

## UNICEF helps curb child malnutrition in Somalia

Malnutrition is one of the biggest challenges facing the survival of Somali children today. In a country where an estimated 180,000 children are acutely malnourished- 26,000 of whom are severely malnourished and in need of immediate treatment- UNICEF and its partners are providing a package of emergency life-saving interventions for Somalia's children. Notwithstanding this effort, the odds facing UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations in Somalia are high. The number of people needing emergency assistance has spiraled by 77 per cent since January, and now totals 3.2 million people. Insecurity in the port city of Mogadishu, through which 80 per cent of all supplies for the country pass, is vastly complicating relief measures.



Health workers weigh a baby at a mobile clinic for IDPs in Bossaso. © UNICEF Somalia/2008

To prevent further deterioration of the malnutrition situation in the country, UNICEF is undertaking blanket feeding campaigns for under-five children in Somalia, with focus on the most vulnerable IDP population. In Bossaso, Northeast Somalia ('Puntland') one of the locations where UNIMIX has recently been distributed in 22 IDP camps, 7500 children are benefiting .

While in Central/Southern Somalia the number of severely malnourished children is continuing to increase in many of the urban towns and among the internally displaced populations, in the north, where nutrition rates are normally low and stable compared to the rest of the country, the nutrition situation is also deteriorating.

The level of desperation among communities is rising and they are calling attention to their predicament. Increasingly, the lack of security is hampering access by relief organizations to those affected which in turn is making their living conditions desperate. It is therefore crucial that local communities, international and local relief organizations and local administrations where they exist collaborate to enhance the protection of children and women and their welfare.

*Christian*

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## Increased insecurity hampers access to children in need of protection

UNICEF's child protection activities and those of its partners have been increasingly hampered by lack of access to areas affected by fighting such as the recent one in Belet Weyne. With the deteriorating security situation Central/Southern Somalia, there is great need for communities, international and local organizations to collaborate to enhance the protection of children.

Nonetheless, during the past month, in Central/Southern Somalia, community mobilization initiatives for child protection were undertaken by a UNICEF partner organization, Somali Peaceline. The activities focused on 14 internally displaced persons camps with most of them being in the Mogadishu-Afgoye corridor and others in Dusamareb, Baidoa, Kismayo and Merka towns.

In Baidoa, two instances were reported of missing children by mothers who were displaced from Mogadishu. Child Protection Advocates who receive UNICEF support are following up on the issue in collaboration with the Somali Red Crescent Society. The fighting has traumatized children and one case of an 11-year-old in Baidoa is being followed with a counseling centre. Incidences of young children working as militia have also been reported.

In Kismayo 87 people mostly militia but among them eight civilians of whom four were children were reported to have died during three days of fighting between Islamic militants and clan militia loyal to Bare Aden Shire, a member of the Somali Parliament. Eventually the militants took over control of the town. A total of 6, 220 families were reported displaced from the town to other villages and districts nearby among them Kamsuma, Gaduuday, Koban, Berhaani, Bu'ale, Jamame and other small villages.

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## Previously learning under trees, students now enjoy the comfort of classrooms

In 2006, Dari-maraa Primary School began as a community initiative to provide learning to children. Typical of such initiatives that spring up among isolated and usually pastoralist communities in Somalia, the first place of choice to provide learning was beneath the shade of a tree. Teaching and learning took place nonetheless, notwithstanding the fact that the open space left the teachers and students exposed to wind, dust, rain and sun.

As is expected, there were no seats and rocks and cans were used instead. Without enclosures the concentration of students was frequently interrupted by passers-by not to mention that rains led to breaks in teaching.



Then and...

Abdi, an 11-year-old boy who walks two hours to school each day and aspires to be a doctor to help his community concurs.

"During the first year of learning under shade, 55 students enrolled first but due to the unfriendly learning space half of them dropped out particularly girls," said Abdurrahman Omer Hussein, headmaster of the school situated about 110 km east of Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland. The school is under the management of Mandera District Sahil Region located in the middle of the Golis range of mountains. "The learning and teaching environment has



Now. ©UNICEF Somalia

However, two years later in 2008, a major transformation of the fortunes of the school has taken place. The reason for this is that UNICEF has constructed two classrooms, an office and store as well as separate latrine facilities for boys and girls as well as a water tank. Additionally, UNICEF has provided furniture for the classes and office.

"There is a big difference between the previous school under a tree and the new school which has encouraged me to continue my education. It takes me one hour each day to walk to the school. I want to be a teacher to educate my people and fight against illiteracy," said Hamda Mohamed Mohamoud, a 12 year girl student.

tremendously changed into a child

and teacher friendly environment," says school head Abdurrahman. "Students are able to stay longer in classes due to comfortable seats and teachers can conduct lessons smoothly without interruption. The new facilities have had a positive effect - in the new scholastic year of 2008 the school enrolled more than 45 new students."

"Thanks to UNICEF now the future of our children is bright, it is our responsibility to sustain and safeguard the school and we are committed to make maximum use of the school including having evening classes for adults," said the chairman of the village Hussein Abdi.

## Child protection advocates help in changing attitudes

By Debra Bowers

Child Protection Advocate Hamud has been working with the Child Protection Committee of the Stadium IDP Camp for almost two years now. Situated on the outskirts of Hargeisa in Somaliland, the camp is home to an estimated 20,000 people, including about 4,500 children under five. And the population of the settlement is growing on a daily basis.

Prolonged drought in much of Somalia has forced many nomadic and rural families to seek help near the larger towns like Hargeisa. In addition, families continue to flee the conflict in Mogadishu – about 870,000 people have been displaced in the past year and the fighting continues. Some of those who have the means to reach the more stable Northwest Somalia ('Somaliland') have ended up at the Stadium IDP camp.

Unlike Mogadishu, there are no daily mortar attacks at the Stadium IDP camp. But life in the camp is not easy and there are still many dangers for children in a setting where traditional community protection mechanisms don't exist.

Trained as a Child Protection Advocate by UNICEF partner NGO Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Somaliland (CCBRs), Hamud helped the elders and community leaders at the camp to establish a seven-member Child Protection Committee, with four women and three men. Hamud has continued to provide support to the Committee and has also trained Nimo – one of the Committee members – to act as a focal point for Child Protection issues in the camp. "Since the formation of our Committee, we have seen many cases of violations against children and we are noticing a change in the attitudes of people in the camp and also a change in our ability to refer children for help," Nimo says. The Committee has tackled a range of issues in the

past two years, from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), to child labour, health problems and sexual abuse.



Young girls at the Stadium IDP Camp. ©UNICEF Somalia/2008

The current Chair of the Child Protection Committee – Fatima – also highlights the progress that the community has made in helping children whose parents are too poor or negligent to get them the necessary medical attention they need. "We meet every week and we have networks to make sure that we are aware of ill or disabled children who need assistance. We have referred children with health problems to Maternal and Child Health care centres and disabled children to the Somali Red Crescent Society for assistance.

The Committee's work on sexual abuse and exploitation dovetails with UNICEF and CCBRS efforts to strengthen the referral network and train more case workers to make sure that victims of sexual and gender based violence, once identified, can get the kind of physical, psychological and legal help they need. Justice doesn't come easy, but there is progress.

Nimo offers some examples: "We recently had a nine-year old girl in our camp who was raped by a 65-year old man. With the help of trained case workers and I think because UNICEF and CCBRS are also working with the Police Department and the Ministry of Justice, the man was jailed and sentenced to five years. This encourages us for the other cases that we have, such as two young boys who were raped by their teacher and a little three-year old girl from our community who was raped".

The child's attacker has not yet received his sentence, but he is in jail and the Stadium Child Protection Committee was able to get medical assistance for the little girl.

## Programme activity round-up

- **Health**

4,600 long-lasting insecticide treated nets were distributed in 17 villages of Sool region between June and August, 2008. The project directly benefited 6,312 people; 50% of whom were children under 5 years old while 8% were pregnant women and 42% women of child bearing age.

The last polio immunization round for 2008 in Northeast Somalia ('Puntland') was conducted in August. The campaign reached 139,913 children between 0 and 59 months. Somalia has not reported polio cases since March 2007 when the last case was found in Hobyso district, Mudug region in Puntland.

- **Emergency**

The government of Somaliland has appealed to the United Nations, INGOs and the Muslim world for emergency food aid. The Somaliland Minister for Agriculture, Aden Ahmed Elmi said on August 2, 2008 that "more than 75,000 people were in great need of food." The minister cited soaring prices of essential food items, drought and destruction by insect pests of food crops as the reason for appealing for food aid.

- **Community-driven Recovery and Development**

In order to achieve development goals in key service sectors such as health and nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene as well as education, and in the general effort to eradicate poverty at community level, there is need for greater involvement of community and local authority representatives in identifying the priorities and needs of their people. Towards this goal, UNICEF and some international partner organizations have embarked on the Community-Driven recovery and Development (CDD) process which is giving voice to the voiceless in the decision-making process. Currently, the process geared towards development and recovery is being piloted in two districts of Boroma and Berbera in Somaliland.

- **Nutrition**

In August 2008 UNICEF provided 10 kg of UNIMIX per child for 78% of 7433 children between 6 and 59 months living in 22 IDP camps in Bossaso, Northeast Somalia.

## Youth can help curb effects of climate change

Youth can help curb effects of climate change in Somalia by sharing knowledge, mobilizing communities and taking action to implement improved environmental conservation and agricultural practices, UNICEF said on the occasion of International Youth Day (12 August).

In Somalia, UNICEF directly supports a skills building initiative that facilitates the engagement of youth with local governance structures to raise and address issues concerning young people and their communities including environment. UNICEF also supports a youth broadcasting initiative where youth produce media (Radio & TV) programmes on various development topics including the environment.

"Somalia faces many climate related problems such as floods and droughts which in addition to the lack of peace and security in a large part of the country, have left a significant portion of the population dependant on food aid," said UNICEF Somalia Deputy Representative, Hannan Suleiman. "With a large proportion of this population being youth, it is vital that their energies be tapped to ensure the country a better future."

Though UNICEF does not have a direct mandate on environment issues it nonetheless ensures that any issues that may help improve the lives of children are raised and/or addressed. A clear issue related to environment is in the provision of safe drinking water and of protecting water sources in Somalia. UNICEF supports delivery of safe drinking water to many populations in Somalia and youth are sensitized to ensure that they, their

siblings and families need to enjoy safe drinking water as a means of ensuring children grow up healthy.

The deterioration of the natural environment is one of the principal concerns of young people world wide as it has direct implications for their well-being now and in the future. UNICEF believes that youth participation is crucial to addressing and solving challenges to curb climate change.

Environmentally-friendly use of natural resources and environmentally sustainable economic growth improve human life. While every segment of society is responsible for maintaining the environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special interest in maintaining a healthy environment because they will be the ones to inherit it.

"It is important to actively engage Somali youth like their counterparts elsewhere in the world in areas of preparedness and action to deal with effects of climate change," said Jairus Ligoo, UNICEF Somalia Adolescent Development & Participation Specialist.

In Somalia, the efforts of youth can be mobilized to build individual and community capacities so that the likelihood of climate change-induced disasters is reduced and that people are able to respond promptly, expeditiously and effectively to them. However, even as the world marks International Youth Day and advocates on the need to curb climate change, the best climate Somali's would hope for is a quick return to peace and normalcy.

## Emergency nutrition interventions offer hope for Somali Children

By Iman Morooka,

In “100-Bush”, one of the Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Bossaso, Northeast Somalia (‘Puntland’), hundreds of people have lined up since early morning under the burning sun – many of them women carrying their babies on their back. Today, each under-five child in this IDP camp is receiving 10 kilogrammes of UNIMIX, a porridge like food supplement rich in vitamins and minerals. Community elders and health workers are working tirelessly to organize groups according to the number of children in their households.

Malnutrition is the biggest challenge facing the survival of Somali children today. In a country where an estimated 180,000 children are acutely malnourished- 26,000 of whom are severely malnourished and in need of immediate treatment- UNICEF and its partners are providing a package of emergency life-saving interventions for Somalia’s children.

“To prevent further deterioration of the malnutrition situation in the country, UNICEF is undertaking blanket feeding campaigns for under-five children in Somalia, with focus on the most vulnerable IDP populations,” said Mathieu Joyeux, UNICEF’s Nutrition Officer. In Bossaso, during this round of UNIMIX distribution for the 22 IDP camps, 7500 children will be benefiting from the scheme.

Children are the first to pay the high price of continued conflict, violence and displacement. Twenty month-old Asha was still in good health when she and her mother left their hometown Mogadishu, in search of a safer life. Eight months have passed since they arrived in Bossaso, and Asha is now among the thousands of Somali children suffering from severe malnutrition.

“Asha was fine when we left Mogadishu. Before, I was able to feed my children three times a day because I had a stable job. Here, I can hardly feed them once a day. I can’t afford it,” said Khadija, Asha’s mother, as she wiped her tears.

The escalating fighting in the central and southern parts of Somalia has resulted in heavy casualties among civilians. Khadija’s family is just one of so many that had to flee

from the conflict torn areas. Separated from their communities and families, they often become exposed to marginalization, exploitation, and unemployment. IDP camps often lack even the minimum basic services with many facing extremely severe living conditions.

Khadija today came with Asha to the mobile clinic of the UNICEF-supported Outpatient Therapeutic Programme (OTP). Cases of severe malnutrition OTP by health children in OTP, treatment and high-food called conditions monitored on UNICEF-



Khadija and her 20 month-old daughter Asha, at the mobile Outpatient Therapeutic Programme clinic in Bossaso, Puntland. © UNICEF Somalia/2008

The OTP day had set public school and learned suffering and referred Stabilization Bossaso UNICEF-intervention to treat children’s severe malnourishment combined with medical complications.

are referred to the outreach community workers who monitor IDP camps. At the children receive using a high-protein energy therapeutic Plumpynut and their are closely a regular basis by trained staff.

team– which on this up its clinic in a - examined Asha that she has been lately from diarrhoea vomiting. The team Asha to the inpatient Centre based in Hospital, another supported

“Severely malnourished children facing medical complications, like loss of appetite, diarrhea and vomiting, need special care before even being helped to regain their weight. It could even be fatal to give them normal food.” said Joyeux, UNICEF Nutrition Officer. “Here we provide them with special care to help them stabilize and recover their metabolism, until it is determined that they are ready to go back to the OTP to be helped to regain their weight”. Children admitted to the Stabilization Centre receive round the clock medical care from trained professional staff and their mothers are provided with free accommodation and meals. Through the feeding programme, UNICEF and its partners are currently reaching 5,200 severely malnourished children in different parts of Somalia, through 115 OTPs and 24 Stabilization Centres.

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