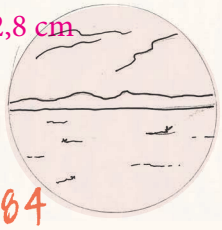
vignettes
2,8 x 2,8 cm



1984

Born in 1984, in Puntland nomadic area of Somalia

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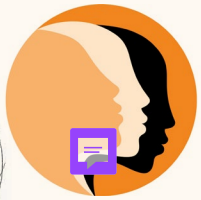
1988

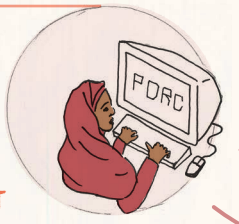
Amina is four when she separated from her parents. She grows up with her aunt and sister.





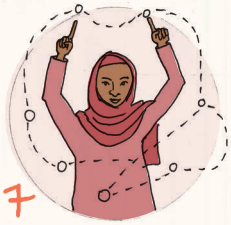
1991 - 1994

Armed conflicts start, Amina flees from Somalia to live in the Utange refugee camp in Kenya.



1994

She goes back to Puntland where she graduates from high school and is selected with 20 others for training at PDRC.*



2007

Amina is selected to join the team managing a 3-year programme about women and peace.



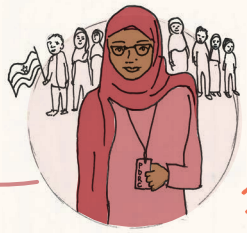
2013

Amina joins a programme about women and peace leadership in the USA.



2017

She wins the inaugural Peace-builder for Water Award.



2019

Amina is appointed head of PDRC's gender equality and social inclusion unit.

*PDRC is a local think tank providing crucial qualitative research, data tracking, and structured training for female politicians and peacebuilders.



MEET THE NETWORK

Amina

CONTEXT

Back in 1991, intense clan fighting co[illegible]etely devastated Somalia. Today, while there is some political agreeme[illegible]rue reconciliation has never trickled down to the grassroots and community levels. Communities are still actively fighting over long-standing grievances, a cycle fuelled by deep poverty and low incomes. In addition, about half of the population are nomads who are losing their rural livelihoods to severe, climate-change induced droughts. This forces families to migrate to towns that simply don't have the infrastructure or resources to support them, driving many desperate men to join the military. At the same time, terrorist groups remain a massive threat. Following the 1991 government collapse, various peace efforts eventually led to the 2002 Djibouti Agreement, establishing the current federal structure. While Puntland state is relatively stable and holds elections, it still operates on a traditional clan power-sharing system with [illegible] fragile, dysfunctional institutions. Electoral representation is [illegible]tly decided by male clan elders. Because women marry outside their clans, [illegible]e elders argue that women don't 'exclusively belong' to either their father's or husband's lineage, using this loophole to com[illegible]tely freeze women out of leadership roles.

Amina's journey is deeply intertwined with the Somali women's movement in Puntland, starting from being completely sidelined from social and political spaces. Puntland, despite being one of the most stable parts of Somalia, remains very fragile, and is a male dominated society, where men lead all the political parties: they are the commissioners and they monopolise all governance structures. Only elders were entitled to participate in peacebuilding and reconciliation talks, reconciling communities and clans. Women and other sectors of the communities were not formally involved. At the time, it was very taboo even to talk about women's issues. "Sometimes people would even refuse to attend events if women's topics were on the agenda, saying this is from outside and is not our culture. It is anti-religion to talk about women's issues."

Somali women: the silent architects of peace

However, over the past few years, this has started to change. Like Amina who was given an opportunity to join PDRC as a fresh high school graduate, women started to informally push for more inclusion in governance, reconciliation and state building.

Between 2005 and today, women in Puntland have slowly but surely driven grass-roots survival, community cohesion and conflict resolution. Steadily, they have transformed from informal, invisible mediators within a highly patriarchal clan framework into increasingly formalised political actors, institutional leaders, and localised peace network builders. In 2007, when Amina started to work on these issues, very few women were present in discussions related to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes at the community level. "Governance can't be separated from peacebuilding, that's why we pushed hard to have women at government levels. **When a conflict happens, it's key to have women inside the system, so they are part of the committees solving it**". So along with others, she started advocating, informally at first, hosting the delegates during reconciliation talks, cooking for them for example, just to be in the same room and listen to their discussions. Then women started to talk about cohesion, a culture of peace and raising awareness within the population. Using their dual-clan identities (lineage by birth and lineage by marriage) women would navigate frontline zones that men could not safely cross. They established peace committees, intercepted early warning signs of retaliatory clan killings and funded local peace agreements through business networks.

In 2007, with the support of Amina's organisation, a regional women's joint peace committee was established in Galkayo with the aim of working on community awareness, ceasefire negotiation and monitoring as well as social cohesion. The committee is composed of members from separate sides of the city, which is divided into two states. Members of this committee were included in the signature of the 2017 Galkacyo peace agreements, a major achievement.

From clan-based to inclusive democracy

After the war ended, there was no government and there were no effective structures and no social services for the population. In 2005–2006, local councils were established in Puntland for the first time. At that time, there were no women present (or rarely), but this did not prevent them from voicing their needs. Through public campaigns, women started to advocate against the clan-based structure and for the inclusion of women in local councils. "Women are the ones who line up to vote, and alongside young people, are very active in public campaigns. But not only can you not be elected as a woman or a young person, you don't even get access to services. So, we engaged with civil society and leveraged the gender ministry. **In 2007, we experienced huge success—we managed to push for a presidential decree saying that 30% of the councils should be female.** We did a lot of advocacy, saying that the image to the outside world of male only power is not good. One of our arguments was also that today's women are educated, many having graduated university and that awareness and knowledge of women has changed. Many have political ambitions now. Then using this presidential decree, we started campaigning. We never reached 30% as elected councillors but at least the number of women increased. At the latest elections, we reached 17% of women as elected councillors. It is a massive success—showing we have moved from a clan-based to a democracy-based society."



We are moving, but I still feel the gap

Amina's peacebuilding journey started with the opportunity given by the former directors of PDRC, when she did not even have a university degree. At first, she was supported by her aunt and sisters and today she can count on her husband. "He is proud of me and my work. He works in the same ecosystem; he understands what I do. He is not an ordinary man".

Amina feels the passion that drives her at every hour of the day "I am passionate. I feel the need to advocate, to fight to get space and a platform for women. When I see women are still excluded, they are victims being used as tools, and I have to keep fighting". Despite the remaining gaps in public services, Amina still feels the difference from 2007. Even though men continue to hold the majority of political positions, women have more substantive roles and are more present. "Across Somalia I see women's networks, women's organisations, individual activists, and they are all very active and engaged". So, there is hope. Hope that the presence of women in governance will positively influence the country but also hope that young people (who represent 75% of the population) get a chance to be part of the change, alongside the women.

"We are not where we want to be. Women are not represented everywhere, but perceptions have changed - we are moving. And one day, elders and politicians will end up realising that it's not a real peace process if young people, and women are not at the forefront".

—

Amina is one of the Feminists Connecting for Peace network members. For more information please see 1000peacewomen.org/en