



FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS, SOMALIA CHAPTER (FAWESOM)

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1. EXECUTIVE

1.1 The Effects of the War on Education in Somalia/Puntland

Although the review on Somalia is for the last four years, the on-going conflict and the lack of proper functioning government has a tremendous negative impact on the education in Somalia and particularly Puntland. It is therefore worth mentioning the effects of the war on human rights situation in Somalia particular on the rights of children to education.

The collapse of the education system and institutions caused not only one but two generations of Somali children to miss schooling. While you can say that this put Somali children in a difficult circumstance, children of disadvantaged groups such as those of female headed families, pastoralists families, poor families, internally displaced families, and girls face special problems and need a special care in the social integration, over and above the basic needs of children in general. For example, there is no assistance available for the tens of thousands of children living in extreme poverty, street children, orphans, and disabled children.

The war affected the lives of many and abruptly terminated the education of children in Somalia. This caused a situation where most children are denied the basic civil rights, freedoms and protection specified in the convention on the rights of the child particularly, the girl child.

1.2 Puntland

Puntland forms part of the greater Horn of Africa region located in the north eastern quarter of Somalia. In 1998 Puntland was declared an semi-autonomous region with an eventual plan to become part of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Puntland is emerging now from a prolonged civil war that has disrupted the social fabric of the society, and has also had a devastating impact on the education sector. Throughout the reconstruction of Puntland, efforts have been made to strengthen the capacity of the education system, to provide access to quality education for more learners. Despite the generous financial contribution from local and international development partners which resulted positive progress in the enrollment and completion rate, a significant number of school-age children is out of school and girls particularly are underrepresented at all levels of education system from primary to tertiary. There are plentiful array of challenges that are facing girls' education in Puntland ranging from limited and unequal access to education skewed heavily against children from nomadic, rural and urban poor families and girls, to lack of proper educational infrastructure, cultural factors that do not value education for girls and school fees that are not affordable by most of the families.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio is among the lowest in Somalia and in the world. Recent research data indicate that only 23% of primary school age children (6-13 years old) have access to formal education. This means that, almost eight of every ten children are out of formal schooling. What is more is that the quality of the education being provided to children and relevance poses great deal of predicament.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report is prepared by Forum for African Women Educationalists, the Somalia chapter (FAWESOM). FAWESOM is an NGO that was registered in Puntland State of Somalia in 2006. FAWESOM is part of the growing number of Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) National Chapters across Africa.

The report is for the Universal Periodic Review in order to highlight the challenges in education that Somali girls face from the perspective of human rights. The facts and figures in this report is based on an-going study that is intended to review the Ministry of Education Policies in order to identify the gender gaps in education that FAWESOM is

currently carrying out. In addition to that UNICEF and Puntland Ministry of Education reports are referred to.

3. CONTEXT

The major consequences of the civil upheaval in Somalia included the collapse of the central government, the infrastructure, education system, health care system, commerce and industry, and creation of massive problems of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Thus, the education system in all regions of Somalia was severely damaged by the civil war, with many schools left in ruins.

Women and girls in Somalia as in many other developing countries bear heavy domestic responsibilities but do not enjoy equal rights and opportunities with men and boys. In practice, from the beginning of life, the Somali girl tends to be undervalued compared with her male siblings and usually has less access than they to the means of survival and development and the resources of the household. On the other hand, girls bear an increasingly heavy domestic burden as they grow up. Women among displaced populations, and particularly female-headed household, face additional stresses. The civil war has significantly increased this burden and stresses on women, not least on the large numbers of female heads of household, and presented them with new challenges.

4. CHALLENGES FACED BY GIRLS IN ACCESSING AND PERFORMING WELL IN EDUCATION

The level of participation of girls and women in the education system in The Puntland state of Somalia is still very low as the GER stands at 38%¹. This is due to the following factors among others:

4.1 Lack of Role Models for Girls

There is lack of role models for girls in schools because most of the teachers and the administrative personnel are male. For example some reports show that only 7% of teachers at primary level are female and only 1% of teachers at the secondary level. Discussions with girls in schools also indicated that they found it impossible to ask male teachers for permission to go to latrines. This practice does not only reduce the attention span and concentration, but also contributes to absenteeism and consequently poor performance of female students. In the classroom, there is little or no encouragement of female students from teachers.

4.2 Low Investment in Education

Puntland state of Somalia is a country recovering from prolonged conflict and the government faces enormous social economic challenges. The national resource base is

¹A Consultancy Report UNICEF 2004

inadequate and significant proportion of the budget is funded by foreign donors. The education sector budget is a minimal 1.7²% and this cannot cater for the enormous challenges facing the sector let alone allocate funds for girls education

4.3 Limited Qualified Teachers

Teacher's salaries are often very low and the ministry of education cannot recruit and pay enough teachers to manage schools. This has led to the low morale of teachers and absenteeism in the teaching force.

4.4 Child Labor

At a family level, poverty remains a key factor in undermining family survival. Household poverty is high with a significant burden placed on women and girls. The lack of livelihood opportunities for most families means that children have to support the family by engaging in odd jobs to supplement family income. The lack of economic opportunities in many communities in Puntland coupled with harsh social and economic environment has significant impact on many families. In such economic circumstances, the direct and hidden cost (in terms of books, pens and clothing as well as the loss of vital household help) of sending daughters to school are perceived by parents to be prohibitive. This is true in Puntland where a majority of women are engaged in small scale businesses like selling tea, vegetables, khat etc. to support the household. This has significant impact on female participation in education since girl children will have to stay at home to take care of the younger siblings and to attend to domestic chores.

4.5 Cost of Education

Tuition fees play a key role in limiting participation of girls in education. The average monthly tuition of 3 \$ per month for primary and 10 \$ at secondary level in public schools is far beyond the reach of many families. Often female students are considered last as far as paying tuition fees are concerned. In some cases girls have to work and earn money to pay fees for their brothers.

4.6 Unfavorable Learning Environment

There are a number of educational issues that undermine female participation in the education system. Most educational institutions are not adequately equipped to meet the needs of female students. There are limited recreation facilities for girls in most schools and some schools do not allow female students to participate in extra-curricular activities. While most schools have separate latrines for girls, discussions with girls and boys in schools indicated most girls do not use latrines at school because of fear that they will be seen by boys. All these factors combined increase dropout rates among girls especially after grade four.

² Source Ministry of Education in Puntland State

4.7 Traditional cultural factors

Socio-cultural issues have emerged as being key factor affecting female participation in education. Puntland is primarily a traditional Somali society with high preference to male children. In most communities, girls are expected to stay at home and attend to domestic chores and other subsistence duties, early marriages are widely. Traditionally, a significant (65%) of the population of Puntland people are pastoralist and relies heavily on the rearing animals. These pastoral communities are often located in remote rural communities where access to educational facilities is poor or nonexistent.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. The government must be committed to all international protocols, conventions and resolutions that promote the rights of all children and particularly those from vulnerable groups.
- B. Increasing access, retention and performance of girls in education must be a state priority.
- C. Supporting measures that allow girls to get back into school in the event that their schooling was interrupted by early and/or unplanned pregnancies
- D. Both government and civil society organization should embark on sustained campaigns to mitigate socio-cultural factors that obstacles to girls' participation in education.
- E. Access to all levels of education should be increased through a deliberate policy of school construction and improving school environment.
- F. Bursary schemes for girls must be established in order to make accessible for poor children particularly girls
- G. Policies that have affirmative action in training and hiring female teachers must be enacted at the Ministry of Education.