

# EDUCATION IN SOMALIA

## ISSUE

Education and formal learning opportunities for children in Somalia, especially girls, are extremely limited. Although there has been a substantial increase in the number of operational schools and enrolment rates, considerable disparities in quality and access to primary education prevail in parts of all regions in the country due to socio-economic, cultural and political realities.

The Primary Education Survey (PES) for Somalia for 2006-2007<sup>1</sup> provides valuable insights. This survey includes data on formal schools and alternative learning centres where school age children are receiving basic education. According to the survey, intensive efforts by UNICEF and its partners have made a significant difference, and despite the years of conflict, an increasing number of boys and girls are enrolling in primary school. Since 2000, the number of children enrolled in grades 1-8 has increased roughly 300%, from an estimated 150,000 to over 460,000. However, the total gross enrolment rate of 30.7% remains one of the lowest in the world<sup>2</sup>.



Gender related disparities in education remain an area of major concern. In 2006-2007 the primary school enrolment rate for girls (25%) remained well below that of boys (37%). Unfortunately, since 2000-2001, there has been little progress towards reducing the gender disparity, which increases rapidly in higher grades. The low enrolment and high drop out rates of girls in most areas are due to a combination of traditional attitudes and practices, timing of classes and economic considerations. Female teachers are also under-represented in Somalia, making up only 15% of the total number of all teachers. Among other things, this affects the participation and retention of girl students

Of the existing schools, a majority are concentrated in and around urban areas. Most schools are financed from fees or other forms of support from parents and communities with some input from external agencies. The sector also suffers from severe limitations of managerial, technical and financial resources and a lack of consistency in standards.

*The primary school textbooks created by UNICEF and UNESCO contain strong images of girls and women and promote gender equity.*

*Together with the inclusion of female images to encourage girl's enrolment, the books are also strictly non-violent, with no images of conflict or the implements of war, and were created in consultation with Somali communities and educationalists. They are Somali owned and geared around Somali themes and culture.*

<sup>1</sup> The Primary Education Survey (PES) for 2006-2007, commissioned by UNICEF, is expected to be published in the very near future.

<sup>2</sup> PES 2006-07.

# ACTION

The Education Programme is comprised of two pillars: Primary Formal Education and Primary Alternative Education, which includes emergency education for displaced and conflict-affected populations. The primary education programme continues to focus on re-establishment and expansion of a formal primary schooling system within Somalia. Special focus is placed on substantially increasing enrolment, retention and learning quality particularly for girls as well as capacity building of local authorities (MoEs) and partners. Alternative pathways are being pursued to provide learning opportunities to children and out-of-school youth, including nomadic populations, who lack access to formal education, or those that have missed the opportunity due to civil strife.



*A few of the girls lucky enough to be attending school. One of the greatest hindrances to girl's enrolment is that traditionally they assist their mothers in bearing the burden of domestic labour and are often sent to work to generate income for the family.*

Through the UNICEF/DFID/UNESCO Strategic Partnership for Education support is focused on service delivery, improved quality and capacity building, reflecting local needs and contexts, and addressing the fragility of state structures. The goal of Strategic Partnership is to promote stability, recovery and sustainable development of the education sector thereby creating the conditions for rapid and increased access to basic education services. Critical areas of support include:

- Provision of learning spaces/school construction based on the 'Child Friendly Schools' framework, which includes child health, water and environmental sanitation facilities (including separate facilities for girls), creating a positive environment for learning and awareness raising on life skills including child rights, HIV/AIDS, FGM/C etc.
- Supply of teaching and learning materials
- Expansion of education opportunities for nomads/mobile communities
- Building management and supervisory capacities of Community Education Committees (CECs) and Ministries of Education (policy and service delivery) and forging partnerships among the private sector, civil society organizations, UN agencies and NGOs

In 2008, the impact of unprecedented displacement and conflict, combined with hyperinflation, drought and deterioration of livelihoods across the country, may have lead to a drop in enrolment for the first time in recent years. Although partial reporting from CECs indicates that at least 11,500 new children

joined primary school, and the number of children attending emergency schools on the outskirts of Mogadishu increased threefold from 7,000 in 2007 to over 20,000 at the end of 2008, it seems likely that once full data is available, we may find that education partners were only able to achieve a reduction in the drop-out rate, rather than an increase in overall enrolment.

The continued provision of learning materials, textbooks and school supplies, and an innovative teacher mentoring programme (which has reached 15,000 teachers since 2004, including 6,700 teachers in 2008 for both formal and non-formal schools) resulted in improved quality of teaching and greater use of child-centred teaching methods.

Increased support to MoEs in school data collection and data management, capacity needs assessment, education financing options and school mapping, laid a foundation for enhanced government leadership of evidence-based sector planning and budgeting.

A strengthened Education Cluster under UNICEF co-leadership resulted in more rationalized planning and appeals, better targeting of emergency assistance throughout the year, stronger linkage with government emergency coordination authorities, and improved coordination at zonal level, especially in emergency-affected Central and Southern Somalia.

## IMPACT

In education, the UNICEF focus is on sustainable development of the education sector, service delivery and capacity building reflecting local needs and contexts, improvement of education quality and increased access to basic education services.

Key results include:

- Increased quality of education through the provision of standardised learning materials, training and mentoring of teachers in the use of the materials and pedagogy.
- Increased enrolment in schools through curriculum development, school rehabilitation, use of alternative channels, capacity building of the Ministries of Education, development of education policies and guidelines for implementation, increased training of female teachers and work with community education committees.

### Primary Education through Formal Schools

Somali children continue to benefit from improved education quality through provision of school supplies, revised textbooks and curricula and from teachers trained in child-centered methodology. In-service teacher mentoring and training has been ongoing since 2002 and has been up-scaled on an annual basis. Parents, teachers and communities appreciate the teacher mentoring programme and support provided by the Ministry of Education through supervision and monitoring.

Underpinning all education programme activities has been the dual strategy of UNICEF in supporting the establishment, training and empowerment of CECs for all operational schools, and assisting education authorities and partners at district, regional and zonal levels in establishing and efficiently managing schools. This has continued to contribute to improvements in sustainability. While the local authorities have been provided with basic infrastructure and technical support, CECs have received systematic training and support for community mobilization for enrolment campaigns, and to increase their motivation and capacity to support and manage schools.

### Primary Alternative Education

Given the socio-political and geographic conditions in Somalia, and the very low coverage of primary schools, a large number of school age children do not have access to quality formal education. Despite the planned rapid expansion of primary schools, these children are likely to be left out of the system in the foreseeable future unless special strategies and flexible programmes are developed and implemented through alternative primary education channels, which provide quality education accompanied by certification. Alternative approaches to primary level education such as integration of basic education in Quranic schools, support to nomadic education and primary alternative learning centres are therefore being explored and developed by UNICEF and partners for an increasing number of children and youth in the coming years.