

# Carruurteenna "our children"

UNICEF Somalia Newsletter

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## Despite lost decades, Somali children yearn for an education

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January 23 2011 marked a grim anniversary for the people of Somalia. Twenty years ago the government of the Somali Democratic Republic collapsed, and the country descended into a brutal civil war, which continues until today. The generation of Somalis born since 1991 – some who are now adults and parents themselves – have grown up in one of the most difficult places in the world for children.

Countless Somali children have lost parents and siblings, were uprooted from their homes and displaced repeatedly, and have suffered from injury or disease. Those who survived have grown up without the care, security and support all children need from families, communities. Few, if any have had consistent access to basic health care and, protection and education services.

Yet while Somalia is known too often to the rest of the world as a "failed state," the children and youth of Somalia have refused to become lost generation. Instead, they are proving a powerful force



**Boys at Abdulqadir Koosaar Primary School near Buraq, Somaliland, using text books donated by the Government of Japan. © UNICEF Somalia/2010/Pflanz.**

for restoring peace, rebuilding communities and society, and their own survival and development.

The most striking evidence of this can be seen in their commitment to their own education. Even in the midst of a protracted civil war, 819,268 school-age children in Somalia were enrolled in primary school last year. Older children and youth who have missed out on chances for formal school are participating in catch-up and alternative education programmes to learn basic skills they need to support themselves and their families.

Responding to the post-1991 generation's demand for opportunities to learn, UNICEF and its partners continue to support education of Somali children and adults as they continued to make efforts to build and restore education systems and institutions. Education authorities in Northeast Somalia ("Puntland") and Northwest Somalia ("Somaliland") oversee public, formal primary and schools. In Central South Somalia, the region still most affected by violent conflict and instability, 1,504 formal schools supported by communities, local government authorities and NGOs serve an estimated 435,747 children. With the start of the new country programme, 2011-2015, UNICEF begins a new 'generation of support for children's education in Somalia.

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## Formal school systems gain strength in Somalia

On 1 February 2011, children in uniforms all over Somalia waited outside their schools for their teachers to arrive, and the first day of a new semester to begin. These signs of "School Opening Day" may be a familiar routine in most other countries, but in Somalia, they are a welcome reminder that formal school systems are growing and gaining strength in many regions.

Since the early days of the emergency in Somalia, UNICEF and its partners have directed investment and support to education programmes at the community level, ensuring that children would not miss out on their chance for education even when formal schools were not in place. UNICEF has also worked together with education authorities to write curricula and textbooks, and systematize training for teachers and community support. Now, as edu-

cation authorities take root in many regions, UNICEF and its partners recognize a new opportunity to support the development of systematic, quality service delivery for all children in Somalia.

Since 2010, UNICEF and the European Union have been jointly implementing the Integrated Capacity Development for Somali Education Authorities (ICDSEA) which provides technical and systemic support directly to the education authorities who administer and oversee schools and education programmes for children and young people. The ICDSEA programme focuses on reforming the education sector and strengthening the capacity of the Ministries of Education in Somaliland, Puntland and Central South Somalia to effectively plan, manage and deliver educational services. The three

-year programme is managed by UNICEF and implemented through a collaborative partnership between the Ministries of Education, UNICEF, Africa Educational Trust and CfBT Education Trust. The programme focuses on five key areas: Strategic planning and policy development for school systems which are complex and supported by many different agencies, and still growing; Human resource management and organisational development, as more teachers and other education professionals join the government-led work force; financial management and planning as the budgets and needs for education continue to grow; Standards and quality assurance to ensure excellence in teaching and learning; and gender mainstreaming and girls participation in education, to ensure that all girls and boys fully enjoy the benefits of education.

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**European Union funded programme supports education administrations in Somalia...**

## Community awareness leads to provision of learning opportunities

Community elders and religious leaders in South Mudug are in the front line in mobilizing resources for the education sector and competing to send their girls school.

As a result, the number of schools in South Mudug have increased from 22 in 2008 to 32 in 2010 with total enrolment of 7,551 children of whom 50.6% are girls. Religious leaders have the Somali Society Development Association (SOSDA) and UNICEF for the progress made in the education sector in South Mudug. Social mobilization has served as a key factor for community transformation in South Mudug.

Prolonged conflict in Somalia and instability have impacted negatively on the social and cultural values of the Somali people. The previous scientific socialist system for Somalia in place for three decades between the 1960s and 1990s primed people to be fully dependant on free services and shared national resources. The generations in that particular time grew up in a situation where education, health, communication, electricity, water and sanitation and many other facilities were free

After the collapse of former regime, the country experienced great anarchy and destruction of all public facilities including



Wisil School under construction  
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schools and learning facilities in Somalia. South Mudug was the most retarded vicinity in Central South Somalia. Outside Galkaiyo town, there was no school and the first one was set up in 2000. The reason for having no schools in rural areas in the region were two: First, South Mudug was inaccessible and humanitarian organizations abandoned it for many years due to clan conflict. Additionally, people in South Mudug had a rigid culture against educating children especially girls. The only available education was in Quranic schools.

It was in the light of these circumstances that the Somali Society Development Association an organization based in Galkaiyo through the financial support from UNICEF initiated efforts to change the situation. In using social mobilization as a strategy for raising community awareness towards education of children in South Mudug, the community became convinced that have equal rights for education regardless of their gender, age, ability and family economic background. Ultimately the message got through that education is a fundamental right for every child in South Mudug. It took three continuous years for SOSDA to see the impact of its social mobilization on education in South Mudug begin to make a difference.

## Formal school systems gain strength in Somalia - From Page 1

Mohamed Omar, a Somali formerly living in Kenya, is one of 15 technical advisors recruited to be embedded in the ministries of education. Mr. Omar has a Master of Arts in Education Planning, and has worked for eleven years with the Kenyan Ministry of Education on education quality, standards and human resources. His focus will be on organisational development, but he hopes in addition "to be useful for the other areas".



Mr. Mohamed Omar  
© UNICEF Somalia/2011/Doherty

According to Mr. Omar who is supporting the Ministry of Education in Puntland, "there are lots of gaps

in the current education system in the five result areas targeted by ICDSEA" and Mr. Omar feels that the ICDSEA programme's focus on technical expertise of personnel is key and that the training of management personnel will ensure qualified human resources are in place in the coming years within the Ministry. "The ICDSEA programme is timely: the Education system in Puntland is in a phase of recovery and the programme has come in good time to ensure the system is resuscitated.. to help the children of Somalia".

## Despite lost decades, Somali children yearn for an education - From page 1

The education programme is focused around three pillars  
1) Equitable enrolment in primary education with gender gap reduced; 2) : Schools and learning spaces, including those in internally displaced persons' settlements, are functional with foundational elements of a child friendly School.

Capacity development for functional education authorities , with reform of government policies for primary formal and non-formal education explicitly prioritise quality, child-centred education and lead to increased government allocations to education. Therefore UNICEF and its education

partners , will promote enrolment and retention for school children and pay special focus on out of school children as well as marginalized children such as those from the nomadic population.

Moreover, focus will be on strengthening the schools and systems that have been established, while filling the gaps that remain. We work closely with educators at all levels to build their capacity to lead and manage high-quality schools that are accessible to all children in Somalia.

## UNICEF and Japan support education for vulnerable children

Faisal Ahmed turns from the blackboard and asks his class of eager teenagers the meaning of square metres and metres cubed.

In the third row from the front, Hibaq Abdirahman glances down at the maths textbook on the desk before her, then shoots her hand up to explain the difference between area and volume.

When the 14-year-old was a baby, her family returned to a camp for displaced people 12km from Burao in Somaliland, after four years in neighbouring Ethiopia as refugees from war in their homeland.



Girls in Koosar primary study maths during class.  
©UNICEF Somalia/2010/Pflanz

"When we arrived, there was nothing at this place, only trees," Hibaq's mother, Halima Ahmed, had said earlier that morning as her daughter gathered her books for school. "There were no schools – the first class was under a tree. I thought it would be better to live near town, because there were schools there. Now, it is very different." Five minutes' walk from Hibaq's home is Abdulqadir Koosar Primary School, four single-storey buildings arranged around a wide playground. On land that a decade ago was empty scrub, there are now seven classrooms for 424 boys and girls aged seven to 15, taught by 12 teachers whose salaries are supported through an incentive scheme funded by UNICEF.

In Class 6, Mr. Ahmed continued with his maths lesson. A dozen textbooks provided through UNICEF are shared among the 22 boys and girls in the classroom, without which learning would be seriously affected, the 25-year-old teacher says.

"Really, it is a very, very big difference and it allows us to move quickly and to learn more," he said. "That makes the children more eager even than before."

In the school storeroom across the playground, shelves are lined with Maths, Arabic, Somali, Religious Studies and Social Sciences text books. Footballs are gathered in a corner, next to skipping ropes and inflatable globes. Chalk and notebooks are stacked neatly on a table.

"You must realise that the people living here are among the most vulnerable, some cannot afford even a pencil or a notebook for their children at school," said Ali Abdullahi Ibrahim, headmaster at Koosar since 2002. Most of these essential school supplies in the store room are supplied with funding from the Government of Japan, as part of its support since 2009 to UNICEF's efforts to improve the provision of social services for vulnerable and displaced communities in Somalia, including access to basic education.

More than 400,000 school-age children and over 10,000 teachers across Somalia have benefited from learning and teaching materials, thanks to Japan's contributions. "Schools in Somalia lack even the most basic teaching and learning supplies such as exercise books, chalks, and recreational items that help teachers to provide child-centered education in primary schools." says Mette Nordstrand, Chief of Education in UNICEF Somalia. "But recently, thanks to generous contributions from donors, UNICEF has been able to provide such essential supplies to about 70 per cent of school children in the country. As a result, the quality of education has improved and more children, girls in particular, were able to go to school because of the reduced cost of education".

## From a nomadic past, girl now gets the opportunity to receive an education

In class 2A, Fahima Mohamed sits tall amongst her classmates, paying close attention in the remote windswept town of Erigavo, Northwest Somalia ("Somaliland"). At 12 years old, she is older than most of the other children in her class, where the average age is about eight, but Fahima doesn't mind. She explains that she started school at the age of 10, having lived with her nomadic family in the plains of Sanaag, tending to the family's sheep and goats for most of her young life.

In this harsh terrain, the spectre of drought looms everlasting. Two years ago a devastating dry spell wiped out all of the livestock that had provided the sole source of income for Fahima's family. Together with her three brothers and parents, Fahima helped the family to pack up their few belongings onto their donkey, and walk the 120kms to move to Erigavo's urban area, in the hope of finding another means of income.

Despite the difficulties of being forced to give up her nomadic way of life and adjust to urban ways, Fahima saw an opportunity for her own education. She watched other girls her age going to school in the mornings, holding brightly coloured text books as she swept outside the families' new makeshift tent. She pleaded with her mother to allow her to go to school. Her mother, who leaves home every morning at 5am to sell vegetables in the market, to return only at sunset, worried who would

help her with the housework since she relied solely on Fahima to assist her with her father and three brothers. Eventually, Fahima convinced her parents to enrol her in afternoon classes at the local Daalo school, where UNICEF supports the teachers with training, and the pupils with text books and other school materials. Fahima was delighted as she told her family of her dream to one day become a doctor. However, although Fahima's work of tending livestock is over – she still works a great deal at home, rising early to light the fire, prepare breakfast and carry out all of the household chores, before making the lunch and then finally going to school.

Since her first day at school two years ago, Fahima has become one of the most active members of the class. She enjoys the whole experience of learning, especially the brightly coloured pictures and clear typeset in her text books – joking that it is easier to read than the teachers hand-writing! Her father, who never went to school and is still out work, encourages Fahima in her schoolwork. Although her life isn't easy, and she still works more than any child should, Fahima's world has been opened up to new possibilities since she started going to school, and with the support of her family, her community and UNICEF, she may return one day to work as a doctor in the plains of Sanaag.

## Child to child clubs tour drought-affected areas and mobilize support for the affected

Through UNICEF's support, the child-to-child (CTC) learning initiative was first introduced in 2005 in 10 schools in Jowhar town, central south Somalia. The initial purpose of the establishment of school clubs was to foster ground for children's participation in learning practices and other extra-curricular activities. The child to child initiative provided children with a greater role to play and enhanced their interaction to cultivate their talents.

The initiative has received recognition with the CTC Club in Jowhar winning an art competition organized by the European Union. The competition also led to financial sponsorship to schools that produced winners with some students getting to be sponsored with fees for one academic year.

The network of CTC Clubs in Jowhar consists of about 20 clubs which have involved children in learning and other school related activities. The network provides forums where the children can freely discuss issues that they deem important and which can help prepare themselves for adulthood.

This year, some 10 club members participated in a mission

organized by Shabelle Education Umbrella organization, a UNICEF partner to assess the effects of drought on people and livestock in Middle Shabelle region. The ten CTC Club members (5 girls and 5 boys) aged between 8 and 14 years participated in the mission and spent five days away from their homes. They were able to witness first-hand the effects of the drought on other children and their communities.

Following the assessment, the children mobilized other students in Jowhar town to help in responding to the drought and participated in drawing up plans to respond to the crisis. The mobilization covered eight schools in Jowhar. The students were given a chance to address their peers at morning assemblies in the schools as well as through local radio. Through this effort, they were able to help mobilize support to assist children in the areas they had toured. The assistance they raised included donations of 234 sacks of rice and four sacks of used clothes.

There are 127 CTC clubs operating across Somalia, supported by UNICEF and funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development.

### Support given to internally displaced children in Bossaso

Four years ago, Haleimo did not think that her children would have a chance to go to school. Having fled the conflict in Mogadishu with her family in 2000, she became one of 40,000 internally displaced persons in the northeastern city Bossaso, living in a tented settlement. Lacking even the money for a permanent shelter, she was unable to pay school fees, or afford basic items such as school uniforms.

Her hopes for the future changed when she received an unexpected visit from a "group of gentlemen," whom she later learned were members of the Biyo Kulule School Community Education Committee. From them, she learned of the Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) Programme, a fee-free "catch-up" programme developed by UNICEF in partnership with the Northeast Somalia ("Puntland") Ministry of Education and implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council and other NGOs. The ABE programme would allow her younger daughter Naima, already 12 years old, to catch up on the equivalent of four years

of primary school in just two years. Haleimo remembers that she was very excited to enroll Naima in the programme –but she was even more excited when she learned, later, that Naima would be able to continue in formal primary school. In 2009, UNICEF in partnership with Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) initiated a new scheme to support children's transition from ABE into Grade 5 of primary. Through the programme, the families of eligible children receive three vouchers to support the costs of schooling: one for fees, one for scholastic materials (such as notebooks and pens), and one for school uniforms. Girl students also receive a voucher for sanitary materials, to support their regular attendance. The programme also includes support to the Community Education Committees at partner schools to keep the school fees as low as possible. At Biyo Kulule school, monthly fees are US\$6, compared to an average rate of \$15 per month. Teachers at those schools also receive monthly payments, to ensure that the reduced fees do not lower their income.

### UKaid-supported Integrated Quranic Schools ensure better learning for Somali children

Al Najah, in a suburb of Somaliland's main city Hargeisa, is one of eight schools in a pilot project aiming to integrate traditional Quranic education with formal primary schooling. For Somalia's parents, Quranic instruction is a cherished first step for their children's education, before they typically moved on to formal schooling.

"But recently we noticed that children were staying in Quranic schools longer and longer, largely because these schools survived the war better than other schools," said Rashid Hassan Muse, Education Officer in UNICEF. "Students were there four, five years, up to their mid-teens, but they were learning little aside from Quran studies."

This prompted the new pilot scheme in partnership with the Ministries of Education and Religion, with support from UNICEF, funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development. It aims to create Integrated Quranic Schools, where religious instruction is still central, but where children are also taught basic literacy and numeracy to pre-

pare them for formal schooling.

Said Farah Hassan, Al Najah's head teacher, says that some parents at first resisted what they saw as a movement away from the school's focus on Islamic teachings. "We were able to show them that the religious instruction is still very important. But we explained that there is more to learn as well. And once the parents saw the changes here, that this is now a nice place to learn, they were happy to bring their children."

In Hargeisa, the eight schools signed up to the programme aim to send their pupils to primary school – with basic numeracy and literacy skills – after two years. The programme ensures quality education for the children through rehabilitation of learning spaces, training of teachers and mentoring by education experts from the Ministry of Education as well as provision of school supplies such as text books and learning materials.

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

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