband's death I was in shock and cried a lot. I didn't believe the death of my husband for almost a week and I became mentally unsettled, where I would talk to myself when I was alone.

My family told me to be patient, as he was already dead, and pray for him. Before my late husband died, our life was smooth and we had our three meals a day. Suddenly my children became orphans <sup>2)</sup> and I

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1 A camp managed by humanitarian aid organisations for internally displaced people (IDPs).

2 In the Somali culture, children are called orphans after the loss of one parent.

became stressed about how my children would cope with their new lives without their father. I felt sad whenever my children would ask me about their father, because I didn't have anyone else to support me as I took care of my children. I was forced to be the breadwinner of the family. Some months later as life became more difficult, I couldn't manage it anymore by myself, so I decided to move to Bondhere Internationally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp where aid is provided by humanitarian agencies.

It was morning when gunmen sexually assaulted me while I was out with my neighbour to collect firewood from the nearby forest, which we both regularly sold within the camp as a source of income. On our way back from the bush a gunman stopped us, holding a knife and pointing it at us. My neighbour and I started to argue with him since he was alone; we decided to face him and fight. We had the firewood on our heads, so we put it down. The gunman confidently walked towards us and I jumped in front of my neighbour as she was a younger woman and I felt that I should protect her. Unfortunately the man stabbed me in my right hand. As soon as the gunman got to us, five other gunmen who were hiding somewhere in the bushes came towards us, took us deep in to the bushes and raped both of us. We continuously screamed for help but nobody was close enough to hear our screams and help us. Then one of the gunmen told me to keep quiet otherwise he would kill us and throw our dead bodies in the forest.

The young woman was not married yet, so she was a virgin. They took her and left me where they had attacked us, because I had fainted while they raped us and I only regained consciousness hours later. I got up and started walking back to my house very slowly. I couldn't walk properly. I left my firewood at the place where they attacked us. When I reached home I was feeling a lot of pain and I couldn't reveal what had happened to my children. Since I didn't have my close relatives within the camp, I approached the family of my neighbour and informed them

about what happened to us and then gave them the sad news that their daughter had been raped and kidnapped by unknown gunmen. The mother of the young woman cried a lot; she was her only daughter. Her husband and the elders went out to look for their daughter. I went back to my house, but that night I couldn't sleep. I was so scared of the gunmen who had raped us and I was feeling sorry and worried for the young woman.

The following morning I called the camp leader and told him about the incident. He felt sorry for me and was concerned about the missing girl. He called someone from an organisation and a lady came with an ambulance and took me to a medical centre. The lady at the clinic asked me what happened, but when I was unable to talk she took me to another room alone. She welcomed me, gave me cold water, breakfast and counselled me about the incident. Her counselling made me feel stronger, as I was still experiencing a lot of shock and moral stress. She also gave me medicine, which made me recover well from my pain. She told me to come back to the clinic after three weeks.

The father of the girl reported the matter to the police where he wrote a statement of the incident and also about his missing daughter. He looked everywhere in town for those gunmen and finally he found his daughter in Afgooye<sup>3)</sup>, where he also found out that one of the gunman was married to his daughter. The perpetrator was charged and sentenced to 15 years. He is still in prison.

After the three weeks had passed, I went back to the clinic and they took me to a laboratory for some testing and I was asked if I had experienced any side effects from the medicine. Several months later they called me from the clinic and told me about an opportunity for skills training to

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3 A town in the southeastern Lower Shebelle region of southern Somalia.



learn the tailoring trade. Some 29 other women and I participated in a course for three months and learnt how to repair torn clothes and how to make new ones. After the training we received a new sewing machine to work with ourselves. I set up my new sewing machine in the market, which is near my house. Tailoring comforted me very much and I am using the skills acquired to earn a better living to support my children. This has helped me to look at the future with high hopes as I am able to work as a tailor and I feel I have become a stronger woman, who can move on with her life. In addition, the tailoring has changed my life and it has given me the capacity to work in a business environment, enabling me to be an independent woman who is able to generate income for her family. Although most of us are not earning a good amount of money from tailoring, the income from this business is enough to feed our children. My children are going to school and I pay their fees from the money I make from tailoring.

*"When I was not a virgin anymore I realized  
that I was no longer a girl."*



## Realise Your Potential

**Nafiso**

*"Now I feel that I am a perfect woman, who can become a leader for her city."*

I started to save money to start a small business. I started selling vegetables in an IDP camp in order to make a profit, as there are no other vegetable sellers in the IDP camp. People used to buy from outside of the camp. My shop grew bigger and more prosperous. Now I am living a comfortable life, where I get my daily income and buy food for my children. I want all women to find strength and realise how strong they really are and to never give up in their lives. Now I feel that I am a perfect woman, who can become a leader for her city.



## The Woman With No Face

**Nathifo**

*"My mother and father are my heroes. I can always count on them and I love them very much."*

My name is Nathifo. I am a divorcée living in the Karan District of Mogadishu. I was born in Mogadishu and I have lived here most of my life with my parents. I have three sisters and four brothers and I am the firstborn of my family. My parents struggled to raise us up in a good standard of living, but we never missed our three meals though.

I was 17 years old when my father pressured me into getting married. He said that I was getting older and he wanted to see his grandchildren, so I agreed to marriage. I got married in January of last year to a man to whom my father had given my hand in marriage, because my father and his father were good friends, so they decided that we should marry. However, his mother and sisters did not want their son to marry me. Two months after we got married, I was told to live with the family of my husband, as his mother didn't want her son to live somewhere else. I was living with them in the same house and they would abuse me when my husband was not around the house. I was scared to tell him, because I didn't want to complain about his mother. I thought I was in love. He was kind and handsome. It was hard for me to live with them, but



I was patient with them. I got pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy, who died when he was 5 months old. When my child died, they started talking about me and they were saying that I was a bad omen to their family.

For many years my husband had been waiting for a visa to travel to Europe. In June 2015 he finally went there. He kept in touch with me and he was even sending money every month. He promised me if he got his citizenship that he would take me there to live with him.

Sadly though, I ended up getting divorced after being raped. One night in September 2015 around 7.30 p.m., I went to a shop not far from my home to buy wheat flour and sugar. When I reached the shop I asked the shopkeeper for the two goods. He was alone in the shop at that time. He asked me to come inside and help him carry soup from the store and I agreed as though he were my brother. I didn't anticipate anything happening to me. When I entered the store, he came quickly and locked the door from the inside. When I saw him lock the door, I was in shock. He came towards me and started to hold me tight and I pushed him away and told him, "What do you want from me, I am a married woman!" He wasn't even listening to me. He came towards me again and threw me on the ground, forced himself onto me and raped me. I tried to fight him off, but I wasn't able to. I cried and screamed, but I was in a small room where nobody could hear me. When he was finished, he let me go and opened the door. I ran away from him towards our home, without the wheat flour and sugar. When I reached home, I told my parents that I had been raped by the shopkeeper. I cried and I cried. My parents were shocked; my father was angry and he went to the shop to fight with the shopkeeper. The shop was closed and the man had disappeared, so my father went to the shopkeeper's house, and when he saw him there, my father started to hit him, but some bystanders got between them and stopped the fight.

The following morning, my mother took me to a clinic, where I was given a check-up, medical care and counselling. They gave me some medicine to use and an appointment for once I had completed my medicine.

I became the Woman with no Face in my neighbourhood. I couldn't go out of my house for a whole month. I was restless. I couldn't meet my friends as before. I wouldn't go out to buy groceries from the shop out of the fear that I would be raped again. I told my mother not to send my sisters to the shop, as they could also be raped like me, and to instead send one of my brothers. My mother agreed.

My father reported the case to police in the Karan police station, where he wrote a statement and urged the policemen to put the perpetrator in prison. The shopkeeper was placed in jail by force. He even slapped the policemen. His case went to the high court and he has been in prison ever since.

When the family of my husband heard that I had been raped, they called my husband and told him that I was raped while loitering at night. They said that out of jealousy because I was going to Europe to live with my husband and have a good life. When my husband heard that, he divorced me and that's why I am a divorcée now. When we got divorced his family was happy and they celebrated. I tried to call my husband and to tell him the truth, but he would not receive my calls. After I got the divorce letter from him, I felt very sad. I couldn't believe that due to being raped my husband was divorcing me. I got emotional and mentally unsettled.

The medicine I was given helped me to recover. I went back to clinic and they checked me again and told me that I was better. The staff at the clinic put me in touch with organisations helping women who have experienced such events as I have. After a month, I was called in for training in tailoring. At the end of the training, with the new sewing machine

I was given, I started to work out of my home to repair people's torn clothes. I managed to earn some wages from tailoring and I was happy for being able to work for myself and for my parents. I aspire to help my parents, who have always been with me in any problems I have had. They loved and cared for me. My mother and father are my heroes. I can always count on them and I love them very much.

*"Among my dreams is to first of all improve my knowledge and the living standards of my children, and for me to keep a good reputation, which has allowed me to progress, God willing."*



## The Businesswoman

**Dahabo**

*"It was through great difficulties I became a businesswoman and I am glad that I have."*

I am the mother of four children and we live in the Hamar-Weyne District. I sell different varieties of women's clothes and garments. I started trading when I was as young as 12 years old, in order to help my mother when she took over all the responsibilities of the family after my father passed away. I used to help her sell things from a small shop she owned and assisted with buying stock from shops for her. I also sold coffee, salt and other small items that people need in their homes. After 2009, I started a shop of my own and became a trader with my own independent business. I also sew clothes, bed sheets and women's clothes and I trade essential items that people need in Mogadishu.

I met many challenges when I first started the business. The security of the country was in constant jeopardy. We used to go to the market surviving on luck alone and were always worried whether we would return home alive or dead after each visit. I failed to pay back the debt I took when I started the business because there was violence at the time and business was down as people were fleeing. I relied on the training I received from helping my mother during my youth to pull through those



times. It was through great difficulties I became a businesswoman and I am glad that I have.

There are many women who have businesses around Mogadishu. Most of them sell secondhand clothes, vegetables, household utensils, cosmetics and food stores in the Bakaara Market <sup>1)</sup>. Commerce adds value to our country because every country depends on the business being conducted within its borders, be it exports or imports. Somalia used to do well in commerce but we have been badly affected by the collapse of our country. Now we need the citizens to revive commerce. For example, if tax revenue is collected from businesses and is used to rebuild the country and pay for education and healthcare for our citizens, I think it can add value to life in Mogadishu. Let's start there and keep making more developments. It is the best we can do.

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1 The Bakaara Market is an open market in Mogadishu, and it is the largest in the country.

*"As I love my Somali people, I want to always stand for their needs and I want them to stand up for the support of our children. I would want change for the better and I hope that it starts with my family."*



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# Health Guardian





## Cry of the Newborn Baby

Su'di

*"I have the rare chance to be one of the first people to meet a newborn baby and to see the joy on the mother's face when she meets her little one."*

I joined the midwifery health profession because from childhood I always desired to become a doctor. I love my job and dream of helping to change and address the health concerns of the public. I want everyone working with me to adopt the same mentality.

I strive to provide safe delivery to the Somali mothers who are giving birth. I have the rare chance to be one of the first people to meet a newborn baby and to see the joy on the mother's face when she meets her little one. I even get to hear the baby cry for the first time. This sound fills me with happiness because I know the little one has taken his or her first breath.

It's not by coincidence or by circumstance that one becomes a midwife but rather by passion. At the same time, I love and have tremendous respect for my coworkers as they contribute to the well-being of the mothers and newborn babies. They need my guidance and support as they don't have enough experience and knowledge about midwifery. Sometimes they may mishandle the newborn child and as a result the



child may develop trauma and could become disabled. So in that regard, I want to make changes to ensure mothers can have safe delivery and better care for their newborn babies.

The maternity department where I work needs more care equipment. There are many hospitals that don't have an incubator to keep the babies who need them. Babies' beds are lacking in some places and no quality drugs are available. This worries me, because I want all the babies I help deliver to be healthy and safe. I try to do as much as I can to help the hospital get supplies. I really do love my patients. As long as I am here, I will keep training my staff and counsel the new mothers to help them succeed at taking care of their children. This is the best I can do to contribute to a healthy society.

*"In life, I dream and hope to work for my country, to advocate for the rights of the voiceless. In the future, I would like to build schools, mosques and health facilities as charity for my people and my country."*



## Bless My Hands

Asha

*"...bless my hands so they can continue to heal."*

After being a refugee in Kenya, living in the United States and then working in Saudi Arabia, I returned to Mogadishu. I currently work with the federal and state governments in Galmudug on protection, peace and upholding women's rights by orchestrating advocacy campaigns.

I chose to enter a public health profession because during the civil war, people were suffering left, right and center and there were no medical facilities in addition to no ambulances, no doctors and no nurses. People were dying of curable and non-emergency issues like bleeding and diarrhea. To bridge that gap, I have decided to study medicine so that I could help my ailing compatriots and on the micro level, help my children and family. It significantly motivated me to work hard when patients who came to seek my help improved. I assisted all of the patients with a smile, hoping and praying to Allah to bless my hands so they can continue to heal.



## Better Care

**Tihaan**

*"I was motivated to join the medical profession because when I was a child I saw so many sick people with no medical services available to help them."*

In July 2014 I got a job at Bondhere Medical Centre as a community health worker where I am now in charge of the children's nutrition department.

I was motivated to join the medical profession because when I was a child I saw so many sick people with no medical services available to help them. At the time there were few medical staff in the country. I remember when my 2-year-old younger sister suddenly started vomiting, had diarrhea and became dehydrated. There was no one who could administer an intravenous injection so she succumbed to the illness due to a lack of medical attention. After witnessing her plight I decided to study health-related courses so that I could help my family and the public. I now work with mothers of malnourished children and I counsel them on how to feed their children.

Few adequate medical facilities exist due to the conflict and lack of security of recent decades. During that period many people died of preventable diseases and excessive bleedings due to injuries and minor



illnesses. Major health issues in Mogadishu currently include malaria, diarrhea, worms, bronchitis, malnutrition and gynecological disorders. This is made worse by the low standards of hygiene in the city, which contribute to the spread of diseases. More importantly there are no latrines and running water in the refugee and IDP camps. This can be improved through the right education of society on hygiene and health.

Currently the inaccessible roads and the unstable security situation in the country prevent many services. The other barrier is cost, where a very large number of people are not able to meet the expenses for transport, consultation fees and payment for drugs and procedures. There is also a lack of knowledge and awareness where people who are able to pay for medical services do not seek professional healthcare but instead visit traditional healers as substitute.

In private hospitals people can generally get better care since patients pay for the services; nurses, doctors and other attendants are always on standby. There are still challenges at private hospitals too, for example getting an appointment to see a doctor takes a long time and the checkup and diagnostic fee is expensive, costing about 100 US dollars. Many patients may not be able to afford all the checks.

To improve access to healthcare, we need to decentralise all emergency services such as maternity and antenatal care, vaccinations, nutrition feeding centres, tuberculosis and HIV care, so that these services can be accessed from any health facility in every neighbourhood in the city. There is also a need to motivate medical staff so that they can perform their work well. The government also needs to work on a programme to provide free healthcare for all the citizens. These are my opinions and experiences as a healthcare provider. I've dedicated my life to my profession and I care deeply about the health of our citizens.

*"My hopes and dreams are for me to be able to bring back my family, especially my mother who is a fashion designer in women's clothes. My older sister is a gynecologist so I hope she comes back and helps our country. Being here has given me the opportunity to interact with many women and girls who suffer from gynecological issues and I believe her services are going to be very useful here. My brother is in high school so he wants to become a pilot and fly Somali Airlines."*



## My own unique way

Farida

*" Maybe I do not have the cures for many of the diseases afflicting many citizens in Mogadishu, but I feel in helping prevent the diseases, I am curing them in my own unique way. "*

I am a public health officer for an international non-governmental organisation I chose to join the health profession because I loved medical professionals and always enjoyed watching TV programmes on medical issues. When I was taken to hospital as a young girl, I admired the professionals, their distinct dress code and intelligence. I came to understand that these people work to save lives and help nurture, treat and cure the sick. It struck me that this profession was the best thing for me, since saving human lives is an admirable and notable undertaking. As a public health officer, I am interacting with the communities and putting together awareness campaigns regarding disease outbreaks to prevent the spread of diseases. I encourage parents to take their children for vaccination against polio and measles and also to teach them ways of preventing diseases by embracing adequate hygiene practises. Many diseases begin with ignorance in the community regarding basic hygiene and sanitation techniques. It is my duty to reduce the ignorance and spread knowledge. Maybe I do not have the cures for many of the diseases afflicting many citizens in Mogadishu, but I feel in helping prevent the diseases, I am curing them in my own unique way.



# Mogadishu, Our Future

“ I want it to be like it was in the heyday when businesses were booming and there was a great expansion from urban to rural; merchants were coming to Mogadishu for businesses. Somalia was the backbone of the world business and was the beauty and true pride of Africa. We will be like that again.”

—**Khadija, merchant.**

“ I would like to see ships docking at the harbor. I would be pleased to see the lights of a booming city. In the next decade, I would like Mogadishu to be like a city similar to Dubai—with paved roads and architecture.”

—**Asha.**

“ My greatest wish for Mogadishu is that displaced people receive adequate housing where my children, husband and I can live. Secondly, I wish for a decent and independent life. In the next decade, I would like my life in Mogadishu to be one that is decent and sustainable.”

—**Ganiyow, IDP.**

“ In the next 10 years, I want Mogadishu to have schools that offer free education and more children's programmes so that those who want to learn can get the opportunity to study.”

—**Mano, 13-year-old girl.**

“ I want life in Mogadishu to become as good as it was before the war. I wish for Mogadishu to have solid resources, a thriving economy, good social networks and a strong sense of unity amongst its residents, full of honest and lovely people who can bring development to the country.”

—**Maryan, gender-based violence survivor.**

“ I wish for us to enjoy the unity and restoration of our customs and traditions. If we do our best and make the Somali people unite then I anticipate that we can achieve prosperous life in the next decade. This will lead to trust within community.”

—**Aeyni, Ministry of Finance, the Federal Government of Somalia.**

“ In the next decade, I want Mogadishu to be greener, in terms of grass, trees, and with more beach access to everybody, more areas of the city to be open to everybody, and more urban development around the city where traffic is less. With the massive amount of cars, factories and equipment coming in we might compromise the clean air we have. I am hoping for more kids in school, more employment and more involvement of the youth and women in politics, in addition to development that's sustainable and environmentally friendly and not just development for the sake of development.”

—**Rodo, a diaspora returnee to Mogadishu.**

“ I hope that citizens of Mogadishu will appreciate the values and roles of women; where women are equally empowered as men and girls are given the attention they need just like their male counterparts. In the coming 10 years Mogadishu will wave good-bye to poverty, inter-clan wars and insecurity, and say hello to the availability of free basic education.”

—**Hawo-lul.**

“ I wish for lasting peace in Mogadishu and for it to be restored to its former glory as the capital city of Somalia. Mogadishu is now in ruins. I wish for development and good prospects for the people. There are good signs of peace now and we pray to Allah to help us expand it. I would like to see restoration of the beauty of the city and hope for a nationalist government with a vision and mission to turn around this devastated country.”

—**Anab.**





## Promoting Rights, Protecting Women

### Prevention of and Response to Gender-Based Violence against Women and Girls in Mogadishu

Somalia has recently been referred to by *The Economist* as “the worst place in the world to be a woman,”<sup>1)</sup> and by Save the Children’s Child Development Index as “the worst place in the world to be a child.” Girls are locked out of obtaining basic health and education services they need to survive, due to socioeconomics and gender-related cultural barriers. Infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world; for every 100,000 live births, 732 women die in childbirth.<sup>2)</sup> School life expectancy is three years for boys and two years for girls. In Mogadishu the widespread gender-based violence (GBV) girls and women are facing reflects gender inequality and social norms that are both drivers and results of years of conflict. In May 2013, 390 GBV incidents were reported in Mogadishu out of which 160 were sexually related.<sup>3)</sup> Eighty-four per cent of the mentioned cases were women while 16 per cent were girls. Even though there are several conflict research papers on the drivers of conflict in Somalia, knowledge about social norms underlining GBV is still anecdotal and fragmented; the linkages between GBV and conflict have not yet been studied in depth. Only last year UNICEF launched a research programme on social norms driving GBV to build “good practice” approaches. What is known so far is that existing traditional practices such as forced and early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation and Intimate Partner Violence including marital rape are rooted in social norms that not only condone violence against women, but may even encourage it. Furthermore, there is a deep culture of silence and fear regarding crimes of sexual

violence, which significantly impacts on reporting and response.<sup>4)</sup>

The project Promoting Rights, Protecting Women is funded by the UK Embassy in Mogadishu and aims at improving the response to and prevention of GBV in South Central Somalia, with specific focus on Mogadishu, Guriceel and Galkayo. The programme foresees a multifaceted approach which includes capacity building, support to service provision, awareness activities and advocacy. The intervention is based on an in-depth conflict analysis and research work that surveyed the linkages between the conflict in Somalia and the social norms related to GBV. The project is strengthening the local systems of referral, prevention and response to GBV at district and community level. Through capacity building and strong collaboration with local government and civil society actors, the project is strengthening the response itself, by supporting the provision of a holistic package of services to survivors, including medical and psychosocial, legal support and economic empowerment. At the same time, it’s developing community-based prevention strategies by identifying and addressing social norms related to GBV by involving key community actors. The target groups of knowledge enhancement and awareness creation are the wide community with focus on men and boys. Finally, the project is supporting these local initiatives by conducting advocacy actions geared towards the establishment of legal framework against GBV. The advocacy includes participation to international debates on reducing GBV in humanitarian settings such as the annual Commission on the Status of Women or the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict held in London in 2014.

**Francesco Njagi Kaburu**

Regional Program Manager – Protection

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1 *The Economist*, Quick study: Lisa Shannon on women in Somalia: “The Worst Place in the World to Be a Woman,” 12 April 2012.

2 *Central Intelligence Agency*, *The World Factbook* (2015).

3 UNHCR, May 2013.

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4 *Joint Communiqué of the Federal Government and the United Nations on the Prevention of Sexual Violence*, 7 May 2013.

## A small step in the right direction

CISP has adopted in its statutory documents and declarations of intent an explicit gender perspective. This translates into a constant effort of putting those principles into practice. While promoting the participation of local communities into the development processes, we are very aware of the risk of not giving sufficient attention to the interests of women and girls where local formal and informal institutions for cultural or historical reasons tend to disadvantage them. To support women and girls in Somalia over the last three decades has meant for CISP to support the access to a rehabilitated education system or aid efforts for a health system to be rebuilt, to assist their breadwinning efforts through income-generation support or to assure assistance and dignity to the victims of violence. Violence and insecurity has been the dramatic background of this effort and CISP staff is fully aware that the experiences of violence and insecurity can be very different for women and men. Somalia is at the moment in a phase of reshaping the country's power relationships within its society. This presents an opportunity where women's rights can be improved and gender relations can change. Now is also the time to support the debate on social norms, power relations and access to resources within Somali communities.

This book could represent a valuable contribution: it is in fact simply focused on recording women's voices and experiences. This collection of stories makes lot of sense for different reasons and different audiences. These types of engagements are crucial for organisations and international actors working to support basic rights and development, as they enable for basic service delivery to be translatable to the women's daily lives.

It is important for the protagonists of this book, the girls and women of Somalia, to have access to a wider audience for their stories and perceptions, creating a bridge among generations: aged women remembering the start of the conflict at the moment when ordinary and serene life was destroyed forever and younger generations not even mentioning the reality of the war and insecurity, as it is part of their daily reality—a reality where terrible stories of sold babies coexist with extraordinary examples of women showing resilience and being role models for others. The opportunities to advance women's rights are there, but these are in the hands of the Somalis and the role of international actors should be that of supporting existing positive local processes rather than imposing any kind of approach. In this context this kind of exercise can be crucial in the translation of social expectations in “demands that are heard” by local institutions and locally owned methods. But a first unavoidable step is to reinforce the strength of women's voices in the debate about power and resources.

This book represents a further small step in the right direction.

**Sandro De Luca**  
CISP Director For Africa Region



## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all CISP Somalia protection, education, health and culture team members who joined the effort and worked wholeheartedly to make this book possible. In particular, thanks to our inspiring team of Somali women working with CISP in Mogadishu (Khadija Farah, Khadija Jimale, Anfac Mohamed, Naima Mohamed, Habon Abdullahi, Zainab Ali Hussein, Naima M. Ismail, Salaado Abdullahi, Fatima Mohamud Abdulrahman, Asma Said), who collected the stories. Also thank you to Nancee Adams-Taylor for her editorial assistance.

We are grateful to the British Embassy in Mogadishu for sharing our vision, funding and supporting the book within the project “Promoting Rights, Protecting Women”. In particular, thank you to Amy O’Brien who first saw the potential of this project in its starting phases, to Kevin Flatt who replaced her, and to Karishma Mohindra who has been following the day-by-day implementation of the project. During the past three years of collaboration with the British Embassy in Mogadishu, CISP has worked with Somali communities, authorities and service providers to ensure assistance to women survivors of human rights violation (with focus on gender-based violence), to enhance protective norms, and to advocate at national and international levels for the rights of the Somali women. CISP’s partner International Alert has provided a precious contribution in informing the project on peacebuilding and conflict prevention and has focused on advocating for change nationally and internationally.

The European Commission and UNESCO’s support within the project “Reviving Culture, Building Peace” and UNICEF Somalia’s continued collaboration in the effort of caring for communities, protecting women and girls and reducing violence in Somalia have been very precious.

Finally, our deepest appreciation goes to all Somali women and girls living in Mogadishu who generously shared their story and made this project come alive.







- |                                   |                        |                                |                       |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Lido Beach                     | 5. Daljirka Daahson    | 9. Bakara Market               | 13. Porto Vecchio     |
| 2. Abdiaziz Mosque                | 6. Magadishu Stadium   | 10. Sayidka Monument           | 14. Mogadishu Harbor  |
| 3. Binocollo di Vittorio Emanuela | 7. Magadishu Cathedral | 11. Arco Di Trionfo Popolare   | 15. Aden Adde Airport |
| 4. Secondo Lido Light House       | 8. Howo Ta Ko monument | 12. Somali National University |                       |



This publication, has been produced by CISP within the Somalia Program. CISP and partners has been dedicating their efforts to supporting empowerment and protection of women and girls in Somalia. Currently education programs for girls and women, gender-based violence prevention and care, mother and child health, nutrition and culture for peace projects are being implemented in various areas of Somalia.

During many years of engagement in this sector we realised that women and girls have strong passions, ideas and hopes for the future of Somalia. Their voices as agents of change and as inspiration, not only for other women in the country but for a wider audience, have not been captured and heard enough. Following the example of many other compilations of women's voices, writings and stories all over the world, the idea behind this project is to create an avenue for women and girls in Mogadishu in which to experience (a) freedom of voicing their memories and ideas, (b) the healing effect of reflecting on their own stories, and (c) the inspiring, transformational power of envisioning a possible future of peace for themselves and other women (and men) in Somalia. Storytelling and sharing contribute to increased understanding and empathy, build identity, offer positive role models, enhance self-awareness, self-confidence and communication skills, while creating opportunities for awareness raising and participation. We hope this book may also be a tool for education and advocacy and contribute to reviving a culture of peace and to protecting women and girls in Somalia and in the world. A Somali version is coming up, as well as guided readings and theatre plays aimed at spreading the stories to a wider public, in schools and other selected places.

This book is dedicated to all the people of Somalia.

**Rosaia Ruberto**  
Regional Coordinator  
CISP East Africa Office

Stories from Women and Girls of Mogadishu



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