

ICT in Education in Somalia

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Source: *World Factbook*¹

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This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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Overview

Somalia gained its independence in 1960, and 10 years later the country was plagued by a civil war that lasted for 21 years. By 1991, this war had ceased, but the education system had disintegrated beyond repair. Sporadic fighting among warlords guarding territorial interest continued until 2004 when the transitional federal government (TFG) was installed to normalise the administration and bring back law and order.

The country is still facing political challenges. In June 2006, a loose coalition of clerics, business leaders, and Islamic court militias, known as the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC), defeated powerful Mogadishu warlords and took control of the capital. The courts continued to expand, spreading their influence throughout much of southern Somalia and threatening to overthrow the TFG.

The education sector is greatly affected by this political instability which has resulted in the displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure and schools, and looting of equipment and books. As much as things are slowly returning to normal, thanks to the efforts of UN bodies, NGOs, and local communities, education system revival and reforms are just but beginning. And as much as ICT is acknowledged as a possible tool in the reform agenda and a possible catalyst to bring about better quality and more accessible education in Somalia, it does not feature in the current plans of most of the organisation working in Somalia or the ministry in charge.

Country Profile

Somalia covers a land mass of 637,657 square kilometres on the east coast of Africa bordering Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti. Years of fighting between rival warlords and an inability to deal with famine and disease have led to the deaths of up to one million people. Somalis, which comprise a former British protectorate and an Italian colony, was created in 1960 when the two territories merged. Since then, its development has been hindered by deep political divisions.

Agriculture is the most important sector, with livestock normally accounting for about 40% of GDP and about 65% of export earnings, but Saudi Arabia's ban on Somali livestock due to Rift Valley Fever concerns has severely hampered the sector. Nomads and semi-nomads, who are dependent upon livestock for their livelihood, make up a large portion of the population. Forty-four percent of the population is under the age of 15.¹

Table 1 provides some selected socio-economic indicators for the country.

Table 1: Socio-economic Indicators: Somalia

Indicator	
Population	8.86 million (2006 est.)

Languages	Somali (official), Arabic, Italian, English
Adult literacy rate	19.2% (2002)
GDP (US dollars)	\$5.023 billion (2006 est.)
Human Development Index	Not available
Human Poverty Index	Not available

The Education System

Somalia has adopted the 8-4-4 education system with eight years of primary education, four year of secondary, and four years of undergraduate studies. The Ministry of Education is responsible for primary, secondary, technical, vocational, primary and technical teacher training, and non-formal education. The Ministry of Higher Education and Culture oversees secondary teacher-training colleges, the Somali Academy for Science and Arts, the National Museum, and the National Library. The six National Universities are autonomous.²

Education and formal classroom learning opportunities are limited and unavailable for a majority of children in Somalia. There have been substantial increases in the number of operational schools and in enrolment rates since the transitional federal government came to power in 2005, but considerable disparities in the quality of and access to primary education are still problematic in parts of the country because of the socio-economic, cultural, and political realities. Primary education is paid for and managed by regional educational committees which assumed the role of the government during the war. Only in Puntland is education free and teachers are paid by the administration.³

Most existing schools are concentrated in and around urban areas and are mainly financed by fees or other forms of support from parents and communities, with some input from external agencies. There are various NGOs, both local and international, working in the education sector in Somalia and an education sectoral committee under the Somalia Support Secretariat sitting in Nairobi, Kenya.

Somalia has one of the lowest primary school enrolment rates in the world. A survey of primary schools in 2003-04 showed that there are 1,172 operating schools with a total enrolment of over 285,574 children representing a 19.9% gross enrolment ratio. Gender-related disparities remain an area of major concern. The survey results revealed that only slightly over one-third, or 37%, of pupils are girls at the lower primary school levels. Since the 2003-04 survey, there has been very little progress on reducing the gender disparity, which increases rapidly in higher grades.⁴

Working alongside other UN agencies, NGOs, local development groups, and the regional educational committees, UNICEF has helped develop a new national curriculum and textbooks for primary grades. Somali educationalists joined a two-year process that was fraught with logistical difficulties and political sensitivities. A series of consultative workshops ensured that all stakeholders had a voice in the process, resulting in a “home-grown” curriculum that respects cultural differences while advocating for the rights of all children. The curriculum is now in place in nine out of 10 primary schools.⁵

Table 2 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.

Table 2: Selected Education Data^{6,10}

Indicator	
Net primary enrolment	62.5% (2005)
Net secondary enrolment	24% (2005)
Gross tertiary enrolment	5% (2005)
Adult literacy	37% (2005)
Gender Parity Index	Not available
Education expenditure as a % of GDP	Not available

ICT Policies

Since the transitional federal government (TFG) came into power, a lot of effort through various international organisations, notably UNICEF and the UNESCO, has been to increase primary school enrolment with the adopted minimum standards of quality primary education and to improve access to post-primary education for Somali children and youth, including technical, vocational and higher.^{7,9}

Some of the strategies used by the UN country team in Somalia in collaboration with the TFG include the following:

- A massive enrolment and back-to-school campaign to increase the number of child- and girl-friendly learning spaces to 7,313
- Provision of alternative primary education to 18,000 school-age children
- Extension of school-feeding programme to cover 60,000 children
- Targeting of female enrolment of 40% to 50% at all levels
- Provision of literacy, life skills, and vocational training to 5,000 ex-militia
- In-service training for 1,800 head teachers and mentoring for 4,500 teachers
- Textbook induction for 4,500 upper primary teachers
- Conducting of Grade 8 examinations for 4,095 students and continuing to reach out to Arabic medium schools to unify the curriculum

At the secondary school levels, the policies were geared towards the following:

- Increasing enrolment in secondary schools to 25,000 students, targeting 35% female participation
- Completing 70% of the development of curriculum and assessment systems to international standards
- Increasing enrolment in technical-vocational training to 8,000 trainees, providing 1,540 textbooks in 64 titles to vocational training centres (VTCs), and upgrading managers and instructors of VTCs
- Developing a scholarship programme for 134 Somali university students

- Having HIV/AIDS mainstreamed as part of life skills in teacher training and publications including for children and youth and alternative methods of communicating to youth including through radio programmes

These objectives form the basis of a draft education policy that also aims to increase capacity for staff at the Ministry of Education, reconstruct schools that have been destroyed, and improve the curriculum.

Infrastructure

Despite the lack of a central government and an economy in ruins, and to the surprise of its closest neighbours, Somalia's telecommunication sector boasts cutting-edge technologies and a mushrooming of wireless solutions. For several years, the country was, to all intents and purposes, disconnected from the rest of the world, but it now has the lowest calling rates in the region.

Prior to 1991, the country had only 8,500 operational fixed lines, most of which were in the capital, Mogadishu. In the ensuing political turbulence, that infrastructure was destroyed, along with its Public Switch Transmission Network. This left Somalis without the means to connect to the large expatriate community of friends and relatives.

After the war, infrastructure had to be built from scratch, but the situation has developed quickly off a low base. Table 3 provides a snapshot of the state of ICT infrastructure in the country.

Table 3: ICT in Somalia¹

Indicator	
Telephone lines	100,000 (2005)
Mobile phone subscribers	500,000 (2005)
Internet users	90,000 (2005)
Television stations	4 (2001)
Internet hosts	3 (2006)
Radio stations	11 FM;1 shortwave (2001)

ICT in schools

The seemingly healthy ICT infrastructure is found mostly in the urban centres, especially the capital city, Mogadishu. This translates to limited use of ICT in the schools, most of which are located outside of Mogadishu. Policy efforts have been focused on reviving the education system, increasing enrolments, and reducing the school drop-out rate and not ICT. There are some private schools that use ICT but more as an administrative tool than as something integrated into teaching and learning. Most of these schools are around the urban centres, especially Mogadishu and in the semi-autonomous province of Puntland.

ICT in tertiary

The UNDP, together with other partners including the World Bank and the African Virtual University (AVU), are supporting the Somalia Somali Institutional and Capacity Development project (SICAD) whose outputs include capacity-building of key government bodies, civil service training, and tertiary institutions through increased use of ICTs.⁸

The Online Distance Learning Initiative which was launched in 2005 enables students to attain internationally accredited university qualifications and build their research capacities through expanded access to global learning and knowledge through partnerships with institutions in other countries.

The six institutions being supported by UNDP under the World Bank Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) Distance Learning and Connectivity Project are East Africa University (Bossaso), Puntland State University (Garowe), the Somali Institute of Management and Administration Development (SIMAD) (Mogadishu), Mogadishu University, University of Hargeisa and Amoud University (Borama). They are also part of the African Virtual University (AVU) network giving them access to digital resources and on-line short courses. Long courses in journalism and teacher education are underway.¹¹

Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

All efforts by the government and the donor community have been placed on getting the school system to work and encouraging parents to send their children to school. Efforts have also been put in disarming young militia and re-integrating them into the education system either through the school system or vocational training centres. UNICEF and UNESCO have taken up the challenge of reconstruction in Somalia and are promoting several projects, but none of these have any ICT components.

In 2006, UNDP in partnership with the World Bank provided resources for inclusion of the six Somalia universities into the African Development Fund/NEPAD Teacher Education Project through the African Virtual University network. This effort was aimed at developing teacher and training capacity for Somalia faster and at the same quality with the rest of the region.

Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Table 4 provides a summary of the current stage of ICT development in Somalia in terms of enabling or constraining features in the education system.

Table 6: Factors Influencing ICT Adoption

Factors	Enabling Features	Constraining Features
<i>Political instability</i>		Somalia continues to face serious political problems that have disrupted the education system. This instability does

		not provide an enabling platform for using ICT in education.
<i>Policy framework</i>		Due to the instability in the country, efforts are only beginning to bring children back to class. The focus of the country is, therefore, more on enrolment and vocational training. As much as it is acknowledged that ICT can play a role, no effort is in place to introduce ICT in the teaching and learning environment.
<i>Infrastructure and cost of bandwidth</i>		The war destroyed most of the basic telecommunications infrastructure. New wireless networks are coming into place and providing the much-needed connectivity, albeit in the commercially viable places. Most of these wireless technologies are based on costly satellite networks.
<i>Electricity</i>		As much as the situation is slowly improving, there are vast areas and communities still without electricity. Only the urban areas and the far more stable Puntland have a consistent supply of electricity, leaving the other areas inaccessible for ICT.
<i>Culture and lifestyle</i>		One of the biggest challenges for education experts in Somalia is the nomadic nature of communities. It has been difficult to retain children in school due to this lifestyle and by extension a challenge to introduce ICT in education.
<i>Gender equity</i>	War, poverty, and community disparity are among the factors that have worked against education for girls. UNICEF and other UN organisations, NGOs, and local communities are making deliberate efforts to encourage enrolment for girls and even teacher-training for women.	
<i>New technologies</i>	Wireless technologies have started to come into Somalia. With these technologies, there are possibilities that deployment into the education	

	sector can come fast if the policies are put in place.	
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Notes

- 1 The World Factbook 2007. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html>
- 2 World Education Services. Profile, Somalia. 2004. <http://www.wes.org/ca/wedb/somalia/soedov.htm>
- 3 “Puntland (Somalia) to Introduce Free Primary Schools.” Afrolnews. <http://www.afrol.com/articles/16083>
- 4 Somalia Education. UNICEF. http://www.unicef.org/somalia/education_56.html
- 5 Communities unite around education in Somalia. UNICEF. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/somalia_25906.html
- 6 UNESCO Institute of Statistics. Education in Somalia. http://www.uis.unesco.org/profiles/EN/EDU/countryProfile_en.aspx?code=7060
- 7 Minutes, United Nations Country Team for Somalia, Annual Retreat 19-21 January 2006. <http://unctlists.undp.org/index.cfm?module=AnnualReport&CountryID=SOM>
- 8 UNDP. Somalia, Programmes, Institutional and Capacity Development. <http://www.so.undp.org/page.asp?id=662>
- 9 UN Development Group. Somalia Team, Work Plan. <http://unctlists.undp.org/index.cfm?module=AnnualReport&page=Workplan&CountryID=SOM&Year=2005&LanguageID=en>
- 10 Somalia, Basic Education Indicators. <http://education.nairobi-unesco.org/PDFs/somalia.pdf>
- 11 “Capacity Building: Somali Tertiary Institutions Launch Online Distance Learning Initiative.” <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/SOMALIAEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20753705~menuPK:2009582~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:367665,00.html>

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