



# WARARKA. soomaaliya

Thematic Briefing of the  
United Nations  
Country Team Somalia

## Putting youth at the core of the development agenda

Young people in Somalia are not just the future of the country – they are also the majority. Nearly three quarters of the population is under 30 years old. Most are born after the overthrow of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and have only known conflict and violence. An entire generation has missed out on education, employment and knowing what a stable life is. Many lost hope for a better future.

In 2012, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Somalia published its Human Development Report "Empowering youth for peace and development." This report which was based on surveys conducted in more than 3,000 households in south and central Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland revealed that the majority of Somali youth believe they have a right to be educated (82%) and a right to decent work (71%). However, youth feel disempowered by a lack of skills and missing job opportunities. For young women, finding employment is even more difficult due to cultural biases and traditional gender roles.

When it comes to education, Somalia has one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world. The survey showed that in Somalia overall, 27 per cent of youth aged 14-29 have not completed any type of school, 25 per cent attended a Koranic school, 27 per cent attended Primary school and 21 per cent went to secondary school or above. Due to the lack of educational opportunities over the last two decades, only half of young Somalis can read or write. Looking at employment, it does

not look much better: nearly 68 per cent of youth aged 14-29 years are unemployed. Due to the lack of opportunities, many even stopped looking for a job. When asked for the reasons for being unemployed, 20 per cent cite a lack of experience and low pay. A lack of jobs and a lack of skills are also high on the list of reasons for unemployment.

Missing out on education and employment creates frustration and demoralization among many youth. They might be tempted by crime, endangering not only themselves but also their communities.

Despite these challenges, Somali youth also show a great sense of optimism when it comes to the future of their country. They want opportunities to go to school and join the work force. They want to be heard and participate in politics and in rebuilding their nation. They want to shape their own future. If given a chance, youth have the potential to become drivers for peace and stability.

This situation calls for nothing less than a paradigm shift in policies and attitudes towards the role of youth in order to empower and place them at the core of the development agenda.

First signs of progress in this direction can already be seen: the Federal Government of Somalia is currently developing a comprehensive national youth policy, while Somaliland and Puntland ratified youth policies in 2011.

During his recent visit to the United States, H.E. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud announced several new initiatives for young people: empowerment and job creation programmes, a university accreditation system,

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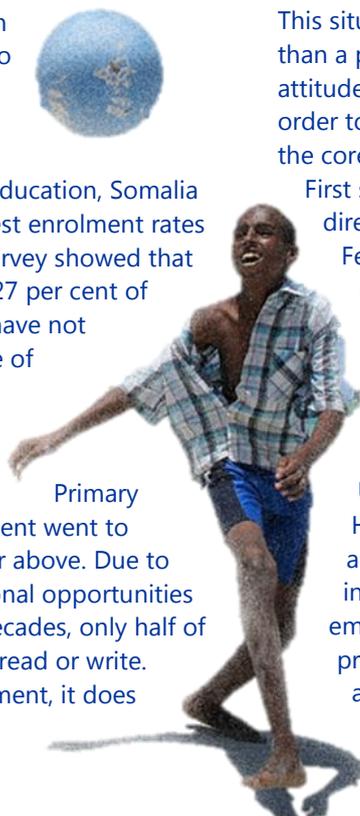
*"Somalia is at a crossroads. Many youth have grown up in a country where education was inaccessible and where security was rare. Now, times are changing and Somali youth can regain dynamism and hope for their future. We were all young at one point and we know that youth want to weigh in on the decisions that affect their lives. Let us link Somali youth up to the vibrant African youth networks in neighbouring countries like Kenya and Uganda and across the continent so that they can share their experience with others and come up with ideas and solutions for their future. In order to support them, we also need to recognize and harness their full potential. We need to focus on the three "Es": education, employment and empowerment. These challenges will be a central issue for Somalia over the next 20 years."*

Philippe Lazzarini  
Humanitarian and Resident  
Coordinator for Somalia

## INTERVIEW

Ilwad Elman

Director of Programs and Development, Sister Somalia



strengthening youth representation in civil, government and political activities, appointing two Youth Advisers to the Office of the President as well as lowering the age limit of elected political representation to 18. The Somali Compact endorsed in September 2013 is another step into the right direction. The document includes an action plan for 2014-2016 and outlines priorities around five Peace and State Building Goals (PSGs) - all specifically addressing youth. PSG 1 "Inclusive politics" calls for an inclusive political dialogue to advance reconciliation at the local and national

levels including youth. PSG 2 "Security" focuses on an increased protection of civilians and with an explicit focus on youth. Additionally, it articulates plans for a programme on disengaged combatants, many of which are youth who could benefit from such a programme and pave their way back into society. PSG 3 "Justice" is about delivering justice for all. This also includes the Convention on the Rights of the Child which the Federal Government promised to ratify. Under PSG 4 "Economic foundations", the Somali Compact outlines plans to address youth unemployment and expand opportunities through job creation and skills development.

PSG 5 "Revenue and Services" focuses on delivering equitable, affordable and sustainable services to the Somali people, including youth. With the endorsement of the Somali Compact the groundwork has been done. The UN will support the Somali Authorities through two initiatives that are currently under way: a comprehensive strategy on youth and joint programming on youth employment. Now it is time to translate plans into actions. Young people are the ones who will inherit Somalia. They deserve a seat at the table today.

## Focus on

### What does "youth" mean?

There is no universally accepted definition of the term 'youth'. Based on concepts commonly found in Somalia, the UNDP Human Development Report of 2012 defined youth as people between 15 and 29 years of age. In general, youth describes the period between puberty and parenthood. It is a distinct social status with accompanying roles, rituals and relationships. As a transitional period of semi-autonomy, youth is a time when people experiment with adult roles, but do not fully commit to them. The transition from childhood to adulthood has a crucial gender dimension. During this stage, societal expectations and personal aspirations of young men and women begin to diverge. Young males are likely to gain much more autonomy, while girls begin to experience new restrictions and attitudes, behavior and conduct. Traditional cultural norms in Somalia dictate that females are sheltered during the stage of puberty for reasons such as puberty and marriageability, stigma or family reputation. In case of conflicts, young women and girls suffer disproportionately from rape and sexual violence as a targeted strategy to weaken families and break down the social fabric.



**Above:** A young boy enjoys a day out at Lido beach in Mogadishu. © UN/T. Jones

Somalia Human Development Report 2012

## Facts at a glance

- Over **70 per cent** of Somalia's population is **under the age of 30**.
- The **unemployment rate** for youth aged 14 to 29 is **67 per cent**—one of the highest rates in the world. Among young women it is even estimated at **74 per cent**.
- It is estimated that **4.4 million** children and youth aged 6-18 years are **out of school**.
- **Early marriages and teenage pregnancies** are common. An estimated **45 per cent** of women aged 20-24 were **married by the age of 18**.

## The Go-2-School initiative

Somalia is in need of a massive expansion of educating services. Many

**Below:** © UNICEF Somalia/Dhayi



youth have never attended primary school. The Human Development Report of 2012 showed that in south and central Somalia only 53 per cent of youth aged 15-24 years are literate. With 56 per cent literacy rates are particularly low among young men. Especially in rural areas only few education services are available and where available these are not used. The quality of the education provided varies from school to school. The G2S initiative – a cooperation between the Federal Government of

Somalia and the United Nations – aims at changing that. The campaign has the objective to offer primary education to one million children and youth between 2013 and 2016. In addition to providing technical assistance and implementing a large part of this initiative, UNICEF will support the Government on the coordination and advocacy front. While UNESCO works on lower secondary education, WFP provides school feeding programmes and ILO offers skills-based youth programmes.





Young boys play basketball at a youth centre in Burao, Somaliland.

## Youth centres and peer networks

UNICEF and partners have, to date, supported about 200 community-based groups across Somalia to provide better life options for young girls and boys. These youth groups are run as 'youth organizations' through which more and more youth have been involved in sports, recreation and other constructive activities. One example of such a youth centre was established by UNICEF in Burco and funded by the Government of Japan. It is run today by the Somaliland Youth Society. Keeping the youth off the streets is one thing. But the most important part is to offer them guidance and advice for their future. This is why the centres not only offer sports and recreational activities, but also cultural programmes organized around the themes of peace, promoting immunization, preventing HIV/AIDS, and eradicating Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. All these activities boost the confidence of the young boys and girls and give them hope for their future.

# Unemployment: Tackling one of Somalia's biggest problems

With 67 per cent of youth being out of work, the high youth unemployment is one of the biggest problems in Somalia. And this rate may be even higher for young women. Due to the insecurity over the last two decades, many youth could not go to school or develop skills that could help them find a job today. This is why the UN runs several programmes that help these youth develop the skills they need to find a job, provides graduates with small grants and also offers short-term employment.

### Vocational skills programmes

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) help youth—many of them formerly associated with armed groups - develop vocational skills and learn the basics of entrepreneurship and commerce.

Based on assessments of which skills are needed in the respective area, ILO and UNICEF provide youth with trainings in plumbing, electricity, fishing, cooking, hospitality and mechanics. In 2013, 863 boys and 237 girls were enrolled in UNICEF's reintegration programme benefitting from vocational training and psychosocial support.

When implementing these programmes, the two UN agencies pay attention to working with government certified institutions to ensure that graduates receive official certificates which will help them continue with their education or apply for jobs. The programmes not only focus on

passing on skills such as how to run a business and calculate profits, but also enable youth to start their own businesses through small business grants. These grants aim to further the talent of those youth who develop and present the best business plans. In Burao, Somaliland for example, graduates opened up their own catering business and now provide the

next generation of programme beneficiaries with hot meals to help them regain strength for class. Additionally, the graduates receive assistance in networking for job opportunities, through

business counselling, apprenticeships and job placements.

Another ILO project focuses especially on young women and their specific needs when it comes to women's empowerment and female entrepreneurship. The project teaches the young women the skills they need to succeed in the business sector as a woman. Some of the participants are vulnerable women living in IDP settlements. For these women, it is particularly difficult to develop the skills they need to join the work force. The participants receive business training adapted to their environment and can apply for small grants to open their own small businesses.

Under the Food for Training programme, the World Food Programme (WFP) offers Somalis – among them many young men and women – who live in food insecure parts of Somalia food in exchange for

their participation in skills trainings. This not only helps them to ensure that their families do not have to go hungry but also improves their economic status and self-reliance. Deka Mohamed, a young woman of 20 years for example, is one of 250 students who have successfully completed a tailoring course supported by WFP. When her family had lost their goats and camels due to the drought and was struggling to make ends meet, a tailoring course gave Deka an opportunity to take care of her family. She quickly discovered her talent for tailoring and after completion of the course was hired by a designer. But this is not the end of her success story: Deka managed to put some of her salary aside and was able to buy her own sewing machine. Driven by her business sense, Deka trained her mother and was able to expand her business. Today, the women are two of the most sought-after tailors in Garowe.

### Professional training

The Mogadishu Midwifery School provides young women with employment opportunities. The school which opened its doors for the first time in August 2012 is a successful partnership between the Federal Government of Somalia, UN agencies

**863 boys and 237 girls were enrolled in UNICEF's reintegration programme**

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4**

Below: Deka at her shop. © WFP/O. Gomey





Above: © UNFPA Somalia

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and donors, including UKaid (DFID), AusAID, SIDA, USAID and SDC. The school trains new midwives and builds the capacities of existing ones. This will not only help the young women to enter the labour force but also contribute to the reduction of the current high maternal mortality and morbidity rates in the country. Running for a period of five years, the project will train approximately 1,200 midwives and provide technical support, equipment, medicine and other essential reproductive supplies to health facilities. In February 2014, the first group of 25 newly trained midwives from five regions in south and central Somalia graduated from the school.

**Internship programme**

In order to prevent the massive brain-

drain of skilled and semi-skilled youth, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Somaliland authorities with funding from the Japanese government have developed a soft-skills and internship training to help youth find a decent job. The seven month training and internship programme, which was implemented between August 2013 and February 2014, placed 14 young women and 26 young men in the local and regional governments of Burao and Borama.

"We are not incompetent. We are not lazy. We want to continue our education, receive employment training and participate productively in the workforce. But we are hampered by a lack of opportunity. We leave the country because we must survive," says Ismail Said Ahmed, one of the interns. In Burao municipality, all nine interns were hired at the end of the programme. A second phase of the programme has just started with 75 interns being placed in Elgavo, Laas Caanood, Hargeysa, Gebiley and Berbera. IOM and partners are planning to scale up similar training programmes across Somaliland, Puntland, and south and central

Somalia.

**Short-term labour**

ILO and WFP create short-term labour to help young people enter the job market and develop new skills. As part of its Vouchers for Assets programme for example, WFP helps Somalis implement participatory infrastructure projects such as wells, canals or roads

and at the same time provides training so that they can better withstand droughts and floods. Many of the people who engage in these activities are youth. The programmes empower the young women and men and give them a sense of ownership over their

**26 interns have been offered permanent positions in the public and private sectors**

environment. Shamso Mowlid Hussein, a young woman who engaged in a project in Dolow, is full of praise for the programme. "I like getting vouchers. I enjoy going to the shop and buying what my family needs. "

To support the Somali Government in reaching the New Deal target of generating 250,000 short-term jobs for youth by the end of 2016, the UN will establish a new Joint Programme on Youth Employment.

**Interview**



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**About Ilwad Elman**

Together with her mother Ilwad Elman runs the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre and is the Director of Programmes and Development at "Sister Somalia," a women's grassroots organization. At the age of 19 Ilwad boarded a plane in Ottawa, Canada, where she had been living as a refugee, to visit her mother in Mogadishu. Seeing her mother's work in Mogadishu first hand and meeting the women and girls at the centre changed her life forever and she decided to stay in Mogadishu to rebuild her home country.

By helping her mother build Sister Somalia, Ilwad's efforts have enabled Somali women and girl survivors of sexual assault to reclaim their lives. Ilwad has become a spokesperson for equality and justice for women in Somalia. She has brought the issue of sexual assault to the forefront of political discussions as the co-chair of the Child Protection Working Group alongside UNICEF and as a chair for the Gender-Based Violence Case Management Group.

and interest in Somalia. I was greatly influenced by the commitment my parents had to the betterment of Somalia and the selfless sacrifices they made motivated me to return. When I began working with the organization founded by my parents, the Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre, I knew I had found my purpose, but it was the people I met through the services provided by us

that inspired me to stay.

**Q At the age of 19 you returned to Somalia after having spent many years in Canada where you had a chance at good education and employment, things that many youth in Somalia miss out on. Why did you make that decision?**

Although I have spent the majority of my life abroad in Canada, I have always had a deep-rooted connection

**Q What does it mean to be a youth in Somalia today and what are the biggest challenges?**

Conflict has been a constant factor of life in central and southern Somalia for over two decades, meaning that entire generations of children have not known peace.

These young people have been deprived of education and other opportunities to gain the kind of skills to make them productive and integrated members of society. Many have lost family and livelihoods and are exposed to extreme levels of economic hardship. The intensification of conflict has meant that almost all children in Somalia have been exposed to the worst predations of war, including displacement, destitution, and orphanhood. Further to this, young people, adolescents, and even children are exposed to the very widespread risk of recruitment into armed forces and groups. The most aggressive, widespread and exploitative recruitment is taking place amongst Al-Shabaab, who are using force, deception, and other methods to take advantage of the desperation and lack of alternatives facing most young people. Once recruited, children appear to have no option to leave, and are often treated with high levels of violence and brutality if they refuse to do as they

are instructed. This practice of recruiting children by all parties involved in the conflict in Somalia has already led to the death of hundreds of children and innocent civilians, whilst others have been injured or have suffered major psychological problems as a result.

**Q What needs to be done – by the Somali government and the international community – so that Somali youth can shape their future?**

70% of Somalia’s population is youth under the age of 30; with the country in conflict for more than two decades, an entire generation has only ever known war and turmoil. Today’s youth have been the most disadvantaged but they are the future of Somalia, and investing in this marginalized majority is a fundamental prerequisite to achieving justice, peace and

**“Entire generations of children have not known peace...they have been deprived of education and other opportunities to make them integrated members of society”**

progressing as a nation. Throughout the protracted conflict in Somalia dialogue has not been seen as high a policy priority as military victory by the international community and the Somali government, yet it remains a paramount constituent to peacemaking. It is my belief that military solutions alone are not enough for ending conflict and inclusive

approaches such as reconciliation, the promotion of active citizenship, strengthening of the existing social protection structures and community leadership will pave the way for a peaceful end to conflict. The majority of those on either side of the conflict are youth; the government and the international community must invest in the youth of Somalia today for it is the only way for improving tomorrow.

## Youth for Change—Turning lives around

Change is what many youth in Somalia aspire. And change is exactly what the “Youth for Change” (Y4C) programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is all about. The programme gives young Somalis in conflict with the law a chance of a better future through education, employment and empowerment.

Since its inception in 2011, 4,000 youth have benefitted from the Y4C programme and another 1,100 will be

enrolled this year. The programme provides young people with an opportunity for rehabilitation and personal development through non-formal education, life skills or vocational training. But this is only one side of the coin. More important than any skills that young people can acquire is a change in mindset, behaviour, attitude and interaction with the community. At the end of the programme, graduates from education programmes are offered to join the formal school systems and youth that have developed vocational skills are helped to enter the work force.



**Above:** Carpentry class in Bossaso. © ILO Somalia

The UN works together with community elders, police and other community organizations to select children and youth that could benefit from the programme. Because Youth for Change is designed to incentivize good behaviour, not all youth selected have a criminal background. But they all have one thing in common: they all need change and are willing to turn their lives around!

**Abdikarim, 18 years, Burao, Somaliland**

*“I have been part of the Youth for Change programme for the last ten months. At first, I did not like it because we have to be punctual and there are many rules that I was not used to. My mother decided that I should come here and make something good with my life. Before I came here, I did not have any skills. I was just sitting around and engaged in violent activities. Now my life has taken a turn for the better. I really enjoy the computer and sciences classes here at the center. I am currently enrolled in the non-formal education programme but I am working hard for my exams and if I perform well, I want to join a formal school next term.”*



# Fighting their way back into society: Social rehabilitation programme for youth in conflict with the law

In addition to education and employment, the UN also focuses on empowerment to help youth take their lives in their own hands. As part of the joint Youth for Change initiative, UNDP's social rehabilitation and integration programme works with youth in conflict with the law. These youth have forgotten what it means to be active and involved members of

**Below:** Social rehabilitation class for youth in conflict with the law. © UNDP Somalia

society. Through the reintegration programme, they learn how they can make full use of their potential to support their communities and to shift their attitudes to positive growth. The programme offers youth training in many different fields. Under the social skills component for example, youth can learn how to communicate well with others and how to cope with psychological stress and trauma. As part of the training on governance and rule of law, young women and boys receive information about women's rights and community cohesion. They also learn how they can get a say in politics through civic participation and elections. The classes on social rehabilitation give youth an opportunity to reflect on the characteristics of an effective leader and to discuss obstacles to youth leadership. All these classes help the

youth understand their role in society and give them ideas of how they can shape their future. Additionally, the young men and women can participate in literacy classes, civic education, sports, arts and community volunteer activities where they can learn new ways of how to steer their energy into positive activities. In order to support the transition from criminal behaviour to becoming a productive member of society, the programme also includes a mentoring programme. Former beneficiaries of the programme who now have jobs and have found a way back into society meet with their mentees and share their experiences. This exchange gives the youth new hope for their future and positive role models to aspire to.



*"I was born into a small family and orphaned at a young age. Being responsible for supporting my siblings, I became the bread winner of my family. I opened a small tea shop at the centre of town. I was married to a pirate and my clients mostly were pirates as well. When district sheikhs and Elders began a campaign against piracy, most of them fled and left me with unpaid bills. That was the end of my business and start of my poverty. I became desperate and depressed. Through UNDP's social rehabilitation programme, I was able to regain strength and hope."*

**Bishaaro Abdi Bile, 25 years**



*"My motto in life was fight, steal, and chew Qat. Basically, I did whatever to "survive". I did not care about who I hurt in the process; the most important thing was that I got what I wanted". Bashir said. Bashir shook his head as he reflected on the person he used to be before he enrolled in the youth initiative. At age 21, today he considers himself an artist and is excited about the future. "Thanks to the youth rehabilitation programme, I discovered on the art and drama classes that I have talent for painting. More importantly through the rehabilitation programme, I have also learned how to deal with disputes without resorting to violence".*

**Bashir Mohamed, 21 years**

## Getting the info...

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is currently preparing for a Labour Force Survey for Somalia (LFS). This survey aims at collecting under-employed or un-employed data and aims at generating quantifiable data on the problem of youth employment. A similar survey on Somaliland was published in January 2013. It is available online under [http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/countries-covered/somalia/facet/.MS\\_234412/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/addisababa/countries-covered/somalia/facet/.MS_234412/lang--en/index.htm).

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