



African Philanthropy Network
THE VOICE AND ACTION FOR AFRICAN PHILANTHROPY



URURKA CODKA HAWEENKA
DHAQANKU NAAFEYAY

Voices and Actions of the Minority Women and Girls in Somaliland on their Response to the Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic



1. About the Voice of Somaliland Minority Women

The Voice of Somaliland Minority Women (VOSOMWO) is a non-governmental and nonprofit, and voluntary organization. Working in Social Protection, live hoods, Shelter, Education, Skills Development, Human rights, Environmental protection, and Community development. The organization officially launched on 20 August 2004 in Hargeisa, the capital city of Somaliland. The minority women activists, human rights defenders from three outcast minority communities (Goboye, Tumals, and Yibirs), and other well-wishers from the majority clans established the organization. VOSOMWO promotes and protects human rights and focuses on deep-rooted discrimination against women from the outcast minority social groups and the social protection and community development in all regions of Somaliland. VOSOMWO Naissance of VOSOMWO intended for the human rights support for the needy minority women and children in developmental areas of rights, protection, health, education, Sports, culture, research, and documentation, in the course of Mass media, publications are all priority areas of interventions designed for Human right advocacy in a multi-disciplinary way at all levels of social lives.

The Voice of Somaliland Minority Women (VOSOMWO), in collaboration with the Africa Philanthropy Network (APN), conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) in Hargeisa, Somaliland. VOSOMWO held the FGD on July 21, 2022, at Daxlls Restaurant, Somaliland.

2.0 Background Situation

Since the first laboratory-confirmed case was reported on 16 March 2019, patients have been notified and confirmed in remote areas, ensuring that the virus is circulating widely throughout the country. A lack of a proactive testing strategy at the beginning of the outbreak has led to widespread clusters of cases¹. As of 8 June, Somalia has seen 2334 confirmed cases and 83 COVID-19-related deaths, with the number of daily cases not yet declining.

In the wake of COVID-19, Somaliland did not have the testing capacity for PCR. It sent samples to the Kenya Medical Research Institute in Nairobi, a laboratory supported by WHO and the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC). World Health Organization (WHO) continued to ship samples for testing from different parts of the country, with many tests coming back positive. Given the apparent transmission of the population's disease, and to quickly isolate and treat cases, World Health Organization ramped up testing capacities and swiftly made three testing laboratories functional - in Hargeisa by 30 April 2020, the molecular testing facility for COVID-19 was operational. This was an outstanding achievement for WHO and partners and was made possible given the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic. UN agencies and international partners, particularly the Italian Development Cooperation, the UN Humanitarian Air Services, and the UN World Food Program, stepped into, providing funds for PCR equipment and other laboratory supplies and flights to ship the equipment.

In addition, WHO brought in two virologists from Ethiopia through a UN flight to boost the knowledge and capacity needed to run these laboratories. The Puntland Forensic Center, supported by the Swedish Government and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), came forward to offer workforce support for the testing for

COVID-19. Given the geographical vastness of the country, COVID-19 samples are currently being sent to the different testing locations by aerial transportation.

Despite the achievements in strengthening laboratory and surveillance capacities, many challenges remain due to societal norms and cultural issues where self-isolation, social distancing, and quarantine have not been well implemented. COVID-19 testing is passive and done only for those coming to health facilities, with results taking around ten days. While waiting for test results, people move freely in highly populated cities, increasing the active transmission of the virus. Stigma is also a vital issue, with many symptomatic or potentially infected cases hiding in fear of a diagnosis. Lack of risk communication and community engagement from the Government compounded the matter.

3.0 The Purpose and Objectives of the FGD

The purpose of the FGD was to share experiences and gain knowledge on how policies put in place by the state to respond to COVID-19 impact on women and girls in Somaliland. The FGD aimed to document women and girls' strategies, tools, and practices to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The FGD identified concrete actions towards building resilience for dealing with similar future pandemics. The FGD, in particular, had the following specific objectives:

- a. To share experiences and gain knowledge on how policies put in place by the state impacts women and girls in times of COVID 19.
- b. To document strategies used and philanthropic practices adopted by women and girls in responding to the pandemic.
- c. To learn how women and girls and Voice of Somaliland Minority Women Organisation are currently doing to build their institutional resilience for dealing with crises and future pandemics

4.0 The Participants

This FGD was participated by 11 marginalized women and girls living in Hargeisa, whom their age is between 18 years to 40 years. Eleven (11) marginalized minority women and Voice of Somaliland Minority Women Organization (VOSOMWO) attended the FGD held on July 21, 2022, at Dalxlls Restaurant, Somaliland. The list of participants is presented in Annex 1.

5.0 Summary of the Discussion

The plenary discussion, as well as questions and answers are summarized as follows:

<p>How women and girls and Voice of Somaliland Minority Women Organization engaged with the formulation of COVID 19 related policies?</p>	<p>Due to existing political situation, there were no specific COVID related policy issued by Somaliland government. However, WHO and other international organisations working in Somaliland like UNICEF followed WHO issued guidelines issued to respond to COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>VOSOMWO implemented WHO guidelines on COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>How did policies put in place by the state impacted the marginalized group in times of COVID 19?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and girls in Somaliland followed WHO guidelines on COVID 19. VOSOMWO collaborated with the local governments in Somaliland in preventing the spread of COVID-19. • The availability of COVID -19 protection materials and improved sanitation, together with VOSMWO and district contributions, helped to ensure the continuity of the services at the health centers and primary schools during this critical time. • VOSOMWO seen itself increasing its involvement with local authorities. In turns the local authority also seen the important role play by the organization at the district level. • VOSOMWO actively worked with the community members in setting up committees to fill in the gap between the community and the local authorities. COVID -19 policy like school closure, caused early pregnancies and early marriages and increased domestic violence. The challenge was mitigated by awareness creation on the rights of the child. • The notable impact of COVID 19 to the marginalized communities in Somaliland was the increased collaboration with the local government authorities in implementing WHO COVID-19 guidelines. The collaboration created strong ownership at local level which helped to undertake COVID-19 response activities diligently.
<p>What strategies used by women and girls and Voice of Somaliland Minority Women Organization to engage and support the marginalized groups respond to COVID 19?</p>	<p>As a response to COVID-19 pandemic, VOSOMWO engaged with vulnerable and marginalized groups using the following strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Communication and outreach Prevention Information on COVID 19: VOSOMWO provided women street vendors and migrant girl's accurate information about COVID-19 prevention which was communicated through guideline posters, leaflets, loud speakers and in person counseling. 150 posters of information education communication materials in line with Somaliland national preparedness and response plan have been distributed and sticker to the houses of women street vendors, migrant girls and their relatives. VOSOMWO also has taken steps to educate women street vendors about the virus and produced video featuring messages on COVID-19 with practical prevention measures such as hand washing and physical distancing and shared in mobile application WhatsApp. Importantly, the video clip included

	<p>messaging to counter myths and falsehoods information, particularly those that promote social stigma, dangerous behaviors and ways to seek help in the communities.</p> <p>ii. Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) Distribution: VOSOMWO provided 180 personal protective equipment including masks and gloves to front line women street vendors, migrant girls and their families. The protective Supplies was intended to keep them safe while coming into close contact with populations.</p> <p>iii. Build capacities of local leaders and influential people about COVID-19 pandemic: VOSOMWO worked with key influential groups, trusted community groups (local influential group such as community leaders, religious leaders, community volunteers etc.), and local networks (women street vendors and migrant girl’s associations) to build their capacity for awareness raising and promoting healthy practices through participatory interventions in the marginalized areas.</p> <p>As they face the pandemic, Somaliland women are a critical asset and source of resilience. Whether in conflict or within the pandemic Somali women have stepped in to meet the immense needs of their communities.</p>
<p>What support did you received from the government and from the individuals?</p>	<p>From the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hargeisa district officials have worked with UNICEF and other JPLG partners to slow the spread of COVID-19 and minimize the impacts of the outbreak on children and their families. UN agencies set up critical water and sanitation facilities, hygiene supplies, and protective equipment for the most vulnerable communities. Key health and nutrition services continued, disseminated vital public health messaging advice, and supported school officials in safely reopening schools. FGD participants stated further that stated that they had received the following preventive services to save their lives from the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Masks and sanitizers and trash bin • COVID-19 related awareness • Water accessibility and sanitation. <p>Participants stated that since the pandemic's start, WHO had taken a more integral role in informing and coordinating donors in Somalia. Somalia saw WHO as the leader in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and partners rely on WHO's situation reports and briefings to the Somali Health Donor Group. WHO influenced VOSOMWO decisions to ensure funds are adequately distributed and directed to high-priority areas and avoid duplication.</p>

<p>What Innovations emerged in response to challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p>In responding to the questions, participants stated the increased use of information technology like remote working and online meetings helped the organization continue implementing their activities and serve their constituents. However, FGD participants reported the challenge of marginalized and minority women's access to modern technology due to a lack of necessities like computers and accessories needed to go online.</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

6.0 The Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats, and Opportunities

In the plenary, participants conducted a deep reflection of the situation, and identify the following:

<p>Strengths</p> <p>Being recognized by the local government authority and working in partnership was mentioned by the participant as one of VOSOMWO's significant strengths. The FGD stated VOSOMWO as an organization accepted by the minority Somali groups to serve as a service provider. The organization proved its capability and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic through awareness building to the community and its capacity to mobilize and distribute COVID-19 pandemic protective gear.</p>	<p>Weaknesses</p> <p>Coordinating and working with other CSOs and having a coordinated COVID-19 pandemic response. Also, due to the country's vastness, it was hard for VOSOMWO COVID -19 response to reach all the minority communities.</p>
<p>Opportunities</p> <p>The local government authority ready to partner with VOSOMWO and implement joint activities is an opportunity. The existence of international organizations prepared to partner with VOSOMWO was also an opportunity to further the organization's mission of serving minority women and girls. COVID-19 itself created funding opportunities for VOSOMWO activities like publications and awareness campaigns.</p>	<p>Threats</p> <p>Insecurity within the country stated by FGD participants as a major threat.</p>

7.0 Recommendations

Participants were provided with an opportunity to propose what should be done to increase resilience of the organization to respond to crises and future pandemics. The FGD participants stated the following:

- Invest in technology and make it accessible to marginalized communities, women, and girls.
- Enhanced stakeholders' collaboration and partnership building
- Increase access to clean water and hygiene and

- Have particular interventions for displaced people to help them respond to future pandemics.

Other recommendations

- As much as possible, try to consult regularly with persons with disabilities (and seek alternative ways of doing so considering practical obstacles and constraints in the current context) about their current situation, needs, abilities, and priorities to address their most urgent needs. Do not assume what they want or need.
- Information and critical messages should be tailored to the needs of all persons of interest with disabilities (including sensory, intellectual, cognitive, and psychosocial disabilities) and shared in different accessible formats and technologies, including digital media. Some designs include closed captioning, sign language, Braille, and audio messages.
- Identify potential barriers to access services: mobility limitations, physical and health accessibility, and communication barriers, among others.
- Continue close coordination and communication with specialized networks and organizations working on the protection of persons with disabilities at the national level (e.g., Humanity Inclusion), ensure inclusive public health measures and care during the pandemic

8.0 Action points and the way forward

- The government should control people to keep social distance to prevent COVID-19 pandemic transmission.
- Somaliland people should pay attention to personnel hygiene as a preventive strategy
- Have a long-term plan for curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic that maintains social interaction.

Name of Organization	Voice of Somaliland Minority Women Organization (VOSOMWO)
Project Title:	The Focus Group Discussion Report
Project Location:	Hargeisa Somaliland
Contact Person name:	Ms. Hibak Ahmed Hassan
Title:	Chairperson of VOSOMWO Minority Women
Contact Phone:	Tel: +252 634119799
Email:	vosomwo@hotmail.com
Office Address	Midtown, 1st floor Dalwanaje building Hargeisa Somaliland

Funding Source	Africa Philanthropy Network (APN)
----------------	-----------------------------------