IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL ACCESS, EQUITY AND QUALITY FOR GIRLS IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS:
EVIDENCE FROM SOMALIA

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEC: Community Education Committee

ESL: English as Second Language

FPE: Free Primary Education

G2S Initiative: Go-2-school initiative

GEF: Girls’ Empowerment Forum

LNGO: Local Non-Governmental Organization

MOE&HE: Ministry of Education and Higher Education

MOE: Ministry of Education

MoHD&PS: Human Development and Public Services

NER: Net Enrolment Rates

SOMGEP: Somali Girls Education Project
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER

In most patriarchal societies, girls and women hold lower social status compared to boys and men and this has led to social exclusion (Lockheed, 2010, as cited by Ritchie, 2017), more so in accessing equitable educational opportunities. In post conflict Somalia, although recovery and reconstruction efforts are ongoing, authorities are struggling with the provision of basic social services to their communities. Access to education follows the same pattern with consistently reduced access to girls across all Somali territories.

The root causes of low enrolment, retention and transition rates for girls are attributed to both supply and demand factors. On the supply side, poor quality of education coupled with poor school infrastructure and lack of school supplies have not encouraged children to stay in school. The latter includes structural inequalities due to traditional values that prevent parents and communities to send their girl-child to school.

In order to address the multitude of problems faced by communities and schools in Somaliland, Puntland, and South Central zone, CARE designed the Somali Girls’ Education Promotion Project – SOMGEP (SOMGEP) - a mix of complementary and relevant interventions meant to address the root causes of the identified problem. SOMGEP targeted 172 communities from the Somaliland, Puntland, and South Central zones. The communities each have a school, either primary or secondary or both. Key intervention components include: Community mobilization, including religious leaders, community committees involved in education, and diaspora contributions, teacher training, refurbishing and equipping schools to be child/girl friendly, with a particular focus on the needs of adolescent girls and strengthening school oversight mechanisms to monitor and improve quality of education. SOMGEP was implemented in 150 primaries and 22 secondary schools in partnership with nine local organizations, religious leaders as well as Ministries of Education in Somalia (Puntland and Galmudug) and Somaliland.

This paper presents the results of the independent evaluation of CARE Somalia SOMGEP project. The independent longitudinal studies were conducted over a period of 3 years from 2013 to 2016. The consolidated findings from the SOMGEP Baseline, Midline and Endline, and monitoring data reflect SOMGEP’s impact on improving girl’s educational access, equity and quality for girls in post conflict situations. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected through structured household and school

surveys, learning assessments and classroom observation, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The 3 studies tracked a cohort of households and girls in 56 communities across Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug.

This paper will share emerging evidence and experiences of improving educational access, retention and teaching practices for marginalised girls through shifting gender norms in a politically fragile context.
1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The civil war in Somalia and the ultimate fall of Said Barre’s government in 1991 has had an enormous impact on the civilian population. Beside the political and economic consequences there has been disruption of education and essential social services (Rasler & Thompson, 2002, as cited by Abdinoor, 2007). In particular, Cassanelli & Abdikadir (2007) argues that the aftermath of the civil conflict has had a serious toll on education which led to the collapse of educational system and infrastructure, leaving millions of Somali children without an education. To date, the country does not have uniform education and curriculum systems, and the education sector is largely supported by different stakeholders.

Somalia has the lowest primary school enrolment rate in the world with an estimated 42% students in school according to 2013-2016 Go-2-school (G2S) initiative (G2S) report. Initiated by the Ministry of Human Development and Public Services (MoHD&PS), G2S initiative estimates the enrolment rate for girls at 36% while the number of children at risk, out-of-school children and youth aged between 6-18 years is estimated to be 4.4 million out of the country’s population of 9.2 million. As a result, the Federal Government of Somalia has prioritised enrolment of one million children and youth into basic education during 2013-2016 school years through a nation-wide Go-to-School (G2S) campaign (MoHD&PS, 2013).

The semi-autonomous state of Somaliland in the North West Somali territory has maintained higher rates of access to primary and secondary education as a result of over twenty-four (24) years of stability and following the 2010 declaration of Free Primary Education (FPE) policy. With relative peace and return to normalcy in South-Central Somalia, the 1998 establishment of Puntland government has resulted in increased access to education as well. Although there are no reliable sources for statistics, it can be inferred that the education sector in Somaliland has seen significant improvements in the past decade.

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data available in most regions, Somaliland has conducted a number of education census in the past few years. Latest data indicates an average primary school Net Enrolment Rates (NER) of 33.3%, with 36.2% and 30.3% of school aged boys and girls in schools respectively. In addition, the NER overall for secondary schools is at 9.5% disaggregated into 10.8% for boys and 8% for girls (MOE&HE Somaliland, 2015).

However, in the absence of a central government and strong institutions to support education, parents, communities, Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs) and international development agencies stepped in to fill the gap by providing basic education services in both Somalia and Somaliland. In addition, regional governments evolved as part of community driven conflict resolution efforts. In most parts of the country, as well as recently pacified zones, post conflict recovery and reconstruction efforts are ongoing and authorities struggle with the provision of basic social services to their communities. Access to education follows the same pattern with consistent lesser access to girls across all Somali territories. This is exacerbated by the Somali’s patriarchal societies where girls and women hold lower social status and face social exclusion, and accessing equitable educational opportunities (Lockheed, 2010 as cited by Ritchie, 2017). Furthermore, groups such as disabled, economically disadvantaged and minorities within patriarchal societies are further excluded and suffer double marginalization.

1.1 Project Overview

The Somali Girls’ Education Promotion Project (SOMGEP) or “Kobcinta Waxbarashada Gabdhaha” in Somali, was a 4 year (2013 -2017) innovative project funded by UKAID through its Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC) fund. SOMGEP aimed to improve access to education, learning outcomes, quality of education and retention of at least 20,000 girls from some of the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized households in rural and hard to reach areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug zones. The project identified and focused on addressing five key barriers that are essential in achieving sustainable change:

i) **Cultural-religious beliefs and practices that inhibit girls’ education:**

Work with Local Non-Governmental Organisations (LNGOs), Religious Leaders and Quranic teachers to address cultural-religious norms and beliefs that hinder girl’s education through community

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mobilization. At school’s level, Community Education Committees (CECs) provide a supportive learning environment.

   ii) **Parents’ and girls’ own attitudes that devalue girls’ education:**
Parental support, mothers support in particular, is essential for girl’s education. Implementation of Non Formal Education (NFE) classes purposely targeted mothers in order to improve their skills in basic literacy and numeracy. As a result of skills learning in NFE class, mothers are expected to have appreciation for education and provide needed support toward their daughter’s education. Provision of space and learning platform following the establishment of Girls Empowerment Forums (GEF) aimed to improve girls’ individual and group efficacy to reach their full educational potential.

   iii) **Teaching practices that are neither child-friendly nor girl-friendly:**
Teacher trainings on teaching methods and classroom management aimed to shift teacher’s behaviour and attitude in class and during teaching sessions. It is important for teachers to understand the effect of caporal punishment, and strategies of working with students through girl’s participation in class.

   iv) **Learning environments that are neither child-friendly nor girl-friendly:**
SOMGEP constructed new and/or renovated and furnished culturally appropriate and child/girl friendly learning facilities. These facilities include girl friendly spaces and toilets to provide needed space and privacy for girl, respectively. In addition, provision of sanitary kits to all secondary school girls aimed at increasing their confidence and attendance during their menses. Further, availability of female teachers contributes to girls learning because they (girl’s) lookup to female teachers as role models and mentors.

   v) **Policies and education system functions that produce gendered effects:**
SOMGEP supported Ministries of Education (MOE) and MOE regional representatives in the 3 zones to deliver relevant and quality education by advocating for girl friendly and female friendly policies. In particular, SOMGEP worked closely with the Gender Department/Unit within the MOE and payment of incentives for the female teachers and Gender Focal Persons (GFP) work in support of girl’s education at schools and in the community.

1.2 **SOMGEP Theory of Change (ToC)**

SOMGEP attempted to address the underlying causes of marginalization for sustainable change, and changing practices at the household, school, community and policy/governance level to create conducive and supportive environment for girl’s education through application of the Theory of Change (ToC). CARE operationalized the approach by implementing project interventions through 9 LNGOs that are geographically focused in different project regions. The Theory of Change (ToC)
attempts to answer the “why” and “how” a desired change is expected to happen through interrelated interventions or activities in order to achieve the project’s desired goal. Pivotal to increasing rural girls’ access, retention and completion of primary education, and transition to secondary education necessitates the need to attain transformative and sustainable social and attitude change on the importance of girl-child education.

Fugure2: SOMGEP Theory of Change.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is developed based on extensive review of secondary data generated through the robust SOMGEP independent evaluations and CARE Somalia monitoring findings. The SOMGEP evaluation design was devised at the outset of the project and implemented at different evaluation points to assess project impact by comparing a cohort of girls and household overtime. The longitudinal studies generated evidence on the interventions that work for improving girls’ school attendance and learning outcomes in Somalia. The findings from the various evaluation points informed improvements in the delivery of the project and supported the development of the next phase of the project (SOMGEP – Transition). Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from a range of sources. The findings of the baseline and midline were used to guide programme staff, partners, stakeholders in the process of achieving the programme’s stated objectives and Endline findings were used to design SOMGEP-T, a follow-up project focusing on girls’ transition and learning.
Also, the paper looks at evidence of SOMGEP impact on education “access”, “equity” and “quality” in relation to marginalized girl’s in rural areas of Puntland, Somaliland and Galmudug.

3 PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Qualitative and quantitative data from the project evaluations demonstrate that SOMGEP’s interventions have contributed to improved learning outcomes, enrolment and attendance of marginalized girls in target schools in Somalia and Somaliland. This is supported by the Endline evaluation finding of increased enrolment and attendance of girls and older girls in particular. Further, the project has contributed to shifting attitudes towards girls’ education that contributes to sustainable social change achieved through community mobilisation and awareness raising, and reinforced messaging on the importance of gender equality in education. Working with key stakeholder that include parents, Community Education Committees (CECs), religious leaders, Local Non-Governmental Organizations (LNGOs) and respective line Ministries in the three zones have contributed to a holistic approach on awareness raising effort on the benefit of educating a girl while showing measures to addressing barriers to girl’s education.

3.1 Access to Education and Increase in Enrolment Rate:

The project contributed to increase the enrolment rate in targeted areas from 61% at the baseline to 73% at the Endline (SOMGEP final evaluation report). This success is linked to a broad social movement that increased awareness about girls’ education in target areas; improved school conditions and school governance, resulting in mobilised community groups; the engagement of religious leaders in support of girls’ education; and mothers’ increased support to girls’ education. In addition to deep shifts in gender norms in communities, the provision of scholarships also allowed the most marginalised to access education.

3.2 Enrolment, Attendance and Transition of Marginalized girls

Evidence from the project evaluation and field reports demonstrates SOMGEP interventions made an effort to ensure marginalized girls access education by deliberately providing an enabling environment and needed support. Through robust community engagement in education strategy, CARE engaged key stakeholders such as government, Community Education Committees (CECs), religious leaders and Somali community in the diaspora in support of girl’s education.
These activities included mobilization and awareness raising at individual, household and community/system level aimed at altering individual and group attitudinal perceptions on girl’s education that translates to increase enrolment and attendance. According to the project evaluation, combination of enhanced community awareness of the importance of education (as exemplified by an increase of 31 percent points in community knowledge of where the nearest secondary school is), linked to the mobilization of religious leaders, and increased capacity of community education committees to identify and address cases of dropout and out-of-school children in the community, contributed to increase girls’ enrolment rate, despite the impact of the recent drought on students, particularly among adolescent girls, and their families.

Data collected for the attendance register and during headcount reveals an increase of girl’s attendance between the Baseline and Endline evaluation at 76% and 79%, respectively. Nonetheless, challenges remain; in many cases, girls miss school due to seasonal migration and household chores, largely linked to poverty and drought.

### 3.3 Evidence Improved Efficacy through Girls Empowerment Forum:

In order to improve individual efficacy, the girl was targeted as an agent of change through the development of leadership skills and opportunities to implement girl-led activities within their school and communities, and improve individual and group efficacy and learning outcomes.

SOMGEP established Girls’ Empowerment Forums (GEFs) and trained peer mentors on taking up leadership roles at targeted upper primary and secondary schools, with support from female mentors and Gender Focal Points at the Ministry of Education (MOE) Gender Units.

Evidence collected from video-voice recording of GEF peer mentors shows improved confidence with all reporting developing improved “self-confidence (and self-esteem) and the ability to speak in front of others without any hesitation”. This change has been attributed to several factors including GEF training where peer mentors acknowledged covering their faces prior to the training because they felt ‘shy’ and did not want their voices to be heard. However, they now report having the confidence to engage boys in school hygiene promotion activities led by girls, and take the lead in awareness raising exercise in front of students and teachers during school assembly. In addition, peer mentors report increased self and group efficacy on what they can achieve as an individual and as a group. For instance, girls report increased determination as a result of knowing “what to achieve in their lives through goal setting” with improved confidence. Girl leaders report setting high standard for themselves in order to meet and achieve their dreams. When asked about their future aspirations, it appears girl are more determined and have better understanding on what is required in order to
achieve ones set goal. In particular, most peer mentors are aware of subjects related to their future career ambitions from the analysis of video-voice analysis of GEF training. According to GEF peer mentor, she “want to be good at science as it will support my future plan of becoming a doctor”\textsuperscript{10}. In order to deliver as a teacher, another peer mentor noted that she needs to “get a teaching certificate and volunteer teaching so as to master the art of teaching”\textsuperscript{11}. Such statements from peer mentors shows ambition and that they (girls) understand what is required in order to achieve their future career.

The collaborative working relationships among peer mentors with support from female mentors has given them the ability and the belief that they can participate in school activities and/or contribute to solving challenges that arose from everyday functioning of the school. All peer mentors report participating in in-school activities to improve the image of their respective schools by mobilizing other students to participate in “school’s hygiene improvement activities”

Prior to the establishment of GEF peer mentors reported that rivalry among girls was a concern to peer mentors where “girls form groups and fight one another frequently”. This was a problem that hindered girls’ collaboration. However, regular GEF meetings and working together has forged solidarity and the formation of a strong “friendship and bonding” as a result of shared issues and challenges. This resulted in supporting one another with homework hence translating to improving reading.

3.5 Evidence on the Impact of SOMGEP Interventions on teaching quality

There is evidence to suggest SOMGEP’s effort to improving teaching quality and learning outcomes were effective. According to the Endline Evaluation report, there has been significant gains in literacy, reading comprehension in particular; the average literacy score for Grades 1-5, measured through a modified version of UWEZO, improved from 56% at the baseline to 69% at the Endline, while the average reading comprehension score for the same grades increased from 37% at baseline to 57% at the Endline. These results indicate an overall improvement in the capacity of teachers in deliver instruction on basic reading skills; this is particularly impressive considering the influx of marginalised children in early grades, as evidenced by the increase in enrolment.


The teacher training provided by the SOMGEP project included modules on classroom management, teaching methods, and gender sensitization and child protection training. In addition, emphasis was put on teachers to address gendered practices in class and in their teaching methods, encouraging girl’s participation in class, and finding alternative ways to addressing behavioural issues in the classroom through child-friendly ways rather than resorting to corporal punishment. Evidence from the household survey conducted during Endline evaluation indicated that 57% of respondents reported changes in teaching quality over the last two years, with 92% of these stating that teaching had improved.

Trainings on gender sensitivity that aimed at levelling the discrepancy in treatment of girls and boys, were generally very well received by teachers. One male teacher described the positive impact that training had on his ability to successfully connect with girls:

“First, of course, they {trainings} had much usefulness for classes, before the trainings; I had difficulty in dealing with female students, how to integrate with them. I had an idea that if I work with female students in the course of group discussion it would be a bad thing against the culture and education, but when I have received the training, I have got advantage that is different from my previous thought, to integrate with students and make girls education easier or encourage them in education ...I explained lessons as someone who is suggesting a topic before but I give lessons in four ways by dividing students into groups, by making discussion and looking for feedback from students it{training} also helped me; and have a connection with students whether it is girls or boys.” (Teachers FGD #2 Puntland).

3.6 Community Education Committees (CECs) and Education Quality

Community Education Committees (CECs) are a powerful tool for community ownership, monitoring, and accountability with local schools. Following training on leadership, fund raising and school management, CECs developed School Improvement Plans (SIPs) as a guide to the implementation of activities specific to the needs of their respective schools. During the project implementation period, both SOMGEP and its partners in the field monitored whether CECs are on track implementing SIP activities. Reports from the field indicated that some CECs are doing tremendous work in implementing SIP activities and more compared to their counterparts at project target schools. Among the many CECs, Haji Salah CEC members stood out and have achieved the most, particularly raising funds in support of their school by engaging their community within Somaliland and in the diaspora.
The village has a well-established resource mobilization with strong funding raising effort in place that not only collects monthly commitments but also tracks pledges in Somaliland, Europe and the United States of America. In an attempt to address the growing demand for education in the village, the community committed to the school guided by the school’s mission of achieving “community centred learning through increasing the number of students, effort, collaboration and improving access and the quality of education”. Therefore, in support of quality education and learning, the village committee is committed to allocating $2000 a month to support the school. As a result, CECs hired four qualified teachers from Hargeisa and Amoud University in Hargeisa and Borama, respectively, in an effort to contribute to long term education quality at the village. Currently, the four teachers hired support both primary and secondary school, as well as provide after school and remedial program. The remedial classes started in 2014 to purposely target students, girls in particular, falling behind to catch up with their peers.
4. **LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION, STRATEGIC PLANNING AND POLICY REFORM**

There are a number of key lessons learnt and policy recommendations for girls’ education in Somalia and countries emerging from protracted conflict. The major issues that need to be addressed according to the project end line findings as well as learning throughout the implementation period are i) to sustain gains made in enrolment, retention and transition of girls in education through scaling up community awareness and support towards girls’ education by working with influential members of the community; ii) Improve the quality of education provided in primary and secondary levels through improved and targeted teacher training and iii) strengthening MOE processes, procedures and policies to ensure responsive policy and practice at national level, regional and district level.

1). Most schools are community established and community run with little support from government usually in the form of teachers’ salaries which is irregular in many parts of Somalia. The community remains the biggest stakeholder and for any policy advocacy towards equitable access to education to succeed working with community structures and influential members of society is imperative. Under SOMGEP the success of: -
a) Working with religious leaders to demystify negative gender norms that are misconstrued as religious teachings was an important lesson.

b) Working with mothers especially through the literacy and numeracy classes was a very important strategy to improve mother’s literacy and numeracy but also to increase support for education of both boys and girls.

c) Working with girls to create agency among girls on the importance of developing their own self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills. In addition, the project proposes to also work with boys to also address issues affecting mainly boys such as drug abuse, vulnerability to join armed conflict etc. while at the same time working with both boys and girls mixed groups to develop their leadership skills together is found to be very crucial.

2). The absence of credible teacher training institutions and weak governance structure leading to poor oversight of the quality of teacher training by government has resulted in a high number of teachers serving in schools being poorly qualified. The projects approach was to combine long term training of teachers through preservice and in-service trainings to increase the number of qualified teachers joining the service and also short term trainings on targeted areas such as Gender Friendly Pedagogy, Child Protection and Safeguarding, Classroom instruction methods for subjects such as Mathematics.

a) The project proposes the establishment of government controlled teacher training institutions as opposed to private colleges/universities providing teacher training without adequate government oversight.

b) The project will in the next phase deepen the training of teachers in Numeracy classroom instruction and equity in education to ensure equal chance for boys and girls in practice and policy. This will improve acquisition of numeracy skills for learners from the early years.

c) Teachers in Secondary school will require English as Second Language (ESL) training in order to deliver curriculum content in English as language of instruction.

3). At policy level the MOE will need to have strong gender departments which will be responsible for the ensuring gender equity in education. This will be guided by the development of a specific policy on Gender in Education in addition to mainstreaming gender in budget process, teacher management, human resource guidelines and other policy frameworks at MOE. The MOE should strive to ensure downstream application of policies from national level to regional and to the district levels up to school level.
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