Introduction

Children’s voices are rarely heard in the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Globally, Somalia scores the highest on the INFORM Global Risk Index due to long-standing political instability, armed conflict, environmental stress and weak governance structures. Between January and August 2019 alone, 270,000 people were displaced across Somalia of which an estimated 108,000 (40%) are school-aged children.

Despite political progress and ongoing efforts to strengthen government institutions, the Ministry of Education (MoE) continues to lack the capacity to deliver basic education services for IDPs, children living in areas with ongoing conflict and other groups living under the most challenging circumstances. Somalia has about 4.5 million school-aged children and of these, 35% of girls and 41% of boys are enrolled in school across Somalia. This means about 3 million school-aged children are out of school.

The crisis in Somalia exposes children (displaced and non-displaced) to various threats. The Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict 2019 states that in 2018, 2,300 children (including 72 girls) in Somalia were recruited and/or used mainly by non-state armed groups, that 331 children (including 328 girls) reported sexual violence and 1,609 children (including 130 girls) were abducted. In addition, 781 boys and 260 girls were killed and maimed.

Due to the volatile and insecure context of Somalia, many children who do access education have experienced various forms of trauma. Teachers are rarely equipped to identify children showing signs of trauma and are therefore not able to support the children appropriately. In a context like Somalia where teachers are under qualified, classrooms are overcrowded, and materials and facilities are scarce, teachers are often using verbal or physical punishment of children to maintain control of the classroom. This behavior affects children negatively and hampers their learning outcome and well-being. According to a Child Protection Rapid Assessment (CPRA) conducted in Puntland, Somaliland and Banadir, 57% of head teachers acknowledge that corporal punishment is being used in their school in
managing children’s behavior. The CPRA further found that peer to peer abuse is prevalent in schools with bullying being identified as a protection concern that happens in their schools by 60% of head teachers interviewed. Unequal ratios of boys and girls in the class or a mix of older and younger children in the same class might exacerbate these situations leading to additional psychosocial stress of already traumatized children.

To better understand what school children need and want, and to enhance the accountability of the Education actors to the children they are targeting, it is crucial to ensure the voices of the children are being collected and heard.

**Objective & Methodology**

In May 2019, the Education Cluster lead a survey to capture the voices of school children. The purpose of the survey was to ensure the voices of school children were included as part of the humanitarian needs analysis for 2020. The Education Cluster, Regional Focal Points and Ministry of Education (MoEs) colleagues jointly designed and developed a set of questions for students to know more about their feelings and needs in the schools. Education Cluster Regional Focal Points and Regional MoE colleagues carried out the survey in seven regions in Southern and Central Somalia. The survey teams interviewed school children through focus group discussions (FGDs). The children were divided into the following groups with around 10 children in each: 8-10 years old (mixed); 12-14 years old (girls); and 12-14 years old (boys). Approximately 1,290 students participated in the survey. All schools visited were at the time of interview supported by an implementing partner.

**Children’s Voices – findings from the survey**

**The road to school**

Most of the children replied that they walk to school and for children in both age groups majority answered the school is near. More than 90% of all the children said they feel safe while walking to school while 10% reported they do not feel safe. 66% of the children responded they feel their school is near by their home while 30% replied they feel the school is far away.

**WASH facilities & menstrual hygiene management at school**

An important element of the Education in Emergencies response in Somalia is to ensure that schools have proper gender and child friendly WASH facilities at the school. 84% of all the children interviewed reported their school has gender segregated latrines. However, only 63% reported that their school has hand washing facilities. Across the country a drop in enrolment and attendance rates by girls reaching puberty can be observed. On reason for this trend is the challenges of proper menstrual hygiene management. Aside from the obvious need for proper WASH facilities, partners are also strongly encouraged to provide adolescent girls with hygiene kits including sanitary pads. More than 46% of the interviewed girls replied that they do not receive hygiene kits at the school. When asked about what the most critical issues are in their schools, girls reported hygiene and sanitation as well as girl friendly spaces. Of the schools visited 68% did not have girl friendly spaces.

**Recreational activities**

Play and physical movement is important for children’s learning in general, but in particular it is important for children who have experienced different kind of traumatic events. Structured recreational activities are considered an important part in the psychosocial support schools provide to children in Somalia. The children reported that 87% of the schools have recreational materials available. In most cases this is footballs and, in some cases, skipping ropes and volleyballs. More than 59% of the children interviewed replied that they use the recreational facilities once a week, 26% reported twice a week and 16% once a month for less than an hour. In general sports fields and supplies are scarce across schools in Somalia except for football fields where only boys play football. It is not considered appropriate for girls to join.
Active participation in class

Active participation during class is important to enhance learning for the individual child. When asked if they raise their hand during class 84% replied always, while 15% replied rarely. This trend was confirmed when asked if they get a chance to ask questions during class and 96% of the children said yes while only 3% said rarely. 54% of the children replied they always work in groups, while 40% said rarely and 6% answered never. When asked if they feel there are enough teachers in the school 65% of the children responded yes while 30% replied no.

Peer to peer bullying

Bullying in schools can have a significant impact on those boys and girls who are being targeted and creates an environment that children might not feel free to express themselves and participate in social relations. 64% of the children interviewed responded they have never witnessed someone being bullied in school. Unfortunately, that means 36% of the children have at some point witnessed someone being bullied. When asked what they did to intervene 45% told a teacher, 37% preferred not to answer the question and 18% either tried to stop it or told a parent. Addressing bullying in schools requires a holistic intervention from teachers, parents and children to jointly ensure the school is a safe space for all children.

Key priorities

When asked what the children felt were the greatest needs and priorities in their school 39% responded teaching and learning materials, recreational activities and uniforms. More than 20% emphasized school feeding and 17% replied proper WASH facilities. 15% replied permanent school structures, classrooms and girl friendly spaces, while 9% responded qualified teachers and school libraries. Priorities did not differ significantly between the two age groups.

Education Cluster recommendations based on findings:

- Provision of hygiene promotion and hygiene kits for adolescent girls.
- Establish girl friendly spaces in the schools to create a safe and free space for girls to interact.
- Construction/rehabilitations of schools, classrooms, fences as well as segregated latrines and sanitary facilities in schools.
- Establish feeding centers or food rations to keep students engaged.
- Set up fully functional recreational facilities in schools.
- Establish of child clubs to increase hygiene promotion.
- Train teachers in classrooms management and positive discipline including PSS and conflict management to ensure a conducive learning environment.

Limitations

The schools included in the survey were selected based on access and on-going engagement of partners and are as such not a representative sample of schools in Southern and Central Regions of Somalia. Puntland and Somaliland are excluded from this pilot. A few regions were not included due to turn over of trained lead enumerators. The enumerator training was based on a cascade model and as such vulnerable to turn over of the enumerated who were supposed to train additional enumerators at regional level. It should be noted that only children aged 8-14 years participated in the FGDs. As such, their needs or priorities may not be representative of all children enrolled in schools.

The assessment was conducted just before the beginning of school break holidays in mid May 2019 which limited the participation of students in some locations.

Notes:

1. INFORM Index Report, 2018
2. Protection Return Monitoring Network (PRMN),
4. Joint Multi Cluster Needs Assessment (JMCNA) 2019, REACH
5. Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, July 2019
6. Child Protection Rapid Assessment, Relief International, 2019
7. Banadir, Hiran, Gede, Lower Shabelle, Galgadud, Lower Juba and Mudug