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UNICEF Somalia Newsletter

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Schools should be a safe haven for children in Somalia

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Schools in Somalia should be protected havens of peace to ensure development and to reap the future benefits of education for children. In a country where decades of insecurity and the lack of governance have had a profound negative effect on the lives of children and women, it is crucial that the basis of a more stable and prosperous Somalia be developed in schools of today.

A good education and school system is the foundation for a responsible citizenry. Schools keep both teachers and children busy and have a role for communities to participate in managing them and trying to secure resources to run them. Additionally, schooling helps keep students away from antisocial activities and plays a great role in moulding students into responsible citizens. However, even more vital is the need for rival combatants and bearers of arms to understand the need to protect children and schools from violence and insecurity. Children have often been caught in crossfire and efforts need to be made to secure schools and their environments as havens of peace.



Children at school assembly in Baidoa, Somalia © UNICEF Somalia/2008

Most parents in Somalia like everywhere else, value the provision of education to their children. It is this goodwill that all key players in Somalia should tap into as they ponder where to invest their resources in the country. Even in the most extreme emergency situations like in the Afgooye corridor (which is home to 366,000 displaced people), UNICEF and its partners have - against great odds - given a sense of normalcy to children who have found themselves victims of displacement due to conflict.

In these and other contexts, school is a big stabilizing factor for children because

it provides a safe and healthy environment for children to learn and to keep themselves busy. Agencies such as UNICEF also try to ensure that they have clean water and adequate sanitation among other services.

UNICEF is behind every child that is in primary school today in Somalia. UNICEF provides all school supplies, teacher training and some teacher incentives among other assistance including in emergency locations. In these and other initiatives, the basic goal is to provide opportunities for children to learn so as to better serve their society. In a country where school enrolment is amongst the lowest in the world, 30.7% throughout Somalia and 22% in Central South, it is crucial that education becomes both an avenue to and the result of peace-building initiatives.

IN THIS ISSUE

IDPs enroll in school in Bossaso	2
New life for Eldibir community	2
Expanding education	3
UNICEF and BBC Trust unite	3
Contact Us	4

Essential education supplies reach Somali children

Until the most recent school semester, every textbook at Sheikh Nur Primary School in Northwest Somalia (Somaliland) was shared by at least four students. But thanks to new supplies, students can now follow their lessons in their very own textbooks.

UNICEF, with funding from the Government of Japan, supported over 180,000 school age children and 3,000 teachers around Somalia during the 2009-2010 school year by providing them with textbooks and school supplies including blackboards, chalk, pens and pencils and exercise books, as well as registers, maps, and recreational supplies.

Sheikh Nur Primary School is one of 790 schools that benefited from this recent distribution of supplies. Hodan aged 10, is one of the 1,700 students enrolled in the school, which is located in one of the

poorest neighborhoods of Hargeisa. "I want to become a doctor when I grow up because my mother wants me to help people. I know that I have to study hard to succeed in my dream," she said.

UNICEF is currently the sole provider of textbooks and school materials for primary schools in Somalia, and is training teachers and community education committees, and supporting incentives for teachers to help keep schools open. UNICEF's goal is to help communities reduce dropout rates and increase new enrolment. In some schools, there are only one or two textbooks for the entire school. "Strengthening our support to education is important to ensure that parents keep sending their children to school, especially those families that are struggling to meet their basic needs," said Safia Jibril, Education Specialist for UNICEF Somalia.



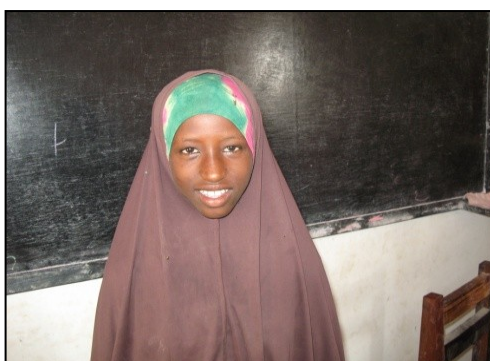
Members of the Japanese delegation and local leaders during the handover of supplies in Hargeisa, Somaliland. © UNICEF Somalia/2009/Imorooka.

Continued on Page 2

UNICEF and Japan provide education materials to 180,000 Somali children...

Displaced children get a chance to enroll in school in Bossaso

Hibo Shiine aged 12 is one of the children enrolled in one of 10 UNICEF-supported schools for internally displaced people (IDP) reopened in Bossaso, Northeast Somalia ("Puntland") in October 2009. The schools in IDP settlements were closed in 2007 after donor funding for teacher incentives was exhausted. When the IDP schools were closed, Hibo dropped out of school because her parents could not afford to pay fees at the community schools, nor could they afford to buy uniforms and books.



Hibo Shiine in a classroom at Daryeel Primary School. © UNICEF Somalia/2009

Hibo's family lives in 100 Bush IDP camp in Bossaso one of the 25 IDPs settlements in Bossaso town. Bossaso is the capital of Bari Region of Puntland State of Somalia with an estimated population of 120,000 people. It is the economic hub of Puntland State with one of the busiest ports in the country, facilitating trade between other parts of Somalia, Ethiopia and the Gulf States.

Due to relative peace and occasional job opportunities, Bossaso has become a host city for a large population of IDPs fleeing conflict and food insecurity in the central and southern parts of Somalia and eastern Ethiopia. About 40,000 IDPs live in the settlements relying on casual employment, petty trade and food handouts for their livelihoods. The majority of these IDPs live in appalling, congested conditions and struggle to put food on the table for their families, and consequently, sending children to school is a luxury when weighed against daily survival needs.

With the support of UNICEF, the Puntland Ministry of Education recently reopened the IDP schools in Bossaso to provide the opportunity to resume schooling for the large number of school-age IDP children. The reopening followed a short survey that revealed 2,808 school-age children in the IDP settlements were out of school.

The reopening of the schools was a great relief. At long last schooling opportunities were made available within the settlements. Hibo was one of those children who benefited. She was quick to enroll in Grade 2 at Daryeel Primary School in the 100 Bush IDP camp. Now nothing is going to stand in the way of Hibo realizing her life-long dream of becoming a teacher.

Hibo recounts her experience after dropping out of school: "Before our 'tented school' closed down in 2007 I loved being in school. After the school closed, life completely changed for me.

I stayed home helping my mother with the daily household chores. I felt hopeless with no expectation of ever getting back to school. Often after performing the chores, I would play with my age mates who were also out of school like me. But now, it is so wonderful for me and other children in my circumstances, we now have a school after our old one reopened in October last year. I will pursue my education upto secondary level and get into university. I want to become a teacher. We have received textbooks, exercise books, pens and pencils bought by UNICEF. We are now enjoying using books in class. UNICEF will also provide school uniforms shortly, we have been

told."

Hibo proudly concluded, "When I get my school uniform, I will look smart like any other student in the school. I like the school uniform because it makes all of us look alike in school. The reopening of my school and the provision of a special package by UNICEF is a guarantee that I will now complete primary education. I am very grateful to UNICEF for this opportunity to pursue and realize my dream. Without UNICEF's help, there was no chance or hope of ever getting back to school I will forever be grateful to UNICEF."

Hibo's school is one of the schools in Bossaso and four in Gal-kayo (another town with a large population of IDPs) receiving a special support package from UNICEF to benefit children from IDP settlements. The school support package comprises teacher incentives, temporary classrooms with water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, education supplies, in-service teacher training, mobilization of Community Education Committees (CECs) and school uniforms for 3,000 learners.

In addition to this, UNICEF is providing a take home package to 150 IDP children from the most vulnerable households to address the opportunity cost of sending children, particularly girls to school. The current incentives will continue until at least the end of the 2010, and measures, including the empowering of CECs and the Ministry of Education are already being put in place to ensure future sustainability.

Supplies reach children

From Page 1

Almost half of the population of the country or about 3.6 million people is now facing a humanitarian crisis. The timely provision of essential supplies is pivotal to ensure better access for Somali children and women to quality services. In December 2009, at a ceremony to hand over the donated supplies, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Japanese Embassy in Kenya, Seiji Okada said, "Although Japan was once a country of warlords, now it has become a developed country thanks to our education and good schooling system. We are very glad to support your school to ensure that you receive good education, and to prepare you to lead the future of your society."

Community mobilizes for education in Eldibir

The Eldibir community, in Eldibir District, South Mudug Region of Northeast Somalia ('Puntland') is nomadic. Unfortunately most pastoralists lost their livestock during prolonged drought over the past two years. Despite being destitute, the community never lost hope despite the hardships it faced.

Due to the drought the community changed its mode of life and settled at Eldibir water point (near a well) and this settlement developed into a village. The community then organized itself and opened a school in a hut in a very windy treeless location. Two teachers, who could read and write Somali and Arabic languages, but had not completed elementary education, were selected to teach the children. **Continued on Page 4**

Expanding educational opportunities to remote areas

Sofia Mohammed is 15 years old and lives in Lebahle, a small remote village in Togdheer Region of Somaliland. Sofia is one of five children and lives with her parents, who are pastoralists like 65 percent of the Somali population which depends on rearing of livestock for their livelihoods. During the dry season, and the more frequently recurring droughts, Sofia's parents move from place to place looking for grazing land and water for the livestock.



Sofia in class©UNICEF Somalia/2009

Sofia was 10 years old when she enrolled in the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) programme in September 2005. The ABE programme had just started with support from the international non-governmental organization, Save the Children UK in response to the need for a school in this remote and desolate village.

The ABE programme provides rural children who do not have access to formal primary education with the opportunity to participate in an accelerated education programme. It also caters for over-aged children, who through no fault of their own, have missed the opportunity to start school at the age of six.

Before the ABE centres were established, the only alternative for parents who wanted to educate their children was to send them to relatives who lived in urban areas. Somali parents are very resistant to the idea of sending their daughters away from their home villages, so that option was only open to boys.

Until the ABE centre opened, Sofia stayed at home assisting her mother with household chores and caring for her younger siblings. As the eldest child in the family, Sofia was given the opportunity to attend the ABE centre.

She worked hard and completed Levels 1 - 3 of the programme which provided her with the equivalent of a Lower Primary Education in the formal education system. Until a few months ago, that was as far she was able to go with her education.

This was not because she didn't want to study but because there were no curriculum materials developed for Levels 4 and 5 which would ensure that she completed the full cycle of primary school.

Fortunately for Sofia and many other children like her in remote rural areas, Save the Children had already been active facilitating the development of Levels 4 and 5 of the ABE curriculum with support from UNICEF Somalia, through funding from DFID.

This meant that Sofia was able to join Level 4 in September 2008 when the new materials were being piloted. When she heard this news she was very happy, "I do not have to go away from my parents and family. It is great that I can continue my education in my own village since level 4 ABE class is being offered here!"

Sofia has enjoyed learning through this newly developed curriculum and is particularly enthusiastic about English which is introduced at this level. She explained, "I enjoy learning English very much. It is a global language and the key to living in today's society".

Sofia already has a way with words. She described the difference between a person who is educated and one uneducated as being just like "the difference between daylight and night".

Sofia has been so inspired by the ABE programme in her village that she hopes to become an English teacher there one day. She regularly encourages other children in her village to attend school and has also convinced her parents to send two of her brothers and sisters to the ABE centre.

Not all parents are so easily won over. Sofia is aware that girls are more marginalized than boys, "Parents still prefer to send boys to school rather than girls," she says. Out of 44 children learning in Lebahle ABE centre, only 14 are girls. There is clearly some way to go before gender equity is achieved in Somalia. However, in spite of this, Sofia's story confirms that having local access to a full cycle of quality primary education is a key determinant in helping parents to decide to send their children to school.

In September 2009, when the new school year began, Sofia proudly enrolled as a learner in Level 5 of the ABE curriculum which is now ready for piloting. Like thousands of other children in Somalia, Sofia will be looking forward to graduating this year as one of the first group of students to have completed the full cycle of primary education through the ABE programme.

Radio teacher: UNICEF and BBC Trust join hands to promote girl education in Somalia

Quraxlo Yonis, is a 16 year old girl who lives in Dingal village, some 40 kilometres from Hargeisa, Somaliland. Yonis comes from a pastoralist family that never recognized the importance of sending their only daughter to school and therefore she had never seen or stepped inside a classroom until the family settled in Dingal three months ago. "I have two brothers and my parents have assigned me the task of looking after our goats and their kids while my brothers herd the camels. At times I help my mother with chores. I had heard about schools but my parents

never bothered to take me to one so when we arrived in Dingal I was very happy that they allowed me to attend evening classes".

These evening classes are no ordinary literacy classes but involve interactive "Radio Teacher" programmes, facilitated by a trained community member. Each lesson is also based on a theme such as health or environmental issues and has been carefully designed to highlight issues that are perceived to be barriers to girls' education in Somalia. While the

number of face-to-face classes will initially reach just over 4,000 adults, the BBC World Service Trust (WST) broadcasts are regularly listened to by over 90 percent of the Somali population so the real outreach is much greater. 50 "Radio Teacher" programmes will be transmitted on short-wave so that the programme can be heard in urban and rural areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Central Southern Somalia, and throughout the Somali Diaspora in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen.

Continued on Page 4

Rural children who did not have access to formal education now have a chance...

Radio teacher: UNICEF and BBC Trust join hands to promote girls education

From Page 3

The "Radio Teacher" programme is just one of a range of innovative projects which UNICEF - with funding from DFID - is using as a platform to address the gender inequities in education in Somalia.

Yonis' case is typical of many thousands of other Somali girls living in a conflict torn and impoverished country. Due to cultural and socio-economic reasons, many parents, particularly in rural areas, do not prioritize sending their daughters to school. In fact, statistics indicate that Somalia has one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world with children in rural marginalized groups most affected. While the overall Gross Enrolment Rate stands at about 30.7 percent, less than 1 percent of children from nomadic families have access to formal education.

Compared to previous years, these figures show that there is some improvement in terms of enrolment for boys and girls in lower primary schools, but there is still much to be done if the Millennium Development Goals on access and gender parity are to be achieved. A recent audience survey, undertaken by the BBC WST in Somaliland, explored the range of cultural, economic, psychological and physical barriers that dissuade Somali parents from sending their daughters to school. The survey was conducted in the initial stages of the "Radio Teacher" project using focus group discussions in two regions of Somaliland, in both rural and urban areas. Both male and female "Radio Teacher" prospective students, parents and educators shared their perspectives on girls' education.

Many of the focus group members, like 16-year-old Quraxlo Yonis, had never had access to education. They expressed how their value for an education and their current desire to learn from "Radio Teacher". However, many parents faced practical challenges with regard to educating their daughters. These included economic barriers such as direct costs (school fees, and uniforms), as well as indirect costs to households such as domestic labour which are closely connected to the culturally defined gender role of girls in Somalia.

Despite low enrolment and gender disparity in schools most respondents were positive about the impact of education overall. Yirowe, a female participant in the Burao focus group explained, "Education is the key to life, it enables the person to cover the needs of his life and his family, after one gets a job". Others were less optimistic and felt that their lack of education was a lost opportunity and an unalterable condition.

The "Radio Teacher" programme which went on air for the first time last year provided over four thousand participating adults with a much needed opportunity to gain functional literacy skills. In addition to literacy skills the half hour programmes provide information and drama on the theme of girls' education, challenging gender-based culturally accepted barriers and normative societal perspectives. While this may open new windows of economic opportunity for some, it will empower many more with new confidence and life skills and has the potential to challenge the attitudes of millions of parents regarding their own daughters' right to education thus unlocking the opportunities for many more Somali girls like Yonis to benefit from education.

Community mobilizes support for school in Eldibir

From Page 2

A UNICEF education officer visiting the this community was impressed by its determination to educate its children. The officer had a meeting with the community, including the local authority, elders and women's groups, where he explained to them the importance of education as a key to development and advised them to look for more teachers who could teach other subjects.

Women in Eldibir are very proactive and strong and requested UNICEF to assist them with the construction of a permanent school building, and they promised to take part in the construction work.

They said they wanted a better life for their children, both boys and girls. As a result of the request, UNICEF agreed to support the Eldibir community with construction of the school building in addition to the community's contribution.



Eldibir school construction © UNICEF Somalia/2010

The community was grateful for the assistance given by UNICEF and the project started within two months of the agreement. During a follow-up visit to the area, UNICEF staff found that the Eldibir community had already shared with other communities the good news of a new school under construction with UNICEF assistance in their village. The school project consists of three classrooms, an office and a store with a veranda, two twin latrines and a water tank. The Eldibir community, particularly women, participated in the construction/rehabilitation of their school, by offering unskilled labour.

UNICEF staff visiting Eldibiri found that the community had recruited a new secondary graduate teacher and helped him to marry a woman from the area. The construction of the classrooms was at the roofing level, toilets were nearing completion and the water tank had just started being constructed.

For more information on our programming or to learn how you can help, please contact us at:

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