

CONCEPT NOTE & CALL FOR PAPERS

5th ANNUAL SOMALI WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH & ACADEMIA KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE CONFERENCE

“Lifting Each Other: Somali Women’s Voices in Learning, Research, and Leadership”

#WomenHEConf25 #WomenInAcademia #WomenInResearch

Thursday 20 November 2025,
Maa Hotel and Suites Conference Hall, Hurlingham, Nairobi

1. BACKGROUND

Building on the positive outcomes of the last four years, the Somali Gender Hub (SGH) in partnership with the Mawazo Institute is organizing the 5th Annual International Knowledge Exchange Conference on Somali Women in Higher Education, Research, Academia on Thursday 20th November 2025. The conference aims to create a supportive space where Somali women in higher education, research, and academia can come together to share their stories, challenges, and achievements.

Somali women face barriers to entering and thriving in academic spaces, from lack of access and support to balancing family responsibilities. The event will be a place for women to connect, contribute and collaborate in sharing knowledge and resources challenges and opportunities for Somali women in academia, in higher education and in research. The event serves as a vital platform for sharing research, exchanging ideas, and amplifying women's voices within academic and policy spaces where they have long been underrepresented.

Through consecutive almost five years of convening this landmark event, SGH has built deep expertise in understanding and capturing the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of Somali women in academia. This conference is relevant because it highlights Somali women’s experiences, builds connections across generations and regions, and encourages more women to join and lead in the world of research and knowledge production. It is also a chance to inspire, learn, and grow together. This year’s theme is *“Lifting Each Other: Somali Women’s Voices in Learning, Research, and Leadership”*. This concept note outlines the objectives, planned activities, expected outcomes, Call for Papers, and a detailed budget breakdown.

2. RATIONALE

The research landscape in Somalia remains fragmented and deeply gendered. Women’s voices - both as producers of knowledge and subjects of research - are significantly underrepresented. Despite making up at least half of the population, Somali women continue to be sidelined in research design, implementation, and publication. This gender gap not only skews national data and priorities but also results in policies and programs that do not reflect the lived realities of women and girls. Through this



conference, we aim to challenge these structural exclusions and promote inclusive, gender-sensitive research that centers Somali women's experiences and expertise.¹

The systemic marginalization of women in research spaces reflects broader societal patterns of gender inequality. There is a scarcity of resources to support women in achieving success in scientific publication. Gender-sensitive research plays a vital role in exposing the unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women, while also interrogating how gendered perceptions shape social hierarchies within both research institutions and society at large. By centering women's voices in research and academia, we can promote equitable participation in knowledge production and ensure that the resulting insights reflect the lived realities and aspirations of all members of society, women and men alike.

The [conference organized in 2024 by](#) the Somalia Gender Hub in partnership with the Mawazo Institute brought together speakers and female participants from both Somalia and Kenya to address the challenges women face in higher education including harassment and discrimination in higher education. Although male academics in Somalia are more prone to securing substantial research funding, female researchers can nevertheless contribute to the advancement of the country's higher education system by actively participating as authors, editors, and reviewers on topics that are relevant to women and their families.

This 2025 conference is both timely and critical. It seeks to enrich the sparse body of gender-focused research in Somalia and provide concrete, actionable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and academics. By highlighting the contributions of Somali women as scholars, researchers, and knowledge bearers, the conference will also serve to validate and elevate their roles in shaping research agendas and influencing development outcomes. The evidence, discussions, and recommendations generated during this convening will lay the groundwork for future scholarly inquiry, capacity building, and transformative gender-responsive policy-making in Somalia. Considering these gaps, this project and the accompanying conference aim to ignite a much-needed conversation about the imperative of engendering research discourse in Somalia. A foundational step in this process is to take stock of what is currently known about gender in Somali research studies, identify who is working in this field, and explore how women's publications can be amplified and supported.

3. THE ORGANISATION – SOMALI GENDER HUB

Somali Gender Hub (SGH) is a pioneering, women-led and research-focused platform dedicated to advancing gender equality, amplifying the voices of Somali women, and transforming the landscape of knowledge production in Somalia. Established with a deep conviction that inclusive, locally grounded knowledge is essential to social transformation, SGH works to center Somali women and girls in academic, policy, and development discourses. Through its work, SGH bridges the gap between research, advocacy, and policy, creating space for Somali women scholars, researchers, and practitioners - both in-country and in the diaspora - to contribute meaningfully to the reconstruction and future of Somali society. The mission of SGH is to empower Somali women as credible producers and custodians of knowledge, strengthen gender-responsive research and policy, and create inclusive platforms for dialogue, reflection, and advocacy that challenge patriarchal systems and structural inequalities. SGH envisions a just and

¹ SA Koshin. 2022. Women in Research, Scholarly Publishing, and Dissemination in Somalia, <https://sahrakoshin.wordpress.com/2022/07/18/women-in-research-scholarly-publishing-and-dissemination-in-somalia-2/>



equitable Somali society where women and girls are fully represented in all spheres of knowledge production, leadership, and decision-making, and where their lived experiences inform the policies that shape their lives.

Since its founding, SGH has built an impressive track record of impactful women researchers programming. One of its flagship initiatives is the [Annual Knowledge Exchange Conference for Somali Women in Higher Education, Research, and Academia](#), held each year since 2019. This unique event brings together Somali women scholars, researchers, and academics from within Somalia and the diaspora to share their research, engage in critical dialogue, and shape collective research and advocacy agendas. Through five consecutive years of hosting this conference, SGH has gained deep expertise in understanding and capturing the voices of Somali women in academia and highlighting the barriers they face, from institutional exclusion and limited mentorship opportunities to lack of funding and systemic gender bias. The conference has become a central convening space that challenges the invisibility of women in Somali academic spaces and promotes their role as vital actors in knowledge production.

The conference has enabled us to document the structural and socio-cultural challenges women face in accessing, remaining in, and advancing within higher education and research institutions. These challenges include gendered expectations, limited mentorship, lack of funding, and institutional barriers to leadership and publication. Beyond simply convening, SGH has used the knowledge generated through these conferences to actively advocate for the inclusion and recognition of Somali women as key producers of knowledge. Our work has contributed to shifting narratives about women's intellectual contributions and has provided visibility to a growing cohort of Somali women scholars committed to transforming academic spaces. As we continue to build on this momentum, SGH remains committed to nurturing a vibrant, inclusive, and gender-responsive research community in Somalia and beyond.

Track record and expertise

In 2023, SGH expanded its impact by designing and delivering a six-month training programme for 24 early-career Somali women researchers. Commissioned by the Somali Dialogue Platform in collaboration with its partners, the programme was aimed at enhancing participants' research competencies, policy analysis skills, and understanding of Somalia's complex political and security landscape. SGH conducted a needs assessment, developed a comprehensive curriculum, facilitated a three-day workshop in Mogadishu, and provided tailored mentorship and feedback on participants' policy papers. This initiative further cemented SGH's position as a leader in capacity strengthening for Somali women in research and policy.

In addition to its conferences and training initiatives, SGH has convened a series of high-level roundtable discussions focused on pressing issues such as women's roles in peace and security, feminist knowledge production, gendered displacement, and decolonizing Somali research. These roundtables have brought together researchers, civil society actors, policymakers, and international stakeholders to foster dialogue, generate ideas, and catalyze collective action. By facilitating these conversations, SGH has created space for critical reflection and agenda-setting led by Somali women themselves. SGH's work has had tangible influence on national and regional conversations around gender and development. Its research and advocacy have contributed to shaping dialogues on issues such as FGM, education reform, inclusive governance, and the localization of humanitarian responses. Through strategic partnerships, diaspora engagement, and a commitment to feminist principles, SGH is challenging dominant narratives and

ensuring that Somali women are no longer sidelined in the spaces where knowledge is created, and decisions are made. Somali Gender Hub continues to grow as a vital force for gender justice in Somalia. With passion, integrity, and a bold vision for the future, SGH is building a vibrant, inclusive research and policy ecosystem, one in which Somali women are not just visible but are leading the way forward.

Strategic partnerships with Mawazo

The Somali Gender Hub (SGH) works closely with a growing network of strategic partners committed to gender equity, knowledge production, and academic empowerment. These collaborations have been vital to the growth and success of the annual Somali Women in Research and Academia Conference. One of SGH's key partners is the Mawazo Institute. Mawazo has been instrumental in co-designing and co-hosting past editions of the conference. From 2020 to present, the Mawazo Institute has provided technical support, coaching sessions, and contributed expert speakers, strengthening the conference's impact and reach. Through this partnership and others, SGH continues to deliver high-quality programming and expand its regional and global footprint. These collaborations foster deeper capacity-building efforts, mentorship opportunities, and broader visibility for Somali women researchers both in-country and in the diaspora. We welcome new partnerships and collaborations to continue building a strong, inclusive research ecosystem led by Somali women.

Conference objectives

The aim of the conference is to provide Somali women researchers, early career researchers, students, and academics the opportunity to present their research work, receive training and feedback and learn from others who are more established in the field. The conference also aims to take stock of the current situation of Somali women in higher education leadership in Somalia. Specifically, it aims to;

- Amplify the voices of Somali women in higher education, research, and academia.
- Facilitate academic exchange through research presentations and dialogue.
- Provide mentorship and coaching to early-career researchers on writing and publishing.
- Build networks and foster interdisciplinary collaboration among Somali women scholars.
- Influence institutional and policy frameworks to better support Somali women in academic spaces.

4. PLANNED CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES AND TOPICS

The conference will provide a unique platform for knowledge exchange, research presentation, and capacity building for Somali women. With a strong focus on mentorship, coaching, and academic writing support, the event aims to empower Somali women in academia and amplify their contributions to research and policy discourse. The following activities are planned;

- Call for Papers: Open submission for research abstracts from Somali women scholars, focusing on key themes such as gender equality, education, and policy influence.
- Pre-Conference coaching and writing support: Capacity-building sessions for selected scholars to refine their research papers before the conference.
- Keynote speeches & panel discussions: Featuring leading Somali and international scholars discussing challenges and opportunities for women in academia.
- Policy brief launch together with Mawazo Institute – 'Somali Women In Higher Education, Research and Academia'

- Paper presentations: Interactive sessions where researchers will present their findings and receive feedback from senior academics.
- Networking & collaboration sessions: Opportunities for participants to establish research partnerships and mentorship relationships.
- Mentorship roundtables: One-on-one and group mentorship sessions for early-career scholars.

5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The conference aims to bring between 80 and 100 guests. Participants will be invited to register and join a mailing list Community of Practice which will enable them to continue the discussion, collaborate, and share resources even after the conference. Breakout sessions will include keynote addresses from leaders in the field of academia, research and higher education. The following outcomes are expected;

- Participation of 80–100 Somali women researchers, academics, and students.
- At least 10 peer-reviewed research papers refined and prepared for publication.
- Strengthened mentorship networks and knowledge-sharing platforms.
- Enhanced research, analytical, and academic writing capacities among early-career women.
- Launch of policy brief
- Establishment of an active Community of Practice (CoP) to continue post-conference collaboration and dialogue.

6. GUESTS, SPEAKERS AND PANELISTS

The conference will consist of expert keynote lectures, panelists and paper presenters from all over the world who will tackle the topic of Somali women in research and academia from different angles. The event will bring together a range of junior researchers, women academics, women bloggers, women writers, activists, members from the civil society and higher education institutions involved in women and research and academia. Just like last year we are counting on the participation of Keynote speakers. The full programme will be available on our website in early November 2025. More details will be posted in the next few weeks and months on our website.

7. CALL FOR PAPERS – 2025 CONFERENCE

5th Annual Somali Women in Higher Education, Research, and Academia Knowledge Exchange Conference, 20 November 2025, Nairobi, Kenya

Building on the positive outcomes of the last four years, the Somali Gender Hub is calling for abstract submission for its 5th Annual International Knowledge Exchange Conference on Somali Women in Higher Education, Research, Academia. The conference will be a place for women to connect, contribute and collaborate in sharing knowledge and resources challenges and opportunities for Somali women in academia, in higher education and in research. The Hub invites abstracts and other creatives to be submitted for presentation at the upcoming knowledge exchange conference which will take place in November 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya.

Themes include, but are not limited to:

- Gender, policy, and the political economy of research in Somalia
- Somali women in science, technology, and innovation
- Mentorship and female role models in academia
- Returning to school after marriage or motherhood
- Personal educational journeys and their impact
- Structural barriers in higher education
- Wellbeing, leadership, and work-life balance in academia
- Feminist research methodologies and community-based knowledge production
- Building solidarity and support among Somali women researchers

Submission guidelines and deadlines

- Abstracts (250–300 words) may be submitted in Somali or English
- Include a one-page bio and contact details
- Indicate which theme your abstract addresses
- Submit via director@somaligenderhub.org and info@somaligenderhub.org
- Deadline for Abstracts: 30 July 2025
- Deadline for Full Papers (max 6000 words): 30 September 2025
- Abstracts should be sent to director@somaligenderhub.org with a copy to info@somaligenderhub.org

Pre-conference coaching and writing support

If you are interested in receiving pre-conference coaching and writing support, please indicate your interest in your application. Somali Gender Hub is committed to supporting scholars, particularly early-career women researchers, in strengthening their research and writing skills ahead of the conference. As part of this commitment, a dedicated team from the Hub will offer tailored capacity-building sessions for selected participants. These sessions will focus on refining research arguments, strengthening methodological clarity, improving academic writing style, and preparing papers for presentation and potential publication. Participants will receive one-on-one mentorship, group workshops, and peer feedback opportunities, all designed to enhance the quality and impact of their work. This support aims not only to prepare scholars for the conference, but also to build longer-term skills and confidence in academic research and publishing. We strongly encourage interested applicants to take advantage of this unique opportunity to receive constructive feedback and professional guidance in a supportive and collaborative environment.

If you are interested to know more, please contact us at:

director@somaligenderhub.org

info@somaligenderhub.org

8. STAY IN TOUCH

We will post regular updates to our social media platforms at;

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/SomaliaGenderHub>

Twitter X <https://x.com/SomGenderHub>



Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/somaliagenderhub?igsh=cmYwajNwdGI4anhi>

LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/company/somalia-gender-hub/?viewAsMember=true>

You can also find more updated information on our website <https://somaligenderhub.org/>

The hashtag for the conference is #WomenHEConf25. And other hashtags we will use are #WomenInAcademia #WomenInResearch