



Assessment summary

Women, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa

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Agency for Peacebuilding | AP

About AP

The assessment report was prepared by the Agency for Peacebuilding (AP), a non-profit association based in Bologna, Italy. AP's mission is to promote conditions that can enable the resolution of conflict, reduce violence and contribute to a durable peace across Europe, its neighbourhood and the world. AP's overall vision is of a world where conflicts can be transformed—through the research of innovative, non-violent and sustainable solutions—into opportunities to promote cooperation that is based on an open and honest confrontation.

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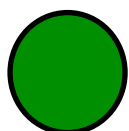
Acronyms

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
AP	Agency for Peacebuilding
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FGM/C	Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
IGAD	Inter-governmental Authority for Development
IWPF	IGAD Women and Peace Forum
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
THP	Traditional Harmful Practices
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

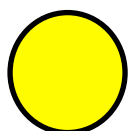
Note about the country dashboards

In order to facilitate the reading of findings and a comparison of country situations across the region, a visual system has been developed, which provides a qualitative measure of each country's performance against four broad categories. This information is presented as a dashboard right at the beginning of each country's specific section.

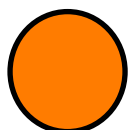
Each dashboard includes a series of simple symbols, whose meaning is hereunder explained:



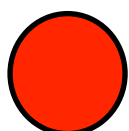
Green means that the situation relating to the specific category is positive and does not provide reasons for concern or alarm.



Yellow means that the situation relating to the specific category is somewhat positive, although one or two issues are present, which cause some concern or alarm.



Orange means that the situation relating to the specific category is somewhat negative, with multiple issues present, which are a source of concern for the country's short- and long-term outlook.



Red means that the situation relating to the specific category is very negative and of absolute concern.



An arrow facing upward means that the outlook relating to the specific category is likely to improve in the medium or long-term. It can also highlight the existence of specific opportunities for positive engagement.



An arrow facing downward means that the outlook relating to the specific category is likely to deteriorate in the medium or long-term. It can also highlight the existence of specific threats or risks for engagement.

Introduction

This report summarizes the findings from a wider assessment that was originally prepared to support the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (Kvinna till Kvinna) in exploring programmatic options in the Horn of Africa region. Kvinna till Kvinna started working in Africa in 2007, when it established an office in Liberia, and has since expanded its work to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The focus on the Horn of Africa is part of a process of possible new expansion, whereby the Foundation is interested in widening the scope of its operations to support women's organizations in additional countries across the African continent. The assessment was therefore conducted with three main objectives: first, to provide a context analysis for each country within the region; secondly, to analyse Kvinna till Kvinna's potential added value, also at country level; and thirdly, to analyse the risks and opportunities of working in the region, including security challenges, administrative requirements and the availability of funding.

Geographically, the focus of the assessment is on the eight countries that are, or have been, members of the Inter-governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), which is the main regional organization for the Horn of Africa. These countries are: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. Thematically, priority has been given to issues pertaining to the situation of women's rights and participation, but also to conflict and security and the operating space for civil society, including the status and strength of women's organizations.

Overall, the amount of information collected for each country has been very extensive. This is due to the wide scope of the assessment, as well as the desire to present as much information as possible to Kvinna till Kvinna, as well as other organizations that are considering whether (and how) they can play a role in promoting women empowerment and peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa. The information was collected through an extensive document review as well as more than 20 interviews with key stakeholders, such as women's rights activists and NGO representatives, working in all eight focus countries.

Main findings

Overall, the assessment paints a rather negative picture of the Horn of Africa in relation to nearly all of the focus countries and across most of the thematic categories chosen for the analysis. This said, the dynamics at the country and regional levels are complex and deeply intertwined; these create some similarities, but also vast differences. These similarities and differences can best be discussed regionally first, then country-by-country.

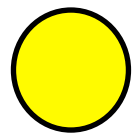
Regional trends

The Horn of Africa is clearly one of the most conflict-prone regions in the world. Three main types of conflicts affect the region: inter-state (such as territorial and border disputes, for example between Eritrea and Ethiopia), intra-state (involving rebel groups and civil wars usually linked to autonomy and political competition, for example the struggle between the Uganda government and the Lord's Resistance Army, or the current South Sudan civil war), and inter-communal (involving violence between ethnic and clan groups, for example among rural populations in Kenya and Somalia/land). Open and recurring conflict has had particularly negative consequences for the situation of women, leading to displacement, disempowerment and very high levels of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

At the normative level, however, there have been several region-wide processes and initiatives aimed at improving women's rights and gender equality. These include the 2002 50/50 policy in the African Union (AU), the adoption of the 2003 Maputo Protocol and the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, and the development, in 2011, of the IGAD Regional Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. These frameworks are positive indicators of the attention that has been given to these issues—by governments, donors and international institutions—but they have also generally failed to bring about concrete changes. As it is, the situation of women is still mostly affected by violence, which is the result of conflict, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and traditions, and an adherence to customary or Sharia law, which curtails women's rights and gives them few, if any, opportunities for empowerment.

Finally, two more regional trends are worth mentioning. First, there has been a general clampdown on fundamental rights and civil society, which has been more pronounced in countries like Ethiopia and Sudan, but also affects relatively more liberal nations such as Kenya and Uganda. This clampdown is closely tied to the region-wide rise of terrorism and the subsequent adoption of anti-terrorism legislation; but it has also been driven by political struggles internal to each country. Secondly, there has been a general backlash against gender minorities across the entire Horn of Africa: homosexuality has now been criminalized in most of the region's countries; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) activists are regularly harassed and targeted by governments.

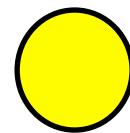
Djibouti



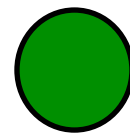
Women's rights and participation



Conflict and security



Civil society environment

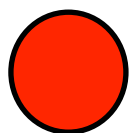


Women's movement

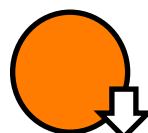
Djibouti is one of the region's most stable countries and its biggest conflict is political, as power is centralized in its long-standing president and opposition figures and parties are regularly harassed. Women's rights are generally protected, but elements of Sharia law within the civil and penal codes limit some of their rights; Levels of SGBV remain high—in particular female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C)—as do women's illiteracy rates. The space for civil society has been constrained in general; however, women's organizations can operate in relative freedom and their main challenge is linked to their capacity, which is limited.

Djibouti is a small country with fewer critical needs compared to its neighbours. It however plays an important role in supporting regional initiatives on peace and development, including on women, peace and security. The country has been an important actor in peace efforts in Somalia, but is also facing a few critical challenges of its own, including a prolonged draught and a refugee crisis related to the civil war in Yemen. Also relevant is the fact that very few international NGOs are active in the country and that donor commitments are very limited.

Eritrea



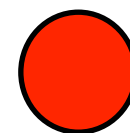
Women's rights and participation



Conflict and security



Civil society environment

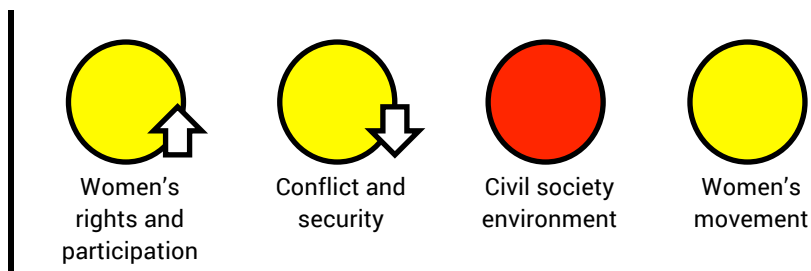


Women's movement

Eritrea is by all measures a police state where human rights abuses against the population are commonplace and institutionalized. The government is repressive in all aspects of life and while there is no specific bias against women, these are also victims of SGBV and several traditional harmful practices (THPs), like FGM/C. There is at present no space for civil society to work in the country, with only national unions able to provide some social services.

Eritrea is also a destabilizing force in the region. It remains engaged in open conflict with Ethiopia on border demarcation issues, but has also engaged in armed conflict with other neighbours, including Djibouti and Sudan. Importantly, Eritrea has played the role of spoiler in the mediation efforts to build peace in Somalia, even supporting the terrorist group Al Shabab. Currently it is impossible for international NGOs to work in the country and even most donor governments have cut diplomatic ties to Eritrea.

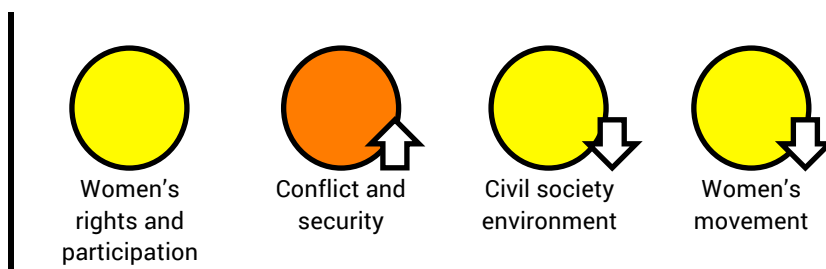
Ethiopia



Ethiopia is possibly the most important country in the East Africa region today, having by far the largest population (over 94 million people, or more than double the population of Kenya) and the fastest growing economy. Ethiopia is now also relatively stable, although armed rebel groups are still active in some of its regions. The country is a federation of ethnic-based states, with a democratic elected government that belies the nature of the state, which is a near-dictatorship in many respects. Ethiopia also maintains hostile relations with Eritrea, with which it fought a war in 1998-2000, and Somalia/Land, where it is engaged militarily.

In terms of women's rights and participation, the country has however very strong normative frameworks: the federal constitution is a highly progressive document and women are well represented in national and local elected bodies. This said, they continue to face high levels of violence, including in the form of THPs (such as FGM/C) and child marriage. Women and girls also have fewer economic and educational opportunities than men, although indicators in this respect have significantly improved over the last 15 years. Finally, the space for civil society is severely constricted and NGOs are discouraged from working on human rights or governance; activists are also regularly harassed and targeted by the government. This has not prevented international donors from investing huge resources in the country, and international NGOs from working on important social issues, including those relating to women empowerment. The Ethiopian government remains however very watchful over civil society and severely limits the work that NGOs can do in the domains of human rights, social cohesion and peace.

Kenya

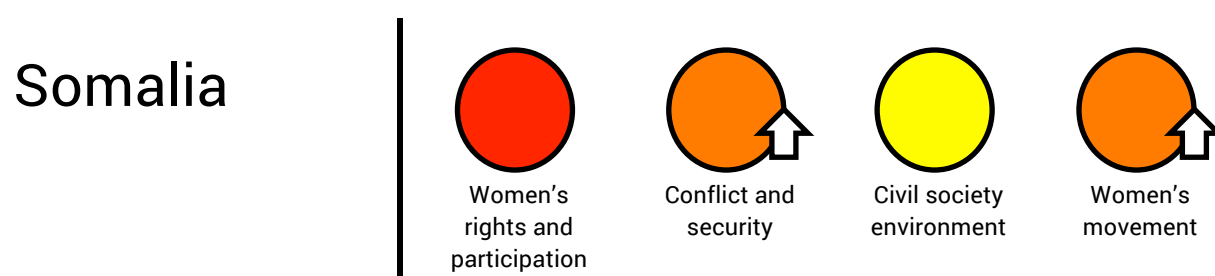


Kenya is a particularly interesting case: on the one side it is one of the most liberal countries in the region, with strong affirmative action provisions to promote women's rights and participation and a vibrant and dynamic civil society; on the other, however, it is a country deeply affected by violence and conflict, where the gains made by women have not yet necessarily translated into concrete improvements. The best example of this is the post-electoral violence that engulfed the whole country in 2007-08, which was driven by a struggle for power between political elites and perpetrated through the mobilization of groups along communal and ethnic lines. The violence had a distinct gender dimension,

with women being systematically harassed and abused, including mass rapes. Yet, these acts have so far gone unpunished.

The social and political situation in Kenya is currently also being influenced by two important factors. First, the country is undergoing a process of devolution, which has triggered important changes in governance structures. This process is the result of the approval, in 2010, of Kenya's new constitution, which requires that more authority be shifted from the central government to local authorities, an ongoing process. Kenya has also seen a surge in terrorism over the last few years, linked primarily to Somalia's Al Shabab. The country has witnessed several tragic terrorist attacks and has responded to these with brutal anti-terrorism campaigns and a crackdown on refugees in particular.

The country is now preparing for new elections in 2017 and the space for civil society is still open in spite of greater regulation by the government—a side effect of its response to the terrorist threat. Overall, working on women's empowerment still enjoys great legitimacy and is supported by the government and all donor agencies.

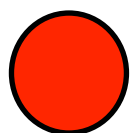


Somalia, including the *de facto* autonomous entities of Puntland and Somaliland, is, along with South Sudan, the most conflict-affected country in the region. And although it has achieved greater stability since 2009, it still faces dire humanitarian challenges.

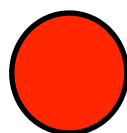
Somalia/land can effectively be divided into three regions: Somaliland, which declared its independence in 1991 and has been relatively stable and safe since then; Puntland, which has been autonomous since 1998 and also relatively stable, though less than Somaliland; and South-Central Somalia, which has been ravaged by violent conflict and remains insecure. Presently, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has been established in Mogadishu and is expanding its control over the rest of South-Central, with strong backing from international donors and the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Puntland has opted into the federal system, but is still negotiating its autonomy, while Somaliland does not recognize the federal state and remains *de facto* independent.

The situation of women remains dire in all three regions, where representation is low due to the clan-based governance system. On the positive side, all of the regions' constitutions provide some protection of women's rights, and women movements have grown in each. All legal frameworks remain, however, based on Sharia law and SGBV and THPs are commonplace, as is the general marginalization and disempowerment of women and young girls. Civil society can work relatively freely, although security remains a huge challenge, especially in South-Central Somalia, where Al Shabaab is still very active. The increasing stabilization has however brought new international NGOs into the country, with strong support from the donor community.

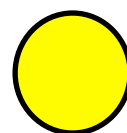
South Sudan



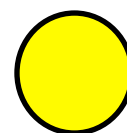
Women's rights and participation



Conflict and security



Civil society environment



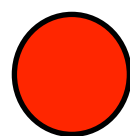
Women's movement

South Sudan has suffered from decades of conflict, with its independence in 2011 proving to be only a moment of short respite. In 2014, a full civil war erupted between the government of president Salva Kiir and rebel factions loyal to vice-president Riek Machar, which has led to thousands of casualties and millions of people fleeing their homes.

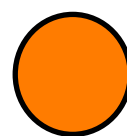
The civil conflict is linked to governance issues and underlying inter-communal tensions between the country's two largest ethnic groups (the Dinka tribe, to whom President Kiir belongs, and the Nuer tribe, which is Machar's). Worryingly, the violence has deeply affected civilians and women in particular, who have been the victims of mass human rights abuses, including mass rapes. In August 2015, the signing of a peace treaty formally put an end to hostilities, calling for the formation of a transitional government. The agreements have however been unable to halt the conflict, and violence has once again erupted across the country—this in spite of the considerable presence of blue helmets under the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

Normatively, the country has good frameworks for protecting women's rights and ensuring their participation, including strong affirmative action provisions. It has yet to sign on to CEDAW, however, and institutions remain weak. The August 2015 peace accord had, positively, integrated several measures to address SGBV during the conflict, but these remain on hold given the return to armed violence. Civil society can operate freely across the country, but poor infrastructure and lack of security are huge impediments; much of the country also remains in a state of humanitarian crisis.

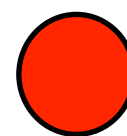
Sudan



Women's rights and participation



Conflict and security



Civil society environment



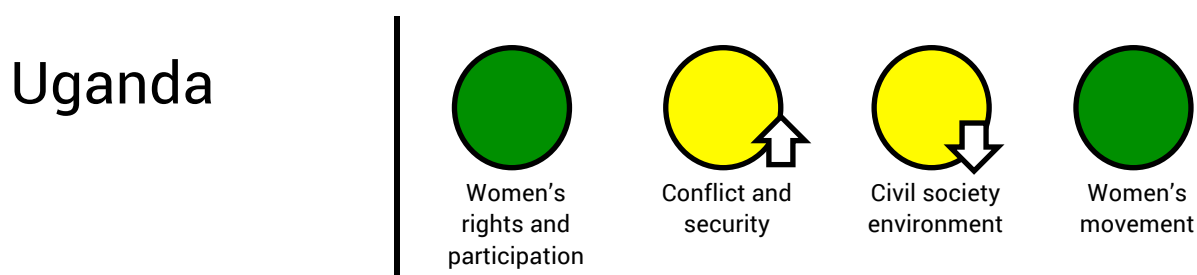
Women's movement

Sudan has some of the worst indicators in the whole region: currently, it is facing internal conflicts in the states of Blue Nile, Darfur and South Kordofan, as well as on-going hostilities with South Sudan, with which it nearly went to war in 2013. These conflicts are tied to control over natural resources, as well as Sudan's national identity; their main consequences have been high levels of insecurity and an outpouring of refugees to neighbouring countries.

Normatively, women's rights and participation are heavily undermined by a strong adherence to Sharia law: for example, even though there is a quota for women's participation into elected bodies, women actually lack the freedom to move freely and

independently. Sudan’s public order law also allows police officers to publicly whip women who are accused of public indecency. Stoning and crucifixion remain judicial punishments in the country. Unsurprisingly, Sudan is one of the two countries in the region not to have signed on to CEDAW. SGBV remains pervasive, with as many as 88% of Sudanese women having undergone FGM/C.

The space for civil society is heavily constricted, as the government exercises arbitrary controls and discourages work on any social issue outside of the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This notwithstanding, historically there was a strong women’s movement in the country and several organizations are still active in spite of the government’s opposition to this type of work. Some international donors are still present in the country, as several international NGOs. Their work, with few exceptions, remains however focused on humanitarian aid.



Uganda is the country with the most positive indicators and is, along with Djibouti, one of the most stable nations in the region. The long-standing conflict between the government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), which has ravaged the country’s northern regions, has largely ceased and reconciliation and reconstruction efforts are now on-going there. Ongoing tensions in the country are limited, first, to the political struggle between the government of long-time president Yoweri Museveni and opposition parties; and secondly, to inter-communal incidents especially on the border with the DRC.

Much like Kenya, Uganda has a progressive framework for women’s participation and a dynamic and vibrant civil society. Women’s participation is strong in elected bodies and working on gender equality enjoys strong legitimacy. Uganda also has one of the strongest women’s movements in the entire region, with women-led national NGOs playing an important role in advocacy and service delivery. This said, most gains have remained superficial and the status of women is still tied to traditional patriarchal norms, which limit their opportunities, especially in the countryside. Uganda has also been one of the quickest to criminalize homosexuality.

Recently, the Ugandan government has also cracked down on civil society, with the parliament passing, in November 2015, a law that imposes greater restrictions on NGOs. While this led to several protests, it was signed into law by president Museveni in March 2016. These trends warrant monitoring, but the country as a whole remains open to organizations working to improve the situation of women, as well as peacebuilding.

Opportunities and challenges

In general, the Horn of Africa's negative indicators in relation to women's rights and participation, as well as peace, describe a situation where the need for additional efforts is strong—arguably even in countries, like Kenya, where civil society is vibrant and the NGO space can appear saturated. One of the main justifications for engagement is, in fact, the general need to target local or grassroots organizations, which are, in all of the region's countries, still weak and poorly supported by both the government and the donor community. Additional opportunities for engagement are hereby presented:

- The increasing stabilization of Somalia is creating a more favourable environment for NGOs to work in, not just on humanitarian issues, but also on governance, peacebuilding and gender equality. Stabilization efforts are also being strongly supported by the international community, with several donor countries recently re-opening a presence in the country and increasing development aid.
- South Sudan's 2015 peace treaty has several provisions that are aimed at strengthening gender equality and women's participation. It also includes the creation of a special tribunal to address cases of SGBV perpetrated during the conflict. If current violence is halted and the treaty can be implemented, it will open opportunities for civil society to engage on issues relating to both women's rights and peace, at various levels—from local communities to the highest echelons of government.
- Elections in Kenya are scheduled for 2017 and will provide an opportunity to strengthen women's participation. The country has in fact a 33% quota for women in elected bodies, but this has not been reached in the last elections. Women will also be most at risk in the case of election-related violence, and prevention will thus be a priority.
- IGAD is becoming the pre-eminent regional organization for cooperation and conflict resolution. It has supported successful mediation efforts in both Somalia and South Sudan; and it sees the participation of all Horn of Africa's countries, in spite of the bilateral tensions that might exist between them. IGAD has also spearheaded region-wide efforts to promote the women, peace and security agenda, and it has recently established the IGAD Women and Peace Forum (IWPF).
- Finally, it should be noted that there is strong and growing donor support for work supporting women's rights and empowerment across the region—including among Italy, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Donor funds play important roles in supporting NGOs work in particular in Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda.

While the above opportunities can be enticing, it is important to also underline the daunting challenges that organizations working—or wishing to work—in the region face. First and foremost, security remains volatile in several countries, in particular in parts of Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. This is due to the threat of terrorist attacks and, in the case of South Sudan, open civil conflict. Administrative restrictions are such that in some countries it is nearly impossible to work on women's rights, including in Eritrea, Ethiopia

and Sudan. This situation is further compounded by a general clampdown on civil freedoms, which has affected all countries.

Finally, while gender equality is an issue that is generally supported by governments, at the social level there are, in most countries, customary norms, traditions or Sharia law provisions, which are biased against women but also deeply entrenched into the fabric of community life. Working to change these can be a huge challenge, as NGOs and activists might trigger backlash from various groups and expose themselves to physical danger.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, while the Horn of Africa is clearly a complex, difficult and volatile region, it could offer many opportunities for international NGOs to establish a presence and operate. As organizations map their next steps, the following recommendations are offered:

- 1) Ensure sound understanding of regional conflict and peace dynamics – Given the layers of conflict across the region, it will be important for any organization to have a regional perspective of conflict trends and dynamics, regardless of where it decides to work.
- 2) Assess the practical and political implications of setting up an office in any one country – This decision should be taken carefully, as it might negatively affect an organization's later expansion. Similarly, a thorough context analysis should be used to inform the selection of local partners or personnel, especially where deep social divisions and conflict exist (e.g. Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, etc.).
- 3) Carry out a thorough assessment of security situation and develop appropriate security protocols (allocating an appropriate budget for this).
- 4) Make sure staff members respect and have a thorough understanding of cultural and religious norms relevant to women's rights and situation – Communities are attached to customary norms and traditions, and opposition to them might lead to backlash.
- 5) Monitor the overall operating space for civil society and legislative changes.
- 6) Conduct an in-depth analysis of what other international NGOs (INGOs) are doing in the pre-selected countries and of the needs of women in each of them.
- 7) Programmatically, organizations should consider engaging on UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the interplay between preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies and gender, and addressing impunity in relation to SGBV.
- 8) Finally, it is important that interventions are designed to maximize sustainability. This means that NGOs should choose the most appropriate scale for their work, target specific issues, regions or groups, and be transparent about the support they will provide in the long-term.