

EDUCATION

ISSUE

Education and formal learning opportunities are virtually non-existent in Somalia. 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 the socio-economic, cultural and political realities in these areas.

The Survey of Primary Schools in Somalia for 2003-2004 provides valuable insights. According to the survey report, there are 1,172 operating schools¹ with a total enrolment of over 285,574 children representing a 19.9 percent gross enrolment ratio (GER). Although this is an increase over previous years, it still places Somalia among the lowest enrolment rates in the world. 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.

Gender related disparities remain an area of major concern as also revealed in the Survey of Primary Schools in Somalia for 2003-2004, which showed that only slightly over one third, or 37 percent, of pupils are girls at the lower primary school levels. Since the 2000/1 survey, there has been little progress toward reducing the gender disparity, which increases rapidly in higher grades. Results of previous school surveys reflect the same pattern. The low enrolment and high drop out rates of girls in most areas are due to a combination of traditional attitudes, timing of classes and economic considerations.

Female teachers are under-represented, making up only about 13 percent of the total number of all teachers. The sector suffers from severe limitations of managerial, technical and financial resources and a lack of consistency in standards.

ACTION



The new 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.

¹ Data from Lower Jubba Region, El Waq district of Gedo Region and Jilib district of Middle Jubba Region was not collected as these areas were inaccessible due to floods and insecurity.

The Education Programme is comprised of two projects: Primary Formal Education and Primary Alternative Education. The primary education project continues to focus on re-establishment and expansion of a formal primary schooling system within Somalia. Special focus will be placed on substantially increasing enrolment, retention and learning levels, particularly for girls. The second project focuses on building alternative non-formal learning opportunities for children and out-of-school youth without access to formal education, or those that have missed the opportunity due to civil strife. UNICEF will continue to provide quality education materials to schools, training for teachers and other education professionals, support community education committees, and support local authorities in establishing and implementing education policies and setting standards for the education system. This includes, but is not exclusive to development of standardised curriculum and textbooks, and related materials. UNICEF works closely with UNESCO and other members of the Somalia Aid Coordination Body's Education Sectoral Committee, as well as local authorities in the northern regions, and communities and related education committees.



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. According to the End Decade Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2000) 49 percent of girls aged 5 - 14 are working in Somalia.

IMPACT

In education, the UNICEF focus is on system wide education reforms, development of a curriculum syllabus, textbooks, and improved standards of learning and the development of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS). Key results include:

- Increased quality of education through the provision of standardised learning materials and training for teachers in the use of the materials.
- Improved enrolment in schools through curriculum development, sensitisation of functionaries, development of education policies in the northern zones, increased training of female teachers and work with community education committees.

Primary Education through Formal Schools

Data from the Primary Schools Survey 2003-4 confirms that the exponential increase in the number of operational schools and in primary school enrolment rates recorded in earlier surveys continues, indicative of the gaining momentum within the education sector. In 2004, the total number of students enrolled was 285,574, representing a 5.7 percent increase from the

previous survey. The continuing record of achievements is attributable to the efforts and commitment of national and international partners, parents and communities in circumstances which remain extremely difficult. However, considerable disparities in access to, and quality of, primary education still prevail due to the socio-economic, cultural and political realities in these areas.

The UNICEF-led reform process has resulted in the finalization of gender responsive education policies for Somaliland and Puntland, and new curriculum, syllabus and textbooks for six subject areas from grades 1 – 4. These were subsequently printed and distributed to all functional schools by UNICEF and UNESCO. UNICEF continues to reprint these textbooks to maintain the established ratio of one set of books to be shared between two children. Meanwhile UNESCO has completed, printed and distributed upper primary textbooks and teacher guides for grades 5 to 8.

Teacher in-service training conducted by UNICEF and partners in the methodologies and pedagogical aspects of the new textbooks was conducted for over 7000 teachers across Somalia. For the first time in over a decade, Somali children are benefiting from quality, contemporary textbooks and teachers trained in creating child-friendly learning environments. On-site teacher mentoring has been ongoing since 2002. Parents, teachers and communities have expressed much support for the new books, and their introduction is expected to lead to a further substantial increase in school enrolment, retention, participation and learning at the lower primary level. The Learning Achievement Survey carried out in 2004, showed that children's literacy and numeracy levels have improved.

Underpinning all education programme activities has been the dual strategy of UNICEF in supporting the establishment, training and empowerment of Community Education Committees (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 led to improvements in sustainability and decreased dependence on external donor support. While the local authorities have been provided with basic infrastructure and technical support, CECs have received systematic training and support for community mobilization for enhancing their motivation and capacity to support and manage schools.

Primary Alternate 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 schooling.

Coordination with education partners...

UNICEF has played a critical technical and coordination support within the education sector. In 2003, UNICEF was elected to be Co-Chair of the Education Sectoral Committee of the SACB and, in this capacity, has been able to further strengthen its leadership role in providing strong networking and coordination both at the Nairobi and zonal/regional levels. The major external partners in the education sector include the UN agencies (specifically UNESCO, UNHCR and WFP), international NGOs and donors. This coordination is also gradually strengthening at the zonal and regional levels where the important national actors include the local authorities, communities and NGOs who are playing a critical role in provision of quality education. In the northern zones, the role of zonal level local authorities is significant. However, in the Central and Southern Zone, their role is limited to those district /regions where functioning local authorities exist.

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 of equivalence accompanied by certification. Strategies for primary level alternate education are therefore being explored and developed by UNICEF and partners for an increasing number of children and youth in the coming years. An Alternative Primary Education study has been conducted and the strategy for development of the programme is currently being developed.