



Horn Institute for Peace and Development

**Challenges and Opportunities of
Higher Education in Somalia**

Policy Brief



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Introduction

One area that is key to the development of a state, especially post-conflict countries, is higher education. However, both external and internal mechanisms of restoring functional institutions of the Somalia government appear to have given little or no special attention to the state of higher education in the Horn of Africa country. Somalia has experienced more than two decades of political instability and insecurity. These completely halted all vital public social services in Somalia. Notably the educational infrastructures were destroyed leading to disruption of the entire education system. Immediately, after 1991, both Somali local populations and international communities have come up with several initiatives of restoring diminishing Somalia's educational system but positive change is yet to be achieved due to the intractable conflict. Moreover, the collapsing education system has led to brain drain of eminent scholars to destinations such as neighboring countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Europe, North America, USA and also Afro – Arab countries. As a result Somalia now suffers from one of the lowest literacy rates in the world [Cummings and van Tonningen, 2003).

Generally speaking, diminishing of Education system in Somalia started in the 1980s as the central government became economically, politically and strategically weak. Today, rather than have a unified national education system, Somalia's education system has disintegrated into various regional education systems.

Since 1991, the northern part of Somalia- current Somaliland, have enjoyed relative peace and stability which has enabled the region to establish and developed its own educational institutions with different levels from primary - Higher education sectors. Northeastern part of Somalia "current Puntland state" also made remarkable progress in transforming its regional the education sector since 1998. South Central Somalia has made the least educational progress during the power vacuum and the main reason was due to the cycles of bloody conflicts and insecurity that have resulted into under-development in all sectors compare to Somaliland and Puntland. Before the collapse of former central government, Somalia had only one government - owned university located in Mogadishu city with branches in other major cities.

Currently, Somalia has over 55 privately owned higher institutions of learning with different capacities, size, and faculties with weak rules and regulations.

The origin of the unregulated mushrooming of privately owned institutions of higher learning can be traced in the weakening of the central government hence its inability to regulate public services resulted in the elites, academics to respond to the vacuum of higher education across all major cities in the country by establishing private higher education institutions. However, the down side of this privatization is the motive of making money at the expense of the quality of education. Consequently, most of the graduates from the local universities are substandard.

However, since 2013, the process of rebuilding the country and developing government institutions at federal and state level has seen rehabilitation and renovation of educational sector among other public institutions and services. All these achievements are spearheaded by the government [s] civil society organizations, International Organizations, who want Somalia to stand on its own feet and gain its lost reputation.

This paper provides a snapshot of the major challenges and opportunities for higher education in Somalia and provides concrete policy recommendations.

Snap shot of Higher Education

Higher education: Ranges from Post-secondary education to certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and post-graduate level including Ph.D. Higher education encompasses universities, middle level colleges as well as technical institutions. Generally, higher education is key driver of growth performance, prosperity, and competitiveness in national and global economies. It also develops the capacity of citizens to meet national goals and contribute to the general welfare and betterment of the society.

Education is the foundation on which a country's development is constructed. It is also described as a main tool for societal development by increasing the level of community in terms of knowledge, skills, mentality and overall life. That facilitates better living conditions for educated individuals and the greater society at large.

Pre- colonial and colonial higher education in Somalia

During the pre-colonial period, Somalia neither had formal education system nor Higher education but the Somalis who are mainly oral society used to learn through traditional ways. Prior to the colonial era in the 19th centuries, the only type of education in Somalia was Quranic Schools which used to provide traditional Islamic education, Islamic theology, Arabic literature, and grammar. This was spearheaded by Islamic scholars, Somali traders and seamen whose main aim was to spread the Islam. This was seconded by the arrival of western countries during the scramble and partition of Africa which steadily established and introduced modern western education systems. Up to now both systems of education are working in parallel in Somalia pointing to the challenge of a non- unified syllabus.

Due to the presence and spread of Islam in Somalia, it was not easy for the colonialists to introduce western education; besides the majority of the Somali population were nomadic people. On top of that, there was negative perception towards the western education which was believed to be a means of spreading Christianity. Consequently, many families opposed western education that was introduced by the colonial powers.

Additionally, the Somalia colonies [British in North – current Somaliland and Puntland and Italy in the South – Current South-central Somalia] had different versions of education, different language of instruction, different management styles as each colony wanted to run the education system by its own version; these worsened the already difficult situation on the ground.

Generally speaking, the history of higher education in Somalia dates back to 1954, very similar to a vast majority of the institutions in Africa whose foundations were laid during the colonial period. It came as a consequence of what was known as the United Nations (UN) Trusteeship, which mandated that the Italian colonial administration (now rephrased as the Italian Trusteeship Administration) in southern Somalia educate and prepare, within the ten years of the trusteeship period, a new cadre of citizens who would be able to manage the country's needs in political, economic, and social affairs.

Contextualizing Somalia within the background of the higher education debate is complicated by many factors, including lack of effective government, prolonged devastation, irregular education systems that have proliferated but with no proper regulation. The absence of official government

sources related to national education data also contributes to the general challenge facing Somali education, where inconsistencies exist in government capacity to cope with the effective streamlining of the education sector.

Post-independence Education

In 1969, when General Said Bare came to power through a military coup, he made significant progress in the provision of all levels of the education sector in the country. The military government introduced quite a number of nationalism, socioeconomic revolutionary programs which became not only successful but also popular in the country. Mass literacy campaign in 1974 was among the programs which deployed a huge number of university students and civil servants to teach basic literacy and numeracy to the rural nomadic populations which increased the literacy level in Somalia.

In the early days of Said Bare government the Somali proverb: *Aqoon la aan waa iftiin la aan* literally meaning “The absence of knowledge is the absence of light” was common in the country while the popular song composed by former prominent Somali Singer [Abdillahi Qarshe] was buoyantly sang as part of 'revolutionary' program to promote the mass literacy campaign introduced by the government.

During the revolution in Somalia, remarkable milestones were achieved regarding the fight against illiteracy.

One of the key milestones introduced and implemented by the Said Bare led government was the writing of the Somali language into Latin script in 1972. Creating a script for the Somali language was considered as a major success for Somalia's history because it created a sign of national unity and de-emphasized the colonial languages.

Another major achievement of Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), was upgrading of Somali National University [SNU] to a full-fledged university in 1972 with more than 10 faculties including, veterinary, law, economics, industrial chemistry, Geology, languages, Journalism, engineering, agriculture, medicine among others. (Abdi, 1998) Indeed, in 1970s SNU was a well-established institution that had world-class attributes (Mohamed A. Eno, Monica N. W. Mweseli and Omar A. Eno, 2015).

Additionally, before the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, it's believed that SNU had an enrollment of over 15000 students with about 700 academic and non-academic staff and about 13 faculties.

However, in due course, ethicized politics by the Said Bare government started to gradually negatively affected higher education. Another consideration that distorted or marred the higher education idea was Somalia's engagement in building a military power in the Horn of Africa for the purpose of reclaiming territories it claimed were annexed to neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya. The combination of these factors and the meager resources of the country, as some analysts suggest, might have contributed to the civil administrations' disdain of higher education—disdain that had its roots in colonial policies aimed at stunting the intellectual and political development of the colonized people. However, although the country lacked an effective plan and infrastructure to develop a viable higher education program, the post-independence governments were benefiting from various scholarships offered to Somali students by friendly countries, mainly Italy.

The Era of self-privatization and the current state of higher education in Somalia

After the complete collapse of former central government 1991, Somalia was branded as a failed state but the local communities mainly headed by the elites respond to the education gap and with the support of the diaspora community, faith-based organizations, UN and the international community, they embarked on reviving higher education. Therefore, the absence of a state educational authority has prompted the intervention of Somali intellectuals and members of the wider community as able stakeholders. The local elites continued with the slogan of “To be without knowledge is to be without light” therefore, through community and elite initiatives, these stakeholders assumed the responsibility of reviving institutions of higher learning in an approach that is in line with the practices of what social scientists postulate as “social capital,” a theory that incorporates “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.”

Previously, in 1997, the European Union (EU) came up with what looked like an ambitious project to help former students of the Somali National University (SNU) complete their disrupted programs.

The EU has established four pre-university study centers where the students will learn English and study skills. The successful ones will get scholarships to study at other African universities” (1997). Though the effort was a good gesture, it was nevertheless not aimed at the revival of the university, but rather at helping students whose studies were hampered by the civil war to complete their studies and contribute to national development.

For instance, Somaliland established Amoud University in 1997 and University of Hargeisa in 2000. Both institutions have been performing well despite the lack of innovations, research, and few medical personnel.

Some regions in the country including the Northern part- Puntland, made remarkable progress in transforming the higher education sector. On top of that, during the civil unrest, the existing higher education facilities in Somaliland and Puntland were neither looted nor damaged, and there were brain drain compared in South-central Somalia.

As a result, during the power vacuum, South Central Somalia has made the least educational progress due to the cycles of conflicts, the insecurity that has contributed to underdevelopment in all sectors compared to Somaliland and Puntland. Despite the challenges, the elites and academics from South Central Somalia established private higher education institutions around the mid-1990s.

Consequently, due to the need, both numbers of privately owned universities and the number of students have increased and several technical colleges turned into full-fledged universities.

But since 2013, the process of rebuilding the country, developing and upgrading both private and public higher education institution mainly Benadir region and other major state cities in Southern Somalia has been positive due to the improvement in peace and stability in the country.

Before the collapse of the former central government. Somalia had only one government-owned university located in Mogadishu city with branches in other major cities. Currently, Somalia has around 46 privately owned higher institutions with different capacities, size, and faculties and affiliated with different entities (HIPS, 2013).

Major challenges to higher education institutions

Finally, all the universities in Somalia have common problems which are: Low-quality education, poor higher education infrastructure, poorly equipped facilities, multiple parallel syllabuses, and meagre service delivery some others are for business purposes only and everything is done to maximize profits rather than quality. The major contributing factor is the lack of governmental regulatory body that ensures quality assurance, quality control, check and balance in the higher education sector, thus the current private higher education institutions trying its best level by putting their first priority as a money-making institution. All these need to be addressed jointly by all levels of government and private higher education institutions and come up with concrete durable solutions that can lead to mutual trust among all stakeholders.

Lack of government regulatory framework for more than two decades has resulted in the private universities to deliver poor service to the nation. Most of the private universities in Somalia have limited physical facilities such as poorly equipped lectures, lecture theatres, laboratories and libraries. Additionally, the cost is unfordable to the majority of the public while the most programs that are offered in the universities mismatch with the current labor market in Somalia. Finally, the TVET institutions and polytechnics are underutilized due to lack of experienced trained instructors.

Opportunities for higher education in Somalia

Quality higher education is every citizen's civil right but in Somalia for close to two decades, there was no effective governance system that guarantees what the students need succeed dissipate the higher education graduation rates. However, the parents, guidance can play a vital role in demanding world-class higher education that their children deserve which is also equal what the parents paying from their loose wallet. Parents mainly focus on the best ways of supporting their children to achieve their favorite course in higher education but equally, they have to raise their voices, demand quality education. Therefore, Parents have to consider themselves as the consumers of higher education, demand urgent reform from the higher education institutions in the country so that the institution can think beyond money.

Somali diaspora experts can be capitalized thus, the national universities may produce a sophisticated university graduate that can fill the critical field for the national needs while avoiding overlapping of graduates in less relevant fields. Indeed, the diaspora can be a great asset to the rebuilding of the

nation. Currently, the diaspora is positively changing the political, business landscape of the country, they can equally do so in higher education.

Conclusions

There is an absolute need for reform in Somalia's education sector. All levels of governments must develop a concrete educational policy that addresses the quality education issues that are aligned with national priorities in the education sector and the betterment of the reconstruction of the country. Regulation for the sake will improve the quality and services provided by the higher education institutions in the country but higher education and technology commission under federal government must play a mechanical role by chaperoning all the required actions in the sector. In order to address the growing concerns about the quality of service provided the federal government reacquire to directly engage with existing private universities and colleges that provide higher education programs so that they can jointly address issues and underscored the required milestones and measures. The international community and Somali's friendly countries including both developed and developing countries should support Somalia through the federal government in order to improve the capacity of government ministries involved in higher education as well higher education institutions.

An institution capable of solving critical education issues needs to build trust among its development partners, business relationships, members of the community, and parents, among others, in sharing resource constraints. Underpinning this is an investment in information systems to monitor whether policies are being effectively implemented and reaching intended beneficiaries, funds are being appropriately spent, vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups are being targeted, and what can be done more effectively with fewer resources.

Somalia education system experience mammoth of challenges including ineffective curriculum, poor school infrastructure, and lack of public education, unregulated education system and uncertified higher educational professionals.

Policy Recommendations

Based on our desk research and observation, we put forward the below recommendations:

Recommendation to the Government of Somalia

- I. The current education system in Somalia is in poor condition and needs complete educational reform and transformation from primary- Higher education.
- II. Through consultation with the respective stakeholders the federal government of Somalia should urgently introduced, implement its oversight role and also produce policies and legislations that can govern the country's education system
- III. The federal government has to prioritize education sector by mainly introducing and implementing new curriculum across the country, emphasize on best ways of assessing quality education and also keep on refocusing the content and methodology in the primary and secondary education system.
- IV. The federal government of Somalia has to come up with new initiatives of training teachers at primary and secondary level so that they can provide quality education across the country and spearhead the implementation of the new curriculum.
- V. The federal government should establish teachers training colleges, curriculum development institutions, national examinations council or body so that those institutions could help the necessary databases, reforms such as largely moving away from theory and test-based systems to skills-based systems
- VI. The federal government of Somalia should invest in early childhood education, youth polytechnics, and tertiary level so that the country can have graduates that are well prepared for the needs of the labor market in the country and the world at large.

Recommendation to the existing private Universities in Somalia

- I. The current private universities in Somalia should aim beyond money-making and seek to prepare quality Somali graduates that can be relevant in the 21st-Century employment in the global economy.
- II. The current universities should develop internal quality assurance standards and regulations. The current universities should bring new teaching methods that are better suited to producing well-trained graduates not half- baked graduates.

- III. Current universities should have better coordination with private sector companies that are willing to invest in the country so the graduates could meet the required qualifications this is among the major issues in Somalia and by doing so will reduce foreigners doing jobs for the nationals
- IV. The current universities should not engage in negative competition among themselves.
- V. The current universities should focus on ICT, technology, digital industry, and have the ability to predict the job market trends for the next decade so that the universities can offer relevant courses and produce marketable graduates

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