

Carruurteenna "our children"

UNICEF Somalia Newsletter

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Against all odds: Providing education for children and youth

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Many of us may remember the feelings that we experienced as children when the long school holiday was coming to an end: part sadness at the passing of care-free days and part excitement at the thought of the new school year. However, not all children are so fortunate. As the new school year begins in Somalia, only three out of 10 children will be able to enjoy their right to quality basic Education.

In diverse environments that range from post-emergency recovery to outright conflict and displacements, access to school in Somalia continues to be restricted. Lack of access is not only due to the lack of school buildings but is also due to the inability of parents to pay for school fees, uniforms, teachers salaries and school materials. These socio-economic barriers are particularly discriminating against girls in Somali society where gender roles and cultural norms work against their equal participation in the education system. Where they exist, Education authorities struggle to provide salaries for only a handful of teachers and so the burden of

education falls on the communities.

Working closely with partners at the community level and in collaboration with Education authorities, UNICEF is attempting to address some of these barriers so that each year more and more children



Girls like this one in a classroom in Galkayo are beneficiaries of UNICEF's support to the education sector. © UNICEF Somalia/2008/Maulid.

can realize their rights to education.

Some of the real life stories in this edition of the newsletter, provide the reader with some glimpses of the innovative ways in which UNICEF is attempting to fulfil its mandate to ensure quality basic educa-

tion in what is often a very volatile working environment. This has been made possible through long-term support from donors like the UK-DfID, the Netherlands, USAID, the EC, and those giving to UNICEF's global thematic priority area of Basic Education and Gender Equality, including Norway. UNICEF's education response has also been supported by the Qatar Charity, the Spanish Committee and U.S. Fund for UNICEF and a combination of short term contributions, including from the Governments of Japan, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Ireland and Denmark in the past 12 months.

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UNICEF responds to emergency needs of children in Afgoye corridor

The Afgoye corridor, a 15 km stretch of road beginning on the outskirts of Mogadishu, hosts more than 524,000 internally displaced people who were forced to flee from their homes by the incessant fighting over the past two years.

The displaced people are predominantly children and women and have suffered greatly. Access to basic social services is limited. Tens of thousands of school age children have been deprived of their right to education. Many families have sought safe haven in rudimentary and squalid camps.

As part of UNICEF's core commitment to children in emergencies, which involves providing protection and a safe environment, the emergency education programme has achieved some success in the Afgoye corridor.

UNICEF and NGO partner interventions in the Afgoye corridor revived basic education opportunities for over 33,000 school age children of whom approximately 49% are girls. The resumption of learning during a time of crisis, which severely affects school age children, does not just help to re-establish a sense of normalcy but also provides an opportunity for healing through the provision of psycho-social care. Through this care

and support, children can more easily and thoroughly recover from the traumatic and disturbing experiences witnessed during fighting and displacement.

The focus of the emergency education response in the Afgoye corridor includes the construction of 151 temporary (made of traditional local materials) and tented classrooms, payment of incentives for 248 teachers, teacher training on child-centered methodology and basic psycho-social care, training of Community Education Committees (CECs), and provision of teaching and learning supplies and recreational materials.

IDP communities in the Afgoye corridor greatly appreciate the emergency education response which has provided a safe and protective environment for their children, and provides a healing break from the difficult situation in the squalid settlements.

Ruquyo Mohamed Diriye is a mother with three children who attend an emergency school in Ebdid IDP settlement. She says she appreciates the free basic education services which UNICEF through a local partner, Somali Community Concern (SCC), is providing to her children.

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Basic education has been revived for 33,000 school children in Afgoye...

Support the youth to improve society, says beneficiary of leadership training

“Helping girls who are my age to lead better lives is one of my goals,” says Fatima Abdulkadir, from Bossaso, Northeast Somalia (Puntland), as she discusses how she got involved in the Girls’ Leadership and Development Initiative (GLDI), a UNICEF-led initiative that empowers young girls to discuss various social issues affecting them.

Fatima first heard of the initiative in late 2007 from a student in her class at a professional institute in Bossaso. The student colleague briefed her on Girls Speak-Out sessions and she enquired as to how she could participate in the initiative. Curious to know what happens at Speak Out sessions, she attended one which she found very useful. “I had never seen such motivated girls before,” she said adding that this process sparked off her interest in volunteering time to help other girls.



Fatima © UNICEF Somalia/2009

As someone with a passion to help bring about positive change, Fatima says she found the leadership initiative a perfect solution that can help protect young girls. “The concept is something we really need. Though there are many youth initiatives in the region, the GLDI concept is unique and provides a lot of skills - life skills, leadership skills, participation skills, gender & advocacy skills, and information to young girls. Through GLDI, we are taught not only how we can help each other as girls but also how we can be peer leaders,” she said.

Fatima is currently a volunteer teacher in a school run by youth volunteers and assists young girls in her neighborhood with skills she gained from GLDI.

“As a young person I feel I must contribute to my society by giving what I can. Previously, I would focus on my life as a student and alternate my time between reading books, being at home and schooling, however, now I am a student and a

leader. I joined Somali Students Connecting Organization (SSCO) youth group which is a youth education initiative in our area where I assist and mentor young girls.” She acknowledges that there are certainly challenges to be faced: “young girls across Somalia, are facing socioeconomic challenges – poverty, lack of central government, lack of girl-friendly spaces and cultural stereotypes. These are the major challenges that hinder the development of girls in the country.

“If we are not educated, or empowered, then we (girls) become vulnerable. That is what we want to fight against,” she says adding that In general, she is confident of the potential of young people. “Young people have great potential and investment in Somali youth is a worthy cause as the youth are very creative.

“In order to realize their potential, Somali youth need the support of people, organizations and opportunities to nurture their innate talents.”

It is Fatima’s wish that Somali political leaders would understand the importance of investing in young people as custodians of the future. “I wish they would recognize our potential, and the innovations that we are coming up with. We are energetic and bright, and worth investing in.”

She has a message for Somali leaders:

“Please stop the aimless fighting, lay down your arms and come to the negotiation table to settle differences in a peaceful manner. That is the only way you can attain your goals, save our country and make our future prosperous. And that is the best way you can be remembered by generations to come.”

UNICEF responds to emergency needs of children in Afgoye -

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“When I see my children going to school, I am relieved that my child’s future will not be ruined. Thanks to UNICEF and Somali Community Concern,” says Ruquyo. As a working mother and breadwinner for the family, Ruquyo says that free education lessens her economic burden as she could not afford to pay the school fees for the children and she can now concentrate her energies on feeding them.

Mohamed Abdi Budul is a father of two children who attend Gutale IDP School in the Afgoye corridor. Mr Budul is also a member of the IDP community leadership that strongly advocates for resumption of education and free basic education in the camp. Mr Budul says that without free education, children in the camp would be facing hazards that would endanger their lives.

Although tens of thousands of school age children are still out of school in the Afgoye corridor, UNICEF’s intention to expand the emergency education response is a signal of hope to those parents whose children are still deprived of their right to education.



Children attending morning shift session at Maryan IDP camp © UNICEF Somalia/2009

The girls leadership initiative helps to empower them...

Youth broadcasting initiative promotes journalism skills

More than 300 young people have directly benefited from the Youth Broadcasting Initiative (YBI) in Somalia, a strategy developed by UNICEF Somalia to build the skills of youth in information broadcasting. Through the initiative, the capacity of young people has been raised enabling them to produce programmes with special relevance to their peer groups and in language styles used by youth.

Through this initiative, they have fostered debate about issues affecting them such as HIV and AIDS, unemployment, female genital mutilation, access to services and children's rights. The initiative looks at building capacities, through a series of interactive trainings of youth in the three main media channels—TV, radio and print journalism.

One such beneficiary is Farhiya Sigid (pictured) who says the Youth Broadcasting Initiative has enabled her to develop journalism skills.

Farhiya, now 18 is currently working for a local FM radio station in Puntland, 98.2, as a news presenter and produces a weekly women's programme. She says that were it not for the YBI she would not have been in the studio. "Right after the first YBI introductory training session, we were divided into three groups each focusing on one of the media categories- radio, TV and print. I joined the radio group, and I enjoyed it," she says.

According to Farhiya, the main objective of joining the initiative was to help the young people in her community by raising their awareness on common issues afflicting them. Additionally, the initiative has helped her and other participants to develop knowledge and skills that have enabled them to find a place in the job market.

"The initiative not only provided us with knowledge and skills but also exposed us to the media sector in our region by creating links between youth groups and the media houses," says Farhiya. It is through such links that Farhiya and other young people like her are now working in a number of media houses in Puntland as reporters, presenters and producers.



Farhiya at work in the studio. © UNICEF Somalia/2009

"Through the initiative we managed to work with media houses and they became aware of our skills and potential," she says. Farhiya says that other youth who were part of the initiative but opted for self – employment, have also been successful and they do earn a living through documenting communal gatherings such as weddings, meetings and commemorations. "I have not attended a university or institute. I just finished secondary school and I was employed here. This shows how important YBI is for youth; it provides livelihood skills that help young people to support themselves and their families as most of them have missed the opportunity to go to formal school," she says. When asked if she stopped supporting her community after she left YBI and youth involvement, she said "I am employed, but I am supporting my community more than when I was a YBI volunteer. Sometimes, our programmes create debate in the society on sensitive issues and if the issue is debated that is already half way to the solution. In that sense, I am still an asset for my people".

Youth get a second chance at learning through Non-formal education centres

Youth and older children who missed out on the opportunity to attend formal education have reason for a hopeful future courtesy of the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme which gives them a second chance at learning.

One such institution offering NFE is the Dr Ricardo Women and Youth Training Organization, an NGO established in Baidoa, Central South Somalia in 2003 to advance the development and empowerment of women and youth through education and skills training. The organization is named after the late Dr. Marques Ricardo, an international aid worker who was shot dead in Baidoa regional hospital in 1997 while on duty.

UNICEF supports the Dr Ricardo Centre through capacity building for the management and teachers. It has provided the NFE curriculum, including textbooks, teachers' guides and syllabi, as well as providing school and office furniture to the centre. Through this support, many youth and school age children who were not able to attend formal schools have continued to attend classes at the centre. Currently the centre caters for 446 NFE youth learners of whom 213 are girls. At the centre they acquire

basic competencies in literacy, math, social studies, health & science, business education, life skills and some vocational skills. A total of 223 learners have graduated after completing level 4 of the NFE programme since the centre opened. Some of the graduates have joined formal schools and gone on to complete grade 8. A few of the NFE level 4 graduates enrolled in vocational skills training within the centre and after completion opened up their own businesses or were employed.

Nineteen year old Abdi Ibrahim Bulle joined the Dr. Ricardo Centre in 2003, studied hard and completed NFE levels one to four within a span of two years. He then enrolled in the Dr Ricardo IT vocational training programme, graduating with a certificate after six months. Currently he is working for Telecom Somalia in Baidoa as a technician.

Says Abdi, "I appreciate Dr Ricardo and UNICEF'S role in facilitating my acquisition of basic education and vocational skills within a very short time for free. I urge all young people and children who missed out on primary education to join the Non Formal Education programmes."

The Youth Broadcasting Initiative put young people in touch with media houses...

Somali boy comes tops in gender art competition

Abdikarin Mohamed Hussein, an 11 year old boy from Jowhar in conflict-torn Central Southern Somalia, is a winner in a global art competition.

Abdikarin's entry, which illustrated his vision for Gender Equality in Somalia, shows a male and female doctor caring for a patient. It was singled out as a competition winner, along with three entries from Kenya, Togo and Benin in Africa. "I wasn't expecting to be disappointed because I have a talent in drawing - it's my hobby," Abdikarin said confidently when he heard the news.

Abdikarin attends Kulmis Primary School in Jowhar where he is in Grade 5. Described by his teacher as one of the brightest students in the school, Abdikarin has for the last two academic years been the second-highest scoring student in the regional examinations. The school, which is the biggest primary school in Jowhar, has 985 students, 384 of whom are girls. It has produced many prominent Somalis. Among the school's graduates is Khadija Mohamed Dirie, a female Member of Parliament who currently holds the post of Minister for Rural Development.

The physical structure of Kulmis school was destroyed during the civil war but was recently rehabilitated, complete with child-friendly sanitary facilities. It was rehabilitated with support from UNICEF through a local non-governmental organization the Farjano Foundation. Farjano Foundation manages the school and in the absence of an effective government education authority, it provides incentives to teachers with support from the community.

A bright but reserved boy, Abdikarin enjoys drawing as a hobby. Both his father and his class teacher have played an important part in encouraging him to further develop his artistic skills. Abdikarin explains, "My father supports me very much and my teacher has inspired me to draw pictures about people and things which represent peace in Somalia." He also attributes his artistic skills to his membership of the Child-to-Child School



Abdikarin shows his artistic skills. © UNICEF Somalia/2009

Club which is part of a network of some 135 School Clubs throughout Somalia supported by UNICEF.

The Child-to-Child School Club programme provides a platform for school children to develop appropriate life skills outside of the formal curriculum through child-centred activities such as inter-school debates, drama and art as well as being active in campaigns which focus on social issues such as girls' rights to education and actively protecting their school environment.

Abdikarin's recent personal achievement has had a ripple effect on the school and his community. The head-teacher, teachers and pupils are all looking forward to celebrating his success when the new school year begins. The school will, on behalf of Abdikarin, receive a prize in the form of school supplies which will benefit every child in the school.

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For example, the expansion of access to formal education through supporting the integration of the formal curriculum into traditional Quranic Schools in Somaliland and Puntland, is seen to have had positive results. In Central South Somalia UNICEF's role as the sole provider of textbooks and school supplies is being complemented by support to teacher training to improve the quality of education.

These trainings are often conducted in extremely difficult conditions. This calls on the commitment of Somali UNICEF staff and the resilience of the Somali teachers who often strive against the odds, to provide quality education for children in their care. Child to Child School clubs provide both boys and girls with an extra curricula platform beyond the more formal classroom setting.

Youth

The many challenges that Somalia as a country faces, also present a very trying situation for adolescents. Education, information and recreation services for adolescents are not at their best; governance is weak and living conditions dire. Adolescents in Somalia struggle to find meaning in their lives as they hope to live and break through many challenges.

It is with this background that UNICEF's Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) project in Somalia has been looking at innovative ways of engaging with out of school adolescents. It seeks to equip them with skills and knowledge that will not only help them face the continuous challenges posed by the environment in Somalia, but also give them the opportunity to join the labour market. This has been made possible with support of various development partners, including most recently the Government of Japan. Given the current context, it is important to continue investing in adolescent programming in Somalia for the youth are the future of the country and key to the realization of peace and stability. UNICEF is committed to work with young people and will continue to draw lessons from previous work with the aim of enhancing our programming with and for children.

The adolescent project looks at innovative ways of engaging youth...

Head teachers endure challenges to get to training venue in Central-South Somalia

Against great odds, UNICEF recently brought together 274 head teachers from different districts and villages in Lower and Middle Juba Regions to a training session. To get to Bu'ale the training venue, the teachers overcame the obstacles of the current complex conflict in Central-South Somalia and the mostly poor transportation networks — tarmacked roads are mostly non-existent and most are very rough and extremely muddy when it rains. To get to Bu'ale required tremendous will, courage and perseverance.

To bring them together, UNICEF kept the teachers apprised of training dates and details via regular telephone calls, and in certain places, HF radio communications. To get to the training venue, some of the head teachers left their respective schools and traveled towards Buale two weeks in advance.

Ibrahim Haji Hussein and Fuma Ali Fuma faced many challenges before their eventual arrival in Bu'ale. The two traveled from Kiyamboni, the southern most point of Somalia, and Madhawa Island. They covered a distance of 500km, the first 260 km by boat to reach Kismayo, and then they proceeded to Bu'ale another 240 km by road using any possible means of transport. Misfortune befell them on the first leg of the trip when the dhow broke down half way to Kismayo. They spent part of two nights at sea eating the occasional grilled fish and drinking Somali tea while anxiously waiting for the boat to be repaired.

When the two head-teachers reached Kismayo and embarked on the road journey to Bu'ale, little did they know that another great challenge awaited them. The unexpected scenario was caused by a heavy downpour that had pounded Buale district for two consecutive days before they arrived. The torrential rains saturated the ground so badly that the roads were extremely muddy and impassable by any type of vehicle.

Even the donkey carts would not dare risk getting stuck in the sludge. The indomitable two decided to push forward by wading knee-deep through the muddy road for six hours to reach Bu'ale. Whenever a mobile phone network was available, UNICEF staff would link up with the two to provide guidance and moral support.

Ibrahim and Fuma reached Bu'ale sore and exhausted but thrilled to meet old colleagues, some of whom they had not met for years. "We never lost hope that we would reach our destination and take advantage of the training," said Ibrahim. "Fuma told me that he is very enthusiastic to acquire new skills in order to manage and administer his school in the best possible manner".

At the end of the training, Fuma said his outlook on school administration had been broadened. "Before the training of head teachers I was unaware of my full role as a head teacher of my school. I wish I could attend more such trainings to share my successes and challenges. I am sure I can learn a lot from my fellow head teachers, especially those with long experience and training."

Faduma Salah, a female participant from Janna Abdalla School in Afmadow district, like Ibrahim and Fuma, had experienced some travel challenges. She covered 200 km of rough and muddy roads before reaching Bu'ale. "I forgot all my physical fatigue and now I am more confident of my capacity to manage our school and children," said Faduma.



Faduma Salah, a female head teacher from Janna Abdalla School, Afmadow at the training. © UNICEF Somalia/2009

Child-to-child clubs take lead in highlighting key social issues

The Child-to-Child (CTC) school clubs programme, which is supported by UNICEF is beginning to have a major impact on children's understanding and attitudes to key social issues in Somalia including drugs and gender inequities.

The clubs have taken the lead in social mobilization and advocacy to promote children's rights to education, protection and well-being in Somalia. In this peer to peer programme children learn from each other about relevant life skills through school-based events such as debates and inter-school competitions as well as engaging with elders in their own communities to discuss social issues that affect the lives of youth and children.

Nimco, a 13 year old girl, is a student at the Biyo Dhacay Primary School in the Maroodijex region of Somaliland. In September 2008, Nimco volunteered to become a Child-to-Child Club member when one was set up in her school. During the end of the school year ceremony in May this year, over 900 children from nine Child to Child School Clubs in Hargeisa came together to celebrate a year of achievements and Nimco represented her school. The children proudly sang about how their efforts had impacted on girls enrolment and girls retention in their schools.

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Despite being stranded the trainees never lost hope of getting to the venue...

Quranic schools bring formal education closer to children

The quality of education in Karin village in Bari region of Northeast Somalia ('Puntland') has been enhanced through the integration of Quranic education with elements of formal education in the village school. In addition to teaching of the Quran, children in the school now are taught maths, Somali and Arabic and have received additional textbooks and training of teachers. The school buildings have been renovated and improved as well.

For many years, Karin village did not have a primary school and for a few hours each day, children attended the minimally resourced Quranic School which parents are obliged to send their children in order for them to learn the Quran.

Previously, the lack of a school in Karin village forced parents who needed to get their children an education to migrate to Bossaso town some 35km away. Migration to Bossaso in pursuit of education was also a challenge, as life is more expensive there. Education in Bossaso does not come easy, children have to pay school fees which ranges from three to ten dollars per month. Given the high cost of education, many families are unable to pay fees or they are forced to choose to educate one child only, usually a boy.

Said Mohamed who took his family to Bossaso and has now returned to Karin is one of the elders in Karin who recognizes and understands the value of education. In his youth he was a seaman and traveled widely. The lack of a school in Karin village however caused Said to migrate with his family of five children and wife to Bossaso town in the hope of finding educational opportunities for them, but town life was not all he had hoped for and they struggled hard to survive. Early this year, Said moved back to Karin village with his children. The pull factor was the renovated Karin Quranic School which is now offering integrated Quranic education.

The village has a population of 500 families, each family with an average of four school age children. The people of Karin are mostly small scale farmers, producing dates and vegetables which they sell in Bossaso town. Unlike the majority of the Puntland population which is mostly made up of nomadic pastoralists, the people of Karin are fortunate to have green pastures and water for their animals most of the year. However, this type of subsistence farming is only enough to feed their families and they often struggle to access even basic social services.

Through UNICEF support the local community in Karin is now involved in the management of the school through a Community Education Committee. The previously dilapidated Quranic School was extensively renovated and extended to include water and sanitation facilities. New furniture was also provided. The new school also has a covered verandah where the children can play.

Integrated Quranic education is a viable channel for increasing access to quality education for children who have been excluded from their right to a full formal education. In Somalia, Quranic schools are found even where there is no formal school. These schools at times operate under trees or in some informal structure. In collaboration with the Puntland Ministry of Education, and with the financial support of DFID, UNICEF has been supporting an innovative pilot of four integrated Quranic schools in Bari Region with a view to expanding the project in the coming year with additional funds from DFID and Qatar Charity. Target schools were selected based on the willingness of the school management to integrate basic formal education into the curriculum of the existing schools. In contrast to popular belief, these targeted indigenous Quranic schools, which due to religious requirements attract some 98 percent of all Somali children, have been open to change and the enormous challenge of keeping up with educational trends. The selected schools are all community-owned, thus assuring sustainability.

Today, children in Karin are taught in a child-friendly environment. Teachers have abandoned their use of corporal punishment in favor of more gender sensitive and incentive-driven disciplinary measures. Furthermore, members of the Community Education Committee are monitoring teacher recruitment and attendance, participating in routine school maintenance and lobbying all parents in their community to enroll their children in school. These parents are agents of positive change in the community. All of this has resulted in increased enrolment of boys and girls, improved retention and performance in the target schools.

One unintended result of the integrated Quranic education in rural areas is that it has stemmed the migration of rural families to the ever sprawling urban areas in search of formal education and other essential social services. As in Said's experience, it is anticipated that even more families will move back to Karin to take advantage of the quality education now available. A full expansion of this innovative approach to promoting access to basic education through integrated Quranic Education will no doubt continue to revitalize Karin, as well as other declining rural communities. Parents like Said, who continue to value quality education, will no longer need to uproot their families in search of basic education in urban areas.



Children listening keenly to their teacher at an integrated Quranic education lesson in one of the newly-constructed classrooms at the Karin School. © UNICEF Somalia/2009

The previously dilapidated Quranic school has been renovated...

Child-to-child clubs take lead in highlighting key social issues - From Page 5

"I'm proud to advocate to my peers not to leave school," Nimco said. "I tell them that education is the key to everything, with it the sky's the limit for me and them!" Not all of Nimco's friends are convinced though. Some of them still believe that primary education prepares them for marriage and nothing more. Nimco may still have more advocacy work to do, but she is very clear about her own future, "I want to continue with my education beyond primary level so that I can become a specialist in something interesting. Later, I would like to travel to experience the world outside of Somalia".

The end of school year ceremony was opened by the Director General of the Ministry of Education who expressed appreciation at the creativity and confidence of the children in the performances.

He said that the Ministry of Education is committed to supporting the promotion of child friendly schools. He praised the Child-to-Child programme for helping to facilitate inter-school activities and reviving a culture of creativity at the school level. He praised the children for speaking out on serious social issues which affect their lives. One of the drama groups presented a play about the effects of chewing *khat* which is a narcotic leaf that is widely consumed as a stimulant, mainly by men, throughout Somalia. At the household level, this practice leaves little money for school fees.

Khat chewing is also increasingly causing children to drop out of school in Somalia. Both boys and girls are affected; boys begin chewing it at an early age and girls' are often coerced into selling it rather than attending school.

With recent funding through the Strategic Partnership for Recovery and Development of Education, a DFID-funded initiative, UNICEF has been able to scale up the Child-to-Child programme in Somaliland and is currently supporting 45 Clubs with a plan to expand them to 60 at the start of the new school year. UNICEF is working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Education in Somaliland and the Somaliland Students Association, a national non-governmental organization which advocates for children's rights through promoting child participation and gender equity.



Members of a child-to-child club stage a drama during the end of school year ceremony. © UNICEF Somalia/2009



Traditional classroom in Rowda IDP camp in Afgoye corridor where UNICEF has supported resumption of learning activities (story Page 1). © UNICEF Somalia/2009

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