

# TECHNICAL REPORT



**Third Annual Knowledge Exchange Conference**  
**Somali Women in Higher Education, Research and**  
**Academia**

**BIEA Conference Hall, Nairobi, Kenya**

**27 SEPTEMBER 2023**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CONFERENCE .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
OPENING REMARKS .....	6
MRS. SILVIA MWENDWA, MAWAZO VOICES PROGRAMME OFFICER.....	7
KEYNOTE SPEAKER DR. FATUMA ALI AHMED, PROFESSOR US UNIVERSITY OF AFRICA, NAIROBI .....	7
QUESTIONS, ANSWERS, AND DISCUSSIONS .....	10
KEYNOTE SPEAKER FATUMA ALI SUMAN, EDUCATION POLICY AND LEADERSHIP EXPERT.....	10
QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND DISCUSSION .....	11
PANEL 1: SOMALI FEMALE STUDENTS AND JOURNALISTS LIVING IN KENYA: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES .....	12
<i>Amal MOHAMED, Student, Kenyatta University.....</i>	12
<i>Zamzam Abbas, master’s Student, University of Nairobi.....</i>	13
<i>Hodman Mohammed, Coordinator, Somali Gender Hub/ Kenya Methodist University .....</i>	13
<i>Leila Mohammed, Journalist and Radio Ergo/ International Media Support .....</i>	14
QUESTION & ANSWERS AND DISCUSSION .....	15
PANEL 2: FEMALE STUDENTS IN SOMALIA, EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES.....	16
<i>Zakaria Hassan, Researcher, Fandhaal Institute Southwest State.....</i>	16
<i>Faduma Adan, Director, Somali Women Development (SOWDO), Jubbaland.....</i>	16
<i>Ikraam ABDIAZIZ, Somali Gender Hub, Mentorship Coordinator, Mogadishu.....</i>	17
BOOK LAUNCH: DR. NEREIDA MUNIZ, LECTURER, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, SOUTH AFRICA .....	18
OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND ACADEMIA, RESEARCH TRAINING MANAGER RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE GEOFFREY LUGANO.....	18
ERICK M KIOKO, RESEARCH FELLOW AT THE KENYATTA UNIVERSITY AND BONN UNIVERSITY .....	19
MIND MATTERS: ELEVATING WOMEN'S ACADEMIC SUCCESS THROUGH MENTAL WELLNESS, NASRA MOHAMED, FRUITION CONSULT .....	19
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OUTCOMES/ACTION POINTS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>WAY FORWARD .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>ANNEXES .....</b>	<b>21</b>
ANNEX 1: PROGRAM AGENDA .....	21
ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS (OFFLINE).....	22

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CONFERENCE

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2023, a one-day conference was organized by Somali women in Higher education, research and academia in BIEA offices in Kenya. The conference was the third annual conference organized by the Somali Gender Hub in partnership with the Mawazo Institute. The event brought together over 60 people physically and over 30 people joined online from different regions watching via Facebook, YouTube and others, including Keynote speakers, who joined via Zoom. A number of Somali women and some men, scholars, and prominent speakers attended this meeting in Nairobi to discuss challenges and opportunities in the higher education sector for women. There was also empowerment for women to realize their potential in research by creating opportunities to build skills for female Somali researchers. Women in higher education often lack professional work experience and struggle to pass standard tests conducted for job opportunities. Women and girls also lack the language and technical skills required for certain positions in academia. Very few women publish their work and there is little collaboration between women themselves.

The Conference on Somali Women in Higher Education, Research, and Academia held on 27<sup>th</sup> September and organized by the Somali Gender Hub in collaboration with the Mawazo Institute was significant and successful. It was the first attempt to combine the experiences and expertise of the more emerging and long-established Somali women researchers and academics. The conference provided an opportunity to reflect on what has been happening in the area of women and higher education, to share experiences, perspectives, and responses to the challenges, and, at the same time, to give thought to set the directions for the future.

A community of practice mailing has been set up for female researchers' network and Somali women in higher education to connect, share opportunities and resources. If you'd like to join our mailing list, kindly email [info@somaligenderhub.org](mailto:info@somaligenderhub.org), mentioning 'NETWORK' in subject line. This link will take you to the community of practice <https://somaligenderhub.org/community-of-practice/>

The Voice of Africa (VOA) Somali journalists came to the event during, and they took pictures, interviewed the director of SGH and other speakers as well as participants, about the objectives and outcomes of the event. Here is a link to the event <https://fb.watch/nyTN457nYX/>

Below are some of the critical takeaways mentioned in the conference from both challenges that are in the way of women excelling in higher education, research, and academia, as well as and opportunities perspectives. Following are bullet points on the takeaways from the conference:

- Women do not have equal chances in education, and existing policies are not implemented to achieve this.
- There is a lack of systematic absence of research and reliable data about the teaching and learning achievements of the country since the collapse of the central government.
- There is a lack of data and evidence about women in HE, research, and academia.
- Women's participation in HE is linked to women's leadership and decision-making roles in public and political spheres. Women in these positions, national, state, and local, remain very low.
- There is a lack of good quality education facilities for Somali women.
- Most universities have no research centers that encourage publications.
- The institutions are not competitive.
- There is a lack of gender responsiveness within the institutions and no female lecturers and only a few female students.
- Lack of role models and inspirational individuals and of organizations that support skills development.
- Lack of skilled women applying for jobs in a competitive labor market and limited access to learning and research resources such as libraries and computers, while access to the internet is available but slow.
- Lack of link between local females and more established Diaspora women academics.
- Scholarships for women and girls must remain competitive and tailor-made to address needs.
- Development of policies at government and institutional levels to promote the participation of women in higher education & academia
- Tailored mentorship and capacity-building programs dedicated to outstanding female talent.
- Invest in the strength of women's voices in academia, knowledge production and research; their power is crucial to the healing of the Somali nation.
- Initiatives must not only provide employment opportunities but also job training support.
- Since the war, Somali women have immensely contributed to the development of their country and must get acknowledgment and recognition for this.
- Access to information.
- 
- To increase women's leadership and participation in research, publication, and HE and see more women in leadership positions in the higher education sector.
- Gender departments in the ministries of education in the federal member states should work together to link and learn from one another.
- According to Somali NDP-11, making policies gender-sensitive and undertaking strategies for women's empowerment is one of the priority interventions for 2020-2024.



## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

This third annual conference had the following set objectives:

- To take home the list of different opportunities and gather them so that one could identify where her potential lies.
- To Explore and understand the situation of Somali women in research and academia as far as gaps are concerned, challenges and opportunities.
- To empower the rising of women's voices in research and knowledge production, primarily reflecting on the Somali war that took place when there was less knowledge on research and reliable data.
- To realize potential in research by creating opportunities to build skills for female Somali researchers
- To increase women's leadership potential and participation in research, publication, and HE and see more women in leadership positions in the higher education sector.
- To reflect on what has been happening in the area of women and higher education, to share experiences, perspectives, and responses to the challenges, and, at the same time, to give thought to set the directions for the future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference on Somali women in higher education, research, and academia consumed much work, study, and dedication. It has been in preparation for months and implementation would not have been possible if we did not have the support of many institutions, organizations and individuals. To begin with, the Somalia Gender Hub team would like to acknowledge the invaluable insights and guidance of the Mawazo Institute for their support and endowment to the conference on women in Higher education, research and academia in Somalia to be successful conference. Contributions such as those from the Mawazo Institute are critical to supporting our institution's scientific, educational, and professional activities. On behalf of the Hub, we would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to this year's keynote speakers and the other speakers and panelists for their invaluable inputs and knowledge concerning women and higher education in Somalia.

We would also like to thank the participants who participated in the extended hour conference and for their questions. It can be reasonably concluded that the Women in Higher Education, research, and Academia conference was successful because of many people's participation and input. Many individuals have contributed to turning this event into a smoothly running meeting with fascinating presentations and speakers and an excellent atmosphere for suggestions and ideas development. In addition, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the volunteers who devoted their time and generously shared their patience, experience, and materials for this project and their enormous and high-quality support. Finally, the success and outcome of the conference required a lot of guidance, assistance, and support. We are incredibly fortunate to have gotten this all along with completing the project work.

## THE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

### Opening Remarks

The one-day event was very substantial as it connected people from different regions watching online on Facebook or YouTube. Other people, including very important keynote speakers, joined the live via Zoom and were able to give their speeches online. Others physically attended in the BIAE office in Nairobi, Kenya. Most importantly, a section of Somali women who are the main antagonists in this initiative, scholars and speakers also attended this conference. Mrs. Sahra Ahmed Koshin, the founder and Director of Somali Gender Hub (SGH) and a Mawazo Institute Policy 2021 fellow, officially opened the one-day conference. She mentioned the objectives of the conference and briefed the people on the programmed scope of the conference. She is also a PhD student in Somali Diaspora Humanitarianism at the University of Copenhagen and Nairobi.

She noted how education, research, and reliable data had not been embraced by women in Somalia and wished that after the conference, everyone would get to grab many opportunities. She was very observant and highlighted the far this group has come from and some of the initiatives they have been involved in. More on the SGH mentorship program is explained further in the report. Sahra acknowledged that it was not easy to find reliable research data on Somali women or studies done by Somali women themselves or involved in them. The Hub provides an online platform that lists Somali scholars engaged in research and knowledge production. It also offers the opportunity to seek out new opportunities for collaboration.

### **Mrs. Silvia Mwendwa, Mawazo Voices Programme Officer**

Mrs. Sahra invited Mrs. Silvia Mwendwa, the Mawazo Voices Programme officer, who is in partnership and connects funds. She introduced herself and started by telling what the institute is all about. It is a women-led organization supporting early careers for women in Africa and researchers in the continent.

The Voices program aims to amplify and elevate the work of the women undertaking their research. She said the Voices program performs its work through public engagements, policy engagement, strategic partnerships, and financial support for its research activities. They use the platform to increase women's visibility in the research programs. She recalled when the institute met Mrs. Sahra in 2021 when their founder, Dr. Rose Mutiso, recommended her and then was willing to expand her work with women in higher education. Silvia mentioned how the institute used Sahra's work with the policy fellowship to build and connect some funds for their research, conference, and policy works.

She then concluded by complementing the Somali Gender Hub headed by Sahra for the good, recommendable work they have been doing on women in higher education, research and academia.



### **Keynote Speaker Dr. Fatuma Ali Ahmed, Professor US University of Africa, Nairobi**

Dr. Fatuma, a professor at the United States University of Africa Nairobi, was the next speaker and, of course, one of the keynote speakers for the day. She joined online and started sharing her presentation through a projection so that it looked lively.

She began by first thanking and congratulating a section of personnel who have worked hard to ensure the Gender Hub organization reached that far. Dr. Fatuma mentioned her focus topic for the day's presentation to be some of the benefits of Somali women being in higher learning institutions, some of the challenges they meet, and finally, the opportunities they have. She did this presentation perfectly by reflecting on the life of a woman in a higher learning institution. On her head start, she began by doing a life academic testimony about her experiences in the higher learning institution for the last 19 years. She highlights her experience benefits, challenges, and opportunities.

She reflects on a story about her experience after finishing secondary school and being called to pursue a degree in home economics at the University of Kenyatta. Her father was shocked to see

her just at home cooking and asked why she did not go to school to take any degree course. However, this was not according to her wish, and she was willing to take a course that would take her very far, like traveling and all that which would be found in areas like aviation. Fatuma said she finally realized and saw herself as a diplomat and started looking for programs. When she found the first one about diplomacy, she qualified for her BA, where there were only six Somali girls, and of course, that would look like a challenge to Somali women's education access.

Dr. Fatuma starts to mention one of her challenges in her education journey by strictly focusing on career work to be more traveling and move to far places. However, no one in her family had even been into this before, and therefore, it was a challenge to convince most people around her that this move was substantial or impactful. On the contrary, she would always get fatherly support and went ahead to get a recommendation from her professor that empowered her to do a master's degree in Sociology and Human Resources. After finishing University, she got interested in working with an international civil society due to its focus on peace education and eradicating war, which she liked the most. After that, she met another challenge when she tried to apply for a scholarship, as it came just a quarter of the total fees needed to go to Cornell, which blew her dream off. She then opted to take the offer and go to Spain for a master's, where she encountered many challenges, including language barriers. She points out a lack of clue on how the Ph.D. she did after her Master's would be impactful to her. After that, she managed to join the international relations department, which was challenging since she was the first woman to deal with stereotypes.



As she concludes her academic journey, she highlights statements of encouragement to her fellow women by starting to tell them about many opportunities in the educational sector. She calls upon women to be out to face the stereotypes and stand their confidence without thinking about who they are. She even makes the women realize that they have role models, including

her, unlike back in her day when she could not learn or copy any role model, therefore making her even think she was rebelling or something. She mentions another challenge: female professors were least expected to teach a class.

For example, when she went to teach at one time and the students realized she was a female, some dropped out; however, the few who continued were successful up to the Ph.D. level to a section. She mentions the importance of this step she has made since she empowers other women through her mentorship, being a role model and giving them opportunities to think beyond what they would think. Dr. Fatuma helps women understand and demystify the myth that if you educate a girl, they will get married, get lost in society, and even be rebellious. This is one of the challenges she experienced when her father's friends complained that educating girls was a waste of money since she would get married. Still, her father was persistent in educating



her to her best level of studies. She, however, challenges these allegations about female education by asserting the women that the good thing is that one can show what they can do and demystify and demonstrate their capacity.

From her reflection, one of the benefits that she sees is that she portrays or forms a motivational structure to her younger University sisters and she can shape their characters, give those pieces of advice, hold their hands and recommend them to do specific programs. The second stage she talked about was knowledge production, where she first highlighted her ability to contribute

knowledge to society by authoring books.

Her sources of inspiration were giving voice on women's empowerment, war, social development and peacebuilding. She next talks about Somali women being visible in the academic journey. She mentions and encourages the people in the room, especially Somali women, to come out strongly to realize their potential and calls upon Sahra to continue empowering the girls to demystify their beliefs. Negative social construction people have about Somali. She continued to say that as Somali women bother lecturers, professors and researchers, many things can be done under our control and achieve every aspect of visibility. She enlightened the people that even if there may be challenges and ups and downs, there is still a chance to get to success.

### **Questions, answers, and discussions**

After Dr. Fatuma Alis's presentation, there were questions and their answers. Here, some people inquired about specific clarifications from Professor Fatuma Ali. The first person wanted to know or have clarifications on the central role played in Fatima's success so that they, as men, could embody the positive traits to support human refugees. She answered this question by pointing out the role of male or male gender in empowering women's place in higher education research and academics. She pointed out some of the essential instances when her father, brother, and professor, Munene Macharia, empowered, supported and defended her in furthering her studies in Spain. The second person asked the source of inspiration for Professor Fatuma to pursue her research in academia until she became a professor. She informatively answered this question that the source of her inspiration came from experience and encounter with the Spanish professors from local regions that she met where some were women in the University. Other sources of her inspiration were women professors who are in the educating field, and therefore, I had a dream to go beyond and make a significant difference.

### **Keynote Speaker Fatuma Ali Suman, Education Policy and Leadership Expert**

The next keynote speaker was Fatuma Ali Suman, an education policy expert who dwelled on Somali female students in Kenya's challenges and opportunities. Madam Fatuma started her presentation by recognizing her profound honor for being part of the resourceful conference meeting. She made a powerful quote nearly at the beginning of her speech, "*she says it is with no doubt that we all know that educating women is equal to educating a nation.*" She appreciated the previous speakers who had paved the way for the discussion. she continues to clarify that the talks were going on were very important since all the women had the chance to come together, supporting and listening to each other's to learn. She called upon the people to recognize that access to quality education illusively remained essential to African culture, particularly Somali women and girls. This section contained this group of women and girls who faced equal challenges and had issues that needed to be addressed.

A central focus of the discussion that morning was the concerted efforts that needed to be done as a team after finding out. For example, she pointed out the need to take note of the Somali students in the northern part of Kenya who are marginalized due to historical disadvantages, which form part of their educational challenges. Additionally, she highlights that northern Kenya's geographical, far-to-reach distance from the capital, rough terrain, and hostile climate were the primary causes for underdevelopment in the education sector and lack of progress and quality education. In support of this remark, she mentions that the basic component for a learner to pursue education and the learning process is the learner's ability to comprehend the language and basic instructions and be motivated to gain knowledge from reading.

As she continues, she says that most learners got discouraged from learning due to their inability to read and understand the basic features of learning. General insecurity formed part of the reasons why quality education is missing in the northern region of Kenya. This is why many teachers fear teaching in the north of the area due to insecurity. She continued to explore academic capacitation in northern Kenya because, in exam results released, the counties of the

north appear at the bottom. This trend was supposed to be one of the issues to be addressed by the organization.

She reflected on the ability of a Somali girl to enter into higher learning institutions. She mentioned that poor education foundation was part of their failure to enter the institutions. Therefore, she called upon the organization to look into the mentioned issues about the learning difficulties. Another challenge to the Somali girl in learning is the poor infrastructure. She said that very low commitment is shown to improve the learning institution infrastructure in the northern region. Madam Fatuma Ali highlighted some areas where learners would generate opportunities for learning foundation, as reading and basic arithmetic are the first to be considered. The best-suggested solution here was empowering the primary and secondary qualified teachers to form the basic foundation for quality student learning. In a finalization, she calls upon the union of the organization the gender, to look into female education so that the growth in Somali women's higher education, research, and academics be elevated to a higher level. On this, she directly refers to a resident of Harvard who says that women's education forms part of change in the world. Therefore, the recommended solution was to look into how to break the barriers hindering their learning without necessarily interfering with the current country's policy.

### **Questions, Answers and Discussion**

After the strong presentation from Madam Fatuma Ali, the chance for the people to ask a couple of questions concerning her presentation was given. The first speaker asked about the role played by the constitution in ensuring a tilt in balance and favor to ensure that marginalized communities are considered. The second speaker came forward to question whether parents had failed to take up the opportunities presented to them by the government. Altogether, Prof Fatuma Ali answered the questions, giving her suggestions separately. She addressed the first question about the role of the constitution in considering the marginalized



northern communities by saying that education is a national initiative and only the section of ECD was the part handled at the county level. Therefore, the whole foundation of substantial education was the proper shaping of the child from a young age.

Then, she answered the second question about the parents failing to take up their responsibilities and opportunities presented by the government. She then distinctively discusses this question by capturing the role of enlightened society or community releasing their rights and withstanding the wrongs that go on in societal education. Similarly, if a community gets the necessary empowerment, they would be able to elect responsible leaders who would ensure the education foundation is well-considered for all and equally.

She concludes by calling upon Madam Sahra Ahmed as the director to continuously empower and build the Female Gender Hub association to attract more and more people to educate females and the whole society.

### **Panel 1: Somali Female Students and Journalists Living in Kenya: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities**

#### ***Amal MOHAMED, Student, Kenyatta University***

Amal Mohamed was the first Panel 1 Speaker, a third-year Kenyatta University student. She introduced herself and said she was an author who wrote her first book in class seven. The book's title was Deception, and it mainly talks about sexual harassment in boarding schools by teachers. Her second book, called Shades of Hope, revolves around the challenges Somali parents face while raising their children in refugee camps and working on their success.

Amal Mohammed introduces her journey from primary school to the university level, being the only Muslim in their class. She faced the challenge of being forced to take CRE while in high school, and as they went to churches, they would be forced to kneel during prayers. To make it worse, they were denied chances to pray and were subjected to expulsion when they failed to follow the stated regulations. She insisted that they missed the support opportunities as Muslims. Her possession of being an author, she was also an environmentalist. She said that the first environmental award she got in class six, the second environmental award she got in from three, the third in form four, and the fifth in her second year when she had joined the University. She



blames almost a quarter of Somali political leaders who failed to represent them nationally before blaming the Ministry of Education.

They were forced to remove the *Hijab* and trousers, and when two political leaders were called upon in this matter and, of course, two Somali leaders, they sided with the teachers and never helped the Somali ladies. She finalized her presentation by pointing out the failure of the Muslim political leaders to ensure the welfare and education of Muslim students, which is the greatest challenge they faced.

***Zamzam Abbas, master's Student, University of Nairobi***

The next Panel Speaker was Zamzam Abbas, who is a master's student at the University of Nairobi pursuing computing studies. Her main point of discussion focused on how mentorship and a robust support system can encourage one to pursue higher education. She starts her presentation by highlighting the positive part of education regarding mentorship to Muslim girl learners. Her education reflection was mainly accommodative for the Muslim community because they got chances to pray and perform the Ramadan. After that, after her completion of undergraduate education level, she got a strong mentorship from a Somali lady who had done her Master's.

She said the lady mentored her by telling her to continue attending school and further her studies before getting the job she aspired for. However, she was worried this was because she did not know how she would take her projects after accepting the proposal and applying for a scholarship, which she got to the University of Nairobi. After that, through the Somali lady and friend, she got herself engaged in a collaborative student research seminar which was for students from Germany. She recognized the BIEA institution, they got the opportunity to attend fieldwork research where she managed to learn different research methodologies and accepted the fact that mentorships are very important. She, therefore, sighted the people by highlighting the importance of mentorship, where she calls for a pool of network creation among Somali Female University students. She insisted that all of them should return to the University immediately after finishing their undergraduate education and apply for scholarships. According to her, it was necessary because the opportunities given by the institutions are supposed to be utilized effectively. She mentioned the positive impacts of the cultural society and critical stems for support when taking higher education on research and academia.

***Hodman Mohammed, Coordinator, Somali Gender Hub/ Kenya Methodist University***

The third Panel speaker was Hodman Mohammed, from coordinator, of Somali Gender Hub and a student from Kenya Methodist University. Her focus of discussion was more on the Somali students' challenges in Kenya. She started her presentation by reflecting on her study foundation from primary in Northeastern district to the University.

However, she said she did not encounter so many challenges as mentioned by the previous speakers. As a travel consultant, she went through so many documents and captured how Somali students went through various challenges. She starts by mentioning the language barrier as the first problem the students face; many students would not be able to speak fluent English and

Kiswahili, the medium languages in Kenya. Secondly, she mentions discrimination and stigmatization as the next source challenge for the Somali student. She attests to the validity of stress and traumatization and comes out as one of the living proof. She talked about a recent time when she could not concentrate on her studies, which resulted from the home incident when her father was shot to death. This incident remained pinned in her head. Whenever there could be any source of conflicts and blurts in Somali, she could remember her father's incident and lose concentration on whatever she was doing.

This she refers to as a panic attack, the disease she developed. She mentioned another challenge being cultural and religious differences where Somali students would never get the chance to get an excuse for praying. When they decided to go for these prayers, they would return to class and find the lectures far away. She called upon the Professors to get to adequately communicate this issue to the Tertiary institutions so that the Somali students get help on this issue.

The next issue was on recognition, equation, and certification, which she highlighted as the most. Here, she said that the certification strategy should be improved, and recognition should be done on the Somali students so that they can get proven certificates. Additionally, she stresses on the next barriers to attaining student Visas. She



asks that the University create a favorable atmosphere for quick processing of the Visa so that their education will be smooth and even get identification cards. Sometimes the university students would even be arrested when they go to some areas like Easleigh and forced to give out something to relieve themselves. She finished by recommending that many Somali women should join and dominate the tertiary level of education, that is, the Higher institutions, so that they can be on the front line to acquire skills, opportunities, and research expertise.

### ***Leila Mohammed, Journalist and Radio Ergo/ International Media Support***

The last Panel 1 speaker was Leila Mohammed, a journalist and Radio Ergo editor working for international media support. She mainly spoke about the opportunities and challenges in education and more of journalism and women. She started by briefly reflecting on her studies, where she finished her Master's degree at Kenyatta University and is now taking her studies in journalism and leadership in the United Kingdom after getting a scholarship. She had the privilege to be the first one to get a master's degree in her family. In the media where she works, she said that they work hard to encourage and educate girls about the importance of education. She mentioned the secret behind challenging oneself to do more than they think in education. Additionally, she said some initiatives or steps they had taken in influencing the government to extensively embrace the girl child education, which is very important in empowering and building

the society. Another challenge she mentions here is the prioritization made on boys regarding education services, leaving girls behind alone. For this reason, she calls upon individuals and groups to look for girls who have never undergone education, whether in their late twenties and take them to get educated if they are willing. The next challenge she pointed out was the inadequacy of female teachers, lectures and elites to empower and be role models to the female gender about the education importance.

She concluded her presentation by opting to influence or call upon every scholar to empower women as she did to the female journalists to go to school and further their studies to become eyes to the Somali women's society and build the women research and academia sectors.



### **Question & Answers and Discussion**

After the panel 1 presentation, the floor was opened for the questions for those who would be in need or make clarifications at some areas. The first person added a comment about the goodness of the four speaker's ability to withstand various challenges here and there until they eventually succeeded to become the women we are today. She adjusted on her comment by asking the successful women to go out there to the schools and strongly mentor their younger sisters in those schools and even uplift them through empowerment. She asked again that anyone who felt to be part of her mentorship programme that she was doing for the marginalized ladies, she would feel free to join her to move on with the journey to change the society and make it a better place. She encouraged the fellow Muslim women in the meeting by being involved in the random say that goes, *"I am a Muslim girl covering my head but not my brain."*

This say acted as a game changer and motivational tool to the women's ability to do impressive steps in society. The second person directed her question to Amal Mohammed if the issue of being forced not to wear the Hijab by teachers or the environment around her residence. Then she added another comment about how indeed it was unfortunate for Muslims being denied the chance or freedom of prayers and Ramadhan celebrations.

Thereafter, Amal came forth to answer the question posted on her. She said that the issue about doing CRE was due to the fact that CRE was made compulsory when she reached form two. Then, after that, she addressed the question about the issue of being forced to wear a Hijab. She said that the administration had not burned them from wearing Hijab but only wanted them to reduce the size of scuff and even remove their trouser which was a little bit complicated.

## Panel 2: Female Students in Somalia, Experiences, Challenges, Opportunities

### ***Zakaria Hassan, Researcher, Fandhaal Institute Southwest State***

The first panel two speaker was Zakaria Hassan who introduced himself as the founder of Fandhaal Institute, a skill development and youth empowerment institution in Boidoa –Somalia. He is a researcher, digital marketing expert, and communication specialist who has a keen interest in social issues and development. Zakaria Hassan was a teacher at Boidoa-Janaay Primary and Secondary School, where he taught English and local Somali languages to top students of different grades. He also taught journalism at Al Madder Institute and Micraaj Institute in Boidoa, where he trained aspiring journalists on the basics of media ethics, reporting, and editing.

Zakaria is also a well-experienced humanitarian worker who has volunteered with several NGOs and agencies to provide relief and assistance to the vulnerable populations in Boidoa. He pointed out some challenges that Somalia as a country faces: civil war, famine, drought, and poverty, which have contributed to a negative impact on the education sector, especially for women and girls. He also captured a gap gender in education is even more evident in higher education, where women are underrepresented as students, teachers, researchers and academics.



He also captured that southwest Somali women face barriers to access and participating in education, research and academics. Some of those challenges are poverty, insecurity, cultural norms, gender-based violence, early marriage, female genital mutilation and lack of female teachers and role models. He also points out that some girls are forced to work to support their families, the high cost of education, and the lack of scholarships and financial support for women in southwest Somalia, which returns on investment for low women's education. Some of the opportunities she pointed out were positive signs of progress and change in the higher education sector. Here, Somali women kept enrolling, graduating, and working in various fields of study and research.

### ***Faduma Adan, Director, Somali Women Development (SOWDO), Jubbaland***

Mrs. Faduma Adan is the Director of Policy & Planning at the Southwest Ministry of Interior and the Local Government Reconstruction. In her opening remarks, Faduma Adan thanked the event organizers, specifically Mrs. Sahara.

Koshin. Mrs. Adan pointed out that this conference is timely and sees herself in the new generation of young female researchers who are coming up. She mentioned that she faced the same challenges and the lack of role models. Mrs. Adan also said she was impressed with all the resources being shared during this conference and strongly supported the mentorship program by the Somali Gender Hub. She pointed out critical challenges that women in Jubbaland. They included lack of fees, conflict and lack of safety, satiability and climate change causing floods and displacement.

Mrs. Adan acknowledged the changes that had occurred in the past 10 years socially and economically. Presently, more women are pursuing higher education than before, explained Mrs. Adan. She added that more women also hold higher and better positions in organizations. She called for more research on women's empowerment and more financial and technical support for students. In her closing remark, Mrs. Adan, explained that she didn't have a lot of time to attend the conference, but would do anything to try to contribute and she is happy to have been able to do so. She elaborated that these events and conferences are important and is willing to be connected to all the women interested in research and academia. She also added she would like to be a role model and share experiences and learn from each other.

***Ikraam ABDIAZIZ, Somali Gender Hub, Mentorship Coordinator, Mogadishu***



Ikraam Abdiaziz was the last Panel 2 speaker, and she is one of the members of Somali Gender Hub working as a mentorship coordinator. She started by raising the issue about women lacking proper mentorship. This is because women needed people to look up to, call a role model, or inspire them, maybe for empowerment and uplifting them. Therefore, she called for the need to put in place a well-coordinated program for Somali women.

These programmes would elevate the women higher education learning up to the advanced levels like pieces of writing academic papers. She then highlighted the issues about women dropping studies, especially in internship positions. She said that women face harassment from male colleagues in higher learning institutions. In Mogadishu also several other challenges like lack of enough female teachers were mentioned by Ikraam. The girls lack quality mentorship and time to jointly work together to achieve their educational goals. In addition to these, she pointed out that the girls in Mogadishu lacked role models to empower and inspire them in their education

journey. As a mentorship coordinator, she highly called upon the need to build a strong foundation for women to realize their potential in developing skills and expertise.

**Book Launch: Dr. Nereida MUNIZ, Lecturer, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa**

After the Panel 2 presentations ended, the next session was taken over by Nereida Muniz, who was also to launch a book. She introduces her speech by informing people how she came to arrive to her book topic. She said how important it is to change perceptions about Somali women, and her PhD was based on the upgrade of women in Nairobi and Johannesburg. Her book content was basically talking about this, which was present in hard and soft copies online. The book was published this year after 12 years of PhD project and it goes at twenty dollars on the online version. She talked about the beginning of her research on the Somali Diaspora, and she was very fascinated by how they were global and can be found almost everywhere. She mentions the importance and reason behind the migration of the Somali culture. They keep on building and keeping interconnected links with one another, which is a very peculiar mentality. She, therefore, appreciated and uplifted the women's ability to raise their voices in empowering each other.

The role of Diaspora in reconstructing the country, which is the central focus of her project, also formed part of her detailed presentation. She mentioned the need for women to start checking on areas like digital technology like information timely delivery. She said the need for consideration of so-called Cosmopolitan Refugees, who those are migrating into areas like Easlegh, and what they do thereafter. She challenged the women that they were no longer marginalized or were passive sachets that did nothing. She challenges women to stop looking themselves as minority and stand out to raise their voices in pursuing their dreams. These women would come to be economically independent and even support their families. She finalized her presentation by reminding the Somali women about the potential present in their research and development in acquiring skills and embracing opportunities.

**Opportunities for Women in Higher Education, Research and Academia, Research Training Manager Rift Valley Institute Geoffrey LUGANO**

Dr. Geoffrey LUGANO presented a list of opportunities for women in research education and academia. Geoffrey Lugano is a Kenyan and come out to capture how women realize their opportunities and make it to higher levels. The first step he mentioned was staying informed about the developments and availability of productions. He said this can be achieved by making connections by relevant people, embracing mentorships and research. He informed the members to stay informed and to be ready to apply for scholarships at any time when opportunities come out.

He then educated the people about the role of Mawazo in empowering and supporting people, including the Somali Gender Hub, in running their projects and initiatives. Additionally, Lugano pointed out some of the scholarship opportunities that were set aside for the people interested

to apply. They included Scholarship position.com, DAAD, African Leadership Center and MasterCard Foundation. These platforms were open, and some were basically for women alone to make the applications.

**Erick M KIOKO, Research fellow at the Kenyatta University and Bonn University**

The next speaker was Erick, who started by informing people about the existing fields that are all over to help people achieve their dreams. He told the women about the importance consultancies that they had so that they would elevate some organization. He mentioned various programmers and projects that they had in place which they call for application for chances to build those who have started the early career research. He also talked about the existence of the refugees' camps under a running project on refugee's career management.

The projects, according to his statement, were there to prepare refugee students for master's and career development. He continuously mentioned some of the very up to date websites that offer scholarship positions that would help in uplifting ones higher learning and research management. The most stressed point that Erick did was the ability to use the occasional chances through advertisements to apply to opportunities which may turn to sources of change to the people's lives. He finalized by informing and calling upon the people to be very outspoken and optimistic to help the refugees in the country using the present opportunities.

**Mind Matters: Elevating Women's Academic Success through Mental Wellness, Nasra MOHAMED, Fruition Consult**

The final speaker of the conference was called Nasra who presented about Matters of the mind in elevating the academic success of the women through wellness. This directly went for women in the sector of research and academia. In this presentation, Nasra recognized the fact that challenges have to be met in research and field work but it had to be embraced and overcome. She mentioned the importance of, mental health in the field work. Here, she pointed out some of the likely challenges to mental wealth that women are likely to face, like safety concerns and traumatization.

Then, the ability of women to withstand the vigorous academic environment that comes about during research and academia. She therefore called upon women to embrace interventions like therapy so that their mental problems are managed. The therapy, according to her recommendations for manageable mental health maintenance, would provide safety by managing anxiety and building reliance. She then recommended peer support network as the next solution for sustainable environmental intervention for mental wellness. She called upon women to reflect on their academic journey by using the available opportunities and also focus building their mental wellbeing. In her conclusion, she mentioned the vitality of mental wellness in the academic journey of an individual and, of course, for women in academia in terms of balancing. Seeking therapy, proper time management, and maintaining a healthy and fulfilling life.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND OUTCOMES/ACTION POINTS

After all the speakers had spoken and shared their views, the final remark was made by Mrs. Sahra Ahmed Koshin. She informed the members about the availability of continuous updates and information passage through various platforms about available opportunities and chances that would arise. Additionally, there was a women's platform network where everyone was free to share any important opportunities they would come across in the after-sessions. During this closing session, there were basically some issue that were mentioned to be the most standing out since the session started. The ability to have the power of role models and mentorship, as mentioned by earlier first speakers, made the perfect scope for the effectiveness of having role models and mentors in the surroundings. Madam Zahra then thanked all the speakers all the way from beginning up to the end.

## WAY FORWARD

The 3<sup>rd</sup> annual knowledge exchange conference in higher education, research and academia was successful. The conference took place on the 27th of September 2023, and was organized by the Somali Gender Hub in partnership with the Mawazo Institute. The conference brought together university students, teachers, higher education lecturers, professors, researchers and others interested in policy development for higher education. The main objective of the conference was to explore and address the gender issues and gaps affecting research and researchers in the Somali regions and to brainstorm on support activities for women researchers. The workshop aimed to bring together scholars, practitioners, and policymakers working on and in Somalia to discuss and explore how knowledge is produced in Somalia, often by - or for - actors who

Never go there. The analysis of the different topics the conference addressed via the various panels helped contribute to the sparse knowledge in this area. In addition, the suggestions and recommendations from this study helped improve the role and level of understanding of Somali women as valuable producers of knowledge in Somalia. They are also useful to scholars who wish to carry out further research on gender, Somali women and research in the context of Somalia as the materials of the study will be of great importance for their enquiries. Another outcome of the conference was the need to continue the discussion annually. Therefore it was recommended that the conference be held ever. The significant outcome of the conference was the realization of the effective participation of both women and men in the production of knowledge on Somalia's benefits and equal opportunities.

The public must be made aware of these issues. Investing in gender-sensitive approaches in education and research allows the research to be of a higher quality as it makes the research valid for a larger group of end-users comprised of men and women. Excellent research must consider gender. Research in Somalia is not well organized, and neither is engendered research. There is very little written about Somali women as producers of knowledge and as subjects of study, even though women and girls make up about 50%, if not more, of the Somali population. After the launch of the conference report, online workshop will be organized, and the policy brief will be drafted. The Somali Gender Hub intends to organize follow-up activities like monthly get-togethers and women researcher roundtables.

Another conference outcome was the need for a centralized platform where female researchers, both emerging researchers and more established ones, can meet and share information and resources. This was founded to be in the form of 3-monthly training on the SGH website, an In-built Moodle app for women only. In these platforms and other areas, ongoing community practices for Somali women researchers to communicate and share resources would continue to be embraced.

## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Program agenda

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> ANNUAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE CONFERENCE SOMALI WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, AND ACADEMIA

27 September 2023, 9am to 4pm, BIEA Kenya

*Creating opportunities, building skills for Somali female researchers*

### PROGRAMME AGENDA

TIME	ACTIVITY	RESPONSIBLE PERSON(S)
08:30am	Arrivals, registration & coffee	Participants
09:00am	Conference starts, prayers, welcome and opening remarks	Facilitator
09:15am	Conference objectives	<b>Mrs. Sahra AHMED KOSHIN,</b> Director of Somali Gender Hub and Mawazo Voices Fellow
09:20am	The Mawazo Connects Funds	<b>Ms. Silvia MWENDIA,</b> Mawazo Voices Programme Officer
09:40am	<b>KEYNOTE SPEAKER 1</b> Somali women in Research and Academia	<b>Dr. Fatuma AHMED ALI,</b> Associate Professor, United States Inter. University Africa, Nairobi
10:00am	<b>Q &amp; A AND DISCUSSION</b>	
10:20am	<b>HEALTH BREAK</b>	
10:50am	<b>KEYNOTE SPEAKER 2</b> Somali female students in Kenya Challenges and opportunities	<b>Fatuma ALI SAMAN,</b> Education Policy and Leadership Expert

<b>11:10am</b>	<b>PANEL 1</b> Somali female students and journalists living in Kenya: experiences, challenges, opportunities	<b>Amal MOHAMED</b> , Student, Kenyatta University <b>Hodman A. MOHAMED</b> , Somali Gender Hub <b>Leyla MOHAMED</b> , Journalist, IMS/Radio Ergo <b>Zamzam ABBAS</b> , Student, UoN Kenya
<b>12.15pm</b>	<b>PANEL 2</b> Female students in Somalia Experiences, challenges, opportunities	<b>Zakaria HASSAN</b> , Researcher, Fandhaal Institute Baidoa <b>Faduma ADAN</b> , Director, Somali Women Development (SOWDO), Kismayo <b>Ikraam ABDIASIS</b> , Somali Gender Hub
<b>12.45am</b>	<b>BOOK LAUNCH</b> Cosmopolitan Refugees: Somali Migrant Women in Nairobi and Johannesburg	<b>Dr. Nereida RIPERO MUNIZ</b> Lecturer and researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa
<b>13.00pm</b>	<b>LUNCH AND PRAYERS</b>	
<b>14.00pm</b>	<b>PRESENTATION FINDINGS OF STUDY</b> Challenges and opportunities for Somali women in research, scholarly publishing and dissemination in the Somali regions.	<b>Sahra A KOSHIN</b> Director of Somali Gender Hub and Mawazo Institute 2021 Policy Fellow and Mawazo Connects Funds fellow
<b>14:15pm</b>	Opportunities for Women in Higher Education, Research and Academia	<b>Geoffrey LUGANO</b> , Research Training Manager Rift Valley Institute
<b>14:30pm</b>	Experience visiting refugee camps in Kenya and the gender-specific impediments to Somali women education	<b>Eric M KIOKO</b> , Research Fellow at Kenyatta University and Bonn University
<b>14:45pm</b>	Mind Matters: Elevating Women's Academic Success through Mental Wellness	<b>Nasra MOHAMED</b> , Fruition Consult
<b>15:00pm</b>	<b>Q &amp; A AND DISCUSSION</b>	
<b>15:15pm</b>	Somali women in research Community of Practice (CoP) launch, highlights of conference and way forward	<b>Nima MOHAMED TIGOW</b> , and <b>Sahra AHMED KOSHIN</b> , Somali Gender Hub.
<b>15.30pm</b>	<b>Q&amp;A AND DISCUSSION</b>	
<b>15:45pm</b>	End of conference and concluding remarks informal networking	<b>Facilitator and Sahra AHMED KOSHIN</b>

## Annex 2: List of participants (offline)

First Name	Last Name	Email Address	Mobile Number
Mustafa	Abdi	mustafcade2030@gmail.com	719298030
Safiyah	Shariff	safshariff@gmail.com	706223452
Fatuma	Abdi	fatuma_abdul@hotmail.com	254729027966
Ubah	Kahiye	kahiyeubah@gmail.com	254724845805

Suada	Abdirahman	suadaali95@gmail.com	714632061
Abdirizack	Hussein	abdirizackhusseinjr@gmail.com	722427176
Ifrah	Reina	adenifraax@gmail.com	724029389
Zuhur	Mohamed	zuhrahashi@gmail.com	796006750
Fadumoladan Abdullahi	Suleiman	fatimaladan0033@gmail.com	740408638
Idil	Ahmed	idhilahmed@gmail.com	728338114
Khadar	Hared	khadarhared@gmail.com	254722444953
DR. Fatuma	Hirsi	fhirsi@gmail.com	723331131
Dr Mohamed Husein	Gaas	Mohgaas@gmial.com	
Najma	Hassan	mandeq99@gmail.com	6148161337
Khadija	Abdi	khadijatahli00@gmail.com	254790785279
Zamzam	Abass	zmzmabass@gmail.com	254701348475
Fardawsa	Hersi	fardawso012@gmail.com	254743929058
Leyla	Mohamed	Leylaugbaad@gmail.com	254790546210
Hafsa Abdirahman	Mohamed	hafsaabdullrahman@gmail.com	252615827924
Amal	Mohamed	queenamal0265@gmail.com	254794830265
Noah	Chiuli	nchiuli@gmail.com	254720575846
Ikra	Abdullahi	ikracadey2018@gmail.com	254 727 423723
Ikhlas Abdirahman	Ali	ikhlasali1977@gmail.com	115129611
Fahima	Ahmed	talowadagwomenorg@gmail.com	252618744444
Hodman	Ahmed	<a href="mailto:hodman254@gmail.com">hodman254@gmail.com</a>	719472731
Charles	Wafula	<a href="mailto:wafula.charles@gmail.com">wafula.charles@gmail.com</a>	
Sumaya	Abdikadir	<a href="mailto:abdikadirsumeya34@gmail.com">abdikadirsumeya34@gmail.com</a>	723527535
Rahma Mire	Mire	<a href="mailto:Rahmadhuux@gmail.com">Rahmadhuux@gmail.com</a>	
Simon	Muriithi	<a href="mailto:Simon.muriithi@kemu.ac.ke">Simon.muriithi@kemu.ac.ke</a>	
Abdi	Jama Hassan		
Naima	Musa	<a href="mailto:nammymusa9@gmail.com">nammymusa9@gmail.com</a>	707346008
Sahra	Ahmed Koshin	<a href="mailto:sahro.m@gmail.com">sahro.m@gmail.com</a>	799929408
Geoffrey	Lugano		
Eric	Kioko		
Shamso Ahmed	KU	<a href="mailto:shamso.ku@gmail.com">shamso.ku@gmail.com</a>	
Mohamed Muse	UoN	<a href="mailto:Musemuse@gmail.com">Musemuse@gmail.com</a>	
Sharon Kwakai	WDC NGO	<a href="mailto:sharon1981@gmail.com">sharon1981@gmail.com</a>	
Samsam Mohamoud			
BIEA intern			
BIEA intern			
RVI Guest			
Silvia Mwendia	Mawazo	Silvia.Mwendia@mawazoinstitute.org	