BRIEF ON THE DISCUSSIONS HELD ON PROMOTING WOMEN VOICES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE ON PARTNERS FOR DEMOCRACY DAY, 19TH MARCH 2024

VENUE: **GARISSA, KENYA**

DATE: **19TH MARCH 2024**

THEME: **"PROMOTING WOMEN VOICES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE"**

ORGANIZER: **SEMI-ARID RESILENCE NETWORK (SARN)**

SEMI ARID RESILIENCE NETWORK (SARN) is a non-profit organization registered in Kenya under the Company's Act, 2015. The organization primarily aims to address key challenges such as poverty, climate change, peace and security, governance, human rights, healthcare access, and disaster mitigation. To achieve these objectives, SARN engages in various activities including providing communities with essential training, issuing warnings, and implementing preparedness measures for disaster impacts. Additionally, SARN focuses on fostering community resilience in peace and security, ensuring that communities are well-equipped to maintain stability and harmony even in the face of potential conflicts.

SARN held an Event on 19th March 2024 at Garissa Kenya on "Promoting Women voices in local Governance" and the following are the:

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

1. **Opening Remarks:** The event commenced with a powerful speech by SARN's Executive Director, who emphasized the importance of women's participation in governance as a cornerstone for sustainable development and community resilience.

2. **Panel Discussions**: Several panel discussions were held, featuring prominent female leaders, local government officials, and community activists. These discussions addressed *the challenges women face in accessing leadership positions and strategies to overcome these barriers.* Topics included capacity building, mentorship programs, and policy advocacy to create a more inclusive governance environment.

Some of the challenges that were identified and discussed are:-

a) *Cultural and Societal Norms*: In Garissa, the majority of the population is of Somali origin, a community known for its strong adherence to traditional cultural beliefs. These

cultural norms often place women in domestic and caregiving roles, which limits their opportunities and time to engage in public life and leadership positions. The deep-rooted patriarchal values within Somali culture can discourage women from pursuing leadership roles due to societal pressure, lack of support, and the expectation to prioritize family responsibilities over public or professional aspirations.

b) *Lack of Access to Education and Training*: Women, particularly in semi-arid and rural regions, often have less access to education and training opportunities compared to men. This educational gap hinders their ability to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to compete for and succeed in leadership positions.

c) *Limited Networking Opportunities*: Women have fewer opportunities to engage in professional and political networks that are crucial for career advancement. These networks are often dominated by men, making it challenging for women to gain the visibility and support needed to ascend to leadership roles.

d) *Economic Barriers*: Economic disparities and financial constraints prevents the women from pursuing leadership roles. Campaigning for political positions or participating in governance often requires significant financial resources, which many women do not have access to due to systemic economic inequities.

e) *Gender Bias and Discrimination*: Women face pervasive gender bias and discrimination in many aspects of public and professional life. This bias manifests in hiring practices, promotion decisions, and the allocation of resources, creating additional hurdles for women striving for leadership positions.

f) *Safety and Security Concerns*: Women in leadership or aspiring to such positions face threats to their safety and security, including harassment, intimidation, and violence. These concerns deters and/or discourages women from pursuing or maintaining leadership roles

To address these challenges, the panelists proposed several strategies aimed at creating a more inclusive governance environment:

a) *Capacity Building and Education*: Investing in education and training programs specifically tailored for women to build their leadership skills and knowledge. This includes formal education, leadership training workshops, and continuous professional development opportunities.

b) *Mentorship Programs*: Establishing mentorship and sponsorship programs where experienced female leaders can guide and support younger women in their leadership journeys. These programs help build confidence, provide valuable insights, and open doors to new opportunities.

c) *Policy Advocacy*: Advocating for policies that promote gender equality and protect women's rights in the workplace and public sphere. This includes enforcing anti-discrimination laws, implementing gender quotas in political and organizational Leadership positions, and ensuring equal pay.

d) *Creating Support Networks*: Facilitating the formation of women's networks and forums that provide a platform for sharing experiences, resources, and support. These networks can also serve as advocacy groups pushing for systemic changes to support women's Leadership.

e) *Economic Empowerment*: Developing programs that provide women with financial resources and support, such as grants, loans, and economic empowerment initiatives. This financial support can help women overcome economic barriers and invest in their leadership aspirations.

f) *Raising Awareness and Changing Perceptions*: Conducting awareness campaigns to challenge and change societal norms and perceptions about women in leadership. Promoting positive role models and success stories of female leaders can inspire and encourage more women to pursue leadership roles.

3. **Success Stories:** Inspirational stories from women leaders who have successfully navigated the political landscape were shared, providing motivation and practical insights for aspiring female leaders in the audience.

4. **Community Engagement:** The event facilitated an open forum where community members voiced their concerns and suggestions regarding women's roles in governance. This engagement underscored the community's support for increased female representation and participation in local decision-making processes.

5. **Networking Opportunities:** Attendees had the opportunity to network with stakeholders, including NGOs, government representatives, and international partners, fostering collaborations that will support ongoing efforts to enhance women's participation in governance.