Review Article

Advocating for Context-Based Interventions to Mitigate Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination in Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia

Mohamud Abukar[1,4], Mohamed A. Eno[2,4*], Charles Kebaya[3,4]

[1]Senior Lecturer, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Southern Somalia, Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia
[2]Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Southern Somalia, Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia
[3]Senior Lecturer, Literature and Linguistics, Machakos University, Machakos, Kenya
[4]Senior Research Fellow, Hakaba Institute for Research & Training, Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia

Abstract: Discrimination based on gender is a pervasive issue throughout Somalia, with women facing various forms of domestic violence, sexual assault and barriers to gainful education, employment, social, economic and political participation. Factors ranging from displacement of people, conflict, religious, cultural, communal, clan, political to social status have been adduced as the root cause for discrimination and violence against women. Focusing on acts of gender discrimination and gender-based violence in the city of Baidoa in the Southwest State of Somalia, this paper provides germane context-based interventions to mitigate the GBV scourge. Conscious of the fact that discrimination based on gender is not only a violation of human rights but also detrimental to societal development, this article shows that for civic education on gender discrimination and violence to be effective, it should be customized to the specific regions, clans and communities in Somalia and that practitioners drawn from these areas should be involved in its delivery. Materials used for civic education should be translated into local dialects with local idioms and totems used in messaging. Clan elders, religious leaders and local administrators should be involved in educating community education and advocacy efforts aimed at eliminating gender-based violence and discrimination. This paper concludes that in order to accelerate progress towards a more just and equitable society for all in Somalia, all stakeholders should be involved in advocacy and mainstreaming gender in society.

Keywords: Baidoa, domestic violence, gender-based violence (GBV), gender discrimination, sexual abuse.

I. INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, progressive gains have been made towards the attainment of gender quality in the political, economic and social spheres (Oswald 2023). For instance, between 2019 and 2023, more and more countries around the world have tackled discriminatory social institutions, notably through legal reforms that protect women's rights and grant them equal opportunities (Oswald 2023). Global advances have also been made in the recognition of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as human rights and a necessity for inclusive development. These gains have been as a result of concerted efforts and global gender campaigns over the years. Gender equality was officially recognized in 1945 through the United Nations Charter as a global strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction.

The official recognition set the stage for making gender equality an integral component of the subsequent equality debates embodied in instruments particularly the 1967 Convention of the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW). The spirit of the CEDAW is rooted in the goals of the United Nations: "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women" as enunciated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) among other international and regional treaties, conventions and agreements. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

*Corresponding Author: Mohamed A. Eno
Professor, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Southern Somalia, Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia

51

provides the foundation for a just and decent future for all, where all men and women enjoy equal rights.

According to the Strategy of Mainstreaming as defined in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed conclusions 1997, Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

Most recently, both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015-2030) have incorporated gender equality as a standalone goal and as a target across other goals. As per the Constitutive Act of the African Union, Article 4 (l) Gender Equality is stated amongst the principles that all states should adhere to.

Article 11 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia provides that both the federal government and state governments must not discriminate against any person on the basis of age, race, color, tribe, ethnicity, clan, culture, dialect, gender, birth, disability, religion, political opinion, occupation, social or economic status or wealth. Discrimination is deemed to occur if the effect of an action impairs or restricts a person's rights, even if the actor did not intend this effect. Gender intersects with each of these inequalities creating a myriad of domination for women which may be more overwhelming than for men because of women's limited access to opportunities, agency and capacity to negotiate and move between different intersections as the situation demands. Regarding economic and social rights, the federal constitution in Article 27 states that it shall be ensured that women, the aged, the disabled and minorities who have long suffered discrimination get the necessary support to realize their socio-economic rights. The isolation of women as needing special attention is also an example of the recognition of intersectional discrimination based on age and gender.

Despite these robust legal provisions that protect women's rights and grant them equal opportunities, various forms of discrimination based on gender are still prevalent in Somalia. Cases of GBV, sexual assault and domestic abuse are reported across the country, with an increase in the belief that men should have more rights to job opportunities compared to women. Crises, conflicts, and the political backlash against gender equality in several states further limit women's access to various opportunities and deepen inequalities. It is against this background that this article examines gender discrimination and GBV in the city of Baidoa, Southwest State of Somalia, and presents ways of mitigating the various forms of discrimination against women in Somalia. It is the contention of this research that germane context-specific solutions are required for Somalia to make tremendous steps towards gender equality in society.

II. METHOD

Document analysis was used as a methodology for this article. This approach was valuable because it allowed the analysis of pre-existing sources and publications such as reports and articles. The document analysis focused on gender-based violence and gender discrimination in Somalia, Baidoa, in particular. Both scholarly sources and research reports were consulted. Thematic analysis was used in the interpretation and presentation of information obtained from document analysis.

III. OVERVIEW OF GBV AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN SOMALIA

United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) report (2022) estimated that 2.3 million people require GBV programs and support services across Somalia, with the number likely to increase in the subsequent years. The report notes that adult married women, adolescent girls, widows, divorced women, female headed households, pregnant and lactating women, orphans, women and girls living with disabilities are disproportionately subjected to various forms of gender violence and discrimination emanating from social status and gendered social norms. Further the report observes that Intimate Partner Violence; rapes; sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse due to displacements are prevalent in Somalia. Pre-existing discriminatory gendered norms and practices have been cited to contribute to GBV and gender discrimination in Somalia, which consequently increase the vulnerability of adolescent girls because of their age and gender.

In addition, a report by Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) in 2021 indicated that 62% of the reported GBV incidents were physical assault, 11% rape, 10% sexual assault, 7% denial of resources, 6% psychological/emotional abuse, and 4 % forced/early marriage. Most of these abuses are little known about because of cultural and traditional practices that treat gender abuse as a private matter to be solved through customary remedials and discussions. For instance, the girl child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some communities, girls are exposed to female genital mutilation, child marriages, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation. Due to the entrenched social-cultural and religious attitudes, girls are often treated as inferior and are socialized to consider themselves of less value compared to men. This leads to a lifetime marginalization of girls. Although these traditional,

cultural, and customary institutions have had enduring roles in Somali society, they more often than not contribute to the disparity between the genders rather than efficiently address women's issues.

The Somali Health and Demographic Survey (SHDS, 2020) notes that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a severe form of GBV that continues to be systematically practiced in Somalia. FGM is socially accepted, considered to be for the good and protection of the female child and therefore performed on most girls. Somali Health and Demographic Survey (2020) indicates that 99% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been subjected to FGM. FGM is not understood as a violation of the human rights of women and girls and has remained pervasive and a strong social norm as it is seen as a requirement for girls to marry. Families seeking to escape poverty and build social acceptance and affinity, will choose to mutilate their female children. According to the findings of the SHDS, there has been a shift from the extreme type 3 Pharaonic FGM to type 1 Sunna, which is a step in the right direction, however as most communities do not consider Sunna as FGM or harmful in any form (physical or psychological), it remains a normative practice. As of yet, Somalia does not have a law against FGM.

IV. CONTEXTUALIZING GBV AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN BAIDOA

Baidoa city serves as the interim capital city of Southwest State of Somalia (SWSS). It is situated approximately 250 kilometers west of Mogadishu. UNFPA (2014) census report indicates that the population of Baidoa is approximately 300,000, while Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF 2024) furnishes an estimate of "1.1 million people in Baidoa and its surroundings" out of which approximately "700,000 are the IDPs" who live in camps situated in the environs of the city, a number which is set to grow in subsequent years. Baidoa is ethnically and culturally diverse, with many local residents originating from other parts of the country. Baidoa is traditionally inhabited by ethnic Rahaweyn clan which is part of the confederate communities called Digil-Mirifle. The Ormale, Ajuran and Wacdan are amongst the smaller clans found in this area.

UNHCR report (2020) indicates that there are many cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Baidoa in particular in IDP settlements and Wadajir area where refugee returnees live in high population. While reporting of SGBV cases has improved recently, it still remains low due to fear of stigmatization and retaliation. A number of humanitarian organizations provide services to SGBV survivors such as medical treatment, transportation and PSS but are inadequate. On the other hand, Saferworld (https://www.saferworld-global.org/) reports the GBV problem along with other social issues and how community action forums (CAFs) intervene: "In 2019, the CAFs in Baidoa dealt with 155

cases: 36 related to land disputes, 21 issues of domestic violence, 24 neighborhood disputes, 11 cases of GBV, 12 safety concerns, and 51 other interventions."

Gender-based violence, in its multiple forms and characteristics, has for long been (and still is) an enduring threat. According to Tyler and Weibel (2008), a confident female mother talks about her ordeal in the outskirts of Baidoa city, with her two daughters, to collect firewood for sale to feed her children: "I was chased once by several armed men. That time we were able to escape, but at other times some of my friends were raped." United Nations-Somalia (2021) published a story in which a victim of domestic violence and a mother of three in one of the IDP camps in Baidoa narrates her experience saying, "I vividly recall what happened that Friday morning. My husband physically assaulted me and caused serious injuries to my body. I left the homestead to seek medical help as well as to escape from him." Although some support was provided to her to overcome and cope with the trauma, it remains a fact that crucial services such as psycho-trauma counselling is not offered by adequately-trained counsellors, since professional practice and education in social work is very recent in Somalia (Eno *et al.,* 2022a, Eno *et al.,* 2022b).

Local implementing organizations, with their meagre resources accessed from international partners and umbrella organizations, participate in the major activities in intervention, prevention, and awareness-raising of the different sectors of society. Using community-based approaches, they build networks with women in different sub-districts of Baidoa city and the IDPs in order to advocate against sex and gender-based violence. Conducting what it termed "16 days of activism against Gender Based Violence," Isha Human Rights Organization (IHRA), a local implementing partner for several international organizations, employed a unique approach of women-to-women (W2W) to create needed awareness among women to confront the evils of SGBV. The aim of these kinds of forums is, among other aspects, to:

- provide a platform for women leaders to speak out violence against women and advocate for the protection of women from all forms of violence;
- provide a space to participants of women-only dialogue to interact with other women including: women leaders, women activists, teachers, students, grassroots women and IDP women and collectively call for immediate actions that address the root causes of SGBV.

According to IHRO (2023), the advocacy campaigns resulted from women's concerns including:
- Sexual abuse and exploitation, rape, and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are all on the rise as a result of the ongoing drought, particularly in Bay and Bakool regions.

- The below-average Gu and Dayr rainfalls in 2022 have resulted in crop failure and livestock death, severely reducing household income. As a result, heads of households, typically men, are less able to fulfill traditional responsibilities of primary provision for families, and the burden of providing economic support by women and adolescent girls is increased.

- This [above-mentioned economic, social, and environmental factors] increases the vulnerability of female-headed households, including widows, women from minority clans, and those with disabilities, as they struggle to cope with rising food prices, scarcity of water, and discriminatory social cultural norms and practices that endanger the lives of women and girls and adversely affect their wellbeing, status, personal security, and health.

According to the organization Women in Development (2020), data specifically collected to analyze the effect of GBV in Somalia reveals that 74% of survivors of the various types of GBV in Somalia, particularly victims who obtained services mainly consist of the vulnerable people in IDP camps, while about 99% of them are comprised of women and girls. To curb the GBV menace, international agencies actively involved in Somalia's emergency, relief, and humanitarian activities set up feedback mechanisms providing "direct feedback channel from the community to the aid agencies through information desks and toll-free hotline-numbers," (Women in Development 2020); although elsewhere reports confirm how some of these mechanisms were ineffective and in certain cases even more harmful to the complainants than before filing the complaint (Thomas and Eno 2022). Abdiweli Shariff Ali (2024), GBV and Protection Project Coordinator of Gargaar Relief and Development Organization (GREDO), a leading indigenous NGO with its head office in Baidoa, chronicles the problem based on his experience as an informed officer with proven account of the situation, with an intonation reflective of his disgust with the malpractice:

> Every day, in every part of Somalia, women are confronted by discrimination and inequality. They face violence, physical abuse, verbal abuse and unequal treatment, denial of resources, opportunities, and right participation in their wider communities, and are denied opportunities to learn, to earn and to lead. Women form the majority of those living in poverty.

V. TACKLING GBV AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Scholars who based their observation on "(particularly in Western contexts)" postulate that "a feminist perspective on prevention calls attention to gender socialization and structural inequities based on gender as inherent in legitimate prevention endeavors," (Strorer *et al.,* 2016:2-3). The feminist perspective encourages the conceptualization of violence from a gender viewpoint so as to unravel the core elements associated with the root causes of the violence (Schechter, 1982; Yllo & Bograd, 1988; Strorer *et al.,* 2016). Studies give the assumption that "quality prevention" becomes more effective in environments where the professionals engaged in prevention exercises have attained the necessary "theoretical and practical expertise needed to enrich efforts to reduce violence," (Prothrow-Stith & Davis, 2010:343).

To strengthen the effectiveness of the prevention approach to gender discrimination, abuse and violence, suggestions have been made that encourage the inclusion of boys and men in primary prevention strategies, responding to the assumption that basically males are recognized as the main perpetrators of gender-based violence and discrimination against women by changing men's attitude as a strategy for an enhanced practice in education on sexual violence (Flood 2004, 2006, 2011; Black *et al.,* 2011; Strorer *et al.,* 2016; Carlson *et al.,* 2015), although there exists scarcity of reliable research engaged in male involvement in prevention of violence in post conflict situations. The notion behind male engagement in the prevention of violence against women informs the realization that underlies the necessity of involving the likely violators of women's rights in the solution-seeking process rather than overload the likely victims with the burden related to the challenges. Experts highlight the inclusion of what is termed as "gender transformative approaches" that maximize men's participation in the prevention of violence and abuse against women as the nature of such involvements "indeed sit at the heart of conceptualizing gender transformative programming and may also ultimately contribute to emancipatory gains related to gender identities," as also elaborated in the models proposed by (Casey *et al.,* 2018:232).

Preference to examine gender discrimination and violence from a feminine or gender perspective is adhered to by a section of scholars including Sarah Bradshaw who view the phenomenon with a constructionist lens focusing on social expectations of how a man or a woman is constituted of (Bradshaw 2013). Hence, a gender or feminist theoretical viewpoint illuminates the intricate realities surrounding gender by considering social relationships that include gender identity, sexual orientation and other societal dimensions and strata and their interconnections with gender and their impact on the normalization of and resistance against oppression, dominance, subordination, degradation and other factors that influence the various types of violence, abuse, and discriminations specific to women. In their "conceptual contribution" describing their model elaborated under the title "The spectrum of prevention: developing a comprehensive approach to injury prevention," authors Cohen and Swift (1999:203-

207) propose a spectrum of intervention that articulates a six-level proposal for attaining impactful results:

i. Strengthening individual knowledge and skills
ii. Promoting community education
iii. Educating providers and other professionals
iv. Fostering coalition and networks
v. Changing organizational practices
vi. Influencing policy and legislation

VI. PREVALENCE AND IMPACT OF GBV AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Asfaw et al. (2008) studied the prevalence of gender discrimination in the health care with focus on the financing behavior of households for children aged under nine years in the Indian context. Gender discrimination is prevalent in households' expenditure on child health care despite scarcity of resources. Analyzing data from India's 52nd National Sample Survey, the study shows the probability of households to sell their assets, or access loan to cover the costs of inpatient girls which is estimate to be 4.3 percent less than the medical costs spent on boys. Fikree & Pasha, (2004) contend that while women from developed countries access several opportunities that enhance their living conditions, the same is not evident in societies where massive gender gap is prevalent. That is why, for instance, women in some parts of the underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh remain disadvantaged and placed in inferior positions in contrast to men, thereby remaining culturally, socially, and economically subordinate and dependent on their male counterpart (Fikree & Pasha, 2004). The culturally constructed subordinate position disadvantages women to the undertaking of traditional household errands such as caring, cooking and cleaning, (Parveen, 2008, Ferdaush & Rahman, 2011), hindering them from their aspirations towards self-fulfillment and self-actualization.

Although women are targeted with multiple types of abuse and violence, discrimination also remains a prevailing phenomenon and an obstacle of women's progress in all sectors of development. It is conceived as an individual's belief or decision of unfair treatment on account of one's membership in a social group or community (Major, Quinton, and McCoy 2002). Apart from the belief, the conundrum with discrimination is the fact of the discriminated individual's inability to measure the amount of discrimination one has been a target of in a particular situation (Kaiser and Major, 2006), where "individuals might see more discrimination than actually exists (a vigilance bias), or they might see less discrimination than actually exists (a minimization bias)," (Kaiser & Major 2006:802-802). According to Schmitt and Branscombe (2011), discrimination is a perceived reality which can be destructive to the person's psychological wellbeing of those who belong to the discriminated group as it informs rejection, inequality to opportunities, and denial of one's effort and aspiration to seek self-actualization. Therefore, the negative attributes assigned as a result of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination "are more psychologically harmful for members of disadvantaged groups than for members of privileged groups," (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2011:168).

Authors including Pradhan and Ram (2010) indicate that certain types of discrimination regarding distribution of roles and responsibilities to men and women in an unequal measure, influence the stereotypical attitudes that seek the formalization of gender-based discrimination often targeted against women. As Lila Adhikari (2007:11) states, normalized social and communal traditional practices over a long period of time "finally justified male domination over female as a cultural trait." The impact of these perceptions, according to Morrison cited in Adhikari (2007) cement the ground for the cultural influences that form an individual's perceived attitude towards abuse. Adhikari invokes multiple authors in the realm of Burgess and Borgida, (1999), Eagly, (1987), Heilman (2001), Terborg (1977) and explains: "The constellation of traits and attributes that are thought to uniquely describe men and women are called descriptive stereotypes. In contrast to descriptive stereotypes, prescriptive stereotypes refer to the set of attributes and characteristics that describe how men and women 'should' be." While gender discrimination and inequality are an everyday reality in present-day society, Mason and King warn in their report that "ignoring gender disparities comes at great cost to people's wellbeing and to countries' abilities to grow sustainably, to govern effectively, and thus to reduce poverty. This conclusion presents an important challenge to the development community" (Mason and King, 2001).

VII. INTERVENTION OF GBV AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION

To participate in the global effort to improve gender empowerment in the multi-spheric avenues of development, in the 1990s countries in the East Africa region started gender budgeting as a strategy to address gender disparity in their countries, "motivated by several key international and regional agreements and to address gender equality issues through planning and budgeting processes," (Khasiani & Tripathi 2018:121). Commonly known as gender responsive budgeting (GRB), the countries reported divergent progress levels. Khasiani & Tripathi (2018) confirm this as they write, "While Uganda and Rwanda have achieved notable success in their efforts to integrate gender-oriented goals into budget policies, programs and processes, a lot more needs to be done in other member countries." Reporting from Ethiopia, the seat of the African Union, Endashaw (2018, cited in Khasiani & Tripathi 2018) explains how the Ethiopian government collaborated with the UN Women to work on its comprehensive national gender agenda that positions gender issues at the heart of state policy and national development strategy as reflected in the annual state budget. In the year 2008 the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) took the initiative to set up a national guideline

for the implementation of gender-focused policy and activities in the budget, as reported by Endashaw (2018).

In a three-day regional workshop held in Arusha, Tanzania, in August 2018, organized by the IMF's East Afritac (AFE) Center, on the theme: "Understanding Gender Responsive Budgeting," over 20 officials from the various ministries and agencies designated to promote and work on gender equality, participated in the event. While responsible officials from Rwanda, Ethiopia, Tanzania (including Zanzibar), Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda participated to represent their countries, delegates from Somalia were absent from the workshop, by either not being part of the regional agenda promoting the initiative, or not considering the importance of the regional effort promoting the amelioration of gender issues toward national development. The discussions, which revolved around five main areas, were summarized by Khasiani & Tripathi (2018) as follows:

i. An enabling legal framework is important but not sufficient to mainstream gender
ii. Leadership by the ministry of finance is critical but not enough;
iii. Introducing GRB as part of broader program of public-sector reform;
iv. Availability of sex-disaggregated data is a key prerequisite; and
v. Keeping reforms simple

VIII. PREVENTION OF GBV & DISCRIMINATION

According to Heise (2011), prevention of violence has to be studied and/or addressed from the three different perspectives of the phenomenon as primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. At the primary level, prevention is applied before occurrence of the violence and alludes to "moving upstream" before any act of offence has been undertaken against a targeted victim of that violence by dealing proactively with the root cause that is likely to trigger the act of violence. Broadening the descriptive scope of primary violence, Cohen and Chehimi (2010) indicate that primary level of violence prevention is an approach that concentrates not only on an individual's behavior but strategically focuses as well on the structures and spaces that have potential to transpire violence.

Contrary to primary prevention, secondary and tertiary prevention are approaches implemented after violence has been meted against an individual target or a group of targets. Thus, secondary prevention focuses on the immediate needs of victims of violence in terms of medical care, moral and other support services that help decrease recurrence or repetition of further violence (Heise 2011). Tertiary prevention, on the other hand, and as described by (Krug *et al.,* 2002; Heise, 2011), relates to mechanisms adopted that are aimed at containing and

managing the negative effects on survivor of violence in the long run.

Investigations carried out to study prevention programs on gender-based violence in developed and under-developed countries seem to have laid focus in the context of non-disaster situations where secondary and tertiary prevention mechanisms were applied. Prevention responses employed in these situations tended to be mainly on the provision of support to the survivors of the violence and efforts to hold the perpetrators of the violence accountable through the justice system. Other prevention approaches included consideration of activities for poverty reduction and promotion of livelihood empowerment for the survivors and advocacy for gender equality aimed at confronting challenges related to negative customary and socio-cultural behavior (Strorer *et al.,* 2016; Ellsberg *et al.,* 2015). The scholarly endeavor does not however provide sufficient evidence that such prevention programs produce remarkable results leading to a decrease in the violence, prompting more attention toward the necessity to increase research on the primary approaches of prevention that particularly study the phenomenon in the context of countries categorized as either low-income or poor countries (Ellsberg *et al.,* 2015; Heise, 2011; Krug *et al.,* 2002).

IX. CONCLUSION

The study carried out a review and analysis of various written sources covering nations across continents. By doing so, it demonstrated the magnitude of GBV all over the world while focusing on its impact on women in Somalia. The study shed light on some of the multiple factors causing the violence against Somali women which have cultural conservatism at the root of the issue. In some contexts, the vulnerability of the victims is further aggravated by lack of effective laws on the one hand, and on the other hand, interference of cultural elders who often undermine the female victim in parts of the country where some sort of gender law exists. In order to combat GBV and gender discrimination mayhem, a concerted effort is needed from all sectors of society to participate in the promotion of gender-friendly social environment that confronts all forms of gender violence and related abuses.

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