

Women's Role in Community Engagement and National Reconstruction in Post-Conflict Somalia.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of women in community engagement and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia, with particular attention to their contributions to peacebuilding, social cohesion, economic recovery, and governance. The study adopts a qualitative desk-review design based on secondary source analysis. It draws on peer-reviewed academic literature, policy documents, and reports published by international organizations, including the United Nations, World Bank, UNDP, and the African Union, to analyze how women contribute to rebuilding society in a fragile post-conflict context. Using thematic analysis, the study identifies the main areas in which women influence recovery processes at both community and national levels. The findings show that women play a vital role in informal leadership, conflict mediation, reconciliation, household and local economic resilience, and advocacy for inclusive governance. At the same time, the study finds that these contributions remain under-recognized within formal political and institutional structures due to persistent cultural, political, and economic barriers. The paper contributes to the literature by providing an integrated Somalia-specific analysis of women's roles across interconnected dimensions of reconstruction, rather than treating peacebuilding, development, and community engagement as separate domains. It concludes that strengthening women's participation and recognition is essential for sustainable peace, inclusive governance, and long-term national development in Somalia.

Keywords: Women, Somalia, community engagement, national reconstruction, peacebuilding, economic recovery, gender equality, post-conflict development.

INTRODUCTION

Somalia's modern history has been deeply shaped by prolonged conflict, state collapse, and uneven processes of recovery and reconstruction. Since the fall of the central government in 1991, the country has experienced persistent insecurity, fragmented institutions, and weakened social systems, all of which have affected economic stability, access to public services, and the cohesion of communities (Powell, Ford, & Nowrasteh, 2008; Burgess, 2013). In response to these challenges, reconstruction in Somalia has not depended solely on formal state institutions, but has also relied heavily on the resilience of local communities and informal social structures that continue to sustain everyday life.

Within post-conflict settings, community engagement refers to the active participation of local individuals and groups in collective action, decision-making, service delivery, conflict resolution, and development initiatives that affect their communities (John, 2011; Sørensen, 1998). In fragile contexts such as Somalia, where state presence is often limited, community engagement becomes an essential mechanism for maintaining social order, supporting vulnerable populations, and rebuilding trust. Similarly, national reconstruction refers to the broader process of rebuilding institutions, restoring social and economic systems, promoting peace, and creating conditions for long-term stability and development after violent conflict (Burgess, 2013; Mallett & Slater, 2012). These two processes are closely linked, as effective national recovery often depends on strong grassroots participation and locally grounded forms of resilience.

In this context, women have emerged as central actors in Somalia's post-conflict recovery. Somali women contribute to mediation, reconciliation, education, caregiving, humanitarian support, small-scale

entrepreneurship, and local advocacy, making them vital to both community survival and broader reconstruction efforts (Ahmed, 2022; Mohamed, 2023). Their roles are especially important in settings where formal governance systems remain weak and where everyday peacebuilding depends on informal actors and social networks. Women's contributions often extend across multiple domains, including social cohesion, economic resilience, and local governance, indicating that they are not peripheral participants but key agents in rebuilding society.

Despite this, women's roles remain insufficiently recognized within formal political and institutional structures. Deeply rooted patriarchal norms, restricted access to resources, and limited representation in decision-making spaces continue to constrain women's full participation in reconstruction processes (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019; Adepoju, Gberevbie, & Ibhawoh, 2021). As a result, there is a significant gap between women's active grassroots engagement and their formal visibility in national policy and governance frameworks. This disconnect is not only a social and political concern, but also an academic one, because it reflects an incomplete understanding of how reconstruction actually occurs in fragile states.

Although there is a growing body of scholarship on women, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery, much of the literature remains either too general or insufficiently grounded in the Somali context. Existing studies often discuss women's participation in peace processes, economic activities, or social support systems separately, without providing an integrated analysis of how these roles intersect and collectively contribute to national reconstruction in Somalia (Sørensen, 1998; Lwamba et al., 2022). Moreover, Somalia-specific research remains limited in its attention to the lived and practical ways women operate across community engagement, peacebuilding, and development in a fragile political environment (Mohamed, 2025; Mohamoud, 2024). This leaves an important scholarly gap in understanding the full scope and significance of women's contributions in post-conflict Somalia.

This study addresses that gap by examining the role of women in community engagement and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia. It aims to analyze how women contribute to peacebuilding, social cohesion, economic recovery, and governance, and to assess the barriers that continue to limit their full recognition and participation. The study is guided by the following questions: How do women contribute to community engagement and national reconstruction in Somalia? What roles do they play in promoting peace and social cohesion? What barriers restrict their participation? And what measures can strengthen their inclusion in reconstruction processes?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to the academic literature in three important ways. First, it provides a Somalia-specific analysis of women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction. Second, it brings together the interconnected dimensions of community engagement, peacebuilding, economic resilience, and governance within a single analytical framework. Third, it highlights the need to move beyond viewing women merely as victims of conflict and instead recognize them as active agents whose contributions are essential to sustainable peace and long-term national development.

LITERATURE VIEW

Scholarship on women in post-conflict societies consistently shows that women are not only victims of war and displacement but also active agents in social recovery, peacebuilding, and development. Across fragile and conflict-affected settings, women frequently sustain households, rebuild social networks, support community survival, and contribute to local peace efforts when formal institutions are weak or absent (Sørensen, 1998; Mallett & Slater, 2012). This broad consensus provides an important starting point for understanding women's role in Somalia, where decades of conflict have weakened governance structures and increased reliance on informal community-based systems.

A major area of agreement in the literature is that women contribute significantly to community engagement in post-conflict settings. Community engagement generally refers to participation in collective social, civic, and developmental activities that support local well-being and resilience (John, 2011; Sørensen, 1998). Studies show that women often participate through grassroots organizations, neighborhood associations, informal support networks, and local service provision. In Somalia, women have been associated with humanitarian support,

health and education awareness, conflict resolution, and community-based mobilization, particularly in areas where formal service delivery is limited (Ahmed, 2022; Mohamed, 2023). These studies suggest that women's community roles are central to rebuilding trust, restoring cooperation, and strengthening the social foundations of recovery.

The literature also broadly agrees that women are important actors in peacebuilding and social cohesion. Feminist peace scholarship argues that women often bring relational, community-centered, and welfare-oriented approaches to peace processes, which can make peacebuilding efforts more inclusive and durable (Smyth et al., 2020). Similarly, studies grounded in social capital perspectives emphasize that women are often crucial in rebuilding trust, reciprocity, and cooperation after conflict (John, 2011). In divided and fragile societies, women's roles in mediation, caregiving, reconciliation, and support to vulnerable groups help restore social ties and reduce everyday tensions (Maynard, 1997). In Somalia, where clan fragmentation, displacement, and long-term insecurity have weakened social cohesion, women's cross-household and cross-community interactions are especially important for rebuilding trust and maintaining social stability (Aduugna & Gezahegne, 2024; Ahmed, 2022).

Another major theme in the literature concerns women's contribution to economic recovery and development. In many post-conflict societies, women play an essential role in sustaining household livelihoods and local market activity, especially in informal economies where formal employment is limited (Jones, 2018). In Somalia, women are widely involved in petty trade, food vending, small retail, livestock-related activities, and other micro-enterprises that support both family survival and local economic circulation (Katib, 2025). Scholarship also shows that women's economic participation often has broader developmental effects because women tend to direct resources toward food, education, health, and family welfare, thereby strengthening household resilience and social recovery (Umeaduma, 2023; Pertiwi, 2025). In this sense, women's economic roles are not limited to subsistence but are directly connected to wider reconstruction outcomes.

At the same time, the literature recognizes women's role in governance and civic advocacy, though this area shows more mixed findings. Some scholars argue that women's participation in formal governance improves accountability, inclusiveness, and institutional legitimacy (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). Others note that in many post-conflict contexts, women's contributions remain concentrated in civil society and informal networks rather than formal state institutions (Silliman, 1999). This distinction is highly relevant to Somalia. While women have increasingly engaged in advocacy, community leadership, and civic action, their formal representation in political institutions and decision-making spaces remains limited. Thus, the literature suggests that women's influence is often substantial in practice but constrained in institutional terms.

Although there is broad agreement that women matter in post-conflict reconstruction, scholars differ in how they interpret the nature and scale of that contribution. One perspective, often associated with feminist peacebuilding, emphasizes women's distinctive contributions to reconciliation, inclusion, and social healing, arguing that women can transform peace processes by broadening the agenda beyond elite bargaining and military settlement (Smyth et al., 2020). A second perspective, reflected in governance and institutional literature, is more cautious and argues that women's impact depends not simply on participation but on whether institutions genuinely allow them influence, access, and authority (Goetz, 1995; Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). A third line of scholarship focuses less on formal politics and more on everyday survival, showing that women's most durable contributions may lie in the informal economy, social support systems, and household-level stabilization rather than visible leadership roles (Sørensen, 1998; Mallett & Slater, 2012). These differences matter because they show that women's contributions should not be understood through a single lens. Their influence operates across formal and informal, political and social, public and private spheres.

The literature is also consistent in identifying major barriers to women's participation, especially in fragile and patriarchal settings. Cultural norms and traditional gender roles remain among the most widely cited obstacles. These norms often confine women to domestic roles and reduce their legitimacy in public leadership and governance spaces (Sultana, 2010; Adeleye & Aremu, 2025). Studies further show that women's political participation is often constrained by limited financial resources, male-dominated institutions, and symbolic rather than substantive inclusion (Goetz, 1995; Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). Economic barriers, including restricted access to credit, education, and formal employment, further limit women's ability to expand their role

in reconstruction (Pertiwi, 2025; Umeaduma, 2023). In conflict-affected environments, these challenges are compounded by insecurity, harassment, and weak institutional protection, all of which reduce women's mobility and public engagement (Valverde, 2011). In Somalia, these structural barriers mean that women often contribute extensively without receiving equivalent authority, recognition, or policy support.

Despite these important insights, the literature reveals several major gaps, especially in relation to Somalia. First, much of the existing scholarship examines women's roles in separate domains, such as peacebuilding, economic participation, or community service, without analyzing how these roles interact and reinforce one another in post-conflict reconstruction. This fragmentation limits understanding of women's full contribution to recovery processes (Lwamba et al., 2022; Sørensen, 1998). Second, a large portion of the literature is framed at a global or regional level and does not adequately reflect the particular historical, social, and political realities of Somalia, including clan dynamics, fragile federalism, prolonged insecurity, and weak state institutions (Mohamoud, 2024; Mohamed, 2025). Third, grassroots contributions by Somali women remain under-documented in formal academic and policy debates, even though women are deeply involved in informal leadership, livelihood support, and local peace efforts (Mohamed, 2023; Nur, 2014). As a result, there is still limited Somalia-specific scholarship that provides an integrated account of how women simultaneously contribute to peacebuilding, social cohesion, economic resilience, and governance.

This study responds to that gap by providing a more integrated Somalia-focused analysis of women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction. Rather than treating community engagement, peacebuilding, development, and governance as separate issues, it examines how these domains are interconnected and how women operate across them in practice. In doing so, the study contributes to the literature by moving beyond a purely descriptive account of women's activities and instead positioning women as central actors in the broader processes of social recovery, institutional rebuilding, and national development in Somalia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by Feminist Theory, Human Security Theory, and Social Capital Theory. These three perspectives are used together because no single theory is sufficient to explain the full range of women's roles in post-conflict Somalia. Feminist Theory explains the structural gender inequalities that shape women's exclusion from formal power. Human Security Theory explains how women contribute to survival, welfare, and resilience in contexts of fragility. Social Capital Theory explains how women rebuild trust, networks, and cooperation at the community level. Combined, these theories provide a more complete framework for understanding women not only as marginalized actors, but also as practical agents of recovery, peacebuilding, and reconstruction (Sultana, 2010; Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012; Kinyeki, 2018).

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory provides the foundation for understanding how gendered power relations shape women's position in post-conflict societies. It argues that political, social, and economic institutions are often structured by patriarchal norms that privilege men and marginalize women, especially in leadership and decision-making processes (Sultana, 2010). In post-conflict settings such as Somalia, these inequalities are reinforced by weak institutions, conservative social norms, and the persistence of male-dominated political structures (Muzvidziwa, 2013).

In this study, Feminist Theory is applied analytically to explain the gap between women's substantial grassroots contributions and their limited formal recognition. The literature and findings show that Somali women are active in mediation, livelihood support, education, community mobilization, and advocacy, yet remain underrepresented in formal governance, peace negotiations, and institutional leadership. Feminist Theory helps interpret this contradiction not as a result of women's lack of capacity, but as an outcome of socially constructed gender roles and institutionalized exclusion (Bade, 2024; Nur, 2014). In other words, the theory is useful because it reveals why women can be central to reconstruction in practice while still being peripheral in formal structures.

This theory is therefore particularly effective in explaining: why women's work is often undervalued or treated as informal; why access to leadership and decision-making remains restricted; how patriarchal norms shape the boundaries of women's participation.

However, Feminist Theory alone does not fully explain how women's everyday activities sustain community survival and recovery in fragile environments. For that reason, it must be complemented by Human Security Theory.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory shifts attention from state-centered security to the protection of people's lives, dignity, and well-being. Rather than focusing only on borders, military threats, or state survival, it emphasizes access to food, health, education, economic opportunity, and personal safety as the basis of meaningful security (Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012). This perspective is particularly relevant in Somalia, where post-conflict insecurity is experienced not only through armed violence but also through poverty, displacement, weak service delivery, and institutional fragility (Farole, 2018).

In this study, Human Security Theory is used to explain how women contribute to reconstruction through the everyday protection and maintenance of life. Somali women's roles in caregiving, household management, support to vulnerable groups, education awareness, health promotion, and informal economic activity directly address the human insecurities faced by families and communities. Their contributions are therefore not secondary or private, but central to post-conflict recovery because they sustain the social and material conditions necessary for stability (Ivers & Cullen, 2011; Msonge, 2022).

This theory explains better than Feminist Theory why women's roles in the household and community are politically significant. It allows the study to interpret activities such as income generation, care work, and support for displaced persons not merely as domestic responsibilities, but as forms of security provision in contexts where state capacity is weak. Thus, Human Security Theory is especially useful for showing how women contribute to: family and community survival; resilience in the face of poverty and displacement; social recovery through everyday welfare functions.

At the same time, Human Security Theory does not sufficiently explain how women rebuild trust and cooperation across divided communities. That is where Social Capital Theory becomes necessary.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory focuses on trust, networks, relationships, and norms of reciprocity that enable individuals and groups to cooperate for shared goals. In post-conflict societies, violence, displacement, and mistrust often weaken these social bonds, making the rebuilding of trust a central part of reconstruction (Kinyeki, 2018). Social Capital Theory is therefore highly relevant for analyzing recovery processes in Somalia, where social fragmentation and clan divisions have undermined collective action and institutional legitimacy.

In this study, Social Capital Theory is applied to explain how women act as connectors and bridge-builders within communities. Somali women often participate in community groups, informal savings systems, neighborhood associations, caregiving networks, and reconciliation initiatives. Through these roles, they help maintain communication, circulate support, and rebuild trust across households and social groups (Gittel, Ortega-Bustamante, & Steffy, 2000; McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Their ability to sustain everyday relationships and mobilize support makes them especially important in contexts where formal institutions are weak or absent.

This theory explains more clearly than Human Security Theory how women's community relationships contribute to broader social cohesion. It highlights that women do not only respond to needs, but also actively rebuild the relational foundations of peace by promoting cooperation, reducing tension, and sustaining collective action (Tang & Chan, 2024). In the Somali case, this is especially important because reconstruction depends not only on rebuilding institutions, but also on restoring trust within fragmented communities. Social Capital Theory is therefore most useful for explaining women's role in: rebuilding trust after conflict; strengthening community networks and mutual support; promoting cooperation across divided social spaces.

Yet Social Capital Theory alone cannot fully account for the gendered barriers that limit women's recognition, nor can it fully capture the broader welfare and insecurity context in which these networks operate. This is why an integrated framework is necessary.

Integration of the Theories

These three theories are not interchangeable. Each explains a different but connected dimension of women's role in post-conflict Somalia. Feminist Theory explains the structure of exclusion. It shows why women remain marginalized in formal institutions despite their active contributions. Human Security Theory explains the substance of contribution. It shows how women sustain survival, dignity, and resilience in fragile communities. Social Capital Theory explains the mechanism of community recovery. It shows how women rebuild trust, cooperation, and social cohesion through everyday networks and relationships.

Taken together, these theories provide a multidimensional framework for interpreting the Somali case. They show that women's roles in reconstruction cannot be reduced to one sphere alone. Women operate simultaneously across the household, the community, and the broader public sphere. They are constrained by patriarchal structures, yet they also provide essential forms of human security and rebuild the social ties necessary for long-term peace. This integrated approach is particularly important in Somalia because reconstruction is shaped not only by formal political institutions, but also by community resilience, informal support systems, and the management of everyday insecurity.

Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study is not simply to present three parallel theories, but to use them together to explain why women matter, how they contribute, and why their contributions remain insufficiently recognized. By combining gender analysis, people-centered security, and social network perspectives, the framework offers a stronger basis for understanding women as central actors in peacebuilding, community engagement, and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Mohamoud, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative desk-based research design grounded in secondary data analysis to examine the role of women in community engagement and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret social roles, meanings, patterns, and relationships rather than measure variables statistically. It is particularly suitable for examining complex processes such as peacebuilding, informal leadership, social cohesion, and gendered participation in fragile settings. In the Somali context, where insecurity, institutional weakness, and access constraints can make large-scale fieldwork difficult, the use of secondary sources provides a practical and analytically useful approach to understanding women's contributions to recovery and reconstruction (Sørensen, 1998; Mallett & Slater, 2012; Farole, 2018).

Source Selection and Search Strategy

The study is based on a structured review of secondary sources relevant to women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding, community engagement, economic recovery, and governance in Somalia. Source selection was guided by the central objective of examining how women contribute to reconstruction processes across interconnected social, economic, political, and community domains. To ensure relevance and breadth, the review included peer-reviewed academic literature, reports by international organizations and development agencies, government and policy documents, and credible NGO and institutional publications. Particular attention was given to sources that addressed Somalia directly, while selected regional and comparative studies on women in post-conflict settings were also included where they helped interpret broader theoretical or empirical patterns relevant to the Somali case (Ahmed, 2022; Mohamed, 2023; Mohamoud, 2024; Lwamba et al., 2022).

The document search focused on materials addressing combinations of the following themes: women in Somalia, post-conflict reconstruction, peacebuilding, community engagement, social cohesion, economic recovery, governance, and gender inclusion. The review drew on academic publications and institutional reports cited in the study, including work linked to organizations such as the United Nations, UNDP, the World Bank, and the African Union, as well as scholarly sources on women's participation in fragile and post-conflict settings. The

search process prioritized sources that were directly related to Somalia, conceptually relevant to women's roles in reconstruction, analytically useful for interpreting community-level and national-level processes, and sufficiently credible in academic or policy terms.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To improve methodological clarity, the study applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Sources were included if they addressed women's roles in post-conflict recovery, peacebuilding, governance, economic participation, or community engagement; focused on Somalia or provided strong comparative relevance to fragile and post-conflict contexts; were published in academic, policy, or institutional formats considered credible for qualitative review; and contributed conceptual or empirical insight relevant to the study's research questions. Sources were excluded if they lacked relevance to women's participation in reconstruction or recovery, were too general to contribute meaningfully to the Somali case, duplicated existing arguments without adding analytical value, or lacked sufficient credibility or traceable authorship.

Scope and Types of Sources Reviewed

The study primarily draws on sources published from the late 1990s to 2025. This time frame was selected because foundational works on women in post-conflict reconstruction and social capital provide conceptual grounding, while more recent studies and reports offer updated insights into post-conflict Somalia, women's community leadership, economic participation, governance challenges, and reconstruction dynamics (Ahmed, 2022; Mohamed, 2023; Mohamoud, 2024; Katib, 2025). Using both foundational and recent literature allows the study to balance theoretical depth with contextual relevance.

The study reviewed a mixed body of documents consisting of scholarly journal articles, theses and dissertations, policy-oriented research reports, institutional and international development reports, and selected conceptual works on gender, human security, and post-conflict recovery. Academic sources provided conceptual and analytical grounding, institutional reports and policy documents helped contextualize Somalia's fragile governance and development setting, and Somalia-focused studies helped identify locally grounded patterns related to women's roles in peacebuilding, livelihoods, and community participation.

Data Analysis Procedure

The study uses thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns across the selected literature. The analysis involved close reading of the reviewed documents to identify recurring ideas, concepts, and forms of women's participation. Similar patterns were grouped into broader analytical categories and then refined into core themes that aligned with the study's objectives and theoretical framework. Through this process, five major themes were developed: women in community engagement, women in peacebuilding, women in economic recovery, women in governance and advocacy, and barriers to participation. These themes were treated as interconnected dimensions of national reconstruction rather than isolated categories.

Theoretical Application

The thematic analysis was interpreted through the lens of Feminist Theory, Human Security Theory, and Social Capital Theory. Feminist Theory helped explain the structural barriers that limit women's formal inclusion despite their substantial contributions. Human Security Theory helped interpret women's roles in sustaining livelihoods, care, and well-being in fragile communities. Social Capital Theory helped explain how women rebuild trust, networks, and cooperation across households and communities (Sultana, 2010; Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012; Kinyeki, 2018; Gittel, Ortega-Bustamante, & Steffy, 2000). This connection between themes and theory strengthens the analytical depth of the study by showing not only what women do, but also how and why those roles matter in post-conflict reconstruction.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its usefulness, the methodology has important limitations. Because the study relies entirely on secondary sources, it does not capture firsthand experiences through interviews, focus groups, or survey data. This means

that women’s lived realities may be mediated through the interpretations of previous authors or institutions. In addition, secondary sources vary in quality, scope, and purpose, and some may reflect institutional or publication bias. The availability of Somalia-specific empirical studies is also uneven, which may limit the depth of localized evidence in some areas. Finally, because the study is qualitative and interpretive, its conclusions are analytical rather than statistically generalizable.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that links women’s roles in post-conflict Somalia to both community-level and national-level reconstruction outcomes. The framework distinguishes between women’s core areas of participation, the mediating constraints that shape their involvement, the immediate community-level effects of their engagement, and the broader reconstruction outcomes that emerge from these processes.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework

Women’s Roles	Mediating Factors	Immediate Community-Level Outcomes	Broader Reconstruction Outcomes
Peacebuilding and mediation	Cultural norms	Conflict reduction	National reconstruction
Community engagement and local leadership	Political exclusion	Participation and trust	Social cohesion
Economic participation and livelihood support	Limited access to finance and education	Household resilience	Economic recovery
Social networking and collective mobilization	Insecurity and weak institutional support	Cooperation and mutual support	Stability and sustainable development

Thematic Framework for Analysis

The analysis is organized around five major themes that structure the interpretation of the reviewed literature.

Table 2. Thematic Framework for Analysis

Theme	Analytical Focus
Community Engagement	Grassroots participation, informal leadership, awareness creation, and social mobilization
Peacebuilding	Conflict mediation, reconciliation, dialogue, and social healing
Economic Recovery	Informal trade, livelihood support, household management, and resilience
Governance and Advocacy	Civic participation, women’s representation, civil society engagement, and policy influence
Barriers to Participation	Cultural norms, political exclusion, economic constraints, and insecurity

Data Sources Framework

The study draws on several categories of secondary sources, each serving a distinct analytical purpose.

Table 3. Data Sources Framework

Source Type	Purpose in the Study	Examples from the Reference Base
Academic Literature	Provides theoretical and empirical analysis of women, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and governance	Sørensen (1998); Mallett & Slater (2012); Milazzo & Goldstein (2019); Lwamba et al. (2022)
Somalia-Focused Studies	Provides contextual evidence on women’s participation, peacebuilding, and reconstruction in Somalia	Ahmed (2022); Mohamed (2023); Mohamoud (2024); Nur (2014)

International and Institutional Reports	Provides broader development, governance, and reconstruction context	UN-related and development-oriented materials cited in the study
Comparative and Conceptual Works	Supports interpretation of gender, human security, and social capital in post-conflict settings	Sultana (2010); Fukuda-Parr & Messineo (2012); Kinyeki (2018); Gittell et al. (2000)

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study on the role of women in community engagement and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia. The findings are presented as a thematic synthesis of the secondary sources reviewed for this study, including academic literature, institutional reports, and policy-oriented materials on gender, peacebuilding, governance, and recovery in fragile settings. The analysis shows that women make substantial contributions across multiple domains of reconstruction, particularly in community engagement, peacebuilding, economic recovery, and governance. At the same time, the findings also reveal that these contributions remain constrained by structural, cultural, political, and economic barriers. Together, the themes demonstrate that women are central actors in Somalia’s recovery, although their roles are still more visible in informal and community-based spaces than in formal institutions.

Women in Community Engagement

The reviewed literature consistently shows that Somali women play an important role in community engagement, especially at the grassroots level where formal state institutions are weak or absent. Their engagement is reflected in local leadership, awareness creation, social support, and collective mobilization. In many communities, women act as organizers of community-based activities, facilitators of communication, and providers of support for vulnerable groups. These roles are especially significant in areas affected by displacement, poverty, and weak access to services, where women often help connect households to local assistance networks and humanitarian actors (Ahmed, 2022; Mohamed, 2023).

The findings further indicate that women contribute to community resilience through education and awareness activities. Across both formal and informal settings, women help disseminate knowledge related to health, sanitation, child welfare, and schooling. Their close interaction with households gives them a particularly influential role in shaping social attitudes and promoting behavior that supports family and community well-being. In this sense, women’s community engagement extends beyond participation in local activities and becomes part of a broader process of rebuilding social trust, sustaining communication, and strengthening everyday forms of local governance (John, 2011; Sørensen, 1998).

Another recurring finding is women’s strong role in social mobilization. The reviewed studies suggest that women are often among the first to organize or support collective responses to local challenges, including humanitarian relief, basic service support, and community improvement initiatives. Their ability to mobilize cooperation and maintain local networks reflects their importance not only as participants in community life but also as actors who sustain the social foundations of recovery.

Women in Peacebuilding and Social Cohesion

The literature reviewed in this study identifies women as important contributors to peacebuilding in Somalia, particularly through informal mediation, reconciliation, and social healing. In many settings, women play roles in resolving disputes within families and communities, helping to reduce tensions and preserve relationships. Their involvement in mediation is often informal rather than institutional, but it remains significant because it operates in spaces where everyday conflict can either escalate or be peacefully managed (Ahmed, 2022; Nur, 2014).

The findings also show that women contribute to broader reconciliation processes by promoting dialogue, encouraging coexistence, and supporting vulnerable groups affected by conflict. In post-conflict environments where mistrust, clan division, and displacement have weakened social cohesion, women often serve as bridge-builders across households and communities. Their contributions are especially important in restoring trust and rebuilding the social ties necessary for long-term recovery (Maynard, 1997; Adugna & Gezahegne, 2024).

The reviewed sources suggest that women's peacebuilding roles are closely linked to social cohesion. Their work in caregiving, reconciliation, and community support helps strengthen unity and mutual dependence in contexts marked by fragility. This supports the broader argument in the literature that peacebuilding is not limited to formal negotiations or elite agreements, but also includes everyday practices that restore trust, reduce division, and promote social healing (Smyth et al., 2020; Sørensen, 1998).

Women in Economic Recovery

The thematic review indicates that women play a major role in economic recovery, particularly through their participation in the informal economy and their management of household welfare. In Somalia's fragile post-conflict environment, where formal employment opportunities remain limited, many women engage in petty trade, food vending, tailoring, small retail, livestock-related activity, and other micro-enterprises that support household survival and local economic circulation (Katib, 2025; Mohamed, 2023).

These economic activities are important not only because they generate income, but also because they help stabilize households and communities during periods of uncertainty. The reviewed literature suggests that women often reinvest earnings in food, education, health, and other essential household needs, thereby strengthening family welfare and resilience. Their role in economic management is therefore both direct and indirect: women contribute through income generation while also ensuring that scarce resources are allocated to sustain household stability and long-term well-being (Pertiwi, 2025; Umeaduma, 2023).

The findings further show that women's economic roles have broader implications for national reconstruction. By sustaining local market activity and supporting household resilience, women contribute to wider processes of recovery in a context where formal economic systems remain fragile. However, the literature also makes clear that these contributions are often undervalued, largely because they occur in informal spaces and are constrained by limited access to finance, training, and institutional support.

Women in Governance and Advocacy

Although women's formal representation in governance remains limited in Somalia, the reviewed literature points to gradual but important progress in political participation and advocacy. Women are increasingly involved in civic action, electoral processes, civil society organizations, and advocacy networks that promote gender equality, peace, and inclusive development. Their participation in these areas expands the range of voices present in public debate and helps connect community concerns with policy discussions (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019; Silliman, 1999).

The findings suggest that women's advocacy roles are especially visible through civil society and grassroots platforms. Women-led and women-focused organizations often engage in awareness campaigns, rights-based advocacy, peace initiatives, and community support programs. Through these activities, women contribute to policy influence even when they are excluded from formal decision-making structures. Their advocacy role is therefore significant not only as a form of representation, but also as a means of challenging exclusion and promoting more inclusive governance processes.

At the same time, the literature shows that progress in formal governance remains uneven. Women continue to face barriers related to political financing, social expectations, institutional bias, and male-dominated leadership structures. As a result, their participation is often more visible in advocacy and civil society than in high-level state institutions (Goetz, 1995; Bade, 2024). This reinforces the broader finding that women's contributions in Somalia are substantial, but their institutional recognition remains limited.

Barriers to Women's Participation

A consistent finding across the reviewed literature is that women's contributions to reconstruction are constrained by multiple and interconnected barriers. One of the most significant obstacles is the persistence of cultural norms and patriarchal social structures that limit women's public roles. In many contexts, women are still primarily associated with domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while leadership and formal authority are treated as

male domains. These norms reduce women's visibility in governance and weaken recognition of their contributions, even when they are highly active in community life (Sultana, 2010; Adeleye & Aremu, 2025).

The findings also show that women face political exclusion from formal decision-making spaces. Even where women participate in peacebuilding, civic engagement, and local leadership, they often remain marginalized in formal political institutions, peace negotiations, and policy processes. This limits their influence over national priorities and reduces the extent to which their experiences and perspectives shape reconstruction agendas (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019; Goetz, 1995).

Economic constraints represent another major barrier. Many women have limited access to credit, formal employment, business support, and education, which restricts their ability to expand their economic activities and translate informal resilience into long-term empowerment (Pertwi, 2025; Umeaduma, 2023). In addition, insecurity and weak institutional protection continue to affect women's mobility, safety, and ability to participate in public life, especially in fragile and conflict-affected areas (Valverde, 2011). These barriers do not operate independently. Rather, they reinforce one another, producing a cycle in which women remain highly active in practice but insufficiently recognized and supported in formal reconstruction processes.

DISCUSSION

This section interprets the findings in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical framework of Feminist Theory, Human Security Theory, and Social Capital Theory. The discussion moves beyond description to explain the significance of women's roles in post-conflict Somalia and how these roles contribute to broader processes of national reconstruction. It also highlights the gap between women's practical contributions and their limited formal recognition within institutional structures.

Women's Contributions and the Informal–Formal Divide

A central insight emerging from the findings is the strong presence of women in informal and community-based spaces, contrasted with their limited inclusion in formal governance and decision-making structures. The literature reviewed consistently shows that women are actively engaged in community mobilization, mediation, and economic support, yet these contributions are often not translated into institutional power or political representation. This reflects what Feminist Theory identifies as structural inequality, where gender norms and institutional arrangements systematically limit women's access to formal authority despite their active participation in social and economic life (Goetz, 1995; Sultana, 2010).

In the Somali context, this divide is particularly significant because reconstruction processes rely heavily on informal systems due to weak state capacity. Women's contributions are therefore essential to everyday governance, yet they remain undervalued in formal policy frameworks. This disconnect suggests that reconstruction efforts risk overlooking key actors who are already sustaining social stability at the local level. The findings thus reinforce the argument that effective reconstruction requires bridging the gap between informal participation and formal inclusion.

Women and Human Security in Post-Conflict Recovery

The findings strongly align with Human Security Theory, which emphasizes the protection and well-being of individuals rather than focusing solely on state-level security. Women's roles in Somalia, particularly in caregiving, livelihood support, and community stabilization, directly contribute to dimensions of human security such as economic security, food security, and social well-being (Fukuda-Parr & Messineo, 2012).

The discussion highlights that women's economic activities, especially in the informal sector, are not only survival strategies but also key mechanisms for sustaining household and community resilience. By ensuring access to food, education, and basic services, women help maintain stability in fragile environments where state institutions may be absent or ineffective. This supports broader findings in the literature that post-conflict recovery is deeply dependent on everyday practices that sustain life and reduce vulnerability, rather than on formal institutional reforms alone.

Moreover, women's involvement in community engagement and peacebuilding contributes to psychological and social dimensions of human security. Their roles in mediation, reconciliation, and support networks help rebuild trust and reduce fear in communities affected by conflict. This reinforces the argument that human security in post-conflict settings is multidimensional and cannot be achieved without recognizing the social and relational contributions of women.

Social Capital and the Reconstruction of Trust

The findings also provide strong support for Social Capital Theory, particularly in relation to the rebuilding of trust, networks, and cooperation in post-conflict Somalia. Women's roles in community engagement, social mobilization, and peacebuilding contribute to both bonding and bridging social capital. At the community level, women strengthen internal cohesion through caregiving, mutual support, and local organization. At the same time, their involvement in mediation and reconciliation helps bridge divisions across families, clans, and communities.

This dual role is critical in post-conflict environments where social fragmentation is a major obstacle to recovery. The literature suggests that rebuilding institutions alone is insufficient if social trust remains weak. Women's contributions to everyday cooperation and relationship-building therefore represent a foundational element of reconstruction (Gittel et al., 2000; Smyth et al., 2020).

However, the discussion also reveals a limitation. While women contribute significantly to the creation and maintenance of social capital, they often lack access to the institutional resources needed to scale these contributions into broader governance processes. This suggests that social capital generated at the community level is not fully integrated into formal state-building efforts, limiting its long-term impact.

Structural Barriers and the Limits of Participation

Despite their significant contributions, women continue to face persistent structural barriers that limit their full participation in national reconstruction. Cultural norms, political exclusion, economic constraints, and insecurity collectively restrict women's access to leadership, resources, and decision-making spaces. These findings are consistent with broader scholarship on gender in post-conflict societies, which shows that women's roles are often expanded during conflict but constrained again in formal post-conflict governance (Adeleye & Aremu, 2025; Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, Feminist Theory helps explain why these barriers persist despite women's demonstrated capacity and contribution. Structural inequalities are embedded in institutions and social norms, making it difficult for women to transition from informal influence to formal authority. At the same time, Human Security Theory highlights how these barriers undermine broader recovery processes by limiting the inclusion of key actors in reconstruction efforts.

The discussion therefore suggests that women's participation in Somalia is not limited by lack of contribution, but by lack of recognition, support, and institutional inclusion. Addressing these barriers is not only a matter of gender equality, but also a requirement for effective and sustainable reconstruction.

Implications for National Reconstruction

The findings and their interpretation have important implications for national reconstruction in Somalia. First, they suggest that reconstruction should not be understood solely as a top-down, state-led process. Instead, it is a multi-level process in which community-based actors, particularly women, play a central role. Recognizing and integrating these contributions into formal systems is essential for building inclusive and resilient institutions.

Second, the discussion highlights the need for policies that support women's economic empowerment, political participation, and access to resources. Without such support, women's contributions will remain limited to informal spaces, reducing their potential impact on long-term development and governance.

Third, the integration of Feminist Theory, Human Security Theory, and Social Capital Theory demonstrates that women's roles are not only socially important but also analytically central to understanding post-conflict recovery. These theories together show that reconstruction involves structural transformation, human well-being, and social relationship-building, all of which are areas where women are actively engaged.

Contribution to the Literature

This study contributes to the literature by providing an integrated analysis of women's roles in post-conflict Somalia across multiple domains of reconstruction. While existing studies often examine peacebuilding, economic recovery, or governance separately, this study brings these dimensions together to show how they are interconnected. It also highlights the gap between women's practical contributions and their formal recognition, offering a Somalia-specific perspective that adds to broader debates on gender and post-conflict recovery.

In addition, the study contributes methodologically by synthesizing diverse secondary sources into a coherent thematic analysis, demonstrating how qualitative desk-based research can generate meaningful insights in contexts where primary data collection is constrained.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of women in community engagement and national reconstruction in post-conflict Somalia through a qualitative analysis of secondary sources. The findings demonstrate that women are central actors in reconstruction processes, contributing across multiple domains including community engagement, peacebuilding, economic recovery, and governance. These contributions are particularly visible at the grassroots level, where women sustain social networks, mediate conflicts, support livelihoods, and promote collective action in contexts characterized by weak institutional capacity and ongoing insecurity.

Despite their significant roles, the study finds that women's contributions remain largely informal and insufficiently recognized within formal political and institutional structures. Cultural norms, political exclusion, economic constraints, and insecurity continue to limit women's access to leadership, resources, and decision-making processes. This creates a persistent gap between women's practical involvement in reconstruction and their formal inclusion in governance. As a result, reconstruction efforts risk overlooking key actors who are already contributing to stability and recovery at the community level.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to theoretical debates by demonstrating the complementary value of Feminist Theory, Human Security Theory, and Social Capital Theory in understanding post-conflict reconstruction. Feminist Theory helps explain the structural inequalities that limit women's formal inclusion despite their active participation. Human Security Theory highlights the importance of women's roles in sustaining livelihoods, well-being, and everyday stability in fragile settings. Social Capital Theory provides insight into how women contribute to rebuilding trust, networks, and cooperation within and across communities. Together, these perspectives show that reconstruction is not only a political or institutional process, but also a social and relational one in which women play a central role.

Policy Implications

The findings have important implications for policy and practice in Somalia and similar post-conflict contexts. First, there is a need to move beyond viewing women as beneficiaries of development and instead recognize them as active agents of reconstruction. Policies should therefore focus on strengthening women's participation in formal governance, peace processes, and decision-making institutions. Second, targeted support is needed to enhance women's economic empowerment through access to finance, training, and market opportunities, enabling them to expand their contributions beyond subsistence-level activities. Third, reconstruction strategies should incorporate community-based approaches that build on existing social networks and local capacities, particularly those led by women. Finally, addressing structural barriers such as gender norms, institutional

exclusion, and insecurity is essential to ensure that women's contributions are not only sustained but also fully integrated into national development frameworks.

Research Implications and Future Directions

This study highlights several areas for future research. First, there is a need for primary empirical studies that capture women's lived experiences in post-conflict Somalia through interviews, focus groups, and field-based methods. Such research would provide deeper insight into the everyday realities behind the patterns identified in this study. Second, future research could explore comparative perspectives across different regions of Somalia or between Somalia and other post-conflict countries to better understand context-specific and generalizable dynamics. Third, further studies are needed to examine the effectiveness of policies and interventions aimed at promoting women's participation in governance and reconstruction. Finally, integrating quantitative approaches with qualitative analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the scale and impact of women's contributions.

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