



### What is GESI and why is it a critical to include in Security Sector Development?

Gender remains to be one of the most misunderstood term in Somalia, despite the many interventions to raise awareness on the inclusion of gender in implementation of the planning and development programs across the country. By virtue, gender is believed to be all about women and an external issue being pushed by external institutions. This view on gender has contributed to oppositions on projects and programs that try to address the inequalities and injustices against women. There is a fear that if women are empowered socially, economically and politically, they will fight and demand for the sharing of existing resources equally as well as their involvement in decision making processes in Somalia. The fear is mainly among those who are already benefiting from the marginalization and discrimination of women and other marginalized groups in Somalia.

The term gender, however, refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. Gender equality is about creating equal opportunities for men, women, girls and boys in a given society. Social inclusion is about addressing existing inequality and exclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups by enhancing their meaningful representation, participation in their respective community and overall enhancing their access to resources, opportunities, agency, dignity and voices. Therefore, gender equality application is about transforming existing systems, both formal & informal, into inclusive and gender sensitive institutions.

GESI is a multi-faceted process that promotes equal and inclusive participation in decision-making processes across all sectors. GESI transforms the existing social norms, beliefs, relationships that contribute to the oppression and marginalization of a particular gender in society. The transformation also builds on people's resilience and collective agency. Through GESI, the security sector can address some of the underlying causes of gender inequality and social exclusion by transforming harmful cultural norms, unequal power relations, and transform institutions – both formal and informal.

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It is critical to address the needs of the most marginalized groups and create inclusive systems. It is worth noting that the efforts of promoting GESI in an environment like Somalia is daunting and challenging. It requires political commitment, investment, and understanding the challenging context to promote and support sustainable change.

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## To what extent is GESI incorporated into security sector development in Somalia?

What actions are so far taken to incorporate into the recommendations of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 into security sector development? Security sector development efforts continue to be top-down and non-inclusive in Somalia. The top-down approach mainly emphasizes on the defeat of hostile groups and rebuilding of national security structures without taking into account gender equality and social inclusion. This approach neither prioritizes the safety and security of the most vulnerable groups in the country nor the prioritization of the inclusion and participation of women and marginalized groups in the security institutions and development sectors. The importance of women and other marginalized groups such as internally displaced population, those hailing from less powerful clans and youth's participation in security sector development need to be recognized. Women's participation in security sectors enriches the institutions and leads to building sustainable security as they have a lot to offer in transforming security sector institutions. The inclusion and gender sensitivity in security sector however, is not considered a priority in Somalia but is viewed as an outside opinion (donor wants and needs). It is worth noting that people of Somalia, having endured over three decades of insecurity and violence, want a security system that is inclusive and participatory and respond to their needs.

Imagine being a woman living in a post-conflict Somalia. Despite the insecurity affecting you, directly and indirectly, you still remain underrepresented in the decision-making processes relating to security and development. This worsens the living experiences as the hostility and violence continues due to lack of voice in the most hostile and violent country in the world. The top-down approach to rebuilding security institutions will not build a lasting and inclusive security for all in Somalia. That is why incorporating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in security sector development becomes an urgent and the right approach to adopt in all of the efforts towards rebuilding gender sensitive and inclusive security institutions in Somalia.

Incorporating GESI in the security sector institutions, means that the specific needs and challenges facing the most marginalized groups including women and youth would be addressed, recognized and removed. Through GESI, we will then be able to understand the processes as well as institutions that perpetuate inequality and social exclusion. With such knowledge, we will be able to remove barriers that deny women from meaningful participation, inclusion and representation in security sector institutions. By providing a much needed space for women in security sector institutions will no doubt contribute to achieving durable and security for all.

### **Albany's Efforts in Promoting GESI through its Women-to-Women Security Project in Somalia**

Albany's Women to Women Security Project in Southwest State region of Somalia, is a very unique project in the sense that it seeks to reduce the effects of insecurity and ensures that women's security concerns and needs are addressed and protected. Through GESI approach, this project places gender at the center of all stages of the project's implementation. The direct stakeholders of this project are diverse women including women leaders, representatives of women's rights organizations, women activists, grassroots women, lawyers, IDP women, women from marginalized community, women living with disabilities, and young university graduates. Prior to the project, women in this region, did not have a platform where they could come together and critically assess their own security situation and demand inclusion in formal decision-making processes.

This project uses a methodology that targets both the right bearers and duty-bearers. Its aim is in building women's agency and capacities to respond to their own security concerns and confidently engage with security and justice actors. Through this project, women are provided a much needed safe space where they come together, map their own security needs, discuss factors that contribute to their insecurity, critically examine security threats, existing security systems, and reflect on potential solutions and strategies to improve their security.

Women hold horizontal dialogues where they collaborate and work together as a group. Through these dialogues, women collectively discuss about security challenges, identify sets of actions that need to be taken to address their security concerns and enhance their engagements with security actors and institutions. Women have also assessed the roles of women in alternative dispute resolution and their low representation in existing Alternative Dispute Resolution[1] (ADR) structures. Additionally, women have evaluated the delivery of humanitarian assistance and its impact on women security and safety. The women noted that the delivery of humanitarian assistance affects women's safety and security through the long hours of line up in open sunny spaces, being beaten up by the guards, and stampede. After women have identified the root causes of their insecurity, gaps in the security institutions and their low representation, they develop applicable and suitable advocacy plans and actions.

Furthermore, the project also utilizes vertical dialogues between women and critical stakeholders including specific line ministries such as the Ministry of Gender, the Ministry of Justice and other institutions. In the vertical dialogues, women directly write letters to the concerned officials and institutions requesting for a meet. Then they engage with security actors and institutions both formal and informal where they present their own security concerns and provide sets of recommendation in addressing insecurity affecting women. Through this project, number of vertical meetings with critical security actors and institution have taken place in Baidoa where women articulated the importance of women's participation in ADR and the need to increase the number of women in ADR structures. Officials who attended the vertical dialogues have been extremely receptive and were very impressed about women's confidence, their preparedness, clarity of their own advocacy messages and demanding accountability from security and justice actors and institutions.

Through the project, women's voices get amplified and their direct engagements with critical actors and institutions are facilitated. They learn how to advocate for their own issues, they gain experiences on how to directly engage with policy-makers, build much needed relationship with influential security actors and institutions, and most of all they learn about the importance of being united as women and push for their own security agenda. The project also provides training and coordinates with security actors to adopt a more gender and conflict sensitive approach to community protection.

Transforming security sector institutions and making it inclusive and gender sensitive in Somalia requires more projects like Albany's women-to-women security. Women at the receiving end, need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to understand their security concerns and needs. They need a nurturing space where diverse women can come together, discuss about their own security challenges, identify actions that can be tackled such challenges, develop their own advocacy strategies, and understanding ways in which they can engage and deliver their own messages to policy makers. Albany's project women-to-women is doing all the above as it continues to empower women to hold security actors and institutions accountable and demand for security sector institutions that are inclusive and gender sensitive.

