

# A City-centric Analytical Lens to Understand Out of School Children: A Case from Mogadishu, Somalia.

## Introduction

Approximately 244 million children lack access to education (UNESCO, 2022). Conflict is among the primary factors hindering their ability to attend school (Russell & Quaynor, 2017). Somalia, a country that has faced conflict in the past few decades, also encounters the issue related to out of school children. Recent estimates from 2020 state that approximately 3 million children in the country are out of school. There is a plethora of literature on complexities with regard to out of school children in conflict and post-conflict settings through the viewpoint of regions and countries; however, this brief highlights a city-centric analytical lens focused on Mogadishu to examine the issue of out-of-school children. Firstly, the brief provides a snapshot of Somalia's education landscape and zooms into the city-level dynamics of Mogadishu city. Secondly, it addresses the drivers/causes of out of school children. Lastly, the study presents a series of recommendations through evidence of interventions that could help reduce out of school children in Mogadishu.

## Educational Landscape Somalia

The evolution of education in Somalia reflects the country's complex social and political history. In the context of education, history could be viewed through three main governing systems: pre-colonial rule before 1884, when qur'anic schools focused on Islamic teaching and preserving Somalian culture was the main educational setup. Secondly, the colonial period divided Somalia into British governance in the North and the Italian administration in the South with their shift to different educational objectives, not aligned with local and cultural values. Thirdly, in the post-colonial era, the Somali government faced

extreme challenges to merge two different educational systems. In the process of this reconciliation, there was a high student attrition rate, specifically in the southern region. Evidence of this is that 76% of the South students could not complete elementary education. However, in the north, there were lower drop-out rates of 15%. In this era, there were various efforts made by both civilian and military governments to unify the education system and increase access to education. A testament to this was the increase in the percentage of expenditure on education. Acknowledging all those efforts, there is still limited discussion about why there is a high percentage of out of school children, especially in the context of the city of Mogadishu. The following section explains the dynamics of Mogadishu in the context of out of school children.

## Education Dynamics in Mogadishu

In recent years, Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, has witnessed a significant population surge. Current estimates suggest a population of nearly three million (Earle, 2021). While this growth fuels the city's rapid development, it also presents intimidating challenges such as overcrowding, overburdened infrastructure, limited employment opportunities, and crucial services like education (Hagmann et al., 2022; Muchunu et al., 2023). These challenges are partly rooted in the prolonged violence and turmoil that have plagued the city since the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, ushering in an era of lawlessness and factional conflict (Elmi & Barise, 2006).

Somalia's pursuit of recovery has witnessed the revival of public schools in Mogadishu, although with

inadequate funding from the government and international donors (Hassan & Wekesa, 2017).

The financial resource constraints also impact the provision of the facilities within the public schools. Due to limited facilities, the private sector has become a significant stakeholder in education provision. These private schools follow a curriculum aligned with international standards to prepare students to be active global community members. However, this brings us to another core issue related to the household's capacity to enroll their students in private schools and pay higher tuition fees. Looking into the composition of schools in Mogadishu, there are 626 primary and 581 secondary schools, of which only 4% are public schools. Moreover, another parallel system in the city is the Madrasas. Typically funded by community donations or private ownership, both in terms of fee payment and construction, these institutions prioritize religious instruction (Daun & Walford, 2004). Based on this composition of education systems, there are significant challenges to understanding enrollments, drop-out, and out of school children.

### **Drivers/causes of Out of School children in Mogadishu**

Based on the educational landscape, the three main drivers of out of school children in the city are the number of public schools, the distribution of overall schools, and the household income to afford private school.

The issue of out-of-school children in Mogadishu is exceptionally critical. Local authorities estimate that nearly one million children in the city are not attending school. This alarming figure highlights the dire state of education in the capital and reflects the nationwide educational challenges. Only 23% of children eligible for primary education are enrolled, and a meager 17% progress to secondary education (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020). Such a drastically low gross enrollment rate indicates a system in deep distress, incapable of realizing the

potential of its youth. Not only is the number of public schools in the city limited, but the distribution of these schools also follows a specific spatial pattern influenced by historical, economic, and social factors. Central and peripheral districts have the city's highest concentrations of out-of-school children. In the central areas, Xamarweyne, Shangani, Xamar Jajab, and Shibis are among the districts with the most out-of-school children.

Another crucial factor is that, on average, the cost of secondary school per child ranges between \$180 to \$300 annually, and the cost of primary school per child is reported between \$120 to \$240 annually. However, these costs seem modest compared to global standards, so it is crucial to understand the economic challenges of the households. Moreover, there are other costs related to schooling, such as textbooks, uniforms, and transportation. Considering the average family size of 6 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022), it is a tremendous economic burden for the household to have more children attending school.

Let us present a case where a household has four children; two are in primary school, and two are in secondary.

$$\text{Cost of Primary (2 children)} = 180 \times 2 = \$240$$

$$\text{Cost of Secondary (2 children)} = 240 \times 2 = \$480$$

$$\text{Total Annual Cost} = 240 + 480 = \$720$$

Based on the GDP per capita for Somalia, \$1,364, approximately 52.7% of the income for this individual will go towards schooling, excluding expenses related to the purchase of textbooks, uniforms, and transportation. This case just presented to identify challenges for low-income households with more than three children.

### **Policy Recommendations**

The background of these challenges is based on institutional factors (in terms of composition and distribution of schools) and individual household factors related to the affordability of education.

Some interventions have evidence to ensure that education continuity is possible.

Firstly, the Madrasas play a significant role in the city to help address access to education for households who cannot afford schooling. The nature of financial obligations is flexible, as there is financial support for families that cannot afford education for their children. Community support is the central theme observed through this institution's effectiveness. Another added benefit of Madrasas is that the value system that specific households want for their children aligns with religious and cultural values. Secondly, in recent years, the government has developed public schools in areas where previously there were no such schools. Along with infrastructure development, international organizations financially supported the incentivization of the education staff; the teachers were being paid approximately \$325 per month, and the head teacher was getting paid approximately \$ 400 per month. This endeavor was to ensure that the public schools could compete with the standards of the private schools and ensure more enrollment for the students not part of formal education systems.

In addition, another recommendation is that Micro-level interventions could reduce the burden on the households and introduce initiatives or interventions such as school meals, textbook provision, and uniform provision. All these different services could motivate parents to send their children to school. An example of this from a conflict setting is Syria, where the World Food Program distributed food for pre-primary and primary students; however, the purpose of the intervention was focused on the health and nutrition of the children, and it still had an impact on reducing the economic burden on the households as well(WFP, 2022). Reducing this burden may increase the number of children returning to school.

Another major factor, conflict and displacement, is crucial to understand within the context of Somalia,

and there is a need to understand factors that strengthen the educational pathways to ensure a reduction in out of school children. An example was a multi-initiative intervention that ensured the retention of children excluded due to crisis and conflict (EAA,n.d). However, there was a specific focus on girls' access to education in this intervention.

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