Dynamics of education in post-conflict Somalia:

The case of out of school children in Mogadishu

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the critical issue of out-of-school children*, a topic that has hitherto received scant attention in Somalia and other conflict or post-conflict settings. Our objective is to shed light on the multifaceted factors contributing to its occurrence and perpetuation. These include protracted conflict, substantial economic barriers, and deep-seated cultural prejudices. By focusing on Mogadishu – a city notably encumbered by the dual burdens of conflict and displacement and has consequently become a focal point for international aid –, we show that the issue of out-of-school children is emblematic of broader social economic, and political processes. To address the root causes, therefore, interventions require a more strategic and politically salient approach that contextually considers both the technical and political dimensions of the problem. Data for this paper was gathered through a qualitative approach. Desk research, which involved a comprehensive review of existing literature and document analysis formed the foundational layer. To complement this, key informant interviews were employed to obtain direct insights from educators, policymakers, community workers, and professionals who have first-hand experience with the educational challenges in Somalia.*

Keywords: Somali, Mogadishu, education, out-of-school children, conflict, and post-conflict

1   Introduction

According to the United Nations, 244 million children and youth are out of school globally (UNESCO, 2022). One of the primary reasons these children and youth are unable to access school is conflict (Russell & Quaynor, 2017). Yet, research focusing on education in conflict and post-conflict settings is limited (Shuayb & Ahmad, 2021; Stubbé et al., 2016). This is particularly the case in Somalia, a country that stands at a critical crossroad between conflict and recovery (Eno et al., 2014; Hassan & Wekesa, 2017), and consequently lags behind in terms of the availability of evidence to support decision making (Cochrane & Thornton, 2018). This results in unanswered questions about the unique challenges and demands for improving access to education in Somalia. At present, nearly 3 million children and youth are out of school (Creative, 2020). To contribute to addressing this gap, we examine the drivers and dynamics of this problem through a localized and city-centric analytical lens that focuses on Mogadishu. We show that decades of conflict, instability, and deprivation have directly shaped this adverse scenario. Furthermore, economic challenges compel numerous children to forsake education. This is compounded by cultural biases creating gendered barriers. Thus, we argue that the issue of out-of-school children is not merely an educational problem, but a manifestation of deeper, systemic shortcomings in Somalia.

1.1   Definition and overview of the debate

In its most common understanding, out-of-school children is defined as those within the age bracket for primary or lower secondary education who are not enrolled in either level (Hawke, 2015). They can be broadly divided into two categories: those who, despite reaching the requisite age, have never enrolled in school, and those who began their education but later dropped out (Shanker et al., 2015). The reasons for this can vary. For instance, Marshall, Nicolai, and da Silva (2020) scrutinize the structural issues inhibiting meaningful advancements in educational participation. Complementing this perspective, Guarcello, Lyon, and Rosati (2015) demonstrate that household income serves as a significant predictor of school non-attendance. Gender disparities further exacerbate this issue. Factors such as pregnancy, early marriage, discrimination, and bullying disproportionately affect girls more than boys (Mokoena & van Breda, 2021; Ndanusa et al., 2021), albeit Manuel et al. (2021) indicate that bullying seems to affect boys more severely than girls. Considering this, addressing the issue of out-of-school children is a complex endeavour that requires context specific understanding and intervention (Ndanusa et al., 2021; Olaniyi, 2019).

In the post conflict context, the current literature on addressing the issue can be mapped into two main domains. One is concerned with the intersection between insurgency, disability, and mental health complications. The other is linked to the first but more concerned with recovery. For instance, Shuayb and Ahmad (2021) criticise the narrow focus of post conflict interventions on the past traumas in psychosocial interventions, urging consideration of current and future stressors like poverty and social inequities. Equally highlighted are key moral issues such as teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence as well as the

incorporation of child labour and protection issues into national educational frameworks (UNICEF, 2008). The second strand is concerned with the reconstruction of destroyed infrastructure and adoption of innovative ways to compensate or advance accessibility. For instance, Celestine et al. (2022) highlights the potential of technologically mediated educational interventions as an effective alternative to traditional teaching methodologies while Brown et al (2020) note that the complex realities of implementation and level of household income impact the potential of educational technology on educational performance.

In Somalia, while conflict-affected regions are most impacted, even comparatively stable areas also experience concerning levels of children and youth unable to access school. For instance, in Somaliland, half of the children lack access to education (Ministry of Education, 2021; UN News, 2019). Similarly, more than 6,000 children are at a high risk of dropping out-of-schools in Puntland (Save the Children, 2022). From economic hardships to inadequate infrastructure and an insufficient number of qualified teachers, various factors contribute to the out-of-school children problem in the country (World Bank, 2018). Rather than utilizing its youthful population of 15 million – with projections indicating this will double by 2050 (UNFPA, 2023) – as a springboard for progress, pervasive low literacy rates, 40%, stemming from the unavailability and or inaccessibility of schools trap the country in ongoing cycles of poverty, with an unemployment rate of 67% (TESF, 2020; World Bank, 2020a). The available data on enrolment and drop out, does not explain the specific causes or barriers nor does it point toward the most suitable options to address the situation.

1.2   Purpose of the study

This paper aims to make such a contribution. Specifically, there are several notable gaps in the available research. Firstly, the unique challenges presented by areas embroiled in conflict cannot be grouped with other non-conflict areas, given the fact that the dynamics and implications vary considerably. Stated differently, as conflicts have spill-over effects across borders, understanding and addressing the educational needs of children in post-conflict settings becomes not just a local concern, but a global imperative. Thus, focusing on post-conflict scenarios enriches the global discourse on education by bringing in perspectives that could contribute to the development of resilient educational systems. Secondly, much of the scholarship focuses on broader state and regional contexts, often neglecting city-specific intricacies. Yet, this could offer invaluable insights into the micro-level barriers and opportunities that affect educational access. It is in this spirit that Mogadishu warrants a focus. This is crucial for several reason. First, Mogadishu is the most populous and significant economic hub in Somalia. Second, it is the epicentre of conflict and displacement which have profound impacts on access to education. And finally, it is often the focus of international aid and developmental projects, including those aimed at education. For these reasons, understanding its nuances can guide targeted interventions and policy reforms tailored to its unique challenges and opportunities.

From here, the paper will be organised into three main sections. The first offers a panoramic view of the country's educational context. This is followed by the presentation of in-depth data and analysis on the out-of-school children crisis. Moving towards solutions, the final section offers an assessment of current interventions and proposes a pathway forward, highlighting both the successes and limitations of existing measures.

2   Understanding Somalia's education landscape

The educational history of Somalia mirrors its complex social and political context. Before the onset of colonial rule in 1884, *qur'anic* schools were the primary educational establishments, focusing on Islamic teachings and, by implication, preserving Somali culture (Hussein, 1988). The colonial order, British in the North and Italian in the South, marked a significant shift in educational priorities (Dawson, 1964). Rather than encouraging critical thinking or social development, these systems were designed to meet the administrative requirements of the colonizers (Abdi, 2003). Consequently, they were often met with resistance from local communities (Olden, 2008) who viewed them as tools for cultural domination. Their impact was thus restricted; for instance, as of 1945, only seven elementary schools were operational in British-controlled Somaliland (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). In the postcolonial era, the government faced the challenge of merging two disparate systems, each with different languages of instruction and curricula. The result was a high rate of attrition. More than 76% of students in the South did not complete elementary education, compared to a considerably lower 15% dropout rate in the North (Dawson, 1964). This disparity was partially attributable to varying academic standards and the political and cultural landscape that shaped them during colonial rule.

Although the postcolonial civilian government took steps – such as the introduction of a 4-4-4 structure that retained both Arabic and English as languages of instruction in 1965 (Abdi, 1998) – to improve and unify the educational systems between the north and the south (Hussein, 1988), their reforms paled in comparison to the comprehensive changes undertaken by the military regime that seized power in 1969 (the Supreme Revolutionary Council took power after a coup d'état in 1969, which was followed by the rule of the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party, from 1976-1991, both led by Mohamed Said Barre). This regime adopted a nationalist agenda, initiating far-reaching reforms aimed at overhauling the education system; for example funding for education rose from 6.8% of the national budget in 1969 to 11.3% just eight years later (Eno et al., 2015). A significant milestone was reached in 1972 when the Somali language was written in Latin script, facilitating its use in educational settings and leading to a significant boost in literacy rates (Andrzejewski, 1979). By 1976, the number of schools had burgeoned to 844 primary schools in the northern regions alone, indicating a substantial expansion in educational access (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). Despite improvements in access to education, corruption, tribalism, economic downturn, conflicts, and geopolitical shifts have all had a significant negative impact on the quality of education during the latter years of military rule.

Although direct colonization had ended, foreign powers intervening in Somalia continued during the early decades of independence. For instance, the conflict between Somalia and Ethiopia (1977-1978) resulted in the Soviet Union ceasing to support Somalia militarily and developmentally (Lyons, 1978) and instead supporting Ethiopia, including with fifteen thousand Cuban combat troops (Lockyer, 2018). The conflict, as well as shifting of allies, had a significant impact on the education system in the country. The situation was worsened by political instability and conflicts in the 1980s, when several insurgencies took up arms against the military government (Ghalib, 1995). As a result, the allocation of Somalia's national budget for education witnessed a precipitous decline, dropping from 11% in the mid-1970s to 2% by the end of 1990 (Eno et al., 2014). As education and other public services deteriorated, so too was the political instability and conflict, finally leading to the ouster of the regime in 1991 (Menkhaus, 2014). However, the factions that removed the junta failed to agree on the formation of the post-conflict authorities, resulting in the eruption of a civil war, prolonged period of lawlessness and web of power struggles among various clans and powerful warlords. This conflict had a devastating impact on education: schools were closed, teachers left, and the organised curriculum disintegrated (Bekalo et al., 2003).

The effects of this period continue to be felt to date, leaving a lasting imprint on Somalia's educational landscape (Cummings, 2003). Despite earnest efforts by post-transition central authorities and regional administrations to re-establish governance and restore order, constructing a comprehensive educational infrastructure was, and remains to be, a formidable challenge (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). In this context, non-state actors have become essential stakeholders amid limited government influence and/or the lack of financial resources to provide educational services (Gandrup & Titeca, 2019). The cost of education remains a significant obstacle to school attendance (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022b), particularly within displaced communities where resources are already stretched thin (Somalia Education Cluster, 2022). For these groups, even nominal school fees can be prohibitively expensive, leading many to forgo formal education altogether. This lack of accessibility not only deprives children of educational opportunities but also exacerbates social inequalities, as it perpetuates a cycle where only those with material means can afford to invest in their futures (World Vision, 2021).

Other key challenges include forced marriages, domestic violence, and pervasive gender discrimination. These problems present additional barriers, often making the journey to educational attainment disproportionately challenging for girls (Moyi, 2012a; Puntland State of Somalia, 2021; UNICEF, 2023b). In addition, nomadic communities' lifestyles, cultural norms, and economic necessities often outweigh the perceived benefits of formal education. For these communities, the immediate needs for food security and livestock management are paramount, as their survival and traditional way of life hinge on these factors. This priority system often results in a large portion of children missing out on formal education due to the seasonal migration connected to their livelihood practices. Instead of attending school, they are integrated into the cycle of herding and tending livestock, as well as other tasks crucial for

the community's well-being. While this ensures the continuity of their traditional lifestyles and immediate economic stability, it also perpetuates a cycle of limited access to education, hindering long-term development and adaptability to changing conditions (Carr-Hill, 2015).

In light of the significant challenges surrounding educational access and the state's limited capacity to resolve these issues, local communities have demonstrated remarkable resilience in sustaining not just education but other essential services as well (Gandrup & Titeca, 2019). While the conditions are far from ideal, the community-driven efforts to keep educational services functional highlight the intrinsic understanding among Somalis of the crucial role that education plays in fostering individual potential and collective progress. Such grassroots initiatives provide a glimmer of hope and set a foundation upon which more comprehensive, systemic educational reforms can be built (J. H. Williams & Cummings, 2015). A recent study on education in Somalia offers a glimmer of cautious optimism, particularly noting an increase in both student numbers and pass rates in the Benadir region (Faqih, 2020). While these positive indicators suggest some level of progress, the educational sector is still far from meeting its objectives, hamstrung by a constellation of challenges including a lack of adequate resources (HIPS, 2020), inconsistencies in policy implementation, complications arising from decentralization efforts (Eno et al., 2015), the poor quality of education reflected both in the teaching skills and curricula standards (Nur et al., 2021).

While the existing literature on Somalia's educational landscape offers critical insights into the historical and modern challenges affecting education in the country, it falls short in adequately addressing the issue of out-of-school children. These studies often explore the challenges from a national or regional perspective, leaving a significant void in the understanding of localized, city-level problems that might vary considerably from broader trends. Similarly, the focus on nationwide or regional issues often overshadows the unique challenges posed by urban educational environments. The complexities of city-level problems – from inadequate infrastructure to social issues affecting attendance – remain underexplored in academic discourse. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by turning the spotlight on city-specific challenges and the issue of out-of-school children in Mogadishu. By doing so, it aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges faced by Somalia at multiple levels, thereby contributing to more effective policy recommendations and interventions.

2   Method and materials

2.1   Secondary data

We have employed a qualitative research method for this study. This method places emphasis on the subjective experiences, personal narratives, and in-depth accounts, offering rich and contextualized insights. Such depth often eludes more data-centric, quantitative methods. The review served a dual purpose: firstly, it allowed us to understand the historical and current context surrounding the reasons for which these children are out of school, the repercussions of their absence, and the proposed solutions to this issue. Secondly, it enabled us to pinpoint

specific knowledge gaps and shortcomings in existing practices, setting a clear foundation for our research direction.

2.2   Primary data

Having gained preliminary understanding about education in general and out-of-school children in Somalia in particular from secondary data, we have also conducted interviews with families of out-of-school children. These conversations shed light on their personal experiences, the tangible needs they face, and their aspirations for their children's futures. Furthermore, the families voiced the challenges they confront in not only accessing but also affording quality education. We have also engaged in interviews with schoolteachers. These teachers provided a first-hand account of their experiences. They discussed the hurdles they face in catering to the diverse needs of children. The insights from these educators are vital, as they are on the frontline of the education system, and their daily experiences offer a direct window into the ground realities of formal education.

To delve deeper, we sought the insights of current and former officials from the ministry of education. These interviews were instrumental in capturing the perspectives and informed opinions of policymakers. These discussions offered a closer look at the roles and responsibilities of authorities in ensuring both the implementation and vigilant monitoring of education-related policies and intervention programs. We have also conducted interviews with officials from city authorities. These dialogues were instrumental in enhancing our understanding of the availability and calibre of educational services within the city. Moreover, these discussions provided insights into the intricate web of coordination and collaboration that exists among various stakeholders. Importantly, by engaging with these city officials, we were able to identify both the challenges faced and the opportunities available in addressing the issues of out-of-school children at a city-wide level.

3   Out-of-school children in Mogadishu: drivers and dynamics

2.3   Overview of Mogadishu

Mogadishu serves as the administrative and economic capital of Somalia. Over the years, the city's population has seen a substantial increase. Estimates vary, but the current population is generally considered to be nearly three million (Earle, 2021). While this growth contributes to the city's rapid development, it also poses significant challenges such as overcrowding, strained infrastructure, and limited access to employment opportunities and essential services such as education (Hagmann et al., 2022; Muchunu et al., 2023). In part, this is the outcome of the protracted violence and upheaval that have ravaged the city since the collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991, triggering a period of lawlessness and factional warfare (Elmi & Barise, 2006). For instance, various armed groups, including clan militias and Al-Shabaab militants, have vied for control over the city, leading to devastating consequences (Maruf & Joseph, 2018; Menkhaus, 2013). International efforts, including interventions by the

African Union and various Western powers (P. D. Williams, 2014), have failed to bring about meaningful security in the city notwithstanding that they helped shape the current fragile order.
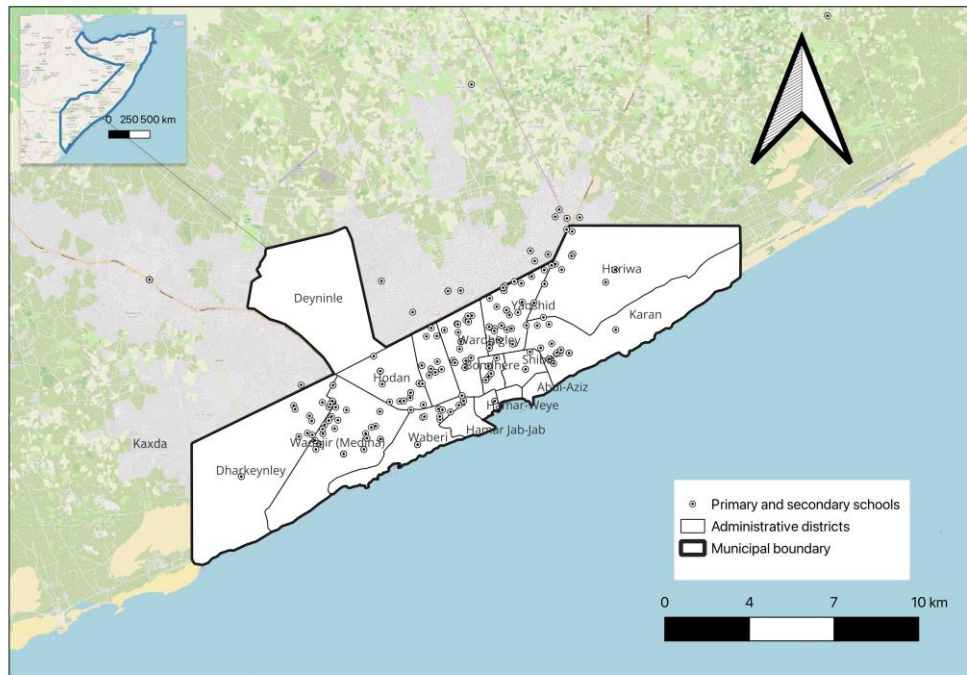

Figure 1: Mogadishu Map

As Somalia moved toward recovery, public schools, with meagre funding by the government and international donors, resumed[1] to provide education in Mogadishu (Hassan & Wekesa, 2017). However, these schools are fraught with challenges, most notably a deficiency in essential resources such as updated teaching materials, adequate facilities, and skilled staff (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022a). To fill this gap, private schools flourish as alternative education providers. These schools often offer curricula aligned with international standards, such as the Kenyan, British and American educational systems, thereby preparing students for globally recognized examinations and potential educational opportunities abroad. Predominantly situated in urban settings, some of these schools largely cater to affluent families capable of affording the tuition fees and often feature a wide array of extracurricular activities (Eno et al., 2014). *Madrasas* represent another dimension of Somalia's educational landscape. Typically funded by community donations or private ownership both in fee payment and construction terms, these institutions primarily focus on religious instruction

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[1] In the initial stages of the conflict, educational pursuits faced a severe disruption, bringing them to the brink of a complete standstill.

(Daun & Walford, 2004).[2] The city boasts 626 primary schools and 581 secondary schools. Unfortunately, a mere 4% of these schools are public. The remaining are privately owned and or operated (Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 2021).

2.4   Governance and politics

Approximately 76% of registered students in Somalia, excluding those in Somaliland and Puntland, are in Mogadishu. However, the city's educational governance remains ambiguous. The reason is that Somalia, under its provisional constitution, follows a federal system. The place of Mogadishu within this structure was not determined during the constitution's negotiations. As a result, while other regions independently elect or select their leaders, Mogadishu's governing body, the Benadir Regional Administration (BRA), is directly appointed by the president. This leaves the city's education largely at the mercy of federal decision-makers. Localized governance allows regions to tailor educational programs to their specific needs, while centralized funding can help minimize socio-economic disparities that can occur when schools rely solely on local taxes. Before 2019, the federal authorities oversaw Mogadishu's education. Efforts to decentralize have restarted with the current administration after a short hiatus. Nonetheless, the success of this combined approach depends on clear and efficient coordination, both at the local and central levels. A senior advisor to the ministry of education stated:

> *"It's impossible to conduct effective oversight over a system we don't manage. The conditions necessary to maintain a delicate balance between decentralized administration and centralized financing are missing".[3]*

This uncertain governance landscape brings up concerns about the state's ability to provide equitable access to education as enshrined in Somalia's Provisional Constitution. Article 28 outlines the state's obligation to look after the welfare of children while articles 30 and 2 go further to mandate free education up to the secondary level (Federal Republic of Somalia, 2012). Other than these constitutional safeguards, there is a lack of a comprehensive children's act that details the rights of children, albeit regions like the Somaliland and Puntland have their unique laws and constitutions although Somalia has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in October 2015 (UN News, 2015). Instead, the nations' legal provisions relevant to children are dispersed across various documents. For instance, the Labour Code protects younger individuals from labour exploitation and its potentially detrimental impacts on their education by setting the minimum age for employment strictly at 15 years (Somali Democratic Republic, 1972). Related to this is also two laws governing juvenile offenses: the Somali Penal Code of 1962 which sets a framework for reduced

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[2] An increasing number of them are diversifying their curricula to include secular subjects such as mathematics, science, and language studies.

[3] Interview with a senior advisor at the ministry of education on September 23, 2023.

punishments for those aged between 14 and 17 (Somali Republic, 1962) and the Juvenile Courts and Reformatories Law which sets the jurisdiction to juvenile courts for most offenses involving minors, with murder being the notable exception (Somali Democratic Republic, 1970). Beyond these laws, federal government policy asserts the imperative of offering "appropriate" and "relevant" education tailored to the specific age, and needs of students (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020b).

2.5   Extent of the problem

The problem of children being out-of-school in Mogadishu is acute. According to the local authorities, nearly one million children are out-of-school in the city.[4] While this alarming statistic underscores the dire state of education in the capital, it also serves as a microcosm for the educational challenges faced nationwide. Only 23% of children eligible for primary education are enrolled, with a paltry 17% making it to secondary education (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020a). Such a drastically low gross enrolment rate signifies a system in deep distress, unable to harness its youth's potential. Not only is there a limited number of public schools available in the city, but the distribution of these schools also follows a specific spatial pattern influenced by historical, economic, and social factors. Central and peripheral districts record the highest numbers of out-of-school children in the city. In the central areas, Xamarweyne, Shangani, Xamar Jajab, and Shibis are leading. These areas are historically populated by minority clans such as the Benadir and Jareer Weyne.[5] According to the director of education in the Benadir Regional Administration, Dr Abdifatah Barre:

> *"In these districts, not only is school attendance low, but the few who enrol often exhibit low educational performance. A culture of protection, amplified by prolonged conflict, make minority clans bear the brunt. Deep-seated beliefs in certain communities downplay the value of formal education, especially for girls, emphasizing instead technical skills, wife grooming, or small business training passed down generations. Though such training is meaningful, it overshadows formal education, depriving children of foundational skills. Intentional efforts to limit interactions between children from minority and major clans, though aimed at reducing conflict, further isolate communities and hinder the sharing of educational resources and opportunities."[6]*

Equally, the situation in the peripheries such as Deyniile and Kaxda is alarming. These areas are predominantly populated by internally displaced persons (IDPs), making them particularly vulnerable to the challenges that contribute to the high rates of children being out-of-school. Often, the education of children is disrupted as families move to escape conflict or find better living conditions, making it difficult for children to attend school consistently. But high

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[4] Interview with the education director of Benadir regional administration on September 7, 2023.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Interview with a lecturer who provided tuition to secondary school students on September 16, 2023.

numbers of out-of-school children in areas heavily populated by IDPs point to a broader, systemic issue that goes beyond just educational infrastructure. It indicates underlying social and economic vulnerabilities that are intensified by displacement. While IDPs already contend with the loss of their homes and traditional support systems, the added burden of limited educational opportunities for their children can have a profound, long-lasting impact. In the peripheries also are also Gubadley, and Garasbaaley which until now did not have public schools.

SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, AND ENROLMENT IN BENADIR

District/Zone	Number of Public Schools	Number of Classrooms	Current Teachers	New Teachers	Total Number of Teachers	Current Students	New Enrolments	Expected Number of Students
Abdicasiis	3	30	36	48	84	1426	1154	2580
Boondheere	3	52	88	57	145	4128	1032	5160
Darusalam	1	7	0	12	12	140	560	700
Dayniile	2	25	21	49	70	1406	1334	2740
Dharkeynley	1	8	0	22	22	170	630	800
Garasbaaley	2	12	0	22	22	250	950	1200
Gubadley	2	20	19	37	56	587	1813	2400
Hilwaa	1	18	7	43	50	575	1190	1800
Hodan	1	18	5	45	50	402	1398	1800
Hawlwadaag	5	67	105	82	187	3591	2108	6696
Kaaraan	3	39	72	37	109	2437	1283	3720
Kaxda	2	20	6	50	56	200	1600	1800
Shangaani	1	14	27	12	39	1255	145	1400
Shibbis	1	12	25	8	33	645	435	1080
Waaberi	4	77	103	121	218	3681	4319	8000
Wadajir	5	71	143	55	198	6014	816	6830
Warta Nabada	1	31	35	51	86	1742	1978	3720
Xamar Jajab	1	19	37	16	53	1508	202	1710
Xamar Weyne	2	42	47	70	117	2310	2490	4800
Yaaqshid	2	36	12	88	100	1210	2390	3600
	43	**618**	**788**	**925**	**1707**	**33677**	**27827**	**62536**

Table 1: Descriptive educational data from Benadir

Other neighbourhoods that fall outside this spatial logic yet are severely affected by the shortage of public schools include Dharkeynley, Hodan, Yaaqshid, and Heliwaa were until recently without public schools, leaving communities in these areas completely underserved. In Hodan district, many public schools have been privately appropriated during the conflict, effectively transforming what should be accessible educational spaces into exclusive establishments. This poses a unique and disconcerting challenge, as these schools, despite being "public" in name, are no longer public in function.[7] The problem doesn't end with access; a significant portion of those who do enter schools exit prematurely due to subpar learning conditions or external stresses. One glaring issue is the dearth of qualified teachers. Prior to 2020, the number of teachers in public schools was a mere 700[8], a figure that is grossly inadequate to serve the needs of the burgeoning youth population in the city. Moreover, the absence of sports fields, libraries, and science labs not only limits the academic options available to students but also restricts their social, emotional, and physical development.[9]

2.6   Causes and consequences

A complex web of financial, socio-economic, environmental, and demographic factors contributes to Mogadishu's alarmingly high rates of children who are not in school (UNICEF, 2023a). In Mogadishu, the average annual cost of secondary education per child ranges from $180 to $300, whereas primary education typically costs between $120 and $240 per child. Although these figures might appear relatively modest by some global standards, they can pose a substantial financial burden for families already grappling with the basic challenges of securing food and shelter. The GDP per capita in Somalia is $1,364 (World Bank, 2023) and average family size is 6.2 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022) making access to education for the poorest the most difficult. The additional costs of uniforms, textbooks, and transportation only exacerbate the strain on family budgets. For households with multiple children, these educational expenses can quickly accumulate, forcing parents to make difficult decisions. According to the director of education in the Benadir regional administration:

> *"If a family has seven children and their average monthly income is just 250 dollars, the harsh reality they face is that they have to make excruciating choices about who gets to go to school and who doesn't. Often, it's the girls who are kept at home. In a setting where each dollar counts, where each expenditure is a calculated trade-off, education becomes a luxury that many can't afford for all their children. This*

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[7] Interview with a Non-Governmental Organisation worker who worked on education in Mogadishu on September 3, 2023.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Interview with a teacher on the phone on September 13, 2023.

perpetuates cycles of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability, trapping families in a web of limited choices and even more limited opportunities."[10]

Based on available income, and when considered in the context of overall household expenditures, families space out formal education and initially send kids to *madrasas* until around the fifth grade, focusing on the *qur'an*. This approach serves multiple purposes: it provides some form of educational foundation, maintains a spiritual and cultural continuity, and buys time for the family to perhaps stabilize their financial situation so they can afford formal schooling later.[11] However, while this strategy might seem practical in the short term, it comes with its own set of long-term limitations. For example, it can create gaps in a child's broader education, delaying exposure to subjects like math, science, and language, which are critical for comprehensive skill development. Consequently, children who enter the formal education system at a later stage may find themselves at a disadvantage, facing challenges in catching up with their peers. The decision to keep kids in *madrasas* until standard 5 is often not a choice but a compromise, reflective of the difficult trade-off (s) families are forced to make in the pursuit of education. In Mogadishu, there is a marked preference for *qur'anic* schools, also known as *madrasas*, over formal educational institutions. The primary motivation behind this preference is often religious in nature but also financial. A teacher in Hodan district stated:

> *"Cost of madrasa isn't necessarily cheaper than formal schooling, with prices ranging as high as 10 to 15 dollars. However, one distinct advantage of madrasas is their potential flexibility when it comes to fees. If a parent can't afford to pay for all their children, there's a possibility that they might only be charged for some. While this doesn't completely resolve the issue of affordability or offer a comprehensive educational experience, it does offer a semblance of hope and options for parents caught in a cycle of poverty and limited choices."*[12]

While *madrasas* meet important cultural and religious needs, the challenge lies in integrating these traditional forms of education with the broader academic curriculum to ensure a well-rounded educational experience for all children. Environmental challenges also exacerbate the already precarious state of education in Somalia. For example, severe drought conditions in the country have led to the premature closure of over 250 schools, adversely affecting approximately 70,000 children (Somalia Education Cluster, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the educational landscape, introducing new and urgent challenges (World Vision, 2021) especially for the displaced population who have for a long constituted a

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[10] Interview with the education director of Benadir regional administration on September 7, 2023.
[11] Interview with a parent in Hamarweyne with children of his own and other in his care by a diseased brother on September 18, 2023.
[12] Interview with a teacher on the phone on September 13, 2023.

significant proportion of the population in Mogadishu (UNICEF, 2011). Despite the absence of precise figures (Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development, 2020), prevailing estimates indicate that the percentage of individuals with disabilities in the country may surpass the global average of 15% (Rohwerder, 2018). In Somaliland, a staggering 42% of households reported having at least one member with a disability (CESVI & Handicap International, 2012). The number is likely to be higher in Mogadishu due to the conflict. This underscores the pressing need for focused attention and resources towards addressing the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in the region

In terms of impact, the issue of out-of-school children has a profound bearing on individual children, most notably through the loss of potential. When children are unable to attend school, they miss out on crucial developmental milestones. Beyond the loss of potential, out-of-school children also face increased vulnerability to various forms of exploitation and harm. Without the protective environment that schools often provide, these children are at greater risk for labour exploitation and early marriage. Moreover, the absence of educational engagement makes them more susceptible to ideological indoctrination, social isolation, and mental health issues. Each of these vulnerabilities compounds the other, creating a complex web of challenges that make it increasingly difficult for these children to break free and realize their full potential.

At the broader societal level, one of the most significant impacts is the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and conflict. Education is a cornerstone for sustainable development. When a significant portion of the population is deprived of educational opportunities, the nation suffers, losing out on the energy, innovative ideas, skills, and labour force necessary to drive development. This not only stifles current progress but also casts a long shadow on the country's future, limiting its ability to compete on a global stage and improve the quality of life for all its citizens. In communities where many children are out-of-school, there's a heightened risk that these young people will be drawn into criminal activities. Thus, high numbers of out-of-school children in Mogadishu have a direct impact on the city's security landscape. The education director of Benadir regional administration points out that:

> "Ciyaal Weero [loosely translated as 'attack children'] have become increasingly prevalent in neighbourhoods like Dharkeynley, Wadajir, and Kaaraan. These areas rank among the city's highest for out-of-school children, second only to the central and peripheral districts. This shows us the correlation between the lack of educational opportunities and increased security risks. Young people, when devoid of structured learning environments, may seek a sense of belonging and purpose elsewhere, often in places that can lead to anti-social or criminal behaviour. The presence of these gangs

creates a dual problem: not only does it raise immediate concerns for community safety, but it also makes it even more challenging to get children back into schools".[13]

The impact also goes beyond national borders. A lack of educational opportunities often forces families to leave their homes in search of better prospects, adding to the rising numbers of refuges and migrants worldwide.[14] These families often end up in refugee camps or migrate to other countries, where their children might still face barriers to education due to language, discrimination, or insufficient resources. Demonstrative of this fact is that UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, recorded 790,513 Somali refugees, 56,893 asylum seekers, and 2.9 million internally displaced Somalis (UNHCR, 2022). This not only compounds the educational and social challenges for these children but also places an additional burden on host countries that may already be grappling with their own educational and social issues. Additionally, the out-of-school children phenomenon has serious implications for international security. Uneducated youth can become easy targets for recruitment by terrorist organizations and criminal syndicates, posing a threat not just to their own countries but to global peace and security. Therefore, the issue transcends geographical and political boundaries, making it a global concern that requires coordinated international efforts for mitigation.

2.7   Current measures and actors

The current focus on educational interventions in Somalia prioritizes enhancing access to quality education, elevating curricular standards, and establishing robust governance mechanisms. To this end, the federal government has rolled out ambitious educational strategies and initiatives (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020a). In 2020, 25 schools were rebuilt and operationalized, spreading across 12 districts. This initiative notably includes five districts and two entirely new locations that previously did not have public schools at all. This is a significant step toward increasing access to education in Mogadishu, especially in underserved areas. For instance, three new locations that benefitted from the rebuilding effort – Gubadley, Dares Salaam, and Garasbaaley – previously had no public schools.[15] Furthermore, this academic year has seen a significant expansion. The number of operational public schools has grown from 25 to 43 (see table). In Deyniile and Kaaraan, both districts that previously had only one public school, an additional school was added in each area. As a result, the population of public school-goers in Mogadishu is expected to more than double this year, soaring from 28,000 to 63,000.[16]

Quality of education has also received significant attention. Chief among the areas of focus is the implementation of quality assurance frameworks or improvement of existing systems such

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[13] Interview with the education director of Benadir regional administration on September 7, 2023.
[14] Interview with a senior civil servant at the federal government of Somalia on September 13, 2023.
[15] Kaxda, Dharkeenley, Hodan, Yaaqshid, and Heliwaa were also without public schooling options.
[16] Interview with the education director of Benadir regional administration on September 7, 2023.

as the education management system that serves as a centralized hub for various metrics and operations.[17] In this system, Federal Member States (FMS) and BRA are provided with "windows" or portals to make input from their local ends, although final approval rests with the federal government. The enrolment of students for examinations is initiated several months in advance, which gives ample time to prepare inspectors and coordinate other logistical elements necessary for the smooth execution of exams. In addition to this management system, there is also a significant focus on the training of teachers to deliver high-quality instruction. In most Federal Member States (FMS), the scope of such quality improvement measures extended only to the regional level. However, in BRA, the reach of these measures is more granular, extending all the way to the city level. For instance, the number of teachers in public schools has seen a substantial increase, jumping from 700 to 1,700.[18] Community engagement has also been initiated to boost enrolment, addressing one of the key challenges: the public perception of low educational quality in public schools.

To enhance quality, efforts have been made to attract some of the best talent in Mogadishu. Financial support from donors has helped make this possible, with each teacher now receiving a salary of 324 dollars and head teachers earning 400 dollars monthly.[19] By improving both their quantity and quality, public schools are poised to compete directly with private institutions.[20] Noteworthy is also the contributions of the Somali diaspora communities and organisations. Their assistance goes beyond just financial contributions, encompassing the sharing of vital expertise and intellectual assets as well (Hoehne & Ibrahim, 2014; Lindley, 2008). Islamic NGOs and charities have also been notably active. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, these organizations have navigated the tightrope of meeting global anti-terrorism guidelines while addressing local educational demands (Saggiomo, 2011). A significant proportion of their assistance goes to the building of schools. On a similar note, western aid organizations have also made meaningful contributions. They have played a key role not only in infrastructure development but also in policy formulation (Federal Government of Somalia, 2020c) and provision of educational materials that make learning environments accessible for those most at risk (UIS & UNESCO, 2018; USAID, 2023).

In a nutshell, inclusive education stands as a beacon of hope for upholding the rights of Somali children to education. With a history marked by conflict, displacement, and socio-economic challenges, many children in Somalia, particularly those from marginalized communities, girls, and those with disabilities, have been denied their fundamental right to learn. By championing inclusive education, Somalia not only commits to breaking down these barriers but also ensures that every child, irrespective of their background or circumstance, receives the

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[17] This includes student enrollment and certification records to logistics, facilities, and the number of schools.
[18] Interview via phone with a civil servant at Benadir regional administration on September 7, 2023.
[19] Ibid.
[20] This is in stark contrast to private schools where teachers may earn around 200 dollars, although they might have other incentives

opportunity to access quality education. The goal is to foster a holistic, equitable, and joyful learning experience for students. This underscores the importance of high-quality early childhood development, removing barriers to education, ensuring teachers are well-supported, and providing a myriad of effective learning resources (World Bank, 2020b).

3   Discussion

As shown above, the educational system in Somalia is grappling with severe challenges that extend from alarmingly low enrolment rates to pronounced disparities across space and gender, a lack of sufficient infrastructure, and poor quality of education. Years of conflict, coupled with systemic poverty and a lack of adequate infrastructure have perpetuated these problems, leaving a staggering figure of 3 million children out of school. While urban areas may have some schooling options, others lack even basic facilities. These issues collectively paint a grim picture, indicating that urgent, multi-faceted interventions are required to revitalize Somalia's educational landscape. With a rapidly growing young population, Somalia finds itself at a unique demographic crossroads that could either propel development or exacerbate existing challenges. While current efforts to tackle pressing challenges are certainly commendable, they often fall short of achieving their full potential due to several to resource insufficiency, poor policy, and planning.

Take the infrastructure for example. The current public education facilities are designed to cater to population numbers that existed before 1991, and these have dramatically increased over the decades. Simply refurbishing old schools or transitioning them back to the public sector is not enough to meet the educational needs of the significantly larger population we now have in cities (Earle, 2021). Therefore, in the face of limited educational infrastructure and space, innovative solutions can be explored to make use of existing community spaces. One such approach involves leveraging mosques and madarasas as venues for primary education. Remarkably, every 250 meters in urban areas one can find a *qur'anic* school. This widespread distribution illustrates how faith and traditions remain accessible and central to daily life. Thus, the unique use of these spaces not only alleviates the strain on the existing educational system but also fosters community involvement and ownership in the educational process. The ministry of education can provide organised guidance on the curriculum and pedagogy that ensures that these centres are in line with more general educational objectives by creating a specialised department devoted to madarasas. Furthermore, such integrative efforts can aid in the decolonization of education in Somalia, realigning the system to reflect, respect, and reinforce indigenous knowledge, values, and methodologies.[21]

Second, education in Mogadishu is subject to the vicissitudes of donor dependence. International aid and funding, while critical in maintaining basic educational services, have inadvertently created a cycle where the Somali educational system lacks financial self-

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[21] Interview with an advisor at the ministry of education on October 2, 2023.

sufficiency. This dependency places the sector at the mercy of fluctuating international priorities, funding levels, and geopolitical considerations. The result is an educational landscape that, while grateful for the assistance it receives, is perpetually on unstable footing and struggles to build foundational resilience against future uncertainties. Moreover, donor programs aimed at bolstering education often face significant challenges related to legitimacy, especially those spearheaded by organizations or individuals of Western origin. This scepticism largely stems from a long-standing suspicion towards foreigners, particularly those from the West, who are sometimes viewed as having ulterior motives or imposing external values (Mohamed, 1996), not least to mention the Somali experience of foreign intervention and conflict, from the era of colonization and proxy Cold wars to the American interventions since the 1990s and the Ethiopian interventions in the 2000s. To mitigate these issues, it is crucial for donor initiatives to be sensitive to local cultures and engage in meaningful, transparent partnerships with community stakeholders.

Moreover, funding should be prioritized for projects that are in sync with the government's long-term educational plans. For instance, infrastructure development is pressing need which tops the government's priority. Thus, donors could offer grants and non-interest loans specifically for constructing educational facilities, especially in conflict-affected regions in much greater scope than is the case now.[22] The alternative educational spaces mentioned earlier should also be considered for funding. At present, a substantial portion of donor funds are allocated to the policy-making process, yet several issues compromise its effectiveness. One is that many advisors involved in this process are either inadequately qualified or have personal relationships with the public officials who appoint them. This not only affects the quality of advice but also turns the role of advisors into a form of patronage, effectively corrupting the system. Additionally, there's a noticeable overlap of resources across various ministries, resulting in underutilized advisors. Given these challenges, it would be prudent for donors to negotiate with the government to establish a centralized "one-stop shop" for policymaking. By addressing the inefficiencies in the policy-making process, focus can be shifted towards enhancing the quality of education. This shift would make a tangible difference in the lives of students and better prepare them for the future.

Third, although there has been notable success in increasing literacy rates, the quality of education has suffered significantly. In the rush to achieve higher literacy figures and school enrolment, educational institutions may have compromised on curriculum depth, teacher training, and learning outcomes. There is also a need to support the integration of technology into educational settings through e-learning resources and computer labs. In fact, leveraging technology can broaden educational reach. For older children who have missed years of formal education, vocational training offers a practical pathway. Skill-based training can be

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[22] However, such allocations should be made in a manner that avoid creating inequality especially in the cases where there is a risk of those in power allocating development projects to areas populated by their own clan without evidence for disproportionate need.

paired with mechanisms that enable these children to join the workforce legally and responsibly. Failing to address the quality issue could further propel a generation educated in name only, lacking the skills and knowledge to meaningfully contribute to society. At present, the learning deprivation gap in the region stands at 20%, suggesting that students in this regions are doubly disadvantaged compared to the global average (Azevedo, 2020).

Fourthly, the focus of intervention in the quality is primarily on rebuilding and strengthening the capacity of educators to deliver quality education in a challenging environment. Efforts are concentrated on increasing the number of teachers, improving qualifications, and professionalizing the teaching sector. Given that many teachers in Somalia started teaching without formal training due to the country's prolonged conflict, this move is commendable. However, the monitoring of educational standards is imperative for ensuring both the quality and equity of educational outcomes. Without a robust system of oversight, inconsistencies in the educational experience can become pervasive, leading to an uneven landscape of opportunity and achievement. Regular assessment and auditing practices are essential for maintaining a high standard of education, identifying areas for improvement, and taking timely corrective measures. This not only helps in upholding the credibility of educational institutions but also ensures that students are being equipped with the skills and knowledge they need for success in a rapidly evolving world. While quality assurance systems are in place at federal level, their utility is limited by the political reality in the country where the central authority does have neither a meaningful influence nor control over the various regional administrations in the country.

While regional autonomy can sometimes be advantageous, it is imperative that these fragmented systems be thoughtfully consolidated into a more unified framework. This consolidation needs to be executed in a considerate manner that respects regional peculiarities and needs, but also aims for a higher, more consistent educational standard across the country.

Fifthly, the importance of inclusivity in education cannot be overstated. At present, girls, children living with disabilities and internally displaced persons in Somalia face disproportionate barriers to accessing quality education. Societal norms, economic constraints, and entrenched gender roles often contribute to this disparity. Reflecting on Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4's principles,[23] it is crucial for stakeholders, policymakers, and educators to champion inclusivity, ensuring that no child, whether affected by displacement or gender biases, is left behind in the pursuit of knowledge (World Bank, 2020b). Given its unique challenges, Somalia must also prioritize the training and hiring of female teachers. Having more female educators not only champions gender equality but also serves as a source of inspiration for female students, creating a more varied and inclusive

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[23] These goals recognize the inherent value of providing quality education for all, irrespective of their circumstances or backgrounds.

educational setting. Moreover, female teachers exhibit a relatively low absence rate of 9%, compared to their male counterparts at 2% (UNICEF, 2020).

Moreover, measures aimed at promoting the education of girls should synergistically work with women empowerment programs targeting participation in work, governance, and politics. Such initiatives can provide mentorship, while also raising awareness about the importance of female representation in decision-making positions at all levels. In India, a system of quotas to ensure adequate representation of women in political and governmental roles is employed. Similarly, in Afghanistan, the establishment of parallel governance structures has created avenues for women's voices to be heard and acknowledged. This not only uplifts the status of women in society but also sets a precedent for young girls, motivating them to aim higher in their academic pursuits (Beaman et al., 2012).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, current educational interventions in Somalia emphasize primarily on technical adjustments. Initiatives largely focus on curricular innovation, infrastructure improvement, and pedagogical enhancement. While technical interventions are necessary, they might not be sufficient on their own. The challenges are rooted in a complex matrix of political variables. For instance, the constitution provides an ambiguous framework regarding jurisdictional boundaries. This vagueness particularly impacts Mogadishu. This is the case because the city's administration is appointed by the President, unlike other regions where they are locally constituted. In light of this, it is imperative for the government to proactively engage in consistent political dialogue pending constitutional reviews that clarifies the roles of the different spheres of government. This engagement would serve as a platform for fostering improved working relationships among stakeholders. By doing so, a more streamlined and collaborative framework of cooperation can be established, ensuring that even as the constitution is under review, the machinery of governance operates efficiently and harmoniously.

4   Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the issue of out-of-school children in Mogadishu. The prevailing discourse surrounding primarily emphasizes technical shortcomings, such as infrastructure, curricula, and ineffective teaching methods. Yet, while addressing these technical facets is undeniably vital, it is equally crucial to consider the deeply rooted political intricacies that contribute significantly to the educational challenges. Focusing solely on technical interventions neglects the broader picture: the political volatility. For instance, the unclear jurisdictional boundaries, particularly evident in Mogadishu's governance, exacerbate administrative inefficiencies and conflicts. Therefore, for a sustainable and holistic development of Somalia's educational landscape, it's imperative to concurrently address both its technical and political dimensions. Mere technical rectifications, in the absence of political solutions, may offer only transient relief rather than enduring progress. Therefore, we argue that Somalia's out of school children's problem are deeply entwined with a matrix of underlying political variables. Although well-intended, we highlight that the current

interventions primarily geared towards technical adjustments such as curricular innovation, infrastructural, and pedagogical enhancement factors are unlikely to bring about enduring solutions without due political consideration.

In so doing, our inquiry enriches the literature on two fronts. The first is the need to address the specific challenges that arise in post-conflict settings when tackling educational disparities, as generalized interventions can lead to unproductive outcomes (Brown et al., 2020; Celestine et al., 2022; Shuayb & Ahmad, 2021). Second, the importance of a city-specific focus that captures the intricacies of an urban landscape, which offers its own blend of challenges and opportunities – from overpopulation and resource limitations to urban migration patterns (Moyi, 2012b; J. H. Williams & Cummings, 2017). This nuanced urban perspective is essential because cities often serve as hubs for economic activity, cultural exchange, conflict, and displacement. The unique dynamics of poverty, social stratification, and other factors in cities like Mogadishu necessitate tailored policy and intervention strategies. Furthermore, a city-level approach has wider implications for international aid and development. Given the focal role cities play in attracting international resources, having accurate, localized understanding can lead to more effective allocation of resources and, subsequently, faster progress.

Additionally, this city-focused research enriches the global educational discourse by introducing complexities often overlooked in traditional educational models, such as the impact of trauma and social divisions. The implications are far-reaching, going beyond localized challenges to contribute to a more diverse and nuanced global conversation on education in challenging contexts. Turning our attention to Mogadishu itself, the dire circumstances of educational inaccessibility are a product of complex, deeply interwoven challenges that encompass financial, socio-economic, and demographic dimensions. The issue extends beyond the inability of families to afford education, impacting wider societal facets such as perpetuating poverty and vulnerability to extremism. It is not also isolated; it amplifies global issues like refugee crises and global security concerns, underlining the need for collective, far-reaching solutions. In parallel, the overarching educational crisis in Mogadishu also symbolizes broader systemic problems affecting the entire country. Factors such as socio-economic disparities, gender and clan-based discrimination, and even geographic factors contribute to the vast inequality in educational access. These disparities have cascading effects, including long-term economic impacts, perpetuating social issues, and escalating cycles of poverty.

Recent years have seen commendable strides in Mogadishu's educational landscape due to the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including the Federal Government, international NGOs, and the Somali diaspora. The expansion of schools, increased teacher recruitment, and soaring enrolment rates point toward positive change. Nonetheless, considerable hurdles, including socio-economic issues and regional disparities, continue to impede full educational accessibility and quality. In a nutshell, while significant progress has been made, there remains an urgent need to sustain and expand upon these efforts to ensure

equitable and quality education for all children in Mogadishu. The complexities of the challenges at hand necessitate an ongoing, collaborative approach that engages all stakeholders from local communities to international partners.

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