

CASE STUDY

SIRAD and Ugaaso-WDS: She Leads Peace - Advancing women's leadership in the implementation of the Asmara Peace Agreement

May 2026

The Somali Regional State (SRS) in Ethiopia has been one of the country's most conflict-affected regions, with armed struggle spanning across three decades. The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has been fighting for self-determination for Somalis since 1984. In 2018, the Asmara Peace Declaration was signed between the ONLF and Ethiopian government, which underscored a commitment to ending hostilities. However, tensions have remained, particularly around expectations of political inclusion, leading to factionalisation of the ONLF, deepening mistrust of the peace process and increasing concerns around the risk of armed insurgencies re-emerging.

The participation of women in the peace process continues to face challenges. Throughout the conflict, women were disproportionately targeted and faced widespread sexual and gender-based violence including rape, forced marriages and torture used as collective punishment. Yet, women were absent during the November 2024 national dialogue consultations in the Somali Region, and the implementation of the Asmara Peace Agreement has not recognised women's roles or gendered impacts from the conflict. Mechanisms such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and political negotiations are overwhelmingly male-dominated, leaving women without meaningful representation or influence. The widespread exclusion of women from these processes has undermined the sustainability and legitimacy of the peace agreement.

Sirad Institute for Research and Development (SIRAD) in partnership with Ugaaso Women's Dialogue Space (Ugaaso WDS), two women-led civil society organisations with extensive networks in the SRS, have been leading on women's leadership and participation in the region.

Under a Rapid Response Window Grant from September 2025 to March 2026, the two organisations worked to position women as integral mediators in rebuilding common ground between ruling elites, within the ONLF, between the ONLF and ruling Prosperity Party, and with local communities. Focusing on alternate responses to tensions and divisions, women mediators have become vital actors rejecting the urge to re-take up arms.

Achievements

Through the RRW project, SIRAD and Ugaaso have helped to strengthen women's leadership and role in engaging divided parties to increase trust within the peace process:

- **Strengthened collaboration within the ONLF and across parties.** SIRAD and Ugaaso worked to develop a Women's Inter-Party Dialogue Forum that was able to bring together different factions within the ONLF, and between the ONLF and the Prosperity Party. The dialogues addressed critical issues such as harmful rhetoric, mistrust and digital conflicts. A crucial achievement from this process was the collective rejection of hostilities or violence; instead, women leaders across political parties promoted reconciliation and peaceful dialogue to address ongoing concerns. They agreed to jointly promote unity and to engage their male leader counterparts to advance the unification process.
- **Male political elites understood the benefits and positive impact of women leaders and were more committed to including them in political decision-making.** SIRAD and Ugaaso conducted numerous training workshops that increased the confidence and access of several women leaders,

including during their engagements with the Prosperity Party. Responding to often male-dominated politics, women leaders not only agreed on the importance of advocating for inclusive representation within their respective parties, but came together to share strategies. Sustained engagements in these areas solidified recognition of women as legitimate peace actors amongst male elites, and an increase in allocation of roles to women in political parties. This includes appointing some women as secretaries and wing leaders, and allocating seats for women, with one woman nominated as a candidate MP.

- **Increased community awareness and ownership of the Asmara Peace Agreement.** SIRAD and Ugaaso's long-term trusted community presence enabled them to conduct advocacy, awareness campaigns and education initiatives which underscored principles of the Asmara Peace Agreement. Highlighting efforts at the senior levels towards the implementation of the agreement helped to strengthen grassroots understanding, support and ownership of the process. Such efforts were also key to emboldening the role of women within their local communities to counter misinformation around the Asmara Peace Agreement and promote peace and stability.

“When Somali women are capacitated, society moves beyond patriarchy and matriarchy toward true balance and justice.”

Lessons learned

- **Within the SRS context, women can play a role in bridging divides between polarised groups and creating safe and structured spaces for dialogue.** Creating a platform and space to facilitate contact through dialogue worked to improve relationships and understanding between women leaders. This new level of harmony demonstrated a more unified position base that made it easier for respective factions to engage their male counterparts.
- **Engaging recognised leadership, building trust and demonstrating the benefits of women's meaningful participation early on in the process cultivated legitimacy.** Holding pre-dialogue sessions and informal engagement was critical for building trust in order to bring different groups together, and built confidence in the process.
- **Linking grassroots-level engagement with the formal process is crucial to accelerate attitude shifts and local ownership of the peace process.** Highlighting the involvement of senior political leaders from the inception increased community trust and faith. Alongside this, women peacebuilders worked to use clear and simple language, translating the complex details of the Asmara Peace Agreement into messages that were easy to understand. This helped to foster community engagement and support, and work to address misinformation around the Asmara Peace Agreement.

The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) Rapid Response Window (RRW) is a funding mechanism that addresses urgent funding gaps with targeted, short-term support to increase women's participation in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements. RRW is a flexible financing tool supporting quality interventions to enhance the capacity of local women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

Design & layout: causeeffectdesign.co.uk

Conciliation Resources is an international organisation committed to stopping violent conflict and creating more peaceful societies. We work with people impacted by war and violence, bringing diverse voices together to make change that lasts.

Conciliation Resources, Unit 1.1, First Floor,
Brick Yard, 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK

@ cr@c-r.org ☎ +44 (0)20 7359 7728

🌐 www.c-r.org **in** Conciliation Resources

f ConciliationResources

Conciliation Resources is a charity registered in England and Wales (1055436) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (03196482)