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Key Points

(i). The gross enrollment ratio of women, at 9.2% for primary and 7.4% for secondary, are among the lowest in the world. . Although women make up to 50% of the population in Somalia 74% are unemployed, and their fare treatment, access to justice and human rights protection is extremely poor

(ii). Clan leaders mired in cultural traditions and religious norms still hold a lot of sway on politics of Somalia, and frustrate women's effort at political office

(iii). National Development Plan 2017-2019 looks to a future in which the society upholds gender equality and dignity

(iv). There is need for fast tracking the ratification of international polices & pending bills on gender issues as well gender mainstreaming during policy formulation

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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A QUEST FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN A POST CONFLICT SOMALIA

ABSTRACT:

The 1995 Beijing conference identified indicators for women empowerment, and states were expected to work towards their achievements, however not much progress has been made in Somalia due mostly to war, cultural and religious believes. In the quest for gender equality in a post conflict Somalia, a multi-pronged approach has been pursued by stakeholders, which includes the government, civil society and international donors to accelerate women empowerment and socio-economic development. The objectives of this study were to examine the government initiatives on women empowerment and socio-economic development, to identify the challenges of women empowerment and socio-economic development in a and to offer pertinent policies for women empowerment and socio-economic development, findings indicate that effective women's empowerment initiatives and socio-economic development strategies are needed to overcome local challenges, and to achieve satisfactory progress on the Beijing milestones.

Key words: *women empowerment initiatives, socio-economic development, gender equality, Post Conflict Somalia*

INTRODUCTION

At present time, more women in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark are graduating from the universities, getting better jobs, engaging in politics, and appreciating the benefits of institutionalized gender driven economic development policies. The United Nations (2005) view gender equality as a key to achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), which includes elimination of poverty, reduction of infant mortality and universal education. The UN Women's view of women's empowerment is based on principles that include establishment of high level corporate leadership for gender equality, treatment of all women and men fairly at work, respect and support for human rights and non-discrimination, ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers, promotion of education, training and professional development for women, implementation of enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women, promotion of equality through community initiatives and advocacy, and measuring and publicly reporting on progress to achieve gender equality (Hawk and Mills, 2011).

The EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) 2016-2020 stresses the need to ensure physical and

psychological integrity of girls and women, promoting the social and economic empowerment of girls, strengthening girl's and women's voice and participation (European Commission, 2015). The US Department of State women's economic empowerment principles include recognizing the importance of women's access to education and training in all fields, recognizing the value of work women do, paid and unpaid, in the home and in the formal and informal economies, increasing women's participation in higher wage areas such as engineering, increasing economic opportunities, and increasing women's representation in senior leadership and decision-making roles across public and private sectors (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

The 1995 Beijing conference identified indicators for women empowerment among which include increased self-esteem, individual and collective confidence, increased articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition, reproductive rights, law and literacy, increased personal leisure time and time for child care, decreased workload, change in roles and responsibility in family and community, decrease in violence on women and girls, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows, improved women's participation in meetings and increased bargaining and

negotiating power at home and community (Sandhya, 2006). The Addis Abba action agenda reaffirmed the role of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls as the drivers of sustainable development (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2015) whereas African Union is working towards achievement of gender parity in public and private institutions by 2063.

In Somalia, although cessation of all out conflict brought semblance of governance due to the support of international community, gender stereotypes appear to be pervasive in all spheres of life including the public sector administration, and decision-making processes in the country's social, political and economic affairs is predominantly a men's affair, and as such, men view gender equality as an 'outsider' initiative to indoctrinate western systems and beliefs. A lot of effort from donor agencies such as UNDP, UNHCR, UN Women, UNFPA, UN OCHA, UNDFW, UNICEF, FSNAU/FAOSO, and IOM, as well as representatives from Sweden, the United Kingdom/DFID, USAID, the European Union, Norway, Denmark, and SAACID are working on empowerment and social economic development of women and girls in a broad range of initiatives in collaboration with local organizations and the government of Somalia

(Zukang, 2010). Laws also have been drafted to address gender violence, but still awaiting enactment. In spite of the high level of stakeholder involvement on gender issues in Somalia, there is scanty analytical information available to inform policy effectively. This paper aimed to bring into perspective of women empowerment initiatives and socio-economic development in Somalia in the quest for gender equality in post conflict Somalia context. The objectives were to (i) examine the government initiatives on women empowerment and socio-economic development, (ii) to identify the challenges of women empowerment and socio-economic development, and (iii) to offer pertinent policies for women empowerment and socio-economic development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the challenges of women empowerment and socio-economic development are broad in nature and context specific, studies show that women empowerment is generally stifled by economic, social, religious, cultural and psychological issues (Shettar, 2015). In addition, characteristics like age, educational status, husband's education, employment status, rural or urban location, have also been found to

influence the level of women's freedom and decision making. Solutions to these challenges can be found, if driven by appropriate government policies, effective implementation and commitment of key decision makers (Habib, Roni and Haque, 2005).

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life and to lead both public and private institutions builds stronger economies, establish stable and just societies, achieves international goals of human rights, and improves women's quality of life (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005). Duflo (2012) sees women empowerment as beneficial to development. Greater gender equality also enhances economic efficiency and improves other development outcomes. (Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué, 2011). Researchers argue that enhancing access to information and developing sustainable economic empowerment models targeting women can improve gender equality (Francis, 2010; Uwantege and Mbabazi, 2015). A study of women's empowerment in India indicates that access to education and employment are some of the enablers of empowerment Nayak and Mahanta (2009). Mokta (2005) views empowerment of women as a process that helps women to be independent, politically active and economically productive.

THEORARICAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Empowerment derives from power, an understanding that involves the capacity of people and organizations in terms of personality or wealth to control others or events (Galbraith, 1983). Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) defines empowerment as an intentional ongoing process entrenched in local communities, engendering mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation whereby disadvantaged people gain greater access to and control over resources (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989). There are differences among researchers on attributes of empowerment, however both processes and outcomes are significant factors, and collective decision making, shared leadership and situation specific control, all contribute to the degree of empowerment (Zimmerman, 1993; Rappaport, 1984; Swift and Levin, 1987).

Socio-economic development refers to the social and economic changes in a country, which manifest as GDP growth, poverty issues, employment, healthcare, environment, trade and commerce and education (Rahman, S., Pervin, J., Jahan, S., Nasrullah, N. & Begum, N., 2011). The World Bank introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) as a measure of a country's welfare. Gender

equality infer same opportunities in public private sphere for women in life (Reeves and Baden, 2000), however, although tremendous strides have been made in developed economies in gender equity, developing economies, especially Africa, and more particularly Somalia are still lagging behind in gender equality due, mostly, to defense of culture and tradition.

RESEARCH METHADODOLOGY

Secondary data from various sources were analyzed, including articles from peer reviewed journals, conference papers, books, dissertations, thesis, Internet, international statues, government policies and publications.

FINDINGS

Women Empowerment Initiatives and Socio-Economic Development

The government of Somalia, the civil society organizations and international agencies are collaborating on a range of issues aimed at mainstreaming Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment-GEWE (UNDP, 2015) and enabling women to negotiate their rights through national processes. The semblance of Political stability in Somalia has provided

women with more economic and representation opportunities, and the Somali Country Report (2014) indicate a fivefold increment of women representation in the period 2005-2012 in the councils while the ministry of planning (2012) figures indicate 1,912 women out of 9,591 people employed in the civil service.

The vision of the government of Somalia as indicated in the National Development Plan 2017-2019 looks to a future in which the society upholds gender equality and dignity as well as respect and fairness for all women and men, subsequent to that, the government pledges to create an enabling legal and policy framework including institutional environment to achieve gender equality; improve safety and security for women and to generate useful information in support of activities that address gender disparities. Relevant legislation and policies have been supported including women's representation in political leadership positions, law enforcement and public sector employment (Federal Government of Somalia, 2017).

The Challenges of Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development

The developed world has made tremendous strides on gender equality, empowerment and

socio-economic development of women, but the African woman, and more specifically women in Somalia continue to face significant challenges and barriers in multiple spheres of society mainly as a result of culture, tradition, religion and lack of education. The gross enrollment ratio of women, at 9.2% for primary and 7.4% for secondary, are among the lowest in the world. Although women make up to 50% of the population in Somalia 74% are unemployed, and their fare treatment, access to justice and human rights protection is extremely poor (UNDP, 2015).

The patriarchal nature of Somalia Culture leaves women poor and without productive assets such as land and capital: women are denied property rights, credit and formal employment opportunities both in private and public sectors. So far the response to the challenges of protecting and promoting women's rights indicate discouraging results, as the gender inequality index for Somalia is still standing at 0.776 (where a maximum of 1 denotes complete inequality), the fourth highest globally (UNDP, 2012). Clan leaders mired in cultural traditions and religious norms still hold a lot of sway on politics of Somalia, and frustrate women's effort at political office. Issues of finance and insecurity also negate women's progress as well.

Policies for Women Empowerment and Socio-Economic Development

Former Somalia President, Siad Barre took the first steps in opening up the political space for women through promulgation of the Family Law in 1975, which recognized equal rights of men and women matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Presently, the 2012 Somalia constitution, article 11 and 15 gives equality and rights against abuse to the women, although policy drafting has been done, adoption and implementation face challenges from religious and political leaders, this is in contrast to self claimed break away Somaliland, which adopted a comprehensive national gender policy in 2009 requiring elimination of gender inequality and women's access to equitable development.

Historical inequality still persists in Somalia and attempts by gender advocates to introduce quotas or some form of affirmative actions have been frustrated (UNDP, 2015). Somalia is yet to ratify article 2(e) on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, and the Beijing Declaration of 1995 also has not been affected. The enactment of sexual offences bill and female genital mutilation bill are in the pipelines. It is therefore imperative for the government of Somalia to fast track ratification

of international policies, pending bills on gender issues as well as gender mainstreaming during policy formulation.

DISCUSSION

The Beijing declaration and platform for action (1995) aimed to accelerate the implementation of strategies focusing on women's empowerment, which 22 years later are still as valid, and yet to be fully realized in Somalia. Women are still unequally burdened by ravages of war, poverty, clan-based culture and misinterpretations of religion. The agenda of empowering women is to hasten development and to build stronger economies, establish stable and just societies, and to achieve international goals of human rights, and to improve women's quality of life. Although Somalia is still lagging behind in many aspects, women empowerment initiatives and socio-economic development is being addressed through a multi-pronged approach that involves the government, civil society, religious leaders and international donor agencies.

Studies show that women empowerment enhances economic efficiency and improves development outcomes, access to knowledge and information improve gender equality and access to education helps women to be independent, politically active and

economically productive (Duflo, 2012; Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué, 2011; Francis, 2010; Uwantege and Mbabazi, 2015; Nayak and Mahanta, 2009; and Mokta; 2005). The findings of the literature reviewed support the theory of empowerment (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989), which indicate empowerment as an intentional ongoing process entrenched in local communities, engendering mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation whereby disadvantaged people gain greater access to and control over resources. The government of Somalia has put a lot of effort, through the support of development partners, on development of appropriate policies and affirmative action in the push by stakeholders for greater gender equality in Somalia. In view of information analyzed, effective women's empowerment initiatives and socio-economic development strategies are needed to overcome local challenges, and to achieve satisfactory progress on the Beijing milestones.

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