



Women, Peace and Security in Practice: Assessing Women-Led Economic Empowerment in Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia

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Abstract: *Women's economic empowerment is increasingly recognized as a vital component of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, particularly in conflict-affected settings such as Somalia. This study examined the contribution of women-led economic empowerment to peacebuilding and social cohesion in Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia, within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Guided by Liberal Feminist Theory and Human Security Theory, the research adopted an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative exploratory design. Data were collected through six focus group discussions with women entrepreneurs participating in the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Women-to-Women Project, alongside key informant interviews with government officials, civil society representatives, community leaders, and development practitioners. Findings indicate that women's entrepreneurship extends beyond income generation to enhance household welfare, strengthen community resilience, promote social cohesion, and support informal peacebuilding initiatives. Women's savings groups and business networks emerged as important platforms for trust-building, conflict resolution, and cross-clan collaboration. However, women continue to face challenges including limited access to finance, insecurity, restrictive gender norms, inadequate infrastructure, and weak policy implementation. The study concludes that women-led economic empowerment should be positioned as a central peacebuilding strategy within Somalia's WPS framework and recommends strengthening gender-responsive financial systems, institutional support, and women's participation in governance and peacebuilding processes to advance sustainable peace and inclusive development.*

Keywords: *Women, Peace and Security; economic empowerment; peacebuilding; social cohesion; women entrepreneurs and Somalia*

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1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, the intersection between women's economic empowerment and sustainable peacebuilding has drawn more attention in discussions of international development, peace, and security. The recognition of women's involvement in conflict prevention,

peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-war recovery underwent a dramatic change in 2000 with the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The resolution recognized that women are critical players in advancing peace and security rather than only being victims of conflict. The significance of women's

involvement in political, economic, and social processes as a requirement for inclusive development and lasting peace has been further highlighted in later WPS decisions (United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 2000; UN Women, 2023).

Globally, evidence suggests that women's meaningful participation in economic activities contributes significantly to household welfare, community resilience, and broader development outcomes. Women's economic empowerment is the process by which women obtain access to and control over financial resources, opportunities, and decision-making procedures that allow them to enhance their well-being and exercise agency in society (World Bank, 2024). Economic empowerment becomes especially crucial in fragile and conflict-affected environments because women often take on greater responsibilities for household survival, income generation, and community support networks. Recent research demonstrates that women's economic inclusion can strengthen social cohesion, reduce vulnerabilities, and create conditions beneficial to peacebuilding and recovery (OECD, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

The relationship between economic empowerment and peacebuilding has gained significant attention from academics and policymakers. Peacebuilding now encompasses more than just putting an end to violence; it also involves creating political, social, and economic frameworks that promote long-term stability and human security. Social tensions and conflict dynamics are frequently exacerbated by economic exclusion, poverty, inequality, and marginalization. On the other hand, inclusive economic possibilities can improve community trust, increase resilience, and lessen the structural factors that lead to conflict (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021). Therefore, empowering women economically serves as both a goal for development and a tactic for promoting peace. Some studies have emphasized the interplay between women's economic participation and empowerment within the women peace and security (WPS) agenda. The essential part of it is that both contribute to equality and peace. In the post conflict reconstruction and recovery like Somalia, interventions focus on emergency and little recovery processes. studies have shown that international community operates with women, peace and agenda to ensure gender equality, while on the contrary gender roles in often contested as part of larger social transformation.

In times of conflict, political unrest, and humanitarian emergencies, women have been vital to the survival of families and communities throughout Africa. In numerous situations, women have managed domestic duties while serving as entrepreneurs, community organizers, peace activists, and mediators. Despite their achievements, women still encounter structural challenges that restrict

their access to markets, leadership opportunities, education, money, property ownership, and productive resources. These challenges are heightened in conflict-affected areas where social inequality increases and institutional capacities are compromised (AUC, 2023).

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by the complicated security issues, displacement, environmental stressors, and governance limitations that persist in Horn of Africa nations including Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia. In the meantime, women throughout the region have shown incredible resiliency through community mobilization, business, and involvement in peacebuilding projects. Therefore, understanding how women's economic participation might support stability, resilience, and recovery in precarious circumstances has received more attention.

The IOM women project in Baidoa attracted our attention as an important case for analyzing the relationship between peacebuilding and women-led economic empowerment in relation to women, peace, and security in Somalia. Somalia has seen protracted conflict, political division, humanitarian crises, and recurrent shocks related to climate change since the central government collapsed in 1991. These issues have had a major impact on social cohesion, governing systems, and means of subsistence. The ensuing economic and social consequences, including as poverty, instability, migration, and exclusion from official decision-making processes, have often fallen disproportionately on women. However, in order to sustain their families and communities, Somali women have continued to be active participants in the economy through commerce, agriculture, livestock production, service delivery, and small-scale entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2022).

Climate change has induced intensive drought that caused the displacement of millions of people from the rural areas to IDPs in the main cities of Somalia, including Baidoa, which is one of them, hosting 89,476 households, 596,931 individuals in 498 verified IDP sites (UNHCR, 2022). The contribution of female entrepreneurs to Somalia's economy has grown. In both the formal and informal sectors, many women run small and medium-sized businesses that promote household welfare, generate income, and create job possibilities. In certain instances, women-owned enterprises have also made it easier for people to engage beyond clan and community boundaries, promoting social cohesiveness and stability in the area. Despite these efforts, women entrepreneurs still face many obstacles, such as restricted participation in formal economic and governance systems, limited access to financial services, insufficient business support systems, insecurity, and discriminatory social norms (Warsame, Mohamed, & Abdulle, 2025). In the South West state, women's representation in the state politics has been decreasing; the current government has

the least number of females in the local MPs as recently indicated by Hiilbillan women group in Baidoa.

The Federal Government of Somalia introduced its National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 in 2022 in recognition of the significance of women's involvement in peace and security processes. The NAP aims to increase women's involvement in economic development, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, governance, and recovery. The policy framework reflects the growing understanding that women must be included in all spheres of society, including leadership and economic decision-making, in order to achieve permanent peace. Though legislative pledges have increased, there is little empirical data on how women-led economic projects support social cohesion and peacebuilding at the local level. A majority of previous research on women's entrepreneurship in Somalia has concentrated on issues related to business development, livelihood strategies, financial access, and economic obstacles. Similarly, women's involvement in governance, political representation, conflict resolution, and protection from violence have been the main focus of study on women, peace, and security. Understanding how female entrepreneurs view the connection between economic empowerment and peacebuilding, or how their business ventures support social cohesion and community resilience, has received very little attention.

This study seeks to address this gap through investigating the lived experiences of Somali women entrepreneurs and looking at how women-led economic empowerment supports social cohesion and reconciliation within the larger framework of Women, Peace, and Security, this study aims to close this gap. The study intends to support policy formation, program design, and implementation initiatives that support inclusive peacebuilding and sustainable development in Somalia by producing qualitative evidence from women entrepreneurs and important stakeholders.

1.2 Problem Statement

The global Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda acknowledges that sustained peace and development depend on women's involvement in political, social, and economic processes. Economic empowerment has been recognized more as a crucial means by which women may increase their agency, enhance home welfare, support community resilience, and actively engage in peacebuilding initiatives. Women's economic engagement is especially crucial in fragile and conflict-affected situations because it helps restore livelihoods, maintain social stability, and reconstruct communities.

Despite decades of conflict, political unrest, relocation, and economic vulnerability, women have become important

economic actors in Somalia. Trade, agriculture, animal production, retail, and service provision are just a few of the industries in which women-owned enterprises operate. These businesses assist local economic recovery, generate jobs, and give families a means of subsistence. However, there are also many structural challenges that Somali women must overcome, such as restricted financial access, limited ownership of productive assets, discriminatory societal norms, insecurity, and exclusion from formal decision-making processes. Further, these challenges limit women's involvement in development and peacebuilding projects as well as the expansion of women-led businesses.

While previous research analyzed at economic empowerment, women's entrepreneurship, and the WPS agenda's implementation in Somalia, the relationship between women-led economic development and peacebuilding has not received much attention, especially from the viewpoint of female entrepreneurs. Additionally, nothing is known about how, in the Somali context, women-led economic initiatives promote social cohesion, community resilience, conflict prevention, and sustainable peace.

There is a significant chance to increase women's involvement in the political, economic, and peacebuilding domains through the execution of Somalia's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. However, policymakers and development partners may not be able to create interventions that successfully use women's economic agency as a mechanism for sustainable peacebuilding in the absence of empirical data about the experiences, difficulties, opportunities, and peacebuilding contributions of women entrepreneurs. Therefore, by investigating how women-led economic empowerment supports social cohesion and peacebuilding in Somalia, this study aims to close this knowledge gap.

This knowledge gap is particularly significant given the opportunities created by Somalia's National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which seeks to strengthen women's participation in peace and security processes. Without context-specific evidence on the contributions of women-led economic initiatives to peacebuilding, policymakers, development practitioners, and civil society organizations may be unable to design effective interventions that leverage women's economic agency as a driver of sustainable peace. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of women-led economic empowerment in promoting social cohesion, community resilience, and peacebuilding in Baidoa, Somalia, generating evidence to inform policy and practice within the Women, Peace, and Security framework.

1.3 Research Objectives

The General research objective is to explore the role of women-led economic empowerment in promoting gender peacebuilding and social cohesion within the Women, Peace, and Security framework in Somalia.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs operating within conflict-affected contexts in Somalia.
2. To examine the challenges and opportunities influencing women-led economic initiatives in Somalia.
3. To assess how women-led economic empowerment contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion within Somali communities.
4. To identify policy and programmatic interventions that can strengthen women's economic empowerment and participation in peace and security processes in Somalia.

1.3.2 Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs operating within conflict-affected contexts in Somalia?
2. What challenges and opportunities influence women-led economic initiatives in Somalia?
3. How does women-led economic empowerment contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion within Somali communities?
4. What policy and programmatic interventions can strengthen women's economic empowerment and participation in peace and security processes in Somalia?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant at the academic, policy, and practical levels. Through analyzing the connection between women-led economic empowerment and peacebuilding in a precarious and conflict-affected environment, it adds academically to the expanding corpus of work on Women, Peace, and Security. While previous studies have focused primarily on entrepreneurship barriers, women's political participation, or peacebuilding interventions, limited research has examined how women's economic activities contribute directly to social cohesion and sustainable peace.

From a policy standpoint, the research will produce data to support the implementation of Somalia's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 and other national frameworks that

encourage peacebuilding, economic inclusion, and gender equality. The findings will provide policymakers with a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities affecting women entrepreneurs and the ways in which economic empowerment can contribute to broader peacebuilding objectives. Practically, the study will offer insights that help guide the creation and execution of gender-responsive economic empowerment programs to development partners, donor organizations, civil society organizations, and women's organizations. Through highlighting the experiences and perspectives of Somali women entrepreneurs, the study will contribute to more inclusive and contextually relevant interventions that strengthen resilience, social cohesion, and sustainable development

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women, Peace and Security

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 in 2000, which gave rise to the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. In addition to highlighting the necessity of women's involvement in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict reconstruction, the resolution acknowledged the disproportionate impact of conflict on women. Since its adoption, the WPS agenda has expanded through subsequent resolutions that address women's participation, protection, prevention, relief, and recovery. Contemporary scholarship argues that meaningful participation within the WPS framework extends beyond political representation and formal peace negotiations. Women's inclusion in economic, social, and governance structures is increasingly recognized as essential for sustainable peace. Economic exclusion often reinforces inequalities and vulnerabilities that contribute to conflict, while economic empowerment can strengthen agency, resilience, and community stability.

2.2 Women-Led Economic Empowerment

The process that gives women access to opportunities, resources, skills, and decision-making authority so they can enhance their financial well-being and take more charge of their life is known as "women-led economic empowerment." Entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, market involvement, access to capital, ownership of productive assets, and job prospects are all included in economic empowerment. According to recent research, women who are economically empowered make major contributions to community development, poverty alleviation, educational outcomes, and home welfare. Women's economic participation often becomes essential for the survival and recovery of households in precarious

situations. However, women's economic advancement is often hindered by structural injustices, discriminatory social norms, restricted access to capital, and a lack of institutional assistance.

2.3 Women-Led Economic Empowerment and Peacebuilding

The interest in the connection between peacebuilding and economic empowerment is increasing. By improving livelihoods, lowering vulnerabilities, fortifying social networks, and boosting community resilience, economic empowerment supports peacebuilding. Women entrepreneurs often play important roles in connecting diverse groups, facilitating cooperation, and supporting local economic recovery. According to research from nations affected by conflict, women-owned businesses can foster social cohesion by fostering interaction between various groups, fostering shared economic interests, and bolstering local support networks. Additionally, economic development boosts women's self-assurance, leadership, and involvement in local decision-making, allowing them to make more significant contributions to peacebuilding projects.

2.4 Women Entrepreneurs in Somalia

The informal and small-scale business sector in Somalia is largely made up of women. They run companies in a variety of sectors, including as financial services, telecommunications, retail trade, agriculture, animal production, and hospitality. In order to support household livelihoods and maintain local economies, women's entrepreneurship has grown in significance. Women entrepreneurs still face many obstacles in spite of these contributions. These include restricted cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, limited economic growth support, instability, restricted access to formal financial institutions, and isolation from important decision-making processes. Previous research has shown these challenges, but has not given much information about how women's economic endeavors support social cohesiveness and peacebuilding.

2.5 Research Gap

The literature demonstrates that women's economic empowerment and participation in peacebuilding processes are becoming increasingly critical, there are still a lot of gaps in the Somali context. Previous studies have mostly concentrated on issues related to entrepreneurship, economic inclusion, governance, or the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and little research has examined how women entrepreneurs themselves understand the relationship between economic

empowerment and peacebuilding or how women-led economic initiatives contribute to social cohesion and resilience. This study aims to close this gap by collecting qualitative data from women entrepreneurs and important stakeholders in Somalia.

2.6. Theoretical and conceptual framework

2.6.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Liberal Feminist Theory and Human Security Theory. These theories provide complementary perspectives for understanding the relationship between women-led economic empowerment, peacebuilding, and social cohesion in Somalia.

2.6.2 Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal Feminist Theory argues that gender inequality results from discriminatory laws, institutional barriers, and social practices that restrict women's access to opportunities and resources available to men. The theory advocates equal access to education, employment, political participation, economic resources, and decision-making processes as pathways toward achieving gender equality (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Within the context of women-led economic empowerment, Liberal Feminist Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how structural barriers limit women's economic participation and entrepreneurial opportunities. In Somalia, women entrepreneurs often face constraints related to access to finance, property ownership, business networks, markets, and leadership opportunities. These barriers reduce women's ability to participate fully in economic activities despite their demonstrated contributions to household welfare and community development.

The theory further suggests that increasing women's access to economic opportunities can enhance their agency, improve decision-making power, strengthen leadership capacities, and promote greater participation in public life. Consequently, women's economic empowerment can contribute not only to improved livelihoods but also to broader social and political transformation. Within the Women, Peace, and Security framework, Liberal Feminist Theory highlights the importance of removing structural barriers that prevent women from participating fully in peacebuilding and development processes.

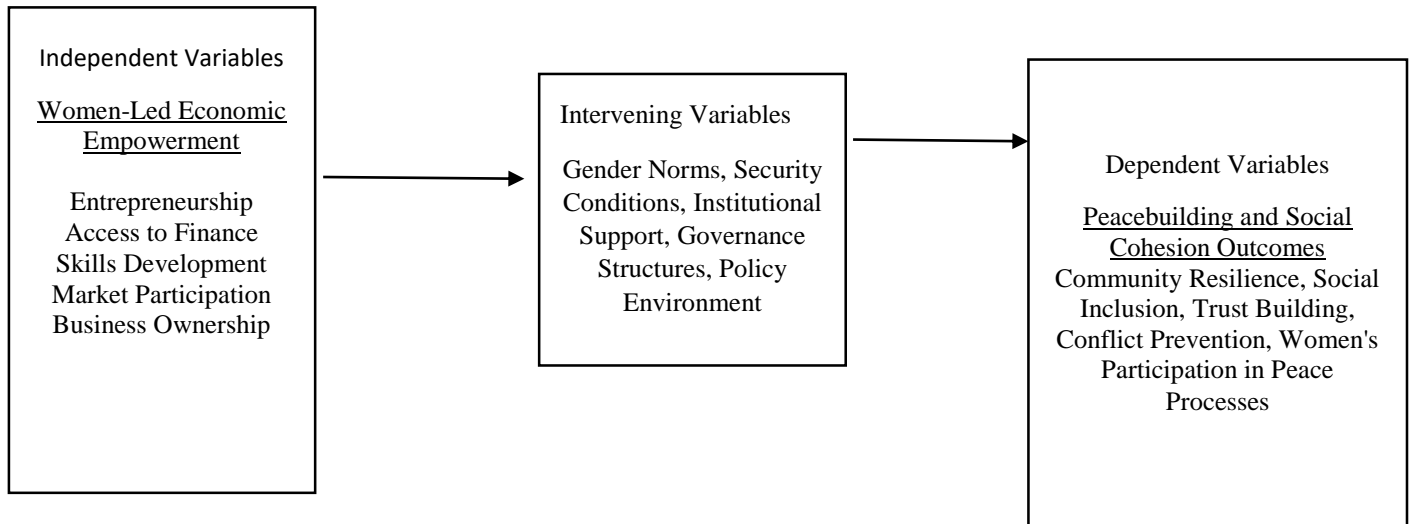
2.6.3 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory emerged as an alternative approach to traditional security paradigms that focus

primarily on state security and military threats. The theory emphasizes the protection and empowerment of individuals and communities by addressing threats to economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

The theory is particularly relevant to conflict-affected contexts such as Somalia, where insecurity extends beyond armed conflict to include poverty, displacement, livelihood insecurity, and social exclusion. Human Security Theory recognizes that sustainable peace requires addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions that contribute to vulnerability and instability. Women-led economic empowerment aligns closely with the principles of Human Security Theory because access to livelihoods, financial resources, and economic opportunities strengthens resilience and reduces vulnerability. Economic empowerment can enhance household security, improve community well-being, and create conditions that support social cohesion and peacebuilding. Through examining how women entrepreneurs contribute to community resilience and stability, this study applies Human Security Theory to understand the broader peacebuilding implications of women’s economic participation.

2.7 Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism was considered appropriate because it sought to understand how individuals constructed meaning from their experiences and interactions within specific social contexts. The paradigm recognized that reality was

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the assumption that women-led economic empowerment contributes to peacebuilding and social cohesion by enhancing women’s agency, economic independence, leadership, and participation within their communities. However, the relationship is influenced by contextual factors such as gender norms, security conditions, institutional support, policy frameworks, and access to economic resources.

Women-led economic empowerment is conceptualized as the independent variable and includes factors such as entrepreneurship, access to finance, business ownership, market participation, skills development, and economic decision-making. Peacebuilding and social cohesion constitute dependent variables and include outcomes such as community resilience, conflict prevention, trust-building, social inclusion, and women’s participation in peace and security processes.

The relationship between these variables is mediated by intervening factors including socio-cultural norms, security dynamics, governance structures, access to services, and implementation of gender-responsive policies. Conceptually, the framework can be represented as follows:

socially constructed and that understanding social phenomena required exploring participants’ perspectives, experiences, and interpretations. Given the study’s focus on women entrepreneurs lived experiences and perceptions regarding economic empowerment and peacebuilding, the interpretivist approach provided an appropriate philosophical foundation.

3.2 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative exploratory research design. Qualitative research was suitable for investigating complex social processes, experiences, and meanings that could not be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The exploratory design was particularly relevant because limited empirical research existed regarding the relationship between women-led economic empowerment and peacebuilding in Somalia. The qualitative approach allowed participants to describe their experiences, challenges, opportunities, and contributions to peacebuilding in their own words, thereby generating rich and context-specific insights.

3.3 Study Population

The study was conducted in Baidoa, Somalia, where women-led economic initiatives and peacebuilding interventions were actively implemented. The selection of the study location was guided by considerations of accessibility, security, diversity of economic activities, and the presence of women entrepreneurs operating within both formal and informal sectors.

The study population comprised women entrepreneurs participating in the IOM Women-to-Women Project in Baidoa, Somalia. These women were the primary beneficiaries of economic empowerment interventions and provided firsthand insights into the relationship between women's economic empowerment, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. The study also included key informants drawn from IOM staff, government institutions, local women's organizations, civil society actors, and community leaders who were involved in implementing or supporting women's economic empowerment and peacebuilding initiatives. Their perspectives provided a broader understanding of how women-led economic activities contributed to peacebuilding and resilience within the Women, Peace and Security framework in Somalia.

3.4 Target Population

The target population consisted primarily of women entrepreneurs operating small and medium-sized enterprises as well as informal businesses in Baidoa, Somalia. These women represented the primary unit of analysis because they possessed direct experience with economic empowerment initiatives and their potential contribution to peacebuilding.

The study also included key stakeholders involved in women's empowerment, economic development, governance, and peacebuilding, including representatives from government ministries, women's organizations, civil

society organizations, development agencies, community leaders, and peacebuilding practitioners.

3.5 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to identify participants with relevant knowledge and experience related to women-led economic empowerment and peacebuilding. Purposive sampling was appropriate because it enabled the researchers to select information-rich participants capable of providing detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

A total of six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with women entrepreneurs. Each group consisted of six to ten participants to facilitate meaningful interaction and discussion. In addition, twenty-two Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with policymakers, representatives of women's organizations, development practitioners, community leaders, and other stakeholders involved in Women, Peace and Security initiatives in Somalia. Sampling continued until sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives were achieved and thematic saturation was reached.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Focus Group Discussions were used to explore collective experiences, perceptions, and perspectives among women entrepreneurs. FGDs were particularly useful for understanding shared experiences and generating discussion around common challenges, opportunities, and strategies related to entrepreneurship and peacebuilding. A semi-structured discussion guide was used to facilitate conversations while allowing flexibility for participants to raise issues they considered important. Discussions were conducted in languages familiar to participants and were audio-recorded with informed consent.

Key Informant Interviews provided in-depth insights from individuals with specialized knowledge of women's economic empowerment, peacebuilding, governance, and development programming in Somalia. Semi-structured interview guides were used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes. Interviews focused on policy implementation, institutional support mechanisms, barriers to women's economic participation, and opportunities for strengthening women's contributions to peacebuilding.

Document review complemented primary data collection through the examination of relevant policy documents, government reports, donor reports, project evaluations, strategic plans, and academic publications. Documents related to Somalia's National Action Plan on UNSCR

1325, women's economic empowerment programs, and peacebuilding initiatives were reviewed to provide contextual understanding and triangulate findings.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data collected through FGDs and KIIs were transcribed, organized, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis provided a systematic process for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-step approach: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. NVivo software was used to facilitate coding and organization of the data.

3.8 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement with participants. Transferability was supported through rich descriptions of the study context and participants. Dependability was strengthened through maintaining detailed records of research procedures and decisions. Confirmability was ensured through documentation of analytical processes and maintenance of an audit trail.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board and relevant authorities in Somalia before data collection began. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and their ability to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts and reports, and pseudonyms were used where necessary. Data were securely stored and accessed only by the research team. Given the sensitivity of discussing experiences related to conflict and insecurity, interviews and discussions were conducted in a manner that minimized potential psychological distress and ensured respect for participants' dignity, privacy, and cultural context.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) carried out in Baidoa, Somalia, with assistance from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) are presented in this section. The analysis is structured in accordance with the goals of the study, which look at women-led economic empowerment, how it contributes to social cohesion and peacebuilding, and how the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda's policy and programmatic frameworks shape these dynamics.

The thematic analysis encapsulates lived experiences of female entrepreneurs, civil society actors, community leaders, and women working in agricultural, urban, informal, and youth-led businesses. The results are presented in a narrative that incorporates participants' voices to maintain contextual authenticity and richness of experience.

4.1 Women's Lived Experiences in Entrepreneurship within Conflict-Affected Contexts

The results reveal that in fragile socioeconomic settings such as Somalia, women's entrepreneurship is primarily motivated by necessity, resiliency, and household survival. In the face of ongoing instability, unemployment, and economic uncertainty, participants in both KIIs and FGDs consistently regard entrepreneurship as a coping strategy as well as a pathway towards dignity, self-reliance, and economic autonomy.

According to the participants, the majority of women run small-scale informal businesses, including as retail stores, food vending, tailoring, livestock trade, and small agro-processing businesses. Respondents emphasized how important these businesses are to home survival and community welfare, despite the fact that they are micro and solo-entrepreneurships.

According to one participant:

"Women put in a lot of effort, yet most enterprises are not established. They struggle with high costs, insecurity, and a lack of finances. Despite all these, women are the foundation of their families."

Similarly, a key informant noted that in conflict-affected environments where formal work alternatives are limited, women's entrepreneurship has emerged as a crucial survival tactic. Participants consistently discussed how their roles in the households have changed as a result of business, going from being financial dependents to

becoming primary earners and active decision-makers. Women can finance their children's education, pay for unexpected family needs, and fulfill significant social duties like weddings and funerals using the money they make from these businesses. As a result, women reported feeling more legitimate, respected, and confident in their families and larger communities.

These perspectives were reaffirmed by key informants, who pointed out that women's economic involvement is essential to household resilience in precarious situations. Even small businesses have a knock-on impact that enhances community resilience, lessens susceptibility to economic shocks, and improves family welfare.

Ultimately, the results indicate that women's entrepreneurship creates prospects for both long-term economic and social empowerment and is intricately linked to survival economies. These results are consistent with recent research that views women's informal entrepreneurship in unstable states as both a critical resilience-building tactic and an economic necessity in settings marked by systemic exclusion (Alonso et al., 2021; UN Women, 2023).

4.2 Challenges and Opportunities Influencing Women-Led Economic Initiatives

Structural and Economic Barriers

The results demonstrate how women entrepreneurs work in extremely restrictive conditions that are marked by insecurity, financial marginalization, poor infrastructure, and limited institutional support. Lack of access to financing was identified as the biggest issue across all KIIs and FGDs. Participants explained that collateral requirements, short credit records, and ongoing reliance on male guarantors make it extremely difficult for women to obtain formal credit. As one person pointed out:

"Women cannot obtain loans from banks without a male guarantor. Transportation to large markets is costly and unsafe".

Another major obstacle to business continuity was insecurity. Participants explained how violence and instability hinder travel, raise transportation expenses, put companies at risk of theft and loss, and deter investment and economic growth. Additionally, cultural norms continue to influence women's business experiences by restricting their freedom of movement and decision-making. Traditional gender norms continue to have an impact on many households and communities, despite respondents acknowledging that attitudes in the community are gradually improving as women's economic

contributions become more apparent. These results align with those of the World Bank (2022) and the OECD (2021), which highlight gendered financial exclusion, institutional instability, and insecurity as enduring barriers affecting women entrepreneurs in economies affected by conflict.

4.3 Emerging Opportunities

Despite these limitations, participants noted a number of emerging strategies that have improved women's economic participation. Women's cooperatives, NGO-supported livelihood programs, mobile money systems, and women's savings clubs were mentioned by respondents as crucial tools for boosting resilience and increasing financial inclusion. Digital financial services have greatly increased women's involvement in commerce, savings, and small-scale investment, especially in urban areas, according to civil society players. Similarly, women's cooperatives and self-help groups were universally acknowledged as critical avenues for group savings, peer education, and support during uncertain economic times. These results are consistent with empirical data showing how digital financial ecosystems are changing women's economic involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2023; GSMA, 2022).

4.4 Contribution of Women-Led Economic Empowerment to Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

The results highlight that informal peacebuilding efforts and women's economic empowerment are closely related. Economic stability was commonly cited by participants as a way to ease domestic tensions, promote social cohesiveness, and stop conflicts from getting worse.

One participant mentioned:

"Women are appreciated when they make money. They collaborate across clans in groupings. They provide their kids with food and shield them from harm. That is what peacebuilding is about.

Women business owners discussed the crucial responsibilities they play in resolving conflicts in homes, marketplaces, and communities. Their involvement in commercial networks that cut across social and clan boundaries promotes cooperation, peaceful interaction, and the development of trust between various community groups.

Additionally, participants explained that steady household incomes lessen conflict related to poverty, resource scarcity, and dependency. Women make a substantial

contribution to family stability and societal resilience by providing for children's everyday home-based needs, healthcare, and education. Additionally, women's business associations and savings groups became significant unofficial venues for peacebuilding. These organizations give women from various backgrounds the chance to work together, exchange resources, settle conflicts, and reinforce bonds that go beyond business collaboration. According to key informants, these networks often serve as a supplement to traditional governance and dispute resolution procedures.

Notwithstanding these contributions, respondents stated that women's engagement in formal peacebuilding and governance systems was low. Despite their significant contributions to informal peacebuilding, women entrepreneurs are still underrepresented in official decision-making processes. This indicates a significant gap between institutional acknowledgment under the Women, Peace, and Security framework and grassroots realities. These findings support UN Women's (2023) assertion that women's economic engagement is a key component of long-term peace in precarious situations. Similarly, Bouta et al. (2021), contend that women's economic agency promotes social cohesiveness and household stability.

4.5 Policy and Programmatic Interventions

Policy Implementation Gaps

The results demonstrates that while Somalia has policy frameworks that promote gender equality and women's empowerment, their implementation is still inadequate and uneven. Particularly with regard to financial inclusion, corporate regulation, and women's participation in governance structures, participants regularly pointed out a substantial gap between the creation of policies and their actual implementation.

As one representative of civic society noted:

"There are policies in place, but they are not being implemented well. Women continue to face barriers to market protection and licensing".

According to respondents, women's economic participation would be greatly enhanced by increasing financial products specifically designed for women running informal businesses, creating flexible lending channels, and enhancing access to inexpensive financing. In order to effectively promote women's enterprise growth, participants also emphasized the need for market linking initiatives, entrepreneurial development programs, vocational training, and institutional reforms. These

findings reflect broader governance challenges associated with institutional fragility in Somalia (OECD, 2021).

4.6 Programmatic Effectiveness

The majority of participants highlighted that NGO-led and donor-funded initiatives, such as financial literacy programs, business grants, entrepreneurship training, and awareness campaigns, have made notable impact. Nevertheless, these programs were often characterized as fragmented and short-lived. The need for comprehensive and long-lasting interventions that incorporate market opportunities, mentorship, long-term institutional support, skill development, and financial access was also highlighted by respondents. The formal inclusion of female entrepreneurs in local governance forums, peace committees, and decision-making processes was another suggestion made by the participants. They maintained that women's economic networks have to be acknowledged as respectable peacebuilding organizations with the potential to significantly promote social cohesion and avoidance of conflict.

4.7 Cross-Cutting Analysis

All of the data sources illustrate three general trends. First, women's entrepreneurship serves as both a means of empowerment and a means of economic survival. Women's decision-making authority, economic independence, and social recognition are all increased when they engage in economic activities, which changes home relationships. Second, despite rising entrepreneurial engagement, structural obstacles such as financial exclusion, insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, and institutional constraints continue to impede the viability and expansion of women-led businesses. Third, women's economic networks play significant but mostly unacknowledged roles in promoting peace. While functioning alongside official government systems, savings clubs, cooperatives, and business associations improve social cohesion, foster trust, and assist in resolving disputes. When taken as a whole, these results highlight a continuous gap between the significant grassroots contributions made by women and the limited institutional acknowledgment they receive within the current frameworks of governance and policy.

4.8 Integrated Key Findings

The findings demonstrate how women's economic empowerment in Baidoa, Somalia, functions as a peacebuilding mechanism, a development intervention, and a survival strategy. In addition to fostering social cohesiveness across varied groups, women's businesses immediately improve household welfare, educational

attainment, healthcare access, and community resilience. However, the full realization of women's economic potential is still hampered by financial marginalization, insecurity, poor infrastructure, a lack of institutional support, and constrictive sociocultural norms. Despite the critical roles that women play in community stability and informal peacebuilding, institutional governance and peacebuilding institutions continue to undervalue their contributions. Ultimately, the evidence suggests that, under Somalia's Women, Peace, and Security paradigm, women's economic empowerment should be viewed as a key component of social cohesion and sustained peacebuilding rather than as an economic issue.

4.9 Discussion

The results are consistent with recent research on fragile-state economies, which emphasizes women as key players in community development, informal recovery systems, and household resilience. However, women's entrepreneurship in Somalia primarily functions in informal, unstable, and institutionally fragile situations, in contrast to more institutionalized economies where entrepreneurship is backed by established financial systems and legal frameworks.

In similar contexts, entrepreneurship serves as a tool to enhance informal governance, increase women's agency, strengthen household resilience, and promote social cohesion in addition to generating revenue. Women's business networks often make up for institutional shortcomings by offering social safety, financial assistance, and conflict resolution. These findings support increasing evidence that women's economic empowerment in vulnerable environments should be viewed as both a peacebuilding intervention and a development strategy.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

According to this study, women entrepreneurs in Baidoa are essential to informal peacebuilding, household survival, and economic resilience. They contribute to social cohesiveness, community stability, and conflict resolution in addition to generating revenue. Despite notable accomplishments, women's participation in formal economic and governance systems is nevertheless restricted by enduring structural challenges, such as financial exclusion, insecurity, institutional limitations, and inadequate policy implementation. Therefore, coordinated interventions that simultaneously address financial inclusion, institutional reform, policy execution, security, and the meaningful engagement of women within peace and security systems are necessary to strengthen

women's economic empowerment. Despite their vital role in maintaining communities, women's significant contributions will remain mostly informal in the absence of such reforms.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Government institutions, financial service providers, and development partners should establish gender-responsive financing mechanisms that provide women entrepreneurs with accessible credit, flexible lending arrangements, low-collateral loan products, and tailored financial services. Addressing financial exclusion will enable women-owned enterprises to expand, improve business sustainability, and contribute more effectively to household welfare and community resilience.
2. Stakeholders should invest in comprehensive entrepreneurship support programs that include vocational training, business development services, financial literacy, mentorship, and market linkage initiatives. Such interventions would enhance women's business skills, increase enterprise competitiveness, and improve long-term economic sustainability.
3. National and local authorities should prioritize improvements in security, transportation systems, and market infrastructure to create a safer and more enabling environment for women-led businesses. Addressing insecurity and mobility constraints will reduce operational risks and facilitate greater economic participation by women.
4. Women entrepreneurs should be formally integrated into local peace committees, governance forums, and conflict-resolution mechanisms. Recognizing their existing contributions to informal peacebuilding would strengthen social cohesion, improve community-level conflict prevention, and ensure that women's voices inform peace and security decision-making processes.
5. Development agencies and civil society organizations should strengthen women's cooperatives, savings groups, and business associations as platforms for financial inclusion, peer learning, social support, and cross-clan collaboration. These networks have demonstrated significant potential for fostering trust-building and community cohesion.

6. The Federal Government of Somalia and its partners should enhance the implementation of the National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 through improved coordination, adequate resource allocation, stronger accountability mechanisms, and systematic monitoring and evaluation frameworks. This would ensure that women's economic empowerment is fully integrated into peacebuilding and recovery strategies.
7. Policymakers and development partners should design long-term interventions that explicitly link women's economic empowerment with peacebuilding outcomes. Integrated programming should combine livelihood support, leadership development, social cohesion initiatives, and community dialogue mechanisms to maximize women's contributions to sustainable peace and development.
8. Government agencies, community leaders, and development actors should recognize and support the informal peacebuilding roles played by women entrepreneurs. Institutional acknowledgment of these contributions can strengthen women's legitimacy as peace actors and enhance their influence within community and national development processes.

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