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# PROMOTING GIRLS' EDUCATION IN SOMALIA

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Oxfam in Somalia works through five partners, Candlelight, GECPD, TASS, SAFE and SAACID, to provide primary education scholarships to girls from poor families; second chance education scholarships to older girls who have never attended primary; numeracy, literacy and vocational skills training to women; in service training for female teachers and facilitations to form an association; capacity building of community education committees (CECs) and school management committees.

This Case Study was a background briefing for Oxfam Novib's 2013 Annual Review, prepared in partnership with , and describes the programme in Somalia. Although it is not a formal evaluation it does consider lessons learned by both Oxfam Novib and its partner organisations.

These Case Studies are shared in the form in which they were submitted, often written by partners whose first language is not English, and have not been edited since submission. We believe that the meaning is clear enough, and the authenticity of the reporting and the availability of Southern Voices on development makes their inclusion in the Oxfam iLibrary worthwhile for sharing with external readers.

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**Programme Partners: Candlelight for Health Education and Environment, Galkayo Education Centre for Peace and Development (GECPD), SAACID, Schools Association for Formal Education (SAFE), Tadamun Social Society (TASS)**

# AIM OF THE PROJECT

The education project aims to increase girls enrolment in primary schools through scholarships and awareness raising campaigns on the importance of girls education; it also provides numeracy, literacy and vocational skills training to women who then go on to start small businesses and support their families. In service training of female teachers improves the quality of education and provides role models to the girls who want to stay on in school to be “someone”.

# CONTEXT

After twenty years of protracted conflict, Somalia is finally settling in an uneasy calm with so much hope and enthusiasm for the future. Because of the key poverty drivers in Somalia (protracted conflict, failure of governance, poorly managed disasters, poor access to basic services, gender disparity, and inadequate economic opportunities), the human development indicators, as far as these are available, are particularly alarming. Overall, Somalia ranks at 161 out of 163 countries on the HDI, with 22.4% under-five mortality, 60 % living on less than USD 1 per day, access to potable water and sanitation stands at 25 %, and primary school enrolment at only 31 %. With the war, there was distraction of infrastructure including schools and hospitals.

Somalia scores extremely low on education and health indicators. Culturally, girls' education is not seen as paramount as she will eventually join another family and while at home, she is charged with domestic work and taking care of the family. Despite the absence of a government providing for these essential services in the major part of the country, NGOs and community/Diaspora groups have re-established many of such services, and Oxfam is in a good position to support such initiatives. Oxfam Novib has supported education for girls in all three zones of Somalia, through a network of five intermediate NGOs, each of which supports several schools. The partners have received grants to support girls with scholarships and pay teachers' incentives.

# METHODOLOGY

The five partners went out to communities and formed committees with selected community representatives charged with selection of the needy girls and women. Once selected and verified by our partners, the girls are enrolled for primary education, second chance education and vocational skills training, all on scholarship. The partners also facilitate formation of community education committees with members selected by the community to monitor project progress and offer support. The schools also have management committees also selected from the community, school teachers and where possible ministry of education officials; they are charged with the monitoring of day to day running of the schools and offer advice when issues come up. The committees are trained on their duties.

Community involvement in the selection of the beneficiaries, monitoring of activities and awareness raising campaigns have helped change the perception on girls' education and in some areas seen increase in enrolment of girls. The training of female teachers and formation of the Mudug Female Teachers Association has also changed the mentality towards female teachers. Before, schools did not hire female teachers as believed were not qualified, but our partners have led the way in hiring them and also lobbied with the Ministry (ies) of Education to hire them.

For the project's success, Oxfam Novib gave grants to our partners and they hired project personnel to implement activities including facilitating community committees in section of needy girls. The project officers were also the liaison between our partners and communities. The partners also held meetings with Ministry of education officials and other stakeholders to drum up support for girls' education and hiring of female teachers.

# RESULTS

## Outputs

Five partner organizations namely Candlelight in Somaliland; GECPD and TASS in Puntland; and SAFE and SAACID in South Central contracted to support girls' education and women vocational skills training through scholarships to needy girls and women.

## Outcomes

Number of women and men (girls and boys) that benefitted from access to quality education where possible in co-operation with national authorities. (For exact figures see annual report on girls and women reached by each partner).

## Impact

- With awareness raising campaigns and community involvement in selection of beneficiaries, there is a shift in the attitude towards girls' education. Communities are challenged and have even offered to support some girls.
- Women who have started small businesses after vocational skills training are now able to support their families and are enrolling their girls to school as have seen the importance of an education. Those who are married are now able to participate in decision making as now bringing something to the table.
- Close collaboration with government agencies and communities has further enhanced the buy in on importance of girls' education. The governments have recognized our partners work and pledge when able can support with teachers incentives.
- The formation of Mudug Female Teachers Association has given them voice to demand their rights and ask for better working conditions.

## Policy and practice changes

- Hiring of female teachers is improving with the advocacy to hire them as they are qualified and capable. Our partner schools are leading with hiring female teachers and some are training them in service to improve quality on delivery.
- Collaborations with various stakeholders in education have enabled our partners to avoid replication and apply lessons learnt to improve on their projects. Involvement of the government agencies has also lent credibility to our partners' projects.

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Successes

1. There is a huge gap in girls' enrolment and our partners have made great strides, but the need is more and urgent to consolidate the gains made by assisting the girls in more than two years of schooling.
2. There is increased enrolment in some project areas with communities taking on sponsorship of more girls. In the SAFE project, the community is sponsoring an additional fifty girls.
3. Formation of Mudug female teachers association with twenty three members and in service training of one hundred female teachers not only improves delivery of quality education, but also enables the teachers to demand for their rights for better pay and work conditions. With female teachers working in the schools, girls get role models and see the value of education.
4. With limited funding and Somalia government unable to provide quality education even in Somaliland where they have announced free education, most parents who are able opt to take

their children to private schools. The poor are left out as there is no money to run the schools. Oxfam Novib has also provided short term limited funding and with the current project closing down, the girls sponsored for two years risk dropping out thus reversing the gains so far made.

## Tips and more

- Increase funding to girls education and vocational skills training. This can target primary school education where we pick one lot of girls from grade one to grade eight. Then liaise with other actors to sponsor their secondary education. This ensures the impact is greater.
- Work with government ministries to build their capacity and support them as they take on provision of education to all. They will also need funding at the beginning.
- Consider mobile schools for pastoralist families to provide relevant education that is culturally acceptable.

# HUMAN INTEREST

## Two human interest stories from GECPD

### ASTUR DURAN ABDI

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Astur Duran Abdi was not born yet when her father's life was claimed by a bullet in the prolonged civil war in Somalia in 1997. Her mother had carried her pregnancy for 8 months and it was just a matter of weeks before the family celebrates the birth of the second born. But then fate struck and this is the only account the 16 year old has of the events preceding her birth. She has never understood why her father had to die before he could see her, who did it and what exactly had happened. Attempts to gather more information from her mother have always ended in tears before anything more has been said. Astur has since vowed never to inquire any further and settled for the sketchy explanation.



But despite the heartrending childhood history, the outspoken and gallant Astur has always maintained a cheerful mood. Whenever her name is called, the caller will always be greeted with a smile; a smile of confidence and hope for a better future.

When she joined Harfo Girls and women center in 2005, thanks to the support of Oxfam Novib, it was not long before she was accustomed to school environment. By the second day, she was already freely interacting with almost all members of the school fraternity including fellow students, teachers and matrons. Although it is her mother who brought her for the first time in school, Astur insists that even at that tender age she knew why she had to attend school. "It is because I wanted to be out of ignorance. I also wanted to improve my life and that of my siblings." she asserts.

She will be completing her grade 8 in May 2013 but on looking back at the situation at home, she doubts if it would be possible to complete up to this level if she was not supported by Oxfam Novib or any other donor. "Surely my mother could not have afforded the cost with all the responsibilities of caring for other siblings she got from her second marriage,' She explains.

Although she is the only one attending school, Astur has not kept the knowledge she acquires in school to herself. When not at school or busy with other household chores, she has dedicated part of her time teaching her younger siblings how to read and write. “I also teach them the songs and poems we learn at school about effects of FGM, environmental conservation and many other issues.” She says. Besides passing the knowledge to her siblings, Astur says she has also been able to apply whatever she learns at school in her daily household chores such as maintaining cleanliness at home and ensuring a balanced diet for the family. Her thirst for education has motivated her mother to enroll in GECPD Adult Literacy programme.

*Mama Hawa, founder of GECPD, and girls singing*



Astur is grateful that through the support of Oxfam Novib, she has been able to complete at least up to grade 8 of formal primary- a historic achievement in her extended family for a girl. When the final examinations come at the end of May 2013, she is confident of doing well. Her teachers are exuding confidence that she will pass. Her ambition is to become a teacher to pass on the knowledge she has acquired in her days in school to others.

“You know the teacher is the brightest person in the world. All the others are taught by the teacher. Even doctors and engineers,” She says in a resolute voice trying to demonstrate why her career choice is the best. Her only worry and that of her teachers is that she may not be able to proceed with her education after grade 8 unless more support comes her way. But even in this dilemma the positive thinking Astur counts herself lucky that atleast she has gone up to grade 8. Her call to Oxfam Novib is to continue supporting other girls from poor families to atleast acquire formal basic education.

## **MALYUN HUSSEIN FARAH**

The 17 year old girl is glad that she has gained much knowledge and understanding of life besides the ability to read and write. The 5<sup>th</sup> born in a family of 10 had no hope of acquiring atleast basic formal education since in her home village of Gahandaale –some 10 kilometres from Harfo town- there is no single school.

At the age of 7, her day was already long and tedious. She would wake up early in the morning to get to the daily chores walking distances in search of water, firewood and looking after the goats- the cultural expectation of a girl of her age. She had already undergone and survived the pain and agony of the harmful traditional practice of FGM. Except her elder brother who had been sent to stay with relatives in Harfo town to get education, the young girl and the rest of her siblings were not attending any school. Life in the pastoral nomadic village inspired no hope for a better future than what her grandmother, mother and elder sisters had gone through. She had resigned to this fate.



But her life was to be transformed when Malyun Hussein Farah got the rarest chance to visit relatives in Harfo town in 2007. She was 11 years then. It is at this time that GECPD was enrolling girls from poor and pastoral families for its formal and non-formal education programs. After consultations with her mother, the relatives approached a member of Harfo Girls and Women Center Community Education Committee to have Malyun considered for an opportunity to education at the center. After an assessment of her situation and in consultation with GECPD, she was enrolled under the Second Chance



Education program since she was already past the grade 1 enrollment age of 7 to 8 years. Within 2 years, thanks to the consistent support of Oxfam Novib, Malyun had successfully completed all the 3 levels of 6 months each of the program enabling her to join formal primary at grade 5. Since she had no permanent abode in Harfo, she was accommodated at Harfo Girls Hostel where she was provided with all boarding necessities. “Accommodation at the hostel gave me an even better opportunity and time to study and learn more through the library and interaction with my classmates, school mates, teachers and the matron.” She says.

The only girl who has attended formal school in her extended family, Malyun is among 34 girls from poor pastoral, orphaned, internally displaced and minority families at Harfo Girls and Women Center, who will be sitting the final Puntland Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) at the end of May 2013. She is grateful that the partnership of GECPD and Oxfam Novib has enabled her come this far. “I thank GECPD and Oxfam Novib for shading a beam of light in the path of my life. Now I can see through my future.” She says with a bright smile on her face. Her only wish and request is for the support to continue so that it can reach and help her friends and sisters whom she left in their home village and who still have had no chance to education.

As for her, the sky is the only limit. If she gets the required support, she hopes to proceed to secondary education and hopefully go for higher learning. Her ambition is to become a Journalist. She wants to utilize the power of the mass media to tell the world the story of the suffering of her people and particularly women and girls and to bring social change. “I would do stories about the effects of insistent droughts and fighting. I will teach how to build peace and respect women rights.” Malyun explains with her eyes focused into the skies as if watching that future becoming a reality.



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This case study was written by Caroline Kiwara and prepared with the support of the Oxfam Novib partners Candlelight, GECPD, SAACID, SAFE and TASS.

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