



POLICY AND PRACTICE

A War on Men?

The enduring consequences of war and conflict on Somali men

In partnership with African Rights

Key points

- The impact of war on Somali men is poorly understood in Somali society and among international policy makers and aid organizations.
- The prevalence of rape in Somalia is indicative of the profound impact of war, the collapse of the state and the changes in normative gender roles.
- Policy makers and aid organizations prioritize women and children as victims of violence, while the physical and psycho-social needs of men who are also targets and casualties of war are overlooked.
- Men are both targets of violent conflict and are affected by the changes wrought by war on gender roles.
- This oversight is related to the way that gender is perceived to do with the protection of women, rather than a relational concept that considers the role of women and men in society.
- The crisis that male youth both pose and face in Somali society is related to the loss of a clear route from boyhood to manhood.

Participants

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Introduction

Mark Bradbury welcomed participants and explained this inception workshop was planned to develop a research framework and identify key issues and questions for a two-year study by RVI and African Rights. The study will investigate the impact of the war and prolonged conflict on Somali men and male youth, as well as the consequences for women, children and wider society. The study's goal is to help promote post-conflict development and stability by deepening knowledge and understanding, at local, national and international levels, of the effects of war and violent conflict. The study will generate a series of publications, audio-visual media and other outputs targeting Somali and international policy-makers and practitioners.

Background

Judith Gardner described how the idea for the study had come from working on the book *Somalia – The Untold Story*.¹ The Somali women contributors who shared their experiences for this book had reflected that women's lives could not fully recover from the war until the its impact on men had been understood and addressed, so generating the idea for a complementary study and book.

Like women, many Somali men lack access to education and under normal circumstances are brought up to fulfil traditionally ascribed roles and expectations. Society holds them responsible for most decision-making, from the household and beyond. They are expected to be responsible for the maintenance of the family as both provider and protector, and to act in prescribed ways to promote the family's survival. In the nomadic context, men are expected to separate from the rest of the family in times of hardship, so as to maximize remaining family members' access to resources. As protectors, men are expected to take part in wars or build alliances

¹ Judith Gardner and Judy El-Bushra (eds.), *Somalia – The Untold Story: The War Through the Eyes of Somali Women* (London: Pluto Press/Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), 2004).



for peace. If necessary, men are expected to die for the sake of the family and clan. According to oral tradition, during conflict a man who engaged in looting and killing was admired and praised, while a peace advocate was scorned and dismissed as weak and worthless.

Little is understood about what it is like to be a man in Somali society today, how the normative roles and expectations of and on men have changed, how men have suffered in the war, and how they have been affected by the widespread break-up of families and loss of or prolonged separation from marriage partners and children. Such literature as exists generally views women and children as the victims in war and men as the perpetrators of violence. Yet men and boys have been the targets of systematic and extensive gender-based violence, usually clan-related killings; threatened with death and subject to torture; profoundly humiliated; and coerced to participate in militia groups. Men and boys have been forced to perpetrate and to witness rape and other sexual violations against women and girls, including their own female relatives. Somalis themselves struggle to understand and counter the devastating social and psychological consequences of war on men, and the immediate and extended family.

War has challenged men's inability to fulfil their traditional role as the family's protector and provider. The perceived failure of men, compared with women, to adapt to the new circumstances wrought by war, displacement, exile and economic hardship seems to present a profound challenge to traditional gender roles and relations, with women becoming breadwinners and taking on decision-making roles outside the home. Women involved in the research for *Somalia – The Untold Story* were not triumphant over their menfolk's humiliation and their own resilience. They expressed pity for their husbands and brothers, and were ready to support them in their time of need. Eight years on from publication—and 23 years on from the collapse of the state—women's lives are far from recovering. Anecdotal evidence from Somaliland suggests women's patience is running out and they are increasingly viewing their menfolk's dependency on them as irresponsible. As religious extremism, with its assertion of male domination over women and girls' everyday lives, or *khat* addiction fills the vacuum in many men's lives, the need for a study on the impact of the war and conflict on men and young males and the consequences for their families and society in general seems more pressing than ever.²

Mental illness: An enduring consequence of the war and conflict

Rakiya Omaar said that the problem of widespread mental distress is now glaringly visible in Somali cities and among diaspora communities—and it is overwhelmingly male. It is an issue affecting all Somali families on a daily basis. The inability of many men to meet the needs of their families creates a drain on diasporic Somalis and contributes to a sense of men as no longer responsible within their communities, while social changes, such as women working in the informal sector, reflect a significant shift from 20 years earlier. In the diaspora, there are high rates of suicide and divorce, serial marriages, and large numbers of young men being repatriated to Somalia by families unable to cope with their mental illnesses, addictions and gang involvement. In Somalia and Somaliland, formal mental health services are totally inadequate to cope with the scale of the problem. Consequently, *cilaaj* treatment centres operated by religious leaders have become a thriving business, often providing inappropriate services to severely mentally ill youth. There are an estimated 90 or more in Hargeisa alone. Men suffering from mental illnesses clearly affects women as well, in their roles as the mothers, wives, and daughters of.

Work with genocide survivors in Rwanda found that while it is women who are more likely to seek assistance voluntarily, they report that their men are in greater need of assistance. But the men have to be reached in another way, due to a culture that puts a premium on men masking any emotion or vulnerability.

The mental illnesses crisis is a glaringly important issue that all Somalis can relate to, and one that affects all communities and transcends political divisions. This project will be linked in a practical way, not just through a report, but by improving the situation, for the sake of Somali men and youth and Somali society as a whole.

Fouzia Musse commented that Somalia is seen as a safe haven by diaspora families for children using or at risk of using alcohol and drugs. Many young men from the diaspora are sent for treatment to *cilaaj* clinics in Somalia, hoping to restrict access to illicit drugs. But few medications are available for treatment and those are not regulated. Health conditions are very poor in these facilities, and many human rights violations have been reported. Life in the *cilaaj* is especially difficult for diaspora youth who are non-Somali speakers.

² *Khat* is a narcotic shrub (*catha edulis*) grown in Ethiopia and Kenya, and widely chewed by Somalis.

Men as perpetrators and victims of violence

Fouzia Musse went on to provide a general overview of the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) in Somaliland, Puntland and South Central Somalia. Throughout Somalia, the prevalence of rape is highest in camps and settlements for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and it is particularly affecting minority groups. There has been a shift towards collective or gang rape, perpetrated by youth from different clans, a little-known phenomenon before the war. The targets of this kind of collective rape now include children, including male children, as well as women and girls. Few male victims are yet being acknowledged or receiving the attention of the health system.



The image of Somali men is one of violence

In perpetrating collective rape the male youth from different *diya* groups are taking advantage of the *diya* system's practice of collective responsibility.³ They are aware that, if a rape victim is assaulted by males from more than one *diya* group, responsibility for paying the *diya* compensation will be spread across their kinship families, rather than one family group being held to account. A further consequence of collective rape is that it enhances the position of the elders who represent and lobby on behalf of the perpetrators. Whether they are lobbying to deny the assault altogether or to diminish its seriousness and hence the reparation due, the momentum of this collective power of elders presents a perplexing development for the victims and their families, whose own elders' position is thus weakened.

³ *Diya* (or *mag*, 'blood'), is compensation paid to a person or their family for injury or homicide, and is a basic element of Somali customary law. Reparation is paid collectively by a *diya*-paying group, made up of between a few hundred to a few thousand men, linked by lineage and a reciprocal contract to support and protect one another.

Depending on the circumstances in which the rape occurred, the woman or girl concerned is often told the rape is her own fault. A typical example is when a working mother has left her children in the care of a male neighbour or teenage boy, who then brings other males to the house and together they rape a child, male or female. The mother is accused of causing the rape because she left her children in a vulnerable situation that facilitated the assault.

The survivors of rape are being marginalized by both traditional legal systems and the statutory system. Women do not receive reparation because rapes and cases of gender-based violence are dealt with by the elders rather than the formal court system. Under the traditional justice system, the rape victim does not personally benefit at all. Men are both the perpetrators and the ones who settle the cases, giving judgement and receiving the *diya* compensation. There is little incentive for elders to do much to prevent or reduce the levels of rape incidents because they always stand to benefit. Growing religious conservatism has not changed this, as religious leaders are silent and do nothing to curb the incidence of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV).

Little research has yet been done on the causes of the increase in SGBV. Accessing and interviewing perpetrators of rape is extremely difficult. There is no doubt that male youth are very marginalized, with most gender-focused programmes encountered across Somalia geared to the needs of women and young children. Male youth often complain of an 'emptiness', which some try to fill through khat consumption and other drug use. For the most part male and female youth lack after-school programmes or sports facilities.

It seems likely there is a link between some SGBV and mental illness, but there is a need for more concrete data. In terms of responses to SGBV, in Hargeisa there have been improvements in the support system for victims, including a dedicated hospital unit supported by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which offers paralegal services. But there is a need for better-regulated mental health programmes, as well as interventions for both SGBV survivors and perpetrators.

There is very little information about male-on-male SGBV in Somalia. Anecdotal evidence suggests that male rape does occur, such as within detention facilities holding residents from different clans, but this has not been investigated.

Plenary discussion

One viewpoint put forward is that it is necessary to look at where problems come from and who has responsibility. Some problems are social issues, such as the lack of rights and protection of widows and orphans. But these are the constitutional responsibility of government. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a government able to address these needs, rather than blaming men for failing to solve problems beyond their abilities.

In relation to SGBV, extremely high numbers of rapes are being reported in Mogadishu and the surrounding IDP camps, giving rise to much international attention and alarm. These high figures are being challenged by some Somali men. How, they ask, can the high numbers of reported rape cases be reconciled with the fact that Somalia has a Muslim culture, in which rape is prohibited? Why is this not preventing or reducing the numbers of incidences? If the numbers are accurate, they would expect more occurrences of retaliatory inter-clan violence, but this is not happening. Thus, they argue, the numbers need to be scrutinized as they may have been inflated.

One participant commented that the numbers might actually be low estimates, as hospital-verified cases in more peaceful regions are finding equivalent high numbers of rape cases. It was also noted that forced marriage of girls aged 13-14 is another form of SGBV and is on the increase, particularly in Al Shabaab controlled areas.

It was noted how the rape statistics and reporting on SGBV in general cast Somali men in a profoundly negative light, summarized by the belief that ‘Somali men rape’. When this version of the Somali male identity is challenged, as when the validity of rape statistics is questioned, the response is denial and a discourse of the deaf ensues. This illustrates the highly sensitive nature of the SGBV issue and discourse, and the need to look beyond the current levels of understanding and analysis. For example, little attention is paid to how other men are also victims when women are raped, and how rape is a family issue, as the husband or father of the immediate rape victim may be the indirect target. It was suggested that sexual violence should be viewed as a societal and economic issue, with those in poverty and in conflict zones most vulnerable, although it was also noted that SGBV occurs in stable situations. Participants observed that the way in which SGBV is currently the focus of attention in Somalia is part of a discourse that conveys an image of the Somali male as inherently violent—an assumption this project seeks to explore.

Zakaria Yusuf discussed the phenomenon of ‘moryaanism’. The term *mooryaan* describes young male Somalis who are orphans without fathers, often displaced and who survive through crime. Since 1990, the term *mooryaan* (*dey-dey* in Somaliland and *jiray* in Puntland) has been used to describe war-related armed gangs, typically followers of, and thus legitimized by, warlords.⁴ Existing outside the law, *mooryaan* depend on the use of force and power over others to survive and obtain what they want or need. Their lives are full of violence and hopelessness; they use alcohol and drugs, commit rape and show no respect for culture or religion.

As young followers of warlords, they are sometimes known as ‘solar’, a term used to convey the sense in which they are the source of their warlord’s light and warmth, his or her ‘energy’ source. *Mooryaan* do not ask for salaries; they expect to obtain their incomes from the population. Notably, the *mooryaan* himself (90 per cent are male) does not benefit beyond individual survival, but benefits are gained through him by the warlord.

Over time, the prevalence of *mooryaan* gangs has reduced and the meaning of moryaanism has evolved from the young man with a gun, fighting for a militia or clan in the early 1990s, to current connotations that describes a type of behaviour that exploits corrupt means to achieve personal gain and become rich. As such, it has come to be applied to a culture of opportunism and lawlessness now found in many sectors of society in south central Somalia. For example, there is economic, political, legal, religious and even elder mooryaanism.

‘Mooryaan elders’ means that the elders in question do not have the confidence of the people. This phenomenon has come about because every warlord has created his own elders to further his interests, for example to conduct arbitration on their behalf. As a result there is not only a growth in the number of elders (*sicir-bararka*) but there are elders who defend piracy, kidnap and rape, and extort money. In the process, they undermine Somali culture and the system of *xeer* (customary law) through traditional elders—although this remains functional in Somaliland and Puntland.

‘Political mooryaanism’ describes the way in which politicians employ the same tactics to further their interests and become rich. They are engaging in vote-

⁴ Roland Marchal, ‘Forms of Violence and Ways to Control it in an Urban War Zone: The *Mooryaan* in Mogadishu’, in *Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the 21st Century* (eds. H.M. Adam and R. Ford) (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997).

buying, intimidation, accepting expedient coalitions and legitimizing warlords. They seek political positions through corrupt means. Eighteen warlords won seats in the last elections held in Mogadishu (July 2012)—and the way they achieved this success is an example of political mooryaanism.

In the total absence of regulation, business leaders have used economic mooryaanism to profit massively from the war economy. There are no standards or respect for cultural mores anymore. The end justifies the means and money can come from anywhere.

Finally, in the past there were respected elders, sheikhs and men of religion. But as Somalia's special form of Sufism has been challenged by Salafism, coming from the Gulf, this has changed and become a culture of religious mooryaanism. Sufism has been profoundly attacked and undermined, with the young accusing respected elderly sheikhs of being stupid. Notably, most Al Shabaab officers were previously operating as *mooryaan*.

Plenary discussion

In relation to understanding *mooryaan* as 'people without fathers' it is relevant perhaps to look back at how Siad Barre manipulated male (and female) identity, drawing all male authority into his person. State collapse and the collapse of male authority in Somalia are contributing factors in mooryaanism. Participants noted that these issues relate to a theme of diminishing male authority and its concentration in a smaller, more powerful and violent elite; and that this culture has benefitted from the extended collapse of the state. The collapse of male authority has also happened at the domestic level between men and women. For example, a study of changing gender relations in the Sablaale area of Lower Shabeelle found, that, unlike in other countries, as women played bigger economic roles so they assumed greater decision-making roles at household level, and in some cases became the main decision-makers of the family.

What it means to be a male youth in Somalia today

Osman Moallin said that youth in Somalia live in fear and have an unhappy life. Even those who make money are not happy, fearing an uncertain future and the possibility of losing everything. Many Somali men have not recovered from losing their livelihoods through war. The resulting enforced idleness and loss of their role in the family leads to depression and stress. Similarly, Somali men living in western countries experience shock and depression when they find they cannot cope and depend on women to

be the leaders of the family, because they are better able to manage and earn a living. Early marriage and high divorce rates are one consequence of this impact of the war for men and the family.



Men can be victims as well as perpetrators of violence

Separated by the war, male family members who fled abroad lose connections with relatives back home. Young men have lost paternal role models due to the war and the subsequent family break-ups, leading to complete behaviour change. Some young men have become perpetrators of violence in their struggle to maintain their families. For those who do not wish to take up weapons, there are few alternatives other than to try to leave the country. Many young men do anything they can to migrate and escape from the effects of war and the traumas they have experienced.

At the same time, many young men have migrated from the rural areas, or been brought to the towns to take part in the war. When their usefulness is over, they find it difficult to return to the interior because they have become urbanized, and often addicted to khat. Such people have been dependent on the clan system for jobs and protection, but now are without guidelines or direction. They face a gap in the social and economic structure that is not yet being filled by government. Many turn to weapons-based income generation activities, such as running checkpoints.

Whereas previously their focus has been on women, more recently both the international community and the Government of Somalia have begun to give attention to the youth. The reason, of course, is that Al Shabaab's recruitment targets young people, particularly male youth.

In the early 1990s, youth groups formed along clan lines, but now one sees student and youth associations coming together on ideological grounds. Although opportunities to exercise their energy are still missing young people are coming together to make change; some are entering journalism to

influence Somali politics. There is a momentum in Mogadishu at the moment, but the impact of the war can still be felt in many areas.

For example, there is considerable youth militarization. Those young people who grew up through and survived clan conflict became the soldiers of the Union of Islamic Courts, i.e. the precursors of Al Shabaab. Then they were targeted for recruitment to the government armed forces, and simply changed their shirts. And now those who used to commit crimes within Al Shabaab and the government forces are recruited into the police. So it is very, very hard to trust the security forces.

The international community has supported the Somali government in recruiting soldiers for training in Uganda, Ethiopia and Djibouti, without considering where they will go after their training. The government is unable to pay their salaries, and without paid jobs they have little option but to use their training to commit crimes.

Ahmed Farah described Sool as a disputed, politically unstable region straddling the Puntland and Somaliland border; it has not been badly affected by the war as many regions. The Lascaanood area was previously very rural, but urbanization has increased and the town has expanded, drawing in the population from the surrounding rural areas. There has also been an influx of IDPs from the south, especially those who are too poor to leave the country. There is also active Al Shabaab recruitment in the area.

Most of the youth in Lascaanood did not experience war directly, unlike the Mogadishu and Hargeisa youth. Nevertheless, they live with the fear that conflict could happen at any time. This fear drives many to leave for the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, believing that it is better to go before the fighting begins. For the youth who stay, there are few livelihood options, as the economy is dependent on livestock. Unemployment is especially a concern for those educated up to secondary school level. In Lascaanood's fee-paying secondary schools, far more boys than girls graduate; it is the other way around when the schooling is free. Female graduates find jobs such as IT work, marry or look to leave—and trafficking is a serious problem. Male graduates find it harder to get jobs: there are very few activities for them and no space to play sports like football or express themselves, even though it is in the communities' interest to give them space and encouragement. There is internet access and it is possible to find a young person in Lascaanood sharing the same views as youth in London. The lack of livelihood opportunities and political instability are

the main drivers influencing young people, particularly boys, to join Al Shabaab.

The price of khat is now lower, and it is being sold in such small quantities that it has become affordable to all: even male secondary school leavers buy it and start the habit of chewing. Rape used to be taboo, and if it occurred the man was forced to marry the woman or girl he had raped. Now the incidence of rape has grown significantly.

Plenary discussion

Based on the experience of the Somali Youth Development Network (SOYDEN) in Mogadishu, male and female youth have quite different experiences and concerns. Girls tend to have a better future but they experience challenges from culture, religion and marriage—although most girls look forward to their wedding day, thinking of it as a day they receive many treats. A major issue of concern to young women attending SOYDEN's youth trauma healing project has been young women's powerlessness in the face of their husbands' and other adult male crimes. For example, a young wife's fury is perceived as jealousy when, despite her support for the family while her husband was idle, he cheated on her and then used her income to marry a second wife.

Many problems arise from young couples who married early but who had not had sex education and were not ready for the responsibility of children; the fathers divorce and leave the mothers with the children and without support. As a result of Al Shabaab, there is the phenomenon of forced early marriage of girls. And there are the families who force their daughters to marry because they believe it is best for her. The legal age for marriage is 18 years, although the contract can be made from 16 years; within Islam it is 15 years. According to Salafi practices, girls can be married as young as nine years old, and boys are marrying at 15 and 16.

Young men, on the other hand, have always been expected to be fighters. Those who wish to avoid this destiny leave the country. Those who want to leave but cannot afford to do and so live in a limbo are known as *bufis*.

Salafi Wahabism is becoming the dominant and attractive culture among the wealthy elite, with its conservative Islamic lifestyle influencing family and business life. Many of the most successful businesses and their employees are proudly Islamist. For them, recovery from the war is identified with religion, as it instils both work ethic and discipline, and opens up employment opportunities for men. Young men aspire to attend madrassas, known to instil a strong work ethic and to encourage male youth to be

focused and independent rather than feeling hopeless and emasculated. Wahabist men are seen as attractive potential husbands because of their work ethic, avoidance of khat and success in business. In contrast, the men who have not recovered from losing their livelihoods in the war and who are refugees living with no livelihood, dependent on women, often cannot sustain their marriages. Many leave their family in the diaspora, returning to Somalia where they take another wife and may embark on multiple marriages.

For young men with mental illnesses, families often arrange marriages in attempts to stabilize the situation—with detrimental effects on both spouses.

The study in context: Gender and conflict

Judy El-Bushra aimed to put this study in context by presenting a current International Alert research project that is looking at gender, conflict and peace globally and asking similar questions. International Alert sees peacebuilding as including interventions and strategies that strengthen the abilities of countries and communities to manage conflict non-violently. It is interested in gender because it considers it to be an essential element in peacebuilding. The first phase of the project, now completed, resulted in the evidence-based publication ‘Gender in Peacebuilding: Taking Stock’.⁵ This report examined some of the assumptions commonly held both among practitioners in the field and in academia: for example, that women are the first victims of war, and that women are innately peaceable, while men are innately violent. The research found that the evidence does not bear these assumptions out, as women also participate in war and many men do not engage in violence. Yet this thinking is part of what lies behind the current international framework on Women, Peace and Security.⁶ The report also found that staff members of agencies charged with implementing this framework are often confused about what it means, and often encounter gender as an imposed agenda that is poorly understood and rarely integrated into programming.

What seems to be behind this confusion is that the discourse is dominated by two interpretations of gender: the first and most dominant being about protection and promotion of women and girls, and the second, which remains under-articulated, taking

gender as a relational concept, i.e. about how men and women live together in society, and entailing recognition that not all men and women are the same, nor are the contexts in which they live. One of the key differences between these two approaches is that the second considers men and women together in society while the focus of the first is on women.

The second phase of the study will identify and explore projects based on this second view, that of gender as a relational issue. The second phase will produce four country case studies (Burundi, Uganda, Nepal and Colombia), with a synthesis report anticipated by March 2014. Though it is too early yet to firm draw conclusions, so far the project has distinguished four different ways in which peacebuilding initiatives have conceptualized men in relation to violence:

The MenEngage Global Alliance takes men as being the main perpetrators of violence against women and seeks to engage men in the effort to protect women from violence.⁷ One example is a project in Uganda that encourages role model men, i.e. men who recognize that domestic violence and other forms of abuse damage not only their immediate victims but the entire community. Role model men undertake publicly to stop abusive behaviours, help their wives with household tasks, collaborate on decision-making, and work with other men to persuade them to make these changes. In this way the MenEngage movement seeks to change men as a strategy for protecting women. This is a worldwide movement; however no such projects in Somalia have so far been identified.

A small number of initiatives see men as being participants, alongside women, in a process of designing a new way for people to live together. Such initiatives use dialogue to help men and women collaborate in the reconstruction of new and more equitable relationships within the family and community. Examples tend to be found mainly in the field of sexual and reproductive health.

Judy cited the Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda as an example of a ‘men as vulnerable to violence’ approach, confronting the powerful stereotype of men as invulnerable, noting that it can be very difficult to discuss issues of male vulnerability, and that there are few such programs in existence at this time.⁸ ‘Men resisting militarized violence’ is another approach. Most such projects employ organized resistance to compulsory conscription, as in Turkey and Israel. There have been very few other cases

⁵ <http://www.international-alert.org/news/taking-stock>.

⁶ See UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000 (<http://tinyurl.com/nd8ba3c>) and Resolution 1820, 19 June 2008 (<http://tinyurl.com/no89v7a>).

⁷ <http://www.menengage.org>.

⁸ <http://www.refugeelawproject.org>.

recording the consequences for men of defying militaristic norms.

Finally, highlighting lessons from the study so far about the importance of gender in peacebuilding, she emphasized the inter-connectedness of economic, political and psycho-social (including sexual) spheres, and urged development planners operating in post-conflict contexts not to separate these, noting that reconciliation and the ways people respond to traumatic experiences are frequently overlooked in post-conflict situations. In conclusion, she stressed that understanding gender as relational, rather than using it to focus on women, would provide better insights into peacebuilding process, along with richer analysis and better contextual understanding, and thereby enable sharper definition of issues to be addressed. It would also provide opportunities for men to acknowledge and discuss their problems and be supported in dealing with them.

Collapsing masculinities in war and conflict: A study from Northern Uganda

Chris Dolan said that the 1986–2006 conflict in northern Uganda between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Uganda National Defence Forces resulted in intensive violence, abductions and 10 years of forced displacement.⁹ The IDP camps, notionally under the protection of the Ugandan army, were places of violation, debilitation and humiliation. The aid system, part of a gender discourse that effectively silences men and renders them invisible, was structured to support women, distributing food and supplies to them, while men were restricted to the boundaries of the camps and rendered dependent.

With both their protector and provider roles gone, it was difficult if not impossible—although no less desirable—for the vast majority of men to fulfil the expectations of husband and father contained in the traditional Acholi model of masculinity, roles that appear to provide anchors and leverage in the midst of social and political uncertainty. However, men's confinement in the camps reinforced their loss of masculinity with their inability to fulfil their role as family protectors, defending their families from both LRA atrocities and the violations by the Ugandan army. It also reinforced Acholi men's subordinate status within Ugandan politics.

⁹ Chris Dolan, 'Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States – A Case Study of Northern Uganda', in *Masculinities Matter! Men Gender and Development* (ed. Francis Cleaver) (London: Zed Press, 2002).

In this context, while it remains possible in principle to attain a masculine identity, the destruction of both educational opportunities and economic environment, the lack of security and protection of rights removes the space through which to explore and develop alternative ways of being a man. Attempts to promote alternate visions are ridiculed; there is a collapse of multiple masculinities, with fewer windows of opportunity through which to tap sources of identity and power. Only the normative model of masculinity remains possible to attain, in principle. In practice, attaining it was virtually impossible unless one made a decision to join an armed group. So young men in particular were vulnerable to recruitment by the LRA, attracted by the chance of a salary and enhanced access to women, and thus the means to achieve the markers of masculinity.

Exploring individuals' frustrated aspirations and the decision by young men to join such armed groups has shed light on the link between the experience of humiliation and the many ways in which the normative model of masculinity can be manipulated for political ends, especially for sustaining conflict. Thus the process of undermining men's sense of masculinity—for example through the rape and control of their women, male rape, abduction and forced displacement—can be manipulated by the state or armed groups, so becoming a channel for some men to exercise power over other men and thus achieve the masculine identity, and sense of power, they have been denied.

With the process of undermining men's masculinity a means to military and political ends, weak states will actively reinforce the dominance of the normative model of masculinity attained through militancy as a political strategy. In a strong state, with mechanisms of legitimacy, rather than control and authority, in place, there is less imperative to adhere to the normative model of masculinity.

Why being a man in a conflict can make you vulnerable

Within violent conflicts, men experience a multiplicity of vulnerabilities at different levels. This can be manifested in attitudes to male socialization, for example the assertion that 'boys don't cry'. At a psychological level, boys and men can be observers of their own humiliation, forced to witness the rape of loved ones, or subjected to perform or endure male-on-male rape or other forms of sexual assault. In the case of northern Uganda, widespread suicide attempts among male rape survivors, and their female partners has been recorded—often related to a perceived loss of masculinity by the men, and/or

the perceived losses of their husbands' usefulness by the women.

Boys and men also experience multiple forms of sexual violation and torture, while in a militarized environment they are subject to forced recruitment, gender-selective massacre, and are the preferred target for social humiliation. In the economic arena, they suffer the loss both of livelihood and the ability to provide for the family. Most prevailing discourses render men who are victims invisible, including men who want and need services. This has contributed to a massive gap in funding for services for male victims, with serious health consequences.

Male-on-male Sexual Gender-Based Violence

The Kampala-based RLP, referred to earlier, addresses legal, medical and psychosocial issues brought by refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs. In response to demand, it has developed a unique programme of work with survivors of conflict-related male rape and other forms of male-on-male SGBV. To illustrate the taboo nature and the enduring and devastating impact of male-on-male rape, and hence its power as a weapon of war, participants were shown two awareness-raising RLP documentaries, *Gender Against Men* (2009) and *They Slept with Me* (2011), made with and featuring survivors of male-on-male sexual violence.¹⁰

Plenary discussion

The extent of male-on-male rape in the Somalia is unknown but it does exist, and may have existed in the past. Due to shame arising from cultural taboos, cases will not have been brought to the traditional justice system. Participants thought that a possible entry point may exist in the refugee camps, as a result of lessons learnt from Uganda.

RLP's entry point is medical, creating a space for medical response and support for survivors; support groups comprising fellow survivors have grown quickly and represent survivors from different African conflicts.

Linking understanding of the impact of war on men to women's rights

Hala Elkarib described the work of the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), a coalition of women's activist organizations working

throughout the Horn of Africa. Its initial focus was on female genital mutilation and violence against women, but more recently it has developed research into the connection between women's rights issues and politics. Looking into why the goal of a political quota system for women has not been achieved in countries in the Horn, SIHA has begun research into religious militancy in the region.

Findings so far show that religious militancy brings a very clear discipline. Fundamentalists have a cause and purpose, i.e. for the 'others' not to exist—and women constitute the biggest 'other'. Women are central to the religious fundamentalists' discourse, as evidenced through the sermons during Friday prayers, which identify women as a source of corruption before moving on to condemn other forms of 'otherness' - such as men from other sects.

Somalia is not alone in this: all the countries in the Horn are exposed to fundamentalism, which represents an ideological transformation from 30 to 40 years ago. A recent visit to Mogadishu gave Hala an alarming insight into what could happen in other parts of the region, and made it easy to understand why men are easily recruited by militant Islamist groups: there are no discourses, vision or views being heard or voiced other than those provided by the militants, who propound a vision where heaven and purity are only accessed by 'us, the real Muslims'. What shocked Hala was the absence of any challenge from moderate Muslims or alternative discourses.

For a long time, civil society actors thought that avoiding the issue of Islamism was the best policy. But deconstructing the awareness of religion, by men and women, is central to countering fundamentalism. When Luul, 27 years old, was raped, she was jailed for reporting her ordeal to a journalist—and that unjust treatment by the authorities made headlines around the world. But when her 57-year-old husband dared to speak out against the crime committed, he was also detained. He understood what his wife had been through but nobody talked to him to seek out his perspective because he is a man. There is potential to develop other discourses—and many people do indeed want to hear alternatives.

Hala concluded that contemporary discourses of moderate Islam from various Muslim countries and the major historical progressive movements of Islamic thought are currently absent from this region. As Muslims, the study's participants should address and challenge the ideas of the militants, and help construct a new discourse for the men and women of the region.

¹⁰ These films can be seen on YouTube:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJSI99HQYXc> and
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dxaFqezrXg>.

Plenary discussion

Participants discussed how western policies designed to counter fundamentalist politics only serve to strengthen their appeal.

Somali men and male youth: Victims of the ‘War on Terror’?

Cedric Barnes said that Somalia is now the biggest post-Iraq international response, other than Mali. Until recently, the policy world of donors and government programme planners had not focused on Somali men. Now, men and male youth are identified as the most vulnerable to radicalization and prone to violence. Young men with guns, *mooryaan* and Al Shabaab, are perceived as the enemy or potential enemy; they are seen as completely outside society, and as a problem that has to be addressed through Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) and de-radicalization.

Despite these negative associations, there is still a continuing reliance on male authority in Somalia. The older generation of men tasked by the international community with achieving a political solution experienced their teenage years in a different context. They did not experience joining Al Shabaab and so simplistically respond to everything about it as negative. In fact, the problem of Al Shabaab has been caused by a lack of attention—except by Islamist organizations—to male youth for 15 years. The current resurgence of violence in the south recalls 1991–2, and is in some ways a second Somali civil war.

There was initial confusion about how to translate Al Shabaab. One attempt, ‘the lads’, seemed out of context, but is accurate in the sense of its depiction of youth who are older than children but younger than men; the equivalent of the ‘lad culture’ age-group in Britain. In Somalia, the gap between being a boy and an elder is huge, and the transition has in a sense been put on hold for the last 20 years. Research has not yet delved deep into the male world, and a challenge for this study will be how to inhabit the Somali male experiences. For example, what is it like waiting to become an elder, and what opportunities are there for young men in this position?

Seen from this perspective, it is important to recognize that, by joining Al Shabaab, young men attain wages, status and power and thus accelerate their route to manhood. The clan-kinship based militia system and clan-based politics are poor competition: within the clan system, youth are subordinate to the older males and must wait several

decades before they grow into the role of elders with the right to share in decision-making and exert authority over the younger generation of male clan members.

Policy makers need to understand that Al Shabaab represents an alternative as well as a problem. Although the ‘lad’ years are a phase of life every man passes through, creating appropriate policy responses to it is problematic—not least because it is notoriously difficult to associate with ‘lads’. Policy makers need to think outside the box and work to understand who and where Al Shabaab are, and where they are going. But nobody ever speaks to Al Shabaab, or can get to them—and who has authority to speak for them? Policy makers are not sufficiently aware of the limited options facing a young man in Somalia about where to go and what to be as he is growing up, making it likely that this latest generation of *mooryaan* will also be lost. The BBC radio programme, *The Men’s Room*, might provide a useful example for the study to consider modelling in Somalia.

Despite the problems for which older male politicians and warlords are responsible, there is continued reliance by policy makers on such figures, who still depend on the clan system and who came to power through the gun, in various ways. In many cases, the interlocutors dealt with by policy makers are precisely past warlords. Similarly, the selection of MPs was made through deteriorated male clan authorities. This is creating a circular engagement from which it is difficult to break free. Issues of maleness and male authority over other males need to be urgently understood, as do male fears and vulnerabilities. Yet the policy makers’ securitization approach to the problem of Al Shabaab is an essentially macho response - recruiting young men to fight other young men.

Plenary discussion

The state-building approach engages and reinforces a clan-based power system, in which dialogue and decision-making lies with elders, while young men are marginalized. This reinforces deep feelings of alienation among Somali diaspora youth, and is counterproductive when the aim is to curb radicalization. An alternative to the state-building project that is attractive to many Somali men is strong and effective Islam, which places men at the heart and centre, along with a vision and a way to transform society. If there is no alternative, and if state building is now a project of the West, without addressing this problem of the men who are disaffected, there is a danger that policy responses

will increase support for an ideology that will sabotage that state-building project.

Somali society is also at a loss as to what to do regarding Al Shabaab. A recent study undertaken in Somaliland found that the majority of people are against religious fundamentalism, but that families often do not find out that their young men have joined Al Shabaab until they have already gone. This is a sign of dissonance within the family and the strong need of the young for a sense of belonging and identity. Work with male youth between 14 and 19 years old in Muduug region has found the reason that some joined Al Shabaab was the hope it gave them. When they see a little bit of hope, wherever it derives from, you can see them coming up with ideas. But more and more, when they look at themselves, they see their own society is not giving them space where they can develop. Everywhere everybody is working with girls, and the boys feel neglected, except by Islamism. It seems Islamism is filling a gap – but what exactly is the gap and is it a gap? Is Islamism or the feeling of hopelessness the problem?

Identity seems to be a fundamental issue, but what are the identity issues and what shapes them? In the Horn, one of the shaping factors is the global context and the opprobrium focused on Somali men.

Key Issues for further study

Participants identified several areas in which the themes of the meeting could be constructively pursued. These questions and priority areas included:

- What is the connection between the apparent collapse of masculinity and the collapse of the state?
- What is the impact of the war on the way the clan system functions in relation to the state and, within that, the specific roles of adult and young men and women?
- In respect of Islamist ideology and ‘mooryaanism’, what options are available to men and boys to fulfil normative expectations of male roles?
- Can current tensions around changes to gender roles and economic effects on men be clarified?
- Can militancy be addressed as a form of accelerated manhood, and can appropriate policy responses be developed?
- How should the psychosocial dimensions be addressed and how can the need for adequate treatment options to address widespread mental illnesses be met?

- Can awareness of sexual violence toward male and female victims be explored without an overwhelming focus on SGBV?
- How can the issue of gender dynamics in state building be best tackled?
- What is the best way of identifying the most critical concerns for men and youth, including likely refugee status, exile, loss of family structure, unemployment, mental illnesses, experience of trauma and addiction?
- What alternative masculinities are acceptable at different ages?
- Are there effective ways to counter the ‘demonization’ of Somali men, which constrains their range of opportunities (refugee determinations, benefit receipt, employability, travel, documentation).
- The study needs to exercise caution around “gender” approaches and perceptions of female bias.
- Study should produce outputs that Somali men can identify with and feel they are reflected in.



Credits

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