

Legal Frameworks for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in East Africa: Progress and Gaps

Samina khan¹, Ahmed F. Idle²

¹Amoud University Hargeisa Somaliland, ²University of Hargeisa. Hargeisa Somaliland

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31918/twejer.2584ELI.27>

Published:2/11/2025

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a critical issue in East Africa despite existing legal frameworks. This study compares GBV laws in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, highlighting enforcement gaps, judicial inefficiencies, and socio-cultural barriers. While Rwanda's specialized GBV courts demonstrate success, other countries struggle with weak enforcement and corruption. The study calls for standardized GBV laws, improved survivor support, and stronger institutional reforms. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, including in-depth documents and legal analysis, the research provides policy recommendations to enhance GBV legal protection. Addressing these legal and systemic gaps is crucial for achieving justice and safeguarding vulnerable populations.

Keyword: Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Laws, Legal Frameworks in East Africa, GBV Law Enforcement, Survivor Protection and Justice, Judicial Reforms, International Human Rights.

Legal Frameworks for Addressing Gender-Based Violence in East Africa: Progress and Gaps

Dr. Samina khan

Assistant professor, Amoud University Hargeisa Somaliland.

Email: saminakhan@amoud.edu.so

Dr. Ahmed F. Idle

Assistant Professor, University of Hargeisa. Hargeisa Somaliland.

Email: dr.ahmed.sgs@uoh.edu.so

3. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive human rights violation that persists across the globe, disproportionately affecting women and marginalized groups, including children, LGBTQ+ individuals, and economically disadvantaged communities. In this study, "Gender" is understood as a social construct that shapes the roles, behaviors, and expectations assigned to individuals based on their perceived sex, often leading to systemic inequalities and power imbalances. These inequalities manifest in various forms of violence, including domestic abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.

East African communities face severe challenges in addressing GBV, despite the existence of national and international legal frameworks aimed at combating this issue (UN Women, 2021). The region experiences high rates of domestic violence, sexual assault, human trafficking, and harmful practices like FGM and child marriage. However, survivors often struggle to access justice due to deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms, legal discrepancies, and insufficient institutional enforcement (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

East African nations have adopted diverse legal approaches to address GBV. For instance, Rwanda has established specialized GBV courts, which have made significant progress in handling GBV cases. However, enforcement gaps, judicial inefficiencies, and corruption remain major obstacles in countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). Additionally, while most East African countries have ratified international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, the domestic implementation of these frameworks remains uneven (African Union, 2018). Survivors continue to face numerous barriers, including judicial obstacles, social stigma, and a lack of adequate support services, which hinder their access to justice (Amnesty International, 2020).

This study explores the root causes of GBV in East Africa, the challenges in implementing legal protections, and the socio-cultural norms that perpetuate these violations. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the systemic changes needed to address GBV and promote gender equality in the region.

3.1 Research Gap and Justification

Despite numerous efforts to combat violence against women, the legal structures addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in East Africa continue to fall short in providing adequate protection for survivors. Previous research has primarily focused on evaluating individual countries' policies, leaving a significant gap in comparative analysis of how GBV laws perform across different national contexts within the region. This study seeks to address this gap by conducting a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of GBV legal frameworks in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, while proposing recommendations for institutional reforms.

The selection of these four countries is justified by several key factors. First, they are all member states of the East African Community (EAC), a regional intergovernmental organization that promotes economic, political, and social integration. As EAC members, these countries share a commitment to harmonizing their legal frameworks, including those addressing GBV, under regional agreements such as the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children. This shared institutional context provides a unique opportunity to compare how similar legal principles are implemented and enforced across different national settings.

Second, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda share geographical proximity and socio-cultural similarities, which influence the prevalence and manifestation of GBV in the region. For example, harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are prevalent across these countries, albeit to varying degrees. At the same time, each country has adopted distinct approaches to addressing GBV, ranging from Rwanda's specialized GBV courts to Kenya's Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centers. By comparing these approaches, the study aims to identify best practices and lessons learned that can inform regional policy reforms.

Finally, while these countries have ratified international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, their domestic implementation remains uneven. This disparity highlights the need for a comparative analysis to understand the barriers to effective enforcement and the role of socio-cultural norms in perpetuating GBV. By focusing on these four countries, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in addressing GBV within the East African context, ultimately advocating for stronger regional collaboration and institutional reforms.

3.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

1. To assess the effectiveness of GBV legal frameworks in East African countries.
2. To identify legal and institutional gaps hindering GBV prevention and prosecution.
3. To determine the extent to which relevant national laws are compatible with international human rights standards.
4. To provide policy recommendations for strengthening GBV legal protections.

3.3 Questions of the Study

To achieve the above objectives, this study will address the following questions:

1. What legal frameworks exist in East African countries that combat GBV?
2. How effective are these laws in practice?
3. What are the main gaps and challenges in enforcement?
4. How do these laws align with international human rights conventions?

3.4 Significance of the Study

The research expands academic knowledge about GBV law enforcement through its comprehensive evaluation of East African legal obstacles alongside policy deficiencies. Policymakers along with legal

practitioners' human rights advocates and international organizations will find the findings beneficial because they will receive practical guidance to enhance GBV legal frameworks. This research uses proven successful approaches from interventions to develop guidelines which will support GBV policy development across East Africa and regional collaboration for effective management of GBV.

4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND LAW

Various theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for understanding the nature of gender-based violence (GBV) and its relationship with legal systems designed to combat it. These theories offer critical insights into why GBV persists despite the existence of legal interventions and provide guidance on how to strengthen legal protections and ensure justice for victims. Key theoretical perspectives include feminist legal theory, the human rights approach, and the socio-legal perspective. Each of these frameworks offers unique insights into the root causes of GBV, the challenges in addressing it through legal means, and potential solutions for creating more effective and equitable systems of justice.

4.1 Feminist Legal Theory

The discipline of feminist legal theory points out that many legal frameworks operate within patriarchal systems, which inadequately protect vulnerable populations, including women (MacKinnon, 2018). From this viewpoint, GBV laws reflect male-dominated systems that

prioritize social stability over the rights of victims. Catharine MacKinnon (2018) argues that legal reforms across multiple nations have not successfully dismantled the core gender inequalities that allow GBV to persist. Violence against household members remains improperly enforced, as cultural beliefs often condone such abuse, even though domestic violence offenses are officially prohibited within legal systems (Tripp, 2019).

4.2 Human Rights Approach

The human rights perspective defines GBV as a fundamental breach of human rights which both needs state response and enforcement of legal standards (United Nations, 2021). The international community through CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol mandates states to establish laws which both stop and punish GBV while aiming for its complete eradication (African Union, 2018). According to Coomaraswamy (2020) the implementation of human rights-based reforms in law should include more than just criminalization processes since it should also work towards ensuring survivor services while providing legal access to justice and cultural change.

4.3 Socio-Legal Perspective

Law and society meet cultural norms under analysis through the socio-legal perspective. This approach shows that GBV requires more than legal intervention because social practices and institutional behaviours frequently work against enforcement implementation (Merry, 2019). Traditional dispute resolution methods known as elder mediation prevail over formal judicial courts throughout East Africa which results in insufficient penalties for criminal offenders (Okello, 2020). To effectively enforce GBV laws need complementary support from public education programs combined with law enforcement training and community participation initiatives according to the socio-legal perspective.

4.4 Methodology

This research adopts a **comparative legal analysis** method to evaluate Gender-Based Violence (GBV) legal frameworks and their enforcement mechanisms in East African countries, specifically Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda. The study employs a combination of **qualitative and quantitative methods** to conduct a comprehensive assessment of existing legal protections and enforcement strategies.

A central part of this analysis involves examining **international treaties and conventions** such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol. These international instruments are analyzed to understand their **incorporation into national laws** and **influence on domestic policy-making** related to GBV. By assessing how these treaties are domesticated and reflected in national legal frameworks, the research evaluates each country's level of compliance with international human rights standards and identifies gaps between international obligations and domestic enforcement.

Furthermore, the research primarily relies on **primary legal documents** (such as national constitutions, penal codes, and GBV-specific laws), **policy reports**, and **secondary literature** including scholarly articles and institutional publications. The choice to focus on **documentary and policy analysis as secondary data**—rather than conducting interviews—is based on several factors:

Availability: Comprehensive legal and policy documents on GBV are publicly accessible and cover a wide range of relevant issues, including law enforcement practices and judicial responses.

Reliability: Official documents and reports from reputable institutions (e.g., UN Women, Human Rights Watch, and government ministries) offer **authoritative and verified information**, making them suitable for rigorous legal analysis.

Comprehensiveness: These sources provide a **holistic and systematic overview** of the legal frameworks, enabling cross-country comparison and the identification of trends and divergences in GBV responses.

Consistency: Given the sensitive nature of GBV and potential ethical challenges in interviewing survivors or officials, documentary analysis ensures **consistency and objectivity** in evaluating legal and policy measures without compromising participant safety.

Through this methodological approach, the study aims to generate a robust analysis of GBV legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms, grounded in both international standards and national legal realities.

4.5 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** complemented by **quantitative elements** to examine the structure, implementation, and enforcement of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) legal frameworks in East African countries. The research focuses on analyzing **legislative structures, court decisions, policy reports, and enforcement data** to assess the real-world impact of GBV laws and policies.

The research process involves several key steps to ensure a systematic and thorough evaluation:

1. **Collection and analysis of primary legal documents**, including national constitutions, GBV-specific legislation, penal codes, and judicial rulings, to understand the legal foundations and formal mechanisms in place for addressing GBV.
2. **Review of statistical data**, such as GBV prosecution rates, conviction rates, and law enforcement responses, to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of the legal frameworks in practice. These data sets are drawn from government reports, official statistics, and international agency databases.
3. **Examination of policy reports and institutional publications** to contextualize the implementation of GBV laws, including identifying the challenges faced by law enforcement, judiciary, and support systems for survivors.

4. **Synthesis of findings**, where legal analysis is combined with statistical evidence to assess not only the existence of legal provisions but also their practical enforcement and outcomes.

By **combining legal materials with statistical findings**, the research develops a **comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of GBV implementation challenges**. This approach allows for the identification of **gaps between legal provisions and enforcement outcomes**, such as discrepancies between what the law promises and what is delivered in practice. For example, while laws may provide for severe penalties for GBV, low prosecution or conviction rates may indicate enforcement failures. Through this integrated analysis, the research highlights both **the strengths and weaknesses** of existing legal frameworks and offers insights into how GBV laws can be better implemented to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

This design ensures that both **normative (what ought to be)** and **empirical (what is happening in reality)** dimensions of GBV law enforcement are fully addressed.

4.6 Data Sources

This study relies on multiple sources, including:

1. **Primary Legal Documents**: National constitutions, GBV-related statutes, court rulings, and international legal agreements such as CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol.
2. **Government and Organizations Reports**: Official government reports, human rights organization studies, and legal assessments by entities such as UN Women, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch.
3. **Academic Literature**: Peer-reviewed journal articles, legal commentaries, and anthropological analyses on GBV law enforcement in East Africa.
4. **Statistical Data**: National prosecution records, crime reports, and NGO-collected data on GBV cases.

4.7 Case Selection Criteria

The study focuses on four East African countries—Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda—selected based on specific and strategic criteria that enable a meaningful comparative analysis of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) legal frameworks and enforcement practices. The following criteria guided the selection of these countries:

Distinct Legal Frameworks on GBV:

Each of these countries has developed unique and diverse legal approaches to addressing GBV. For example, Kenya has enacted comprehensive legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act and Protection Against Domestic Violence Act, while Uganda and Rwanda have introduced specialized laws targeting domestic violence and sexual violence. Tanzania has incorporated

GBV-related provisions in its broader criminal laws but lacks specialized GBV legislation. This diversity in legal structures allows for a comparative assessment of different legislative models and approaches to GBV.

Variability in Implementation and Enforcement Practices:

The selected countries represent a range of experiences in GBV law enforcement and implementation, making them suitable for evaluating practical challenges and best practices. For instance, Rwanda has established specialized GBV courts and fast-track procedures for handling GBV cases, demonstrating advanced implementation mechanisms. In contrast, Tanzania still struggles with legal gaps and limited enforcement capacity, particularly in rural areas. This variation in implementation effectiveness enables a critical examination of how legal frameworks translate into real-world protection and justice for GBV survivors.

Compliance with International Human Rights Treaties:

All four countries are signatories to key international and regional human rights instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). However, the degree of incorporation of these international standards into domestic laws and policies varies significantly among them. By comparing their levels of compliance and domestication of treaty obligations, the study assesses how international norms influence national GBV responses and highlights gaps between treaty commitments and national practice.

Through these carefully defined criteria, the study ensures that the selected cases offer rich, diverse, and contrasting insights into GBV legal frameworks and enforcement in East Africa, supporting a balanced and evidence-based comparative analysis.

4.7 Case Selection Criteria

The study focuses on four East African countries based on the following criteria:

1. **Legal Relevance:** Each country has distinct legal frameworks addressing GBV, allowing for comparative analysis.
2. **Implementation Variability:** Some countries, like Rwanda, have specialized GBV courts, while others, such as Tanzania, have legal gaps, enabling an assessment of best practices and challenges.
3. **International Treaty Compliance:** The study examines how each country aligns its national laws with international human rights conventions.

4.7 Action Needed

Explain the criteria for selecting the four East African countries in detail, such as how their distinct legal frameworks, implementation practices, and treaty compliance provide a basis for meaningful comparative analysis.

4.8 Data Analysis

Law enforcement documents and legal policies were coded using a thematic framework to determine general principles of law applied, enforcement gaps, and judicial inefficiencies. Comparative charts and tables were created to show the similarities and differences in legal protection and implementation of GBV laws across countries. Trends in prosecution rates and legal compliance were examined statistically to assess the effectiveness of national GBV laws over time.

4.9 Limitations

While the study provides a comprehensive evaluation of GBV legal frameworks, certain limitations exist:

1. Access to Data: Some legal cases and law enforcement records were inaccessible due to privacy laws or bureaucratic restrictions.
2. Regional Specificity: The findings focus on East Africa and may not be directly applicable to other African regions.
3. Subjectivity in Qualitative Analysis: Interpretations of legal effectiveness depend on available literature and reported case outcomes, which may not capture all realities on the ground.\

4.10 Existing Research on GBV Legal Frameworks in East Africa

Studies on East African GBV legislation show that improvements have occurred, but fundamental difficulties remain. Most countries have adopted GBV-related legislation, yet its impact varies extensively from one nation to another. Victims of sexual offenses in Kenya face difficulties because the Sexual Offences Act (2006) fails to prevent slow legal processes, which intimidates victims during enforcement (Republic of Kenya, 2015; Okello, 2020). In Uganda, the Domestic Violence Act (2010) protects victims from intimate partner violence, but survivors still encounter social discrimination and economic hurdles when pursuing legal remedies (Republic of Uganda, 2010). Tanzania's Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act (1998) includes penalties for GBV but has been criticized for failing to adequately address marital rape and female genital mutilation (FGM) (United Republic of Tanzania, 1998). In contrast, Rwanda's GBV Law (2008) demonstrates superior results through the establishment of specialized GBV courts and comprehensive victim support programs (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). Despite these legislative frameworks, their impact remains limited due to implementation shortfalls, inadequate enforcement, and insufficient public awareness (Tripp, 2019).

The execution of GBV laws faces hindrances such as inadequate law enforcement systems, cultural opposition, lack of access to justice, and corruption. Secondary victimization occurs when judicial and police officers, lacking proper training in GBV case handling, fail to address such cases effectively (Amnesty International, 2020). A conflict exists in communities where traditional or religious laws block the enforcement of formal legal provisions. For example, in some regions, traditional leaders may prioritize customary dispute resolution methods over formal legal processes, often resulting in lenient or inadequate responses to GBV cases (Merry, 2019). Survivors of GBV face significant challenges in reporting attacks and pursuing legal action due to economic and logistical difficulties, particularly in rural areas (Coomasary, 2020). Judicial inefficiencies and corruption further weaken legal protections for GBV cases, leading to extended delays, dismissals, and the use of informal resolutions (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Several countries have implemented successful legal advancements and policy transformations to combat GBV. For instance, Rwanda's establishment of specialized GBV courts has significantly improved the efficiency of case resolutions and enhanced victim support. These courts are designed to handle GBV cases exclusively, ensuring that judges and prosecutors are trained to address the unique complexities of such cases. This has led to faster trials, reduced case backlogs, and better outcomes for survivors, including access to medical care, counseling, and legal aid (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). In Kenya, the government has introduced mobile judicial units to serve distant communities, improving access to justice for GBV victims in remote areas (Republic of Kenya, 2015). In Uganda, the government collaborates with non-governmental organizations to provide legal assistance and shelter programs for GBV survivors (Okello, 2020). The combination of effective legal frameworks, institutional changes, and community involvement has proven to enhance protections for GBV cases.

4.11 Review of Global and Regional Legal Standards

The East African institutions addressing gender-based violence base their authority on human rights treaties at international and regional levels to permit local governments in establishing domestic regulations and enforcement mechanisms. Countries developing their responses to GBV must comply with multiple international frameworks, including the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, adopted in 1979. CEDAW is a cornerstone international treaty that obligates states to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women, including gender-based violence. Specifically, **Article 2** of CEDAW requires states to adopt legislative and policy measures to prohibit all forms of discrimination against women, while **Article 16** emphasizes the need to eliminate discrimination in marriage and family relations, which often intersect with GBV. Additionally, **General Recommendation No. 19** (1992) by the CEDAW Committee explicitly defines gender-based violence as a form of discrimination that violates women's human rights, obligating states to prevent, investigate, and punish such acts (United Nations, 2021).

The **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)** further reinforces the global commitment to addressing GBV. Specifically, **Article 4** of the Declaration states

that states should "condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination." It also calls for states to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or by private persons" (UN Women, 2021). This declaration, while not legally binding, provides a strong moral and political framework for states to develop legal interventions for the prevention and punishment of GBV.

At the global level, **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5** aims to achieve gender equality and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. While SDG 5 is not a legal standard, it serves as a global target that encourages countries to align their policies and legal measures with international human rights frameworks, including CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol. East African nations are part of these global agreements, which compel them to develop comprehensive laws against sexual violence, provide assistance services to victims, and establish effective enforcement mechanisms.

4.12 Legal Frameworks for Addressing GBV in East Africa

Various legal provisions enacted by East African countries to fight gender-based violence (GBV) show inconsistent results due to difficulties in enforcement, cultural practices, and institutional capabilities.

Kenya has enacted several laws to combat GBV. The **Sexual Offences Act (2006)** criminalizes sexual violence, including rape and defilement, and imposes severe punishments (Republic of Kenya, 2006). The **Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (2015)** provides survivors with access to protection orders and other legal remedies (Republic of Kenya, 2015). Additionally, the **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) Act (2011)** makes FGM illegal, although the practice persists in certain ethnic groups (Republic of Kenya, 2011). Despite these legal measures, survivors face barriers to justice due to insufficient law enforcement, case backlogs, and social discrimination (Okello, 2020).

In **Uganda**, GBV is addressed through various legal measures. The **Domestic Violence Act (2010)** offers legal protection to victims of abuse and criminalizes domestic violence (Republic of Uganda, 2010). However, marital rape remains unaddressed by the **Penal Code Act of 1950**, as there have been no explicit efforts to acknowledge this issue (Republic of Uganda, 2010). The **Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009)** focuses on human trafficking, particularly targeting women and girls (Republic of Uganda, 2009). Survivors face significant challenges in seeking justice due to patriarchal cultural beliefs, limited legal understanding, and the high cost of legal processes (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

In **Tanzania**, the **Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act (1998)** criminalizes sexual violence but has been criticized for failing to address marital rape explicitly (United Republic of Tanzania, 1998). The **Law of Marriage Act (1971)** allows parents to approve child marriages for girls as young as 14 years old, which contradicts international child protection statutes such as the **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** (United Republic of Tanzania, 1971).

The **Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2008)** punishes all forms of trafficking-related offenses (United Republic of Tanzania, 2008). However, religious and customary rules, particularly in some Christian and Muslim communities, often challenge the implementation of national GBV laws by failing to support measures against early marriages and domestic violence (Merry, 2019).

Rwanda stands out as a regional leader in transforming its legal approach to GBV. The **Law on Prevention and Punishment of GBV (2008)** imposes significant penalties for GBV crimes and provides necessary assistance services for survivors (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). The country has established **Gender-Based Violence Committees** to monitor victim assistance services and law enforcement activities nationwide. Additionally, specialized **GBV courts** were created to expedite case processing and improve judicial outcomes (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). These innovative measures have led to enhanced prosecution rates and improved survivor assistance programs, serving as a model for other East African countries (Tripp, 2019).

Despite these legal frameworks, law enforcement across the region faces significant challenges in implementing existing laws. The effectiveness of GBV laws in East Africa is hindered by inconsistent enforcement, judicial system inefficiencies, and persistent socio-cultural barriers. To enhance GBV legal safeguards, East African countries must build stronger institutional systems, educate the public, and tailor legal procedures to better support victims.

4.13 Table 1: Comparative Analysis of GBV Legal Frameworks

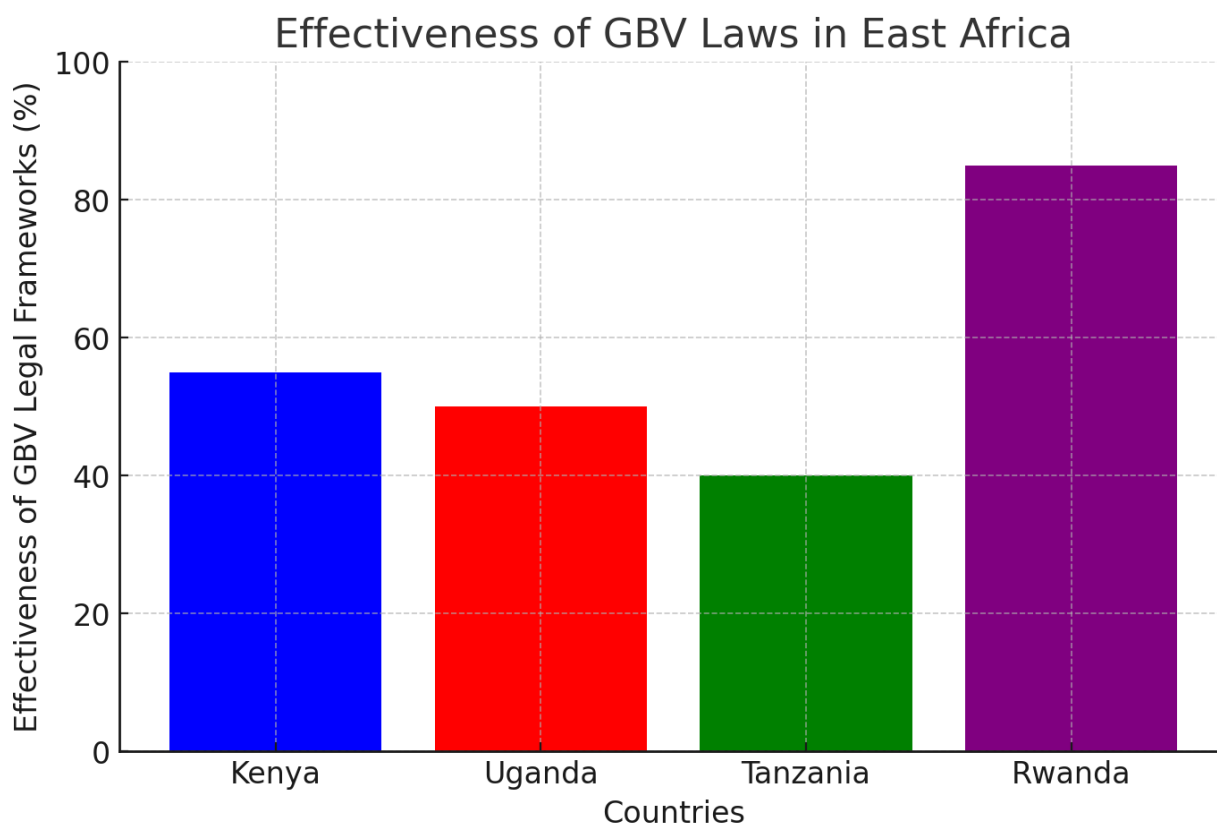
Country	Key GBV Laws	Strengths	Weaknesses
Kenya	Sexual Offences Act (2006), Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (2015), FGM Act (2011)	Comprehensive legal framework; criminalization of FGM	Weak enforcement; long case resolution times
Uganda	Domestic Violence Act (2010), Penal Code Act, Prevention of Trafficking Act (2009)	Legal protection for domestic violence survivors	No marital rape recognition; limited victim support
Tanzania	Sexual Offences Act (1998), Anti-Trafficking Act (2008), Law of Marriage Act (1971)	Addresses sexual violence and trafficking	Allows child marriage; weak prosecution of GBV cases
Rwanda	Law on Prevention and Punishment of GBV (2008), Specialized GBV Courts	Strong enforcement mechanisms; dedicated GBV courts	Resource-intensive system

Source: Table 1 Kenya: Sexual Offences Act (2006), Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (2015), FGM Act (2011) (Republic of Kenya, 2006, 2011, 2015; Okello, 2020). Uganda: Domestic Violence Act (2010), Penal

Code Act, Prevention of Trafficking Act (2009) (Republic of Uganda, 2010, 2009; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Tanzania: Sexual Offences Act (1998), Anti-Trafficking Act (2008), Law of Marriage Act (1971) (United Republic of Tanzania, 1971, 1998, 2008; Merry, 2019). Rwanda: Law on Prevention and Punishment of GBV (2008), Specialized GBV Courts (Republic of Rwanda, 2008, 2018; Tripp, 2019).

Rwanda maintains the most advanced anti-GBV legal structure whereas Tanzania stands as the weakest because their laws permit harmful practices including child marriage.

4.14 Figure 1: Effectiveness of GBV Laws in East Africa

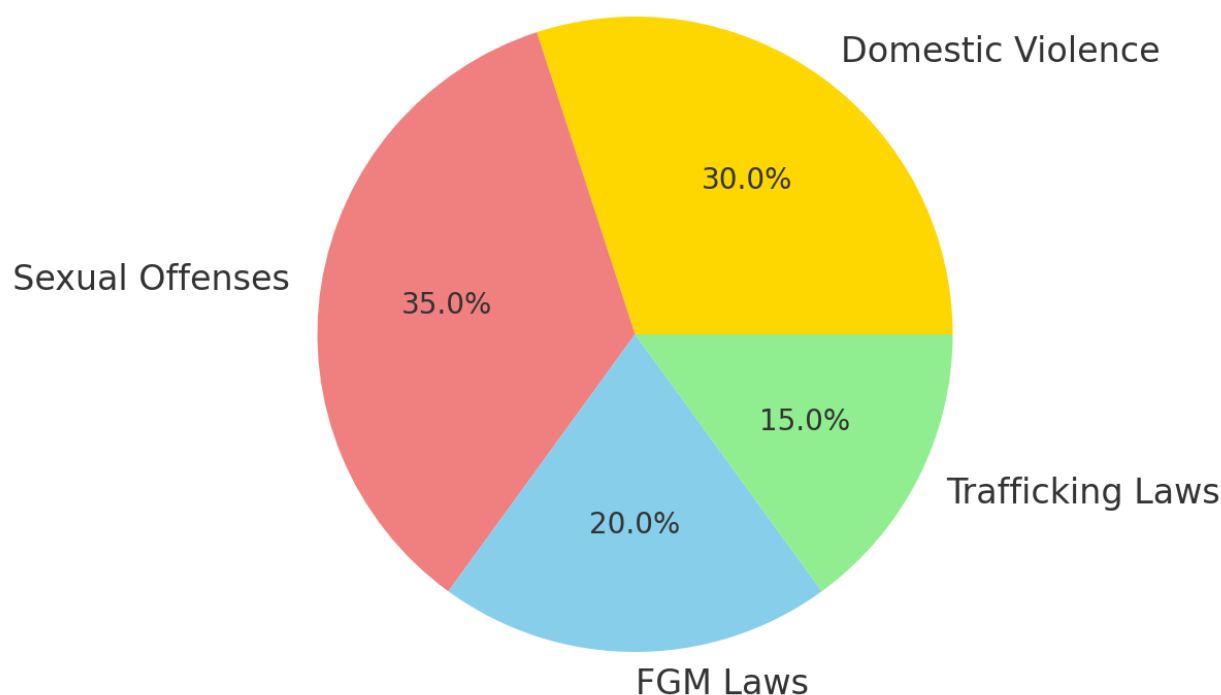


Source: Figure 1 Data compiled from Human Rights Watch (2019), UN Women (2021), and official government reports from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda.

The data presented in this bar chart shows GBV law enforcement levels across East African States. Rwanda leads all other countries with its advanced victim support system and enforcement mechanisms at 85% level, but Tanzania remains low with only 40% level due to its antiquated laws and ineffective enforcement practices. Legal and policy improvements should be considered for Kenya and Uganda because both countries show 55% and 50% effectiveness respectively.

4.15 Figure 2: Proportion of GBV-Related Legal Provisions

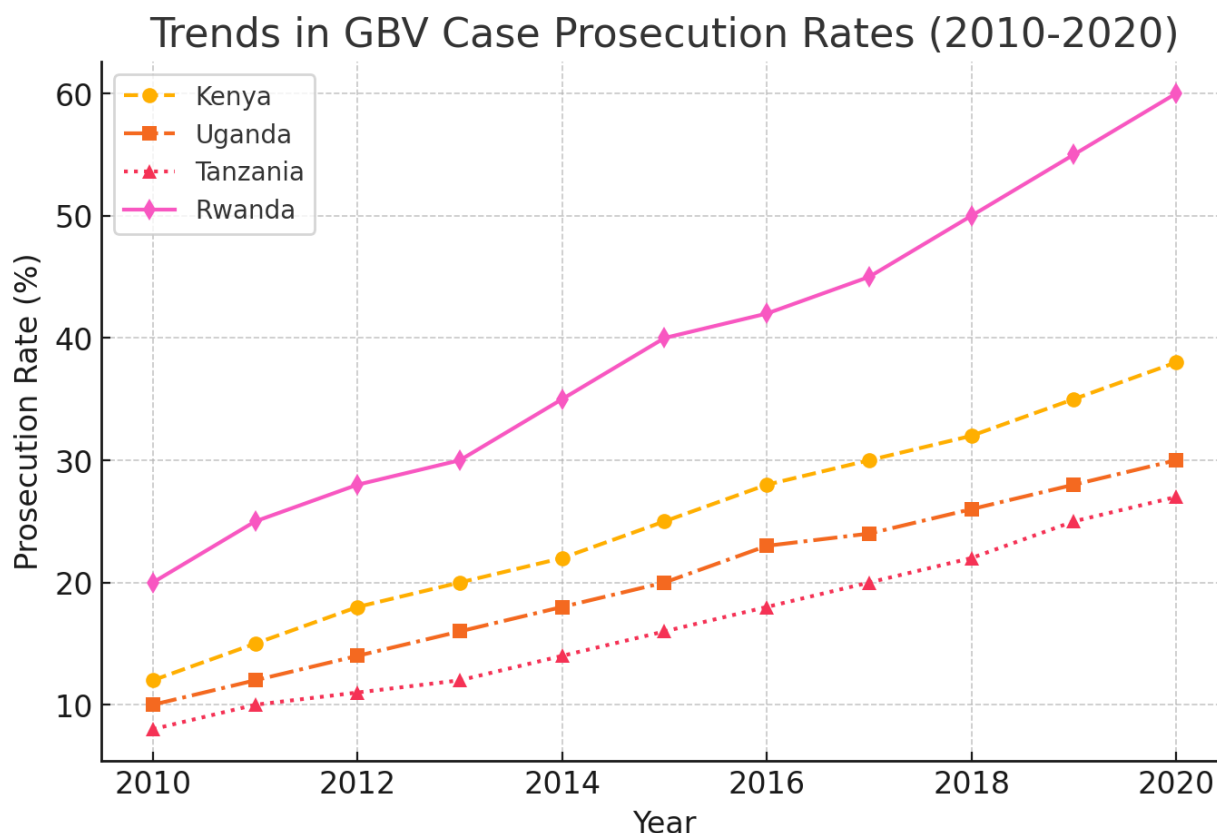
Proportion of GBV-Related Legal Provisions



Source: Figure 2 Based on national GBV laws and regional assessments (Republic of Kenya, 2006, 2011, 2015; Republic of Uganda, 2010, 2009; United Republic of Tanzania, 1971, 1998, 2008; Republic of Rwanda, 2008, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019; UN Women, 2021).

The chart presents data on East African GBV-related law distribution across four categories. The two largest segments of GBV laws in East Africa consist of Sexual Offenses with 35% and Domestic Violence with 30% of the total share. FGM Laws together with Trafficking Laws constitute a smaller segment of GBV-related laws while Sexual Offenses Laws and Domestic Violence Laws represent the largest segments in East African legislation. The current statutory framework in East Africa requires substantial augmentation to prevent human trafficking and protect from harmful customs such as FGM.

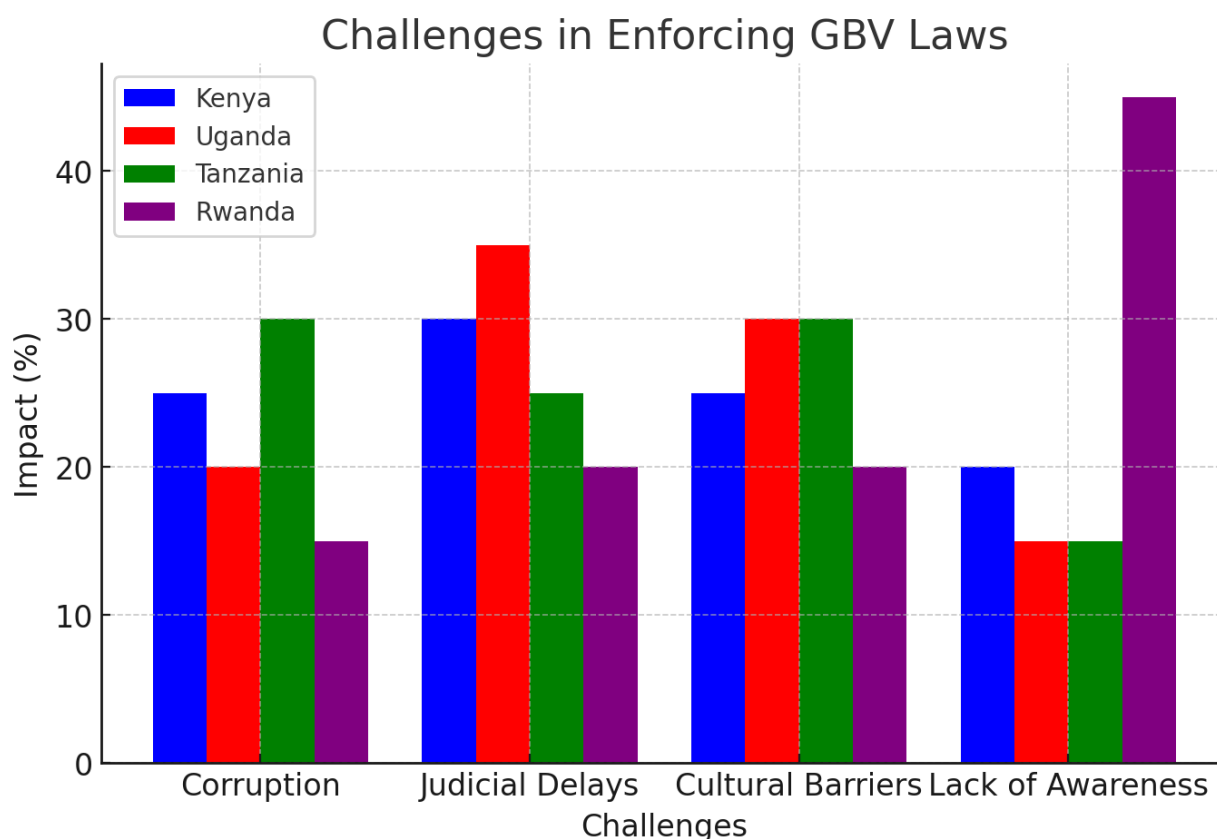
4.16 Figure 3: Trends in GBV Case Prosecution Rates (2010-2020)



Source: Figure 3 Derived from national justice ministry reports and prosecution statistics of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, supplemented by Amnesty International (2020), Human Rights Watch (2019), and UN Women (2021).

The graph demonstrates how GBV case prosecution figures have evolved in Kenya and Uganda and Tanzania and Rwanda during years. Rwanda's prosecution statistics demonstrate significant advancement because their rates jumped from 20% in 2010 to 60% during the year 2020. The three nations of Kenya and Uganda together with Tanzania exhibit a slow upward trend which points at ongoing social and legal obstacles that persist. The data indicates countries that operate GBV courts in combination with strong institutional frameworks obtain superior outcomes in prosecuting GBV cases.

4.17 Figure 4: Challenges in Enforcing GBV Laws



Source: Figure 4 Based on reports and assessments by Amnesty International (2020), Coomaraswamy (2020), Merry (2019), Okello (2020), Tripp (2019), and UN Women (2021).

This chart compares barriers to GBV law enforcement across the four countries. Judicial delays together with corruption maintain their position as the greatest barriers to prosecution rates within both Kenya and Uganda. Survivors encounter multiple cultural challenges that prevent them from pursuing justice in Tanzania. The main obstacle in Rwanda stems from insufficient public understanding even though the country implements strong legislative enforcement. The data signifies the importance of specific solutions which include shortening judicial timelines together with fighting corruption and educating the public about GBV laws and overcoming cultural opposition toward GBV regulations.

4.18 Implementation Challenges in Addressing GBV in East Africa

East African society faces multiple barriers to GBV law enforcement which include poor police effectiveness and social obstacles as well as limited services for survivors. The combination of ineffective law enforcement along with inefficient judicial system produces high levels of untried GBV cases because both factors create obstacles for prosecuting perpetrators (Amnesty International, 2020). Survivors abstain from pursuing legal redress because bureaucratic obstacles as well as prolonged judicial processes and danger of victimization from their

attackers (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The handling of cases by law enforcement officers becomes inadequate because they miss essential training about gender sensitivity which results in the secondary victimization of survivors (Merry, 2019).

Socio-cultural and economic obstacles had made the GBV fight more challenging to overcome. Strong patriarchal cultural beliefs drive victims to avoid reporting abuse because they worry about community discrimination as well as possible retaliation from perpetrators (Coomaraswamy, 2020). The challenge of economic dependence on abusive relationships becomes worse because many women need financial independence to end abusive relationships or take legal steps (Okello, 2020). Survivors who lack sufficient economic options frequently face prolonged exposure to violence because getting justice or finding safety is unattainable.

Survivors face serious difficulties because survivor support programs lack complete and accessible services. RBV victims within rural communities face special challenges because they lack access to secure shelter facilities and legal help and mental health support (UN Women, 2021). Insufficient medical services combined with restricted healthcare access for post-rape examinations and forensic examinations continuously undermines investigations of GBV cases (Tripp, 2019). Survivors lack protection when a coordinated support network does not exist since this absence exposes them to additional abuse and exclusion.

4.19 The Role of International and Regional Organizations

International and regional organizations take essential steps to strengthen legal protections that fight GBV. As signatory members of CEDAW and SDG 5 the United Nations requires countries to put forth strong legal frameworks which defend GBV survivors (United Nations, 2021). UN Women and UNDP support the development of GBV response programs through funding and training assistance and technical expertise. This assistance aids national entities in their approach to GBV problems (UN Women, 2021). Such initiatives work to develop better legal systems and conduct awareness efforts to fight against sexist social norms (Coomaraswamy, 2020).

The African Union's Maputo Protocol requires East African nations to strengthen their legal protection of gender equality but demonstrates inconsistent implementation (African Union, 2018). The East African Community (EAC) GBV Action Plan works to create matching laws between member states to develop unified GBV prevention and response frameworks (EAC, 2021). The implementation of these GBV protocol remains inconsistent because the institutions lack adequate capability and face political resistance (Tripp, 2019).

4.20 Gaps and Challenges in GBV Legal Frameworks in East Africa

A wide gap exists between the current GBV laws in East Africa and their execution which obstructs survivors from obtaining justice. Laws from the past, weak management systems and cultural barriers along with economical obstacles lead to ineffective GBV legal systems throughout East Africa. The countries of Rwanda have introduced GBV courts together with victim support systems, yet Tanzania and Uganda face ongoing problems because of missing

legal safeguards and weak enforcement practices. Analysis of key problems that stall East Africa's legal framework for handling GBV takes the focus in this part.

4.21 Legal Gaps in GBV Laws

Despite existing legal frameworks, significant gaps remain in effectively addressing GBV in East African countries. **Some national laws conflict with international human rights standards**, leaving survivors inadequately protected. For instance, **Tanzania's Law of Marriage Act (1971) still permits child marriage under certain conditions**, contrary to international conventions that prohibit such practices (United Republic of Tanzania, 1971). Similarly, **the absence of explicit criminalization of marital rape in both Uganda and Tanzania** undermines comprehensive protection for women against intimate partner violence (Human Rights Watch, 2019). These gaps highlight the need for **harmonizing domestic legislation with international obligations to ensure full protection against GBV**.

Due to the disagreements between traditional norms and laws confusion arises which complicates the legal system. Traditional dispute resolution systems in certain communities supersede official legal procedures to reach agreements which normally side with attackers rather than their victims. The absence of united standards in regional law continues to make it difficult to execute GBV legislation in different territories.

Everything regarding GBV criminalization is properly written in the laws of Kenya and Rwanda, but most countries do not offer survivor-focused protections. Most legal punitive measures fail to deliver essential support services including counselling and housing accommodations with financial assistance for survivors (Republic of Kenya, 2006). Compensation systems for victims are insufficiently developed thus deterring survivors from taking legal recourse.

The inconsistent laws across East Africa complicate the criminal prosecution of cases containing cross-border elements of human trafficking as well as forced migrant situations. The East African Community (EAC) operates without unified GBV laws resulting in limited national collaboration (EAC, 2021).

4.22 Institutional Barriers to GBV Law Enforcement

Many East African countries face **significant institutional challenges** that hinder the effective enforcement of GBV laws. Law enforcement agencies and judicial systems often **lack adequate training and resources to properly handle GBV cases**. Victims frequently experience **secondary victimization**, as unprofessional or untrained police officers may dismiss serious cases or fail to perform their duties effectively (Okello, 2020). The **limited specialized training** received by both law enforcement officers and judicial officials **reduces their capacity to provide justice and support to survivors**.

Furthermore, **corruption and judicial delays** severely undermine GBV law enforcement. **Prolonged case durations and bribery allow perpetrators to escape prosecution**, undermining survivors' confidence in the justice system. The **low conviction rates of GBV**

cases across the region highlight systemic failures in securing justice for victims (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Another major barrier is the **unequal distribution of legal services across geographical areas**, which significantly limits access to justice for rural women and marginalized communities. According to Kruger (2019), **most legal aid services, courts, and victim support organizations are concentrated in urban centers**, leaving rural areas underserved. Moreover, **in many rural communities, customary law traditions dominate, leading to informal mediation processes that often favor the perpetrator over the survivor** (Coomaraswamy, 2020). These socio-cultural practices, combined with institutional weaknesses, continue to **obstruct survivors' ability to seek justice and protection under formal legal systems**.

Socio-Cultural and Economic Barriers

In many East African countries, **deeply rooted patriarchal norms** continue to dominate, and women who challenge these norms often face violence from men. These social structures make it extremely difficult for survivors of abuse to report incidents. **Social stigma and victim-blaming** discourage survivors from pursuing legal action, as they fear rejection or shame from their families and communities (Amnesty International, 2020). **Cultural attitudes that perceive domestic violence as a private or personal matter** undermine the effectiveness of legal protections and discourage survivors from seeking justice.

Many GBV survivors are also **financially dependent on their abusers**, making it extremely challenging to leave abusive relationships or afford legal representation. **High costs associated with court processes, transportation, and legal fees** prevent many survivors from filing complaints. For example, in Uganda, **survivors from low-income backgrounds struggle to access legal aid, limiting their ability to receive a fair trial** (UN Women, 2021). These barriers are not only **social and economic but also institutional**, as they reflect broader failures within justice systems to support vulnerable populations.

Additionally, **a large portion of the population lacks awareness of existing GBV laws and the rights available under them**. Legal literacy campaigns remain underfunded and insufficiently reach rural and marginalized communities, making it difficult for survivors to seek justice (Tripp, 2019). **Many women and girls are unaware of how to file GBV cases or where to access legal aid**, which further complicates efforts to address gender-based violence effectively.

Table 2: Barriers to GBV Law Enforcement in Select Countries

Country	Key Barriers to GBV Law Enforcement
Kenya	Police corruption, slow case processing, lack of shelters for survivors
Uganda	Marital rape not criminalized, financial barriers to justice

Tanzania	Child marriage still legal, weak legal protection for survivors
Rwanda	Strong legal enforcement but lack of awareness in rural areas

Source: Compiled from Republic of Rwanda (2008, 2018), Republic of Kenya (2006, 2015), United Republic of Tanzania (1998), Republic of Uganda (2010), Human Rights Watch (2019), and UN Women (2021).

These country-specific case studies show that specific country contextual challenges call for contextual targeted legal and institutional reforms.

Though legal and policy framework to counter GBV is available in East Africa, implementation is poor because of legal, institutional and cultural systemic hindrances. Outdated laws, dysfunctional judiciary, corruption and social stigma keep survivors away from justice. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive response including legal reform, improved policing, additional survivor support services and a wider community awareness.

In addition, regional action is needed to harmonise GBV laws throughout East African countries for survivors to get the same level of protection despite of borders. Governments must strategize gender-sensitive policies and public engagement initiatives for GBV cycle to face out and enhance gender disparity.

Without quick policy reforms and institutional change GBV will continue to survive in legal loopholes and social silence. A timely law and social response is urgently required to break impunity and protect rights of women and vulnerable communities in East Africa.

5. Case Studies: Successes and Lessons Learned in GBV Law Enforcement

Despite being a major challenge in East Africa, Gender-based violence (GBV) some countries have achieved significant progress in implementation of legal protection through traditional courts, mobile legal services, public-private partnerships, and community engagement. Through examination of Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania examples, this section highlights key successes and lessons for GBV law enforcement across the region.

5.1 Rwanda: A Model for Specialized GBV Courts and Legal Reforms

Rwanda has turned out to be the stronghold of GBV law enforcement because of solid legal frameworks and trained institutional modifications. Very effective has been the creation of GBV courts in 2008, which were established to exclusively deal with GBV cases. These courts have led to quicker case resolutions, reduced judicial workload, enhanced conviction rates, therefore boosting the confidence of survivors in the legal system (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). The courts are attended by trained gender responsive legal experts thereby ensuring that cases are tackled with reasons for survivalists rights.

Rwanda's Law on Prevention and Punishment of GBV (2008) is a survivor-centred in that it combines justice system legal aid, counselling and support to survivors in the delivery of justice (Republic of Rwanda, 2008). Immediate relief care has been made available through government-funded relief centres to minimise the survivors' risk of being exploited once again.

The Rwanda example shows that biodiversity and generalized violence case - handling specialized courts and comprehensive survivor justice services accelerate R result.

5.2 Kenya: Leveraging Legal Frameworks and Mobile Courts

Kenya has set in place a robust GBV legal framework which includes the Sexual Offences Act (2006) as well as the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (2015) (Republic of Kenya, 2015). One of the most progressive ways the country has addressed enhancing access to justice is to establish mobile courts to hear GBV cases in hard to reach regions. These courts, bring legal aid to marginalised communities, promote higher reporting rates of GBV cases, as well as speedy trials especially where customary dispute resolution structures are traditional and perpetuate injustice for survivors (Okello 2020).

Mobile Courts implementation is evidenced to be a cost-savvy way for attaining gender justice, specifically in rural communities where survivors otherwise can struggle attaining due process of law. Although access to domestic justice has been enhanced, corruption and backlogged cases in formal courts continue to be significant to complete justice.

5.3 Uganda: The Role of Public-Private Partnerships in GBV Prevention

Uganda has adopted a multi-sectoral approach to addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), extending beyond government efforts to include civil society organizations and international partners. While the Domestic Violence Act (2010) provides a robust legal framework for tackling GBV, enforcement has been strengthened through collaborations with organizations such as FIDA (Federation of Women Lawyers) and ActionAid. These organizations offer free legal assistance, provide shelter support, and conduct gender sensitivity training for law enforcement personnel (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Partnership between the government and non-governmental organisations has filled important gaps in legal aid and survivor protection. Despite this, there is still approximately \$1.1 million less per hour spent on GBV survivor-centered services in Uganda than is lost yearly to FGM.

5.4 Tanzania: Addressing GBV Through Community Engagement

Tanzania has centred several community-centred interventions to tackle GBV. Although the Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act (1998) has outlawed GBV, harmful traditional practises like child marriage, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) still exist because of lack of enforcement (United Republic of Tanzania, 1998).

Local government and religious leaders have been involved in promoting prevention of GBV interventions, and public education campaigns have tried to challenge cultural attitudes that accept domestic violence (Tripp, 2019). School-based programmes were also introduced to change gender norms since childhood. Despite these efforts, social attitudes are changing because weak systems for enforcement and inefficiency from the judiciary hold back progress in Tanzania's struggle with GBV.

5.5 Table 3: Comparative Analysis of GBV Law Enforcement Successes

Country	Key Intervention	Impact	Challenges
Rwanda	Specialized GBV courts	Faster case resolutions, improved conviction rates	Limited rural awareness on GBV laws
Kenya	Mobile courts for GBV cases	Increased access to justice in rural areas	Corruption, slow judicial processing
Uganda	Public-private partnerships	Free legal aid, shelters for survivors	Insufficient funding, case backlog
Tanzania	Community-led awareness programs	Shift in social attitudes, grassroots GBV prevention	Weak enforcement, judicial inefficiencies

Source: Compiled from Human Rights Watch (2019), Okello (2020), Tripp (2019), and UN Women (2021).

A comparative analysis of GBV law enforcement efforts in East Africa highlights key interventions, their impact, and the challenges each country faces.

5.6 Key Takeaways and Policy Recommendations

While much of the data to date has shown that GBV law enforcement in Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania can be strengthened by new approaches. Area specific GBV courts in Rwanda have streamlined case resolution pace and better survivor dependability in the justice framework. Mobile courts in Kenya have brought justice closer to the people of the rural communities. Together with her government, NGOs have bolstered support services for survivors and legal assistance. Community-based activities in Tanzania have provided a change of perspective in social attitudes towards GBV preventions.

While these victories were celebrated, loopholes and outdated laws continue to be a problem in many of the Eastern African countries. Corruption and legislative inefficiencies in justice system have prevented application of laws on GBV. Public awareness campaigns should be scale up, particularly in rural areas where GBV prevalence are underreported. Furthermore, survivor services need additional funding for legal aid, someone to live at a shelter, somebody to take them to the doctor, etc.

The country case studies by Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania show that effective GBV law enforcement comes down to a mix of good laws, good justice reform, support for survivors, engagement in the local population. Although specialized courts, mobile legal services and community-led initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes, and more must be invested into sustained enforcement of legal mechanisms and survivor services to ensure lasting progress. Intra-radius governments can immediately enforce evidence-based policies and build strong regional relations to increase legislation protecting and deliver available and effective justice for survivors of GBV.

5.7 Discussion on Results

The results of this study show how the law is gradually being enforced with regards to gender-based violence (GBV) across East Africa, albeit at a pace that needs to accelerate. Although legal rules and structures are already present in almost every country, but the level of effective enforcement of these legal rules is very much dependent upon legal loopholes, socio-cultural norms, institutional inefficiency, survival service facility inadequacies etc. Countries like Rwanda deliver admirable progress with custom made GBV courts and all-around victim assistance programs, while in addition Tanzania and Uganda face the realities with archaic legislation, weak enforcement, and societal opposition (Tripp, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2019). The ensuing discussion interprets the implications of these findings against existing research, policy criteria, and intra-regional comparative analysis.

5.8 Legal Frameworks and Implementation Gaps

Even though laws to punish sexual violence, domestic abuse and human trafficking are in place, weak law enforcement diminishes their value. Kenya's Sexual Offences Act (2006) and Uganda's Domestic Violence Act (2010) prohibit various forms of GBV but reported cases are difficult to investigate and prosecute due to judicial inefficiency and corruption (Republic of Kenya, 2015; Republic of Uganda, 2010). This is in line with research that says criminalizing GBV in isolation is not enough unless legal standards have the support of institutional accountability and enforcement (Amnesty International, 2020; UN Women, 2021).

One of the biggest backlogs is the non-recognition of marital rape in Uganda and Tanzania laws continued leaving married women open to intimate partner violence (Human Rights Watch, 2019). It is documented that legal loopholes in marital rape reveal deeply entrenched patriarchal systems in which the laws still more willingly give weight to the interests of the family unit rather than that of the person. The latter is characterised by Rwanda having a forward-thinking statute that considers intimate partner violence as a significant crime, resulting in higher conviction rates and higher survivor protection (Republic of Rwanda, 2008).

One of the biggest obstacles to GBV law enforcement is a lack of justice and corruption of judges. It is said that many GBV cases are dropped because of bribery and political influence, discouraging survivors from pursuing legal action (HRW, 2019). Kenya and Uganda, for instance, have reduced conviction rates for sexual offences because of pervasive corruption that erodes within the law enforcement agencies and that gives the perpetrators the power to not be punished (Okello, 2020). The findings are abreast with global studies which have demonstrated how corruption undermines gender justice systems, creating an environment of impunity for perpetrators (Merry, 2019).

Case backlogs and delayed judicial procedures also extend survivor trauma, so many victims cannot access on time justice. Rwanda's GBV Specialised Courts have been found to be ensuring that cases are ended quickly, that justice is served quickly, and that survivors receive the timely support that they need to recover (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). Adoption of similar fast-track GBV courts across the East Africa could greatly enhance prosecution rates and court delays-reducing style, (Tripp 2019).

Whilst legal provisions provide for the protection of survivors, the absence of government-run shelters and crisis centres mean being unsupported by most survivors (UN Women, 2021). Data indicates that the majority of GBV survivors never report, nor do they seek retaliation or financial dependency to come into conflict with the worth lecherous, and safer housing options (Coomaraswamy, 2020). Nationwide, countries like Tanzania, and Uganda for instance, lack government run shelters implying various struggles for victims that indeed look to NGOs religions and thus are restricted to constant legal feel psychological care (Amnesty International, 2020).

Kenya and Rwanda have also established crisis centres that offer legal and medical care but with the post largely contracted to urban, so rural women, marginalised groups have little to no assistance (Republic of Kenya 2015 and Republic of Rwanda, 2018). Expanding government-funded shelters, psychosocial counselling services, community-based programs are going to greatly help in the outcomes of law enforcement of GBV (Tripp, 2019).

Economic limitation persist in hindering survivors from recourse to the courts. Research indicates that costs of court fees and opportunities, cost of legal representation, travel to locations discourage survivors from declaring cases (Okello, 2020; UN Women, 2021). In Rwanda, Government-Subsidized legal support programs have increased liable access to remedial administrative activity legal proceedings, sustaining down Kenya, Uganda, along with Tanzania suit expeditions stamp, many from a fiscal wrongful incarceration is doomed in seeking address (Republic of Rwanda, 2018; Human Rights Chance, 2019).

One creative intervention was Kenya's mobile courts, that brought justice to the doorstep of rural communities, thereby: increasing case filing and prosecution rates (Republic of Kenya, 2015). Increasing mobile courts and legal aid services across East Africa potentially could make a big difference to access to justice for excluded communities (Amnesty International, 2020).

5.9 Socio-Cultural Barriers to GBV Law Enforcement

Attitudes at the cultural level towards GBV are a barrier to the enforcement of the law. Many studies suggest that many survivors cannot report their abuse because of social pressure, fear of stigma and family shame (Coomaraswamy, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020). In some communities, traditional bargaining and conflict resolution systems typically favour reconciliation over justice and therefore tends to produce reduced accountability of the perpetrators (Merry, 2019).

Most survivors are not aware of what are their legal rights and what support exists for them, particularly in remote and marginalized communities (Tripp, 2019). Rwanda also carried out public awareness campaigns and school-based gender education programmes that have been instrumental in a steady cultural change in GBV reporting perspectives (Republic of Rwanda, 2018). Extending legal literacy programs throughout all East Africa may help empower survivors and lowered unreported cases (UN Women, 2021).

6. Conclusion

The study gives a full analysis of the legal frameworks addressing gender-based violence (GBV) in East Africa showing both what has been accomplished and what remains to address. Although, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda have each put in place legal frameworks to combat GBV, implementation is weak because it is hampered by also judicial inefficiencies, corruption, socio-cultural factors and lack of support services to survivors. Even though key international treaties have been ratified including CEDAW and Maputo Protocol, still many national laws have blanks and courtroom flaws; most glaring are gaps in criminalization of marital rape and Implementation of Domestic Violence. Survivors still find various hurdles in getting justice, among them prolonged legal process, poor legal representation and fear of reprisal.

One of the major findings of this study is that a forensic process aiming at a high proportion of conviction of GBV appears to be blocked by judge-and-jury delays and institutional corruption. Survivors frequently suffer from secondary victimization where case thereof is mishandled by law enforcement and judiciary resulting to low conviction rates and declining of trust in the legal system. Although, there are examples of positive practise, for instance Rwanda's specialised GBV courts and Kenya's mobile legal units, which have shown the effective GBV case handling and better outcomes for survivors. These models serve as a valuable learning to scale up selected interventions across the region.

Efforts to improve GBV law enforcement and survivor protection need several key policy and legal changes to be prioritised. First steps include both crim-inalizing marital rape, outlaw-ing child mar-riage, and al-ign-ing na-tional GBV laws with in-ter-na-tion-al hu-man rights stan-dards. Secondly, institutional reforms are required, among which are higher judicial budget, gender-sensitive training of law enforcement and establishment of fast-track GBV courts to reduce the late cases. Third, expanding survivor-focused services—like government-funded emergency shelters, unspent fervent legal aid, and mental health programs—is vital for guaranteeing survivors inspection the nine essential incentives. Public awareness campaigns need to also be increased to challenge inappropriate change of gender norms, decrease stigma and raise GBV case report. Moreover, regional cooperation within the East African Community (EAC) should prioritise a harmonised response towards GBV including cross-border prosecution, survivor assistance and legal data sharing.

Future research should investigate the long term consequences of specialised GBV courts and mobile legal units, study the views and perspectives with survivors of the justice system and examine the part of digital technology in GBV case reporting and tracking. A GBV law enforcement involves a multi-disciplinary approach including law, sociology, public health and a human right perspective to grasp the structural obstacles to effective GBV law enforcement.

Therefore, ending the issue of gender-based violence in East Africa needs a long-term and cohesive effort from governments, police agencies, civil society, and international bodies. While enhancing legal safeguards is not sufficient on its own without also a greater number of judicial accountabilities, support for survivors and public outreach efforts. With political will, sufficient resources and engagement of the community, GBV laws in East Africa can become

more than just enacted, but truly enforces, bringing about justice to survivors and accountability for perpetrators.

7. Recommendations

Enhancing GBV law enforcement in East Africa is dependent on codifying marital rape criminalization, outlawing underage marriage and aligning GBV laws within the area for legal cohesion. Judicial and law enforcement reforms such as specialized GBV courts, gender-sensitive police training and anti-corruption package can enhance prosecution rate. Increasing survivor services through government-funded shelters, free legal assistance, better medical and psychological care can offer greater protection. Public awareness campaigns, school-based gender education, mobilisation of men can contribute to changing harmful gender norms. Improving regional cooperation and obtaining worldwide investments can solve Transfrontier GBV difficulties and strengthen policy execution. A multi sectoral approach that includes legal reform institutional strengthening and survivor-centric services is always necessary if a girl would be able to get justice and would be protected from a victim of child marriage.

8. REFERENCES

African Union (2018: n.p.). *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)*.

African Union (2021: n.p.). *African Union legal frameworks aim to break the cycle of violence against women and girls*. Available at:
<https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20211125/african-union-legal-frameworks-aim-break-cycle-violence-against-women-and>

Amnesty International (2020: n.p.). *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights: A tool for human rights protection*.

Amnesty International (2024: n.p.). *Burundi: Landmark law on gender-based violence must be strengthened*. Amnesty International. Available at:
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/12/burundi-landmark-law-on-gender-based-violence-must-be-strengthened/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023: n.p.). *Gender-based violence laws in ten African countries with high HIV prevalence and incidence among adolescent girls and young women*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at:
https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/154366/cdc_154366_DS1.pdf

Coomaraswamy, R. (2020: n.p.). *Human rights and gender-based violence: Legal perspectives*. United Nations.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2005: n.p.). *Criminal Code of Ethiopia*.

Heise, L. (2018: n.p.). *Gender-Based Violence: A Human Rights Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.

Human Rights Watch (2019: n.p.). *Unequal Justice: Enforcement of Gender-Based Violence Laws in East Africa*. Human Rights Watch Report.

International Monetary Fund (2024: n.p.). *Combating gender-based violence and fostering development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Available at:

<https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2024/322/article-A007-en.xml>

Kageyama, M., Verani, A., Patel, P., Hegle, J., and Saul, J. (2023: n.p.). *Gender-based violence laws in ten African countries with high HIV prevalence and incidence among adolescent girls and young women*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/154366/cdc_154366_DS1.pdf

MacKinnon, C. A. (2018: n.p.). *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination*. Yale University Press.

McCool, A. (2025: n.p.). *Kenya's wave of deadly violence spurs women to fight back*. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenyas-wave-deadly-violence-spurs-women-fight-back-2025-01-31/>

Merry, S. E. (2019: n.p.). *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*. University of Chicago Press.

Mwiine, A. A. (2023: n.p.). *Unravelling backlash in the journey of legislating sexual offences in Uganda*. Available at: <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=106281>

Mwiine, A. A., Ahikire, J., and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, G. (2023: 67–87). *Unravelling backlash in the journey of legislating sexual offences in Uganda*. In S. Nazneen, S. Hickey, and S. Eleni (Eds.), *Negotiating gender equity in the global South: The politics of domestic violence policy* (pp. 67–87). Routledge.

Okello, R. (2020: 201-219). *Assessing the Effectiveness of Domestic Violence Laws in East Africa*. *Journal of African Law*, 64(2), pp. 201-219.

Republic of Kenya (2015: n.p.). *Protection Against Domestic Violence Act*. Nairobi: Government of Kenya.

Republic of Kenya (2015: n.p.). *Sexual Offences Act*. Government of Kenya.

Republic of Rwanda (2008: n.p.). *Gender-Based Violence Law*. Government of Rwanda.

Republic of Rwanda (2008: n.p.). *Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda.

Republic of Uganda (2010: n.p.). *Domestic Violence Act*. Kampala: Government of Uganda.

Tripp, A. M. (2019: n.p.). *Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

UN Women (2021: n.p.). *Ending Violence Against Women: The Role of Legal Frameworks and Policies*. United Nations Women Report.

United Nations (2021: n.p.). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*.

United Nations (2021: n.p.). *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*. UN General Assembly.

United Republic of Tanzania (1998: n.p.). *Sexual Offences Special Provisions Act*. Dar es Salaam: Government of Tanzania.

World Bank (2023: n.p.). *Tanzania gender-based violence assessment*. Available at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099155003312242676/pdf/P17605107388b40600a73a0ef1c83555589.pdf>