

Post-Conflict Education Development in Somaliland

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Abstract

In the light of fresh international initiatives to achieve Universal Basic Education (UBE) and gender equality in education by 2015, this paper examines factors affecting its realisation in the context of Somaliland. In a country where over 80% of school age children are receiving little meaningful education, the paper reflects on more flexible education approaches to provide sustainable education for children and disadvantaged adults. The paper draws on fieldwork data from a DfID funded study [1] and the authors' own experiences.

The discussion highlights the peculiar circumstances of Somaliland. It charts the provision of Education in the then Somalia from the colonial era through post-independence times to the civil conflict which led to the destruction of education in the country. It goes on to look at the progress being made at the present time following “stop-gap” measures for emergency education towards revitalising enhanced education. It completes the picture by describing challenges to the achievement of the UBE target.

The authors review aspects of alternative and flexible educational approaches and urge the integration of these non-formal systems with the formal, governmentally controlled school systems being restored in Somaliland. They do so while sounding a note of caution that for all the energy and enthusiasm associated with these approaches, they have yet to be evaluated for their effectiveness in providing quality basic education.

This paper looks at education in Somaliland. It presents a brief summary of the development of education from colonial times, through the recent civil conflict into the present time. In a situation where less than 20% of school-age children are going to school, it concentrates on the various flexible alternative approaches to education which are attempting to meet the high demand for basic, skills and vocational education for children of school age and for educationally deprived adults. The views of the people most concerned with education - Ministry officials, INGO officials, teachers, parents, community leaders and the children themselves have been sought. They have been asked about the purposes, benefits and costs of education, as well as the constraints, as they see them, on reaching the education for all by 2015 target. The outcomes are reviewed against the implications for education in Somaliland.

1. Background

The concept of the right to education has long been enshrined and established in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN and in subsequent watershed summits (UN, 1948; 1989; UNICEF, 1990). In Africa, one notable earlier watershed initiative was the 1961 Addis Ababa conference on education which set targets, amongst others, to achieve Universal Basic Education [UBE] by 1980 (UNESCO, 1961). There has been a long-standing broad agreement that education, including universal primary education, is indispensable for the eradication of illiteracy and resulting poverty. Furthermore, the attainment of a basic level of education as a foundation for further learning, is critical for the realisation of individual potential and the socio-economic development of a nation (WCEFA, 1990, 1992; UNCED, 1992; Psacharopoulos, 1994; Tilak, 1994). As a result of this recognition, and as a world-wide goal of education, national governments and international development agencies have expended major efforts to universalise basic education. In developed industrialised countries, basic education for all, which was a utopian ideal a century ago, has now become the norm.

Yet, at the turn of the new millennium, although some progress has been made in the last half century, basic education is still far from being universally available in many developing countries. South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are seriously disadvantaged even when compared with other developing countries: enrolment is lower, dropout higher and the gender disparity wider (Oduga and Heeveld, 1995; UNESCO, 1993; UNICEF, 1997; 1999; Mehrotra, 1998; Buchmann, 1999a, b). Various factors have been identified for the apparent failure of developing countries to achieve UBE. Lack of access to school or inadequate educational provision are amongst the most pronounced constraining factors, but all are interconnected in a complex nexus of changing economic and social factors.

As is very much the case in Somaliland, civil conflict interacting with a cycle of growing poverty, which is discussed throughout the paper, has further complicated and impacted upon the demand for and supply of educational provision. The search for effective educational strategies that respond to rapidly changing circumstances and the growing needs of society have been the focus of recent educational initiatives. In the recent Dakar Conference (WEF, 2000), nations and development organisations reaffirmed the positive effect of education and a commitment to achieving UBE by 2015, including countries in crisis and emergency. Notwithstanding the importance of such initiatives to accelerate progress towards the target, it is argued that similar initiatives in the past have been neutralised by problems, many of which still exist and which may inhibit the achievement of this new target. The sections that follow will support this assertion in the context of Somaliland.

2. Country context

Somaliland (formerly the British Protectorate of Northwest Somalia) is located in East Africa. It has particular socio-cultural and political characteristics, partly because it is not yet an officially recognised independent country. The former British Protectorate hastily united after independence in the 1960s with Italy's former Trust Territory of Southern Somalia to form Greater Somalia. This country fell apart in

the 1990s following a civil war and the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. Since 1991, Somaliland has existed as a defacto independent state making positive progress towards restoring peace and stability and revitalising education. It now occupies an area of 109,000 sq. km bordering Somalia in the South, Ethiopia and Djibouti in the north and a long stretch of Gulf of Aden in the east.

Exact population figures are difficult to obtain and estimates vary in the current situation, partly as increasing numbers of war displaced people are returning home due to the improving peace and stability. According to the UNICEF (1997b) survey, the total population of Somaliland is estimated at 2 million. About half a million Somalilanders, not included in this figure, are believed to be displaced as refugees inside Somalia or neighbouring countries or live and work overseas. Of the 2 million in the country, 45% are believed to be urban dwellers, 6% are sedentary rural dwellers and 49% are nomadic (Ahmed, 2000; Morah, 2000).

The climate is one of the primary factors affecting much of Somali's life and economy. With hot, dry weather all year round, except at the higher elevations where crops are grown, most of Somaliland is classified as semi-arid to arid, suitable primarily for the nomadic, pastoral lifestyle that more than half the population practises. Additionally, a small number of people rely on fishing. The rest of the population are urban dwellers engaged in commercial and industrial occupations, largely at a subsistence level.

As it has been for centuries, the present economy of Somaliland is largely based on livestock with the main export earnings generated from the sale of cattle and camels to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States. Other significant exports include hides, skins and aromatic gum. There is also a large trade in the import of Khatt from Ethiopia. Khatt is a green shrub the leaves of which are a mild stimulant that is commonly chewed fresh daily by almost all Somali men. According to Ahmed (2000), the annual Khatt business is estimated to amount to \$US 250 millions.

Remittances from Somalilanders abroad, in the Gulf States, Western Europe and North America, estimated at around \$500 million, provides a significant family income and is playing a significant role in business and economic recovery. The agriculture production and trade deficit is alleviated largely through a combination of entrepreneurial activities, remittances and international aid. During our study fieldwork we observed that the thriving private business sector was functioning remarkably well. Many analysts have noted that the business sector has proved resilient, leading the country from a wartime survival economy towards a fully functioning market economy (Ahmed and Green, 1999; Green and Jamal, 1987; Mubarak, 1997). However, it is difficult to obtain accurate current economic information in a data deprived Somaliland, partly due to the absence of a systematic regulatory economic environment and financial institutions.

Somaliland (the whole of Somalia for that matter) might be described as mono cultural, its people using a single language, Somali, and bound by a common religion, Islam. It may be argued here that use of a single language can be an advantage for promoting literacy and numeracy education. However, as Mukhtar (1996) and Ahmed and Green (1999) point out, this homogeneous entity is not fully accurate

and sometimes misleading as it is based on a simplistic generalisation. Despite shared cultural beliefs and norms, and this common language, the social and political structure consists of loosely associated clans and sub-clans, with more or less important psychological bonds between members of Somali clans (Lewis, 1967; Cassanelli, 1982; Latin and Samatar, 1987; Samatar, 1991). The clan organisation is described as an unstable system, characterised by changing alliances and temporary coalitions, which serve both as a source of great solidarity, as is the case in Somaliland, as well as of conflict, as in South Somalia.

Observers note that since the overthrow of the southern-based Siad Barre regime in 1991, in addition to the restoration of peace and stability to the territory under its control, Somaliland has demonstrated significant progress towards socio-economic and political recovery (The Economist, 7-13 August 1999 p. 35). Yet, despite its distinct history of pre-colonial partition and pre-independence collective administration, as well as the recent demonstration of compromise politics among clan leaders leading to the restoration of stability, Somaliland has not been accorded political recognition by the international community.

3. Educational context

This section summarises the development of modern education from colonial times to the present.

3.1 Early education development

The development of education in Somaliland, as elsewhere in Africa, can be traced back to pre colonial traditional education through to post-colonial, western-style, modern education. Prior to the colonial era, as pointed out by Bennars et al. (1996) and Morah (2000), Koranic schools provided traditional Islamic education which developed into theology, Arabic grammar, Arabic literature and Sharia Law. Arabic, widely referred to as the language of the Koran, was the medium of instruction in these schools. The Koranic school, although overshadowed by the introduction of western type education during colonial times, still forms an important component of community education and culture in Somaliland. In fact, as will be discussed in more detail later, the traditional Koranic Schools have been noted as the only and most sustainable educational institutions at the time of the recent, destructive civil war crisis (Elmi, 1993; Bennars et al. 1996; Morah 2000).

The colonial era of the late 19th century introduced the western-style of education. As Rodeny (1974) and Memmi (1991) point out, colonial education was designed and pragmatically implemented for the administrative and low-level technical needs of the then British imperial power. Since the Somali language had no written form until the 1970s, English and Italian served as the languages of government and education during the colonial administration and beyond. According to Bennaars et al. (1996), on the eve of Somalia independence in the 1960s, although there were several schools established by the colonial powers, educational provision was largely limited to primary level and was beyond the reach of the majority of people.

Educational opportunities expanded, although not to the same extent across regions, during the early and middle period of the socialist military government era (1969-1980). The introduction of the Somali script in 1971, based on the Roman alphabet, stimulated educational development. The then socialist government's decision to use the Latin script for the writing of the Somali language, coupled in the mid-1970s with a mass literacy campaign as a move to make basic education compulsory, changed education fundamentally. It both stimulated the demand for education and increased school participation. Consequently, between the mid 1970s and early 1980s, Somalia experienced sharp increases in the literacy rate, from a dismal 5% to an estimated 55% and enhanced primary school enrolment. The numbers of children in school rose from 28,000 in 1970 to 220,000 in 1976, and to 271,000 in 1982 (Somalia: a country report, 1982; Morah, 2000). Likewise the Mid-Decade review reported an increase in the number of primary schools from 287 in 1970 to 844 in 1975, and to 1,407 in 1980 (Bennaars et al., 1996). Further, the number of teachers reached a peak of 3,376 in 1981.

3.2 The decline of education

Even before the recent outbreak of civil war educational development had slowed, especially in Somaliland, and school remained beyond the grasp of the majority of people. As an increasing number of students moved through the primary education system, pressures mounted to rapidly expand the number of places available in the few secondary schools primarily located in the capital and major towns. In the 1980s, the increasing educational demand coincided with massive government defence spending. This was stoked by the cold war-induced disproportionate armament in response to internal and external conflict in the military-ruled Somalia and resulted in subsequent economic decline. As a result, education and other social development programmes stalled, allocated an ever-decreasing share of the national budget.

The 1984 estimates of state expenditure, for example, show that the government was spending between 1.5 % and 2% of the national budget (0.6% of GDP) on education while it spent 36% on defence and security (Samatar, 1988). In contrast, during the 1975-79 period, the total basic recurrent and development expenditure on education had been 19 % of the national budget. Somalia's educational development declined to near crisis level.

According to a UNESCO report, (1991), the literacy rate dropped from 55% in the early 1980s to 24% by the end of the same decade. Similarly, the gross school enrolment ratio for 4-to-23 year-olds, of 14% in 1980 slipped back to 7% by 1988. By 1990, only 644 schools and 611 trained teachers remained in the service, with total enrolment of pupils down to 150,000 (Bennaars et al., 1996; UNICEF, 1987, 1998). The enrolment figure is one of the lowest school-enrolment rates in the world. Even within the context of Sub-Saharan Africa, Somalia became educationally and, therefore, developmentally more marginalised than other countries.

The limited provision of higher education institutions was confined to southern Somalia. The principal higher learning institutions, such as The Somali National University and The Lafaole College of Teacher Education, were based in and around Mogadishu in the South. There were no higher education

institutions built in what has become Somaliland. Overall, the increasing educational demand on the one hand and the declining national education budget on the other, brought the inevitable financial stress on the expansion strategies and educational development became unsustainable.

3.3 Collapse of education

In the late 1980s and post-1990 the devastating civil war added the final blow to a collapsing education system and other civil service sectors. As reported by various studies (e.g. Bennaars et al., 1996; UNICEF, 1998), over 90% of the schools that existed prior to the outbreak of civil conflict in 1988, were completely destroyed or seriously damaged. Almost all formal, modern learning systems ceased to function and no formal education took place in Somalia for at least two years (1991-92) in the aftermath of the civil war (UNICEF, 1998). As far as the effects on higher educational institutions was concerned, Finnegan (1995), describes the condition of the former College of Teacher Education:

‘The low-rise, modern looking building of the former College of Education is now a displaced person’s camp. The classrooms and dormitories were full of families; the walls were blackened by cooking fires ... The library was a world of dust. Books were piled everywhere, on sagging shelves, on toppling heaps. Some were stained and disintegrated, but most were intact. Every title I saw seemed, under the circumstances, absurdly ironic: *The Psychology of Adolescence*, ‘*Adolescents Grow in Groups*,’ ‘*Primitive Government*,’ ‘*The Red Badge of Courage*.’ Sunlight drifted through high windows on the west wall. A cow mooed somewhere. The dust was so deep that it was as though the desert itself was creeping through the walls, burying the books in fine sand.’ (p. 76).

Teachers, students and the educated elite were forced to disperse and leave the country. There were hardly any schools in Somaliland for children to attend immediately in the aftermath of war. As a result, the entire school population threatened to remain illiterate and innumerate due to lack of education. The traditional Koranic school, locally referred to as “duskis” or “mal’amad”, was the only available form of basic education at the height of the civil war and in its immediate aftermath.

3.4 The post-conflict reconstruction of education

In spite of the long civil upheaval to the education and social system in whole of Somalia, significant positive steps have been taken in Somaliland to restore stability and revitalise education. This is mainly attributed to the demonstration of compromise politics among clan leaders, which has resulted in the relatively stable, de facto independent State of Somaliland. This has, in turn, allowed education and other development sectors to function as early as 1992. Local and international NGOs have had significant involvement in the rehabilitation and development of Somaliland’s education.

An earlier extensive survey conducted by the Somaliland government (MOEYS, 1996) reported 159 primary schools in operation with over 27,000 pupils. The survey also revealed that only 17% of primary age children, 23% of boys and 12% of girls aged 6-14 years old, were enrolled in these schools. Enrolment in urban areas was considerably higher, at 27%, than in the rural areas, 16%, and among

nomadic pastoral peoples, 1%. According to the most recent surveys, approximately 46,000 pupils are enrolled in 171 functioning primary schools in Somaliland (UNICEF, UNDP & UNESCO Somalia, 2000; MEDPR, 1999/2000). Indeed, these surveys revealed that the annual enrolment rate exceeded the pre-war level of 34,300 children in 1987/88 (UNICEF, 1997a [G1]). The MEDPR (1999/2000) survey put the number of teachers at 1,167, making the pupil to teacher ratio (PTR) for Somaliland at around 31:1. It has been reported that this was achieved largely through a combined effort of the local authorities and communities together with international development agencies.

Although there is progress in increasing enrolment reported in recent years, as discussed below, the civil conflict has had a huge impact on school building and rehabilitation, the functioning of local education authorities and their ability to provide educational information, curriculum development, teacher training, teacher remuneration, and finance for the system.

3.5 The Present Situation and the Challenges Ahead

In spite of the progress, the school enrolment figures show that over 80% of primary age children are not enrolled in school or receiving any form of formal education in Somaliland. Girls constitute only 30% of the total enrolment. Enrolment rates are higher in urban areas than in rural areas and among nomadic people (UNICEF, UNDP & UNESCO Somalia, 2000; MEDPR, 1999/2000). There are also several thousands of illiterate and innumerate young men and women who have had no basic education over the past decade or so.

As the MNPC (1999) and MEDPR (1999/2000) surveys indicate, teacher numbers and their qualifications are a further problem. Over 50% of the current teachers are reported to be either not trained or under-trained. Only 15% of the teaching force are female, the majority of whom were concentrated in the urban areas.

The lack of opportunities for further education after primary school is another major constraint in Somaliland, although ten secondary schools have been established since 1996 and the number is reportedly increasing. There is also significant growth in the number of private schools in Somaliland, although such unplanned and uncontrolled development has inevitably brought other problems associated with quality and uniformity in standard. The growth of the private schools favours the economically well to do and does little to address education-for-all. Beyond this, there are few further or higher education and training opportunities. Besides disparity in the various levels of educational development and lack of uniformity, the quality of primary education is poor, commonly characterised by untrained teachers and by the shortage of instructional materials and support services.

Besides issues of school access and of gender disparity, another major problem is the high attrition rate, estimated at more than 70% in 1996 (Morah, 2000). This dropout rate is alarmingly high, especially among girls in higher grades.

4. Insights from our field study experience

The main aim of the DFID funded study is to characterise flexible approaches to education in Somaliland as the country strives to achieve universal basic education by 2015. Our fieldwork covered two of the five regions of Somaliland, Galbed and Togdheer, and comprised interviews and discussions with many of the key stakeholders in the education system, including education professionals, community leaders, parents, teachers and children of school age.

Some 15 formal schools and alternative or flexible learning centres also referred to in this paper as non-formal schools, located in and between Hargiesa and Burao towns, were visited. Over 30 interviews and small group discussions were conducted with a range of the stakeholders just listed. The interviews were intended to gauge the understanding of education ‘consumers’ about the benefits of education and their perceptions of the constraints on providing education-for-all. We were interested to find out how strong was the demand for education and we had a particular interest in the local commitment to the attendance of girls at schools and non-formal education centres.

The results reported in the remaining sections, drawn from the findings of the interviews and observations, provide an insight through the voices of people involved in many aspects of education.

4.1 Demand for Education in relation to its perceived benefits

We observed, and had our impressions confirmed by educators and INGOs officials interviewed, that the community initiates and contributes to the rehabilitation of schools, providing materials at its own expense or by providing labour.

Almost every report or publication describes people as having a thirst for education and a regret that there are not enough schools or learning centres to provide it for the children of school age or other groups of disadvantaged adults. Everyone, with whom we met, demanded education for themselves or their children. Educated and uneducated parents alike were firm in their wish to see all their children attending school, if it was available and affordable. However, there was no common understanding of what is meant by education or a common view of its expected benefits.

With regard to the reasons for demanding education, however, the views are different for various groups. Those educated at least to the end of primary school or in professional jobs, have a more abstract view of why education is ‘a good thing’. Besides the expected monetary return through wage-paying jobs being available only to the educated, they expressed demand in terms of a relationship between education and economic progress. Among other benefits, they described the contribution of education as resulting in the application of better farming and house management techniques, resulting in improved production and increased well being.

Uneducated respondents were no less certain about wanting education for their children. However, it was hard to shake beliefs about what an education is supposed to deliver, even where empirical experience appears to provide contrary evidence. For instance, one woman had two sons where the educated boy was unemployed and the uneducated sibling was supporting his mother. She maintained

her view that the educated one would go further and have greater earning potential in the long run. This was despite the current economic climate in Somaliland, where salaried jobs are scarce.

Q: What are your children doing?

A: I have 3 children, 2 boys and 1 girl

Q: Ok, but what are they doing? Are they around and do they go to school?

A: Oh, they are grown up. One of the boys left school long time ago when he lost interest, because he got used to making money – a taste of money doing casual work. The other boy completed high school and did more education in Mogadishu (the Capital). I don't know what education he did, but he was also teaching. With regard to my daughter, I wanted her to help me in the house, so she didn't go to school. I'm a widow and life is hard here, so one needs daughter's help.....do you understand?

Q: How about your sons? Can't they support you?

A: One of them helps me. Sometime financially and sometimes when I'm not feeling well he helps me to get necessary things for the house and teashop.

Q: Which one?

A: Oh.....No, not the educated one who used to be a teacher. You see, he doesn't have a regular job. Sometime he teaches, but there is no enough work and payment for him, so he is usually idle and lives on Allah's mercy.

Q: Can you tell me the job of the uneducated one who supports you? What is his job?

A: No, he does not have a job. He just does a casual job. Sometimes he sells Khatt, other times he works with shop owners to deliver goods. I don't know it all, but he does many things, anything available.... you know what I mean.

Q: Oh yes I understand. It sounds to me though, the uneducated son is doing well and he even supports you financially.

A: But the educated one is looking for a job. When he finds one, he will help me better because he will get a good job, maybe in an office or maybe teaching.

Q: Yes, but what I'm trying to say is its good that the uneducated one is helping you now and for the last many years as you said.

A: That is true. But, although the uneducated one is helping me, the educated one will support me more in the future. He will earn more and do a respectable job – In sha Alla; i.e. God Will!. (Female parent, street teashop owner in Somaliland)

It should be noted, however, that the expressed benefit of education in terms of later monetary returns is not exceptional to Somaliland. Other studies in developing countries report that in the circumstances of poverty, interest in education is often tied in with the prospect of getting a job, often where a job is only worthy if it is in the white-collar sector. (e.g. Bekalo and Bangay, 2002; Jones 1992).

Besides the monetary return, other perceived benefits related to skill development and the enhancement of status and the respect brought to children and their parents. It was common in our interviews for uneducated parents to express an interest in the need to educate themselves.

Q: You said you want education. Can you tell me what you want education for?

A: Oh yes, I myself am eager to learn.

Q: OK, but...what do you aspire to learn?

A: To start with Somali script and arithmetic. I'm a businesswoman and have money but I feel I lack main things like reading and writing. I would be delighted to be able to read newspapers, letters and do calculation, as I'm a businesswoman, and then progress. (Group discussion with nomad women involved in business in Somaliland)

The picture is complex, but revealing. Some parents portrayed educated people as possessing lightness and uneducated ones as in darkness. They described the advantages in terms of being able to read and understand formal notices and procedures.

“You see educated people are full of knowledge, their brains are full of knowledge. They can read and write, so nobody cheats them in court with written statements or court order. They also speak well (i.e. articulate with reason) so that they are able to explain their case with authority and among themselves. The educated don't spend a long time arguing on the same thing over and over again like we (uneducated) do.....

Uneducated people have an empty brain, brain without knowledge or empty like a newborn baby. So they sometimes gets cheated by authorities or dishonest people because they can't read and write and can't communicate well to argue for their case”. (Woman from rural village in Somaliland)

“Educated ones are like a plant with a flower.... Uneducated ones are like a plant with no flower”. (Urban parent)

Reflecting on priority problems and needs, an elderly male nomad said during an interview in the car: “It

would be nice if you help us in getting drugs for our animals. Especially, if you can find poisonous drugs to kill hyenas from our village. They are attacking our cattle and camels and even start attacking people. Water pump is also very important for us”

When pressed about his earlier suggestion that the community demands and benefits from education, he said: “Look at my eyes (pointing to his closed eyes) - this what it means being educated. And look at my eyes again (pointing to his open eyes) - this the educated man. But for me as you can see I’m an old man and it’s too late for me. For children and young people it is good

4.2 Factors affecting enrolment in schools and education centres

Despite the near unanimous demand for education, an overwhelming majority (over 80% of boys and 90% of girls) of the school age population of Somaliland are not receiving any education. One of the reasons for this is the absence of schools. However, this is too simple an answer to account for all the school age children not in school. Other reasons relate to the quality of schooling on offer and a complex nexus of socio-economic and cultural influences.

· Distance to school or centre : the economic dimension

Parents, from the city and rural communities, educators and INGOs officials, all described distance from school or learning centres as a major factor keeping children and their basic education apart. Distance is tied closely to both economic and cultural practices. Children, especially girls, are an economic asset and assist their parents in domestic and commercial activities. Distances of 10 km require about 1 hour of travelling time in each direction and, added to the time in school, are about the maximum amount of time that parents will spare their children. It appears these indirect costs can outweigh the benefits accruing from schooling. The longer the distance to the site of education the higher are the costs of lost labour and the higher the likelihood that children will not go to school or of them being obliged to drop out. Urban parents also associated distance with the higher direct costs of bus fares to school.

The above situation does not appear to be improving in post conflict Somaliland, especially for girls. As many men who fled the war have not returned, women are increasingly engaged in business and in household decision-making. Although mothers' earning potential is increasing, girls’ opportunities for education have not been enhanced. Daughters of working mothers are more likely to be pressured to perform the domestic chores in their mother’s absence. Gender stereotypes appear to have been reinforced as boys are not seen as possible replacements in the home.

Reflecting on this one respondent said:

“Because there are more jobs for women or mothers than men after the war the family relies more on and use girls for household work. The mother needs to free herself to work in the market. That means, unless a family employ a housemaid like those rich people, girls stay at home, because boys and adult men can not do domestic work and it is not common in our culture.” (Male parent, teacher)

· Distance to school or centre: the socio-cultural dimension

As noted elsewhere by Psacharopoulos (1994), although the distance covered or the time spent to access a given school or centre may be the same for both sexes, the associated opportunity costs are seen as different for male and female children in Somaliland. The opportunity costs of girls attending school are seen as higher for a variety of reasons.

As mentioned above, girls are perceived as a greater economic asset in domestic pursuits from a young age. They are more likely to assist the mother in bringing up siblings and attending to household chores, especially if the mother has wider economic responsibilities. Attitudes to girls and marriage remain traditional in Somaliland. This is evident from the expressions of interviewees below:

“ In nomad camp we pay a Koranic-religious teacher when a boy completes the Koran. Girls often do not complete. You see this Koranic education takes a long time, up to 4 or 5 years sometimes. So, girls don't have time to complete the long Koranic education, because they are supposed to help the family in the household.” (Rural, nomadic people)

Another popular view, here expressed by an educated parent from Hargeisa was:

“ Our tradition and culture favours boys education, although we also send more girls to school now than before. You see parents and the society at large are reluctant to send girls to school due to marriage. There is also the issue of housework designated for girls. For example, even if I wish and offer to help in cooking or other household duties my wife does not allow me, she will be ashamed and our neighbours / the community might find it strange”.(Male parent)

Distance to school increases the constraints on educating girls. Interviewees' responses addressed two main issues in this regard. Firstly, parents and others expressed their fears for their daughter's safety when they travel to school. Part of the fear is associated with the mixing of the sexes while unsupervised outside the home and school. Mixed sex primary schools and centres are the norm in Somaliland. Respondents indicated that, especially at puberty and beyond, the community felt school to be a corrupting and dangerous place for girls. They were at risk of being seduced by male students especially while travelling to and from school. The longer the travelling time the greater the fear that girls could be compromised by unwelcome advance.

Secondly, there is the issue of bride price. According to one view, girls are often withdrawn from school in order to marry. This secures immediate economic return for the parents. With marriage, girls' dependence ceases to be the responsibility of the parents so not only do they receive the bride price, they also lose the costs of supporting the female child. The price a girl will command on marriage is affected by her virginity and parents are unwilling to put this at risk by exposing their daughters to corrupting influences or to rumours that might lower the bride price. As a result many parents remove girls from schooling after only a few years, if they enrol them at all, to preserve this economic asset.

Furthermore, many parents are unwilling to invest in girls' education as the benefits are seen to follow her into the family of her husband and provide no return for the parents.

Demand for education relates closely to the prospects of obtaining employment in the formal sector. Girls are seen as less likely to gain such employment especially in Somaliland where these jobs are very scarce. Expenditure on girls' education is thus perceived as having little economic return, a further reason for the low enrolment statistics for girls in education in Somaliland.

· The direct costs of education

Although none of the people interviewed described disadvantages of education, most had concerns both about the direct costs and long-term economic benefits of education. All spoke of the costs of textbook and stationery, of school fees and uniforms. Outside the growing private sector in Somaliland, fees which may appear trivial outside the country, can be significant for those with little or no income. School uniform may be a source of pride for the pupils and for the community, but it can represent a major cost for parents with limited income or means especially where they were not part of a cash economy. Urban parents also considered the bus fare to school to be a significant direct cost.

Many people interviewed talked about the cost-benefit relationships of education. In particular, parents with little or no visible income and those operating outside the cash economy were anxious about the immediate cost of education given the uncertain employment prospects for their children. These are adults who regarded their spending on children's education as an investment in their own security, expecting that they would be supported in old age. They weighed the unpredictable benefits of sending a child to school against the direct financial costs, textbook, stationery, and the opportunity costs, labour, bride price. The benefits of going to school are long-term, and will mainly benefit the child while the parents bear the costs (Bekalo and Bangay, 2002). The larger the sum of direct and opportunity costs, the lower the likelihood of children ever entering school.

Most parents interviewed expected the father to carry the costs, shoulder the responsibilities and take on all the decision-making about children and their education. The mother assumes that role where the father is deceased. However, few suggested that covering the costs of education or decision making was a responsibility to be shared by both parents.

Interestingly, some educators and INGO officials pointed out that in the present situation mothers were the ones to cover the costs of children's education. The effect of the civil conflict has shifted the balance. As more women have become the breadwinners in the family they have become de facto decision-makers in the family. Additionally, fewer educated men were any longer able to support their family either due to a lack of 'proper white collar jobs' or an unwillingness to engage in manual work.

Most of the professional educators and officials talked about collective community responsibility to bear the overall costs of education. They suggested that since the government was poor, community support mobilisation should be more encouraged and organised in the effort to maximise educational provision

and enrolment by assisting the poorest families. They did not describe how this should be organised.

- Limitation of the formal approaches to education

There are 171 schools in Somaliland, mostly sited in towns. These are characterised by overcrowded classes as they have insufficient classrooms to meet the increasing demand for school places. The crowded classrooms of Hargeisa and Burao are diminishing the overall quality of classroom and school experiences of those children who attend.

Many children do not enter formal school, not only because it is unavailable, but also it is not sufficiently flexible to meet their particular circumstances. The formal school system works to a rigid timetable within externally determined school hours and a set school calendar. Yet where most children simply have no choice, but to be economically active, formal schools limit attendance because they are not in harmony with these local needs. The challenge is to provide a flexible, effective response which educates children and adults while fitting into their economic and socio-cultural constraints.

Concerned to educate the country's current school-age population and to meet the needs of older people who have missed out on formal schooling over the years development organisations, in collaboration with local authorities and communities, have been taking encouraging steps to provide alternative educational programmes. The rapid growth of private schools in Somaliland, favouring those with money, is doing little to address education-for-all. Thus local community groups in collaboration with INGOs, have been striving to re-establish formal and alternative education centres in villages and towns.

Promising alternative flexible education programmes, described below, are emerging which respond to many of the issues described above. These programmes are characterised by their diversity. They are often in disused school buildings, their study hours are from 6.00 to 9.00am or at the end of the day, they provide basic skills training to young adults, they are taught by low-paid or volunteer teachers. Equally they may take place in a house donated by a community leader, offer basic literacy and numeracy for women, and be taught by local faith leaders.

5. The potential of flexible education approaches

It is clear from the discussion so far that education-for-all cannot be achieved through the formal education sector alone. It requires an enhanced education system, which may offer a solution where the formal education is not available, insufficiently flexible or unable to attract or retain learners. In what follows, the potential of FEA to maximise the provision of quality education for the majority in Somaliland is explored.

For the purpose of this paper, Flexible Approaches to Education, sometimes referred to as alternative approaches to education or non-formal education can be defined as:

“A Flexible Approach to Education (FAE) is a system providing a variety of education to those who

have no access to the formal system, who need to supplement education already received, or to pursue objectives not catered for by formal schools. Its educational activities may straddle formal and non-formal modes of delivery depending on organisational arrangements, locations, subject content and needs of the learners. Often the programmes are short, but systematically organised to focus on and achieve specific sets of goals, on a regular basis. Hence, it is not the same as informal education, although it may include some dimensions or components of informal learning. Also, it is distinct from formal education in its structure and in that it provides a rapid response to diverse community education and training needs, which are fulfilled through the formal education system”.

“Non-Formal Education (NFE) is any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the formal system to provide a selected type of learning to particular groups in the population, adults as well as children.

Formal Education (FE) is the institutionalised, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured education system, spanning lower primary school to upper reaches of university, governed by full time professionals and sanctioned by government.

Informal Education (IE) covers all remaining educational activity being categorised as the life long process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment.” (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974).

Although the above distinctions are useful to situate FAE, we believe it is equally important to view formal education, non-formal education and flexible approaches to education as providing complementary ways of offering opportunities to learn rather than as discrete entities. The study at the heart of this paper uses this notion complementarily to describe FAE which has the merits of being of broader in scope than formal education and which tends to accommodate a wider range of educational activities and practices.

5.1 The potential of FEA

The potential of FEA to promote UBE can be seen to address the following:

- Increasing educational provision

FEA reduces both direct and opportunity educational costs at the household and national levels. The greater flexibility of FEA in terms of providing education at the nearest convenient place - church or mosque, community leader's compound - means it reduces opportunity costs. Students travel lesser distances and so their labour is unavailable for less time.

The provision of lessons at flexible time and for shorter days further reduces the opportunity costs.

Q: So, are there any possibilities you see to educate a nomadic community like yours?

A: Nomads would attend school if given an opportunity that suits our life style.

Q: What do you mean by suitable life style, you also mentioned suitable time?

A: Night school, for example, after the animals are kept inside or early in the morning between 6:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. before we set off for grazing and watering.

Q: There is no light / electric power, so how can you learn at night

A: By burning fire or kerosene light. (Nomadic mother)

At the same time, decreasing indirect costs and travelling time reduce the fear and risk by increasing the security of female students. The informal centres we saw in Somaliland had nearly an equal number of girls and boys. The chances of girls and young women being enrolled and retained in education are enhanced by the provision afforded by these flexible approaches. Beyond the household, at the community or national level, using existing community settings as alternative places for education eliminates the high direct cost of building new schools, at least in the short to medium term.

· Increasing demand for education

FEA is also marked by greater variation in structure, curricular content and learning methodology aimed at meeting learning needs relevant and attractive to the community. It appears, from our observations of the numbers attending and satisfied with these alternative education centres, to motivate learners to seek education to match demand and enrol to attain basic skills. As can be seen from the conversation below, almost all respondents pointed out the flexibility of NFE in providing basic education, particularly in attracting older children and young women who missed out on formal schooling. They said that the convenient school time in the afternoon increased an educational opportunity for many that may otherwise have not been able to attend. They also said that learners got close attention and support from teachers, making lessons easy and enjoyable. Two teachers from HAVOYOKO non-formal school claimed that there was hardly any drop out in their school. A male restaurant owner in Berbera talked very highly of NFE:

I tell you – NFE is the best way, because it opens at a convenient time. That is why more people including mothers are attending NFE schools. You see, I'm a working man and I know what is working in the community I live in. You said that the Ministry or the people you met in Hargeisa didn't say much about NFE. But we are telling you (asking approval from his friends drinking tea together in the outside teashop), we are a working people who speak and know what is working in front of our eyes. (Male restaurant owner)

A parent in Hargeisa said:

The afternoon HAVOYOKO / NFE class attracts needy students, especially girls and women, because it is open in the afternoon when Somali men chew Khatt or sleep. The women usually get a break in the afternoon because they do not (i.e. at least publicly) chew Khatt. It is Haram (a shame) in our culture for women to chew Khatt. (Male parent)

In an interesting contrast, a female teacher in HAVOYOKO referring to flexible school time said:

I know more and more students are coming to HAVOYOKO, but for me teaching in the afternoon is an odd thing, a strange time to teach. The afternoon is, supposed to be for resting and I never taught in the afternoon whilst I was a teacher in Mogadishu.

Having said that, teaching grown up children and adults is easy in a way. Maintaining discipline is not a problem to start with. We have here 14-30 years-mixed age students. Getting students attention is not difficult as it used to be for me when I taught primary-age children in formal school in Mogadishu. Often young children come without pen / pencils and so on and disciplining them is difficult. But these adult students are very interested in the lesson and attentive. (Female teacher, FEA centre)

However, this demand may be short-lived if those attending find their expectations unfulfilled. The issue of the quality of provision is fundamental and will become tied closely to the economic rewards experienced by those who graduate from the FEA programmes. In addition, as experience shows, the majority who have had no contact with education or dropped out and lost faith in formal education may not be easily attracted. There is evidence from neighbouring countries - Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan - that many children living quite close to the village school never choose to enter (Abrha et al. 1991, BESO-USAID, 1994). Factors such as the relevance of the education have been identified for non-enrolment (Bekalo and Bangay 2002). As Buchmann (1999) suggests, the key to securing attendance and continued motivation appears to be relevance and assurance of achievement. The children we talked to certainly added weight to this conclusion. They disliked subjects they saw as irrelevant and this dislike contributed to their absence from school.

· Reducing costs of instructors

Many FEA programmes have reappraised the training and payment of teachers. Adopting the strategy pioneered by BRAC in Bangladesh (BRAC, 1994, 1995; Lovell and Kaniz, 1989) programmes in Somaliland have introduced accelerated, short teacher training programs. In these schemes, most of the training is spent on the job reducing training costs while ensuring that classes have a teacher. Using the same teachers in short sessions on double or triple shifts increases efficiency. While teachers are still paid low rates, they teach more sessions, increasing their individual earnings and providing instruction for more classes. This serves also to decrease the demand for large numbers of teachers, reducing the training and salary bill at the same time.

The programmes in Somaliland, in common with many other countries, use competent specialist local volunteers as teachers - religious instructors, traditional birth attendants, retired teachers, school

graduates - under the direct supervision and orientation of trained educators. Many of these occasional teachers work on a voluntary basis, further reducing the costs to the providers. The experience of ActionAid Ethiopia and several other similar programmes may offer instructive lesson on how to maintain both quality and cost-effectiveness in training and retaining (e.g. Ali, 1997).

Again, the above has to be seen in the context of Somaliland. Lowering the cost of training and payment of teachers is critical. Teachers' salaries in developing countries usually account for an overwhelming proportion of the education budget, up to 97% in neighbouring and relatively well-off Kenya, leaving little or nothing for other education sector development (Knamiller et al. 1999, Mehorata, 1998).

· Addressing tradition and cultural practices Traditional views towards women as homemaker, wives and mothers can impede initial enrolment and subsequent performance and retention of girls in school (Colclough et al., 2000). The shorter school day of many FEA frees girls at times convenient to them and their families. They can both attend an education centre and complete domestic chores. They do not have to travel far and so the risk of abduction and seduction is reduced.

Furthermore, FEA often involved local influential figures such as religious and community leaders. Not only does this provide an opportunity to educate adult-decision makers, a flexible curriculum allows work with girls and young women to cover practical educational issues, such as health, hygiene, peace studies and human rights as well as providing learning opportunities to develop basic skills, literacy and numeracy. In this regard, the educational programme of Africa Educational Trust (AET) in Somaliland are promising (AET, 2001). Examples of AET's Flexible Education Programmes are presented in appendix 1.

Yet, despite the encouraging recent positive changes in attitudes and values regarding education in general, and education of girls in particular, gender imbalances in education still persist in Somaliland. As the interviews have revealed, girls continue to face gender biases in school, in the family and the community. This is very much evident from the following honestly expressed views of children, both in-school and out-of-school, who seem to have internalised sex-stereotypes relating to education and occupations.

Perhaps, surprisingly, one FEA female student commented:

A women can not solve a complicated problem. For example, she can not become a minister and take responsibility to be a high decision-maker. Also, from our religious and cultural viewpoint, education is more important for boys.

The following interview dialogue with two out-of-school children further illustrates the point.

A: Education is important for boys, not that much for girls because girls can't do or manage what boys do. They (girls) soon get tired and also they are not as brave as boys and men.

Q: But I see in the market here, also in this teashop, women working hard.

A1: Those are a minority, not a great number and an unusual situation.

A2: Yes, I agree in part with what my friend said. You see those you mentioned working in the market are older women, not young girls.

Q: Well, those I saw are not all old – there are quite a few young women. Besides, don't you think that it's young girls who eventually become grown up women or mothers.

A1: As far as I'm concerned girls only know better how to beautify themselves and waiting for marriage to attract a husband.

Q: I think they(girls) do a lot of work in the house, supporting the family.

Group A: Oh ... That is nothing, it is an easy work which girls do.

Q: But let me tell you something – two of my best teachers at university were women.

A: (silence).

Q: Also, I have seen in HAVOYOKO here some girls are doing better than boys.

A: Silence, then .. Oh you are wrong ... You try to tell us things as if we don't know. (Two boys, out-of-school)

Other viewpoints were expressed.

Another FEA female said:

My mother used to tell me that after 13 years old, education is not important for girls. She thinks or fears girls will be spoiled in school if they stay there until the time of marriage. But I do not think is should be as my mum feels. Here in the school we all feel that anyone should be given an opportunity to learn as far as he or she can. (Female FEA student)

Although a few respondents acknowledged that girls' household responsibility was affecting their school performance, they tended to maintain the view that girls lack natural capability.

Yes, girls can be competitive as is the case in our school. Last year, two girls stood 1st in their respective classes. But this year we worked hard and myself and my friend got 1st and 2nd positions in our class. So we worked hard to make sure that we outperform girls as always expected. (Schoolboy)

On the other hand, although opinions vary again, some parents and many educators said that girls outperformed boys. Reasons given included girls being more disciplined and hardworking during their limited time available. Boys were said to be undisciplined and more interested in spending their time in leisure activities and chewing Khatt than on education.

In my school experience, in the last 3 years teaching here, I witnessed one girl stand 1st in my class. There is also another girl in the other class performing better than boys. You asked me if you are doing anything special here, but as you can see it for yourself, I don't think we do anything bad to the boys or a special thing for girls. Simply, the girls regularly attend class more than boys. The boys are busy playing football, chewing Khatt and watching videos in the video shop or watching Television. (Female teacher, on-formal centre)

We deliberately sought the views of children. They expressed their reasons for being out of school in terms of family poverty and the absence of schools, but the lasting impression was of the chaos that conflict had brought to their lives disrupting their chances of getting an education.

They mostly liked the subjects they had experienced because of extrinsic reasons, such as the qualities of their teachers. Dislike on the other hand was mostly down to the intrinsic properties of the subject. They could see no value or relevance in its study. They did not mention resource issues as affecting why they did not attend school.

Children's views echoed their parents in almost every other aspect of our enquiry. They welcomed non-formal approaches because these provided opportunities for education otherwise missing for them. They were surprisingly stereotypical in the views of the place of girls in education and, as we have seen, held strong views about the inferior academic performance of girls.

6. Conclusion

As a consequence of the political unrest and violent conflict in recent years in Somaliland, almost all formal modern learning systems ceased to function and educational information has been destroyed. No formal education took place in the whole of Somalia at the height of the civil war, for at least two years between 1991-2, although Koranic Schools continued to function. These have been described as the only and most sustainable educational institutions, operating even at a time of crisis (Elmi, 1993; Bennars et al. 1996; Morah 2000). The traditional Koranic School has always provided religious education, and basic numeracy and literacy in Arabic. Importantly in Islamic Somaliland, it reaches the majority of students and thus is most accessible to even the most disadvantaged of communities. Although we could not confirm this through our observations, according to the UNICEF reports (1997c, 1999) and Morah (2000), unlike other schools where the number gap between girls and boys was wider, between 37% and 43% pupils in Koranic schools were girls. Increasing the place of this institution to deliver enhanced secular basic education within other, formal systems deserves serious attention.

Encouragingly, since the 1990s, Somaliland has been making positive progress towards restoring peace

and stability and revitalising education. Significant progress has been observed in building the capacity of the formal school system in the last 10 years, from almost none in 1991/2 to 171 functioning primary schools in late 2001.

Yet, with all their merits, formal schools provide access to basic education for a fraction (17%) of the country's children, mostly due to the limited nature and scope of the system. Notably nomadic groups, girls and the poor in urban and rural areas do not attend formal primary schools and are not likely to in the near future, partly due to the scarcity of schools compounded by a lack of resources. There are also several thousands of illiterate, innumerate and unskilled young men and women disadvantaged because of civil conflict over the past decade or so.

Furthermore, with peace now prevailing and the rapid return of displaced inhabitants, populations are increasing again. This, in turn, is likely to increase the demand for education. The challenge is to develop an educational approach which reaches the majority who have had no access to education for a variety of reasons. Such education needs to be time and cost effective.

The FEA programmes developed in Somaliland by various institutions provide a way forward to universalise basic education. However, although support for FEA is gradually emerging in Somaliland, in many other countries it is not yet wholeheartedly supported (Bekalo and Bangay, 2002). Perhaps due to its diverse and flexible nature, it has often been overlooked and underestimated, by governmental organisations and centralised systems especially. One possible explanation is that FEA is viewed as 'low profile' or 'poor man's' education'. Another alternative if charitable explanation is that it falls outside the previous experience of key players of the formal education system.

Thus to maximise the potential contribution of FEA, there needs to be a climate of positive opinion towards FEA as a key contributor to the education of children and adults. It has to be given a clear policy mandate as an essential sector of education, followed by an effective implementation strategy recognising that the graduates of FEA centres have gained skills and are basically literate and numerate. This recognition is often missing. Perhaps this is due to the nature of FEA itself. It is essentially diverse, a characteristic which more rigid and prescribed, formal systems find hard to accommodate. Thus, whilst accommodating educational provision through FEA is time and cost-effective, it would neither be totally cost-free nor a simple matter.

Furthermore, there is little information about the effectiveness of FAE or its true quality. There are no studies of the products of FAE centres to find out if they are sufficiently literate, numerate or skilled to be successful in the emerging Somaliland. We do not know if the benefits of education through FAE are outweighing their costs as perceived and measured by the communities in Somaliland's towns, villages and by the significant number of nomadic herds people.

What we do know is that there is a high and growing demand for education which needs to be satisfied through a concerted and co-ordinated approach involving both the formal and non-formal sectors. We know that provision has to be flexible at times which take into account the need of communities for their

children to be active in the informal economy. We also observe that girls and women face deeply held prejudice in gaining access to basic education. The formal sector is not yet able to meet the educational demands. The major challenge now is how to integrate and scale up flexible approaches within the formal system to providing quality basic education-for-all.

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