



# COVIDED – COVID 19 and Education in Somalia/Somaliland

A TESF COVID-19 Research Report

## Introduction and rationale

Between June and September 2020, this team, composed of staff from Transparency Solutions (TS) - Peter Campbell, Mustafe Elmi, Latif Ismail, Sandra McNeill, Abdi Rubac, Asma Saed Ali, Amel Saeed and Mohamed Shidane – and the University of Bristol (Eric Herring) conducted the COVIDED project on COVID-19 and Education in Somalia/Somaliland.

In 1991 Somaliland unilaterally declared its independence from Somalia. Somaliland has been self-governing ever since but has not been recognised internationally as a sovereign state. This ambiguity of being both not in and in Somalia explains why we refer to Somalia when referring to the federal level, to Somaliland when referring to Somaliland alone and Somalia/Somaliland when referring to both. The project aimed to understand the impact of COVID-19 response on education in Somalia/Somaliland. It sought to do so as something valuable in itself because it is important to know what harm is caused to education by COVID-19 responses, to know whether measures to counteract those harms are effective or exacerbate inequalities, and to draw lessons for how to better prepare for and respond to such emergencies. The research was also important as an activity to feed into the developing *TESF Somalia/Somaliland Country Background Paper* and the TESF Call for Proposals (invited in the case of Somalia/Somaliland) as part of its Network Plus projects. The

project relates explicitly to the overall purposes of TESF, the themes related to COVID-19 as set out in the no-cost extension proposal and the specific context, issues and needs in Somalia/Somaliland.

Full details of the research – context, rationale, methods, findings and conclusions – can be found in the outputs from the research, namely an academic journal article in English (Herring et al. 2020a) and versions of the article in standard Somali (Herring et al. 2020b) and the Somali Maay dialect (Herring et al. 2020c). The academic journal article relates the research to academic research and government and donor programmes within and beyond Somalia/Somaliland. For more comprehensive discussion of education availability and quality, see our TESF *Briefing Note* (Herring et al. 2020d) and forthcoming TESF *Country Background Paper* (Elmi et al. 2020). The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the COVIDED research that relates it to the overall context of TESF.

## The formal education system and COVID-19 responses

While there are some differences in specifics, the overall patterns across Somalia and Somaliland have been similar in relation to education and COVID-19 responses. Even before the pandemic,

there was very little access to formal education (among the lowest rates in the world) and the formal education that exists is nearly all of low quality. Few people have access to healthcare and Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Government of Somaliland (GSL) efforts to limit the spread of the disease had major negative educational impacts – direct through educational institution closures and indirect through loss of ability to pay for education. The authorities imposed widespread closures of educational institutions in March 2020, with partial reopening for examinations in Somaliland in June and Somalia in July. The authorities, with support from international donors and the local telecommunications companies, provided some compensatory education online and via radio and television. However, these measures tended to be more accessible to the more privileged financially and the more urban – most cannot afford a radio or television and only a few have internet access. For reasons not yet understood, Somalia/Somaliland – like many African countries – has had very low rates of illness and death from COVID-19. As a result, life is mostly being conducted normally, with few efforts to maintain COVID-29 control measures.

## Methods

The methods were summarised in the journal article as follows:

The research explored the educational and broader social impacts of COVID-19 control measures and efforts to compensate for those measures in the education sector (e.g. by online teaching) in Somalia/Somaliland. It did so through 131 interviews and four focus group discussions with forty government educational officials, educators and the public with a wide range of educational experiences, including no education ever (Herring et al. 2020a, 200).

We would add the following observations about our methods:

- We were able to conduct remote research via smart phones and basic phones only.
- Long term partnership between TS and UoB was vital. We drew on the team's deep understanding of and embeddedness in the local contexts of Mogadishu and Hargeisa and excellent skills to recruit participants; manage cultural, political, social, physical, and psychological risks; grasp policy agendas; and connect illiterate people and senior government officials alike to those agendas.
- We ensured participation across the full range of education, including no education ever, and from sectors of the population who tend to be most excluded from education in Somalia/Somaliland, namely rural populations and nomadic pastoralists.
- Co-production - 'with not for' – is central to our work: as we explain in some of the points below, the participants are actively involved in shaping the research.
- We obtained consent orally. This approach is suited to a more oral culture.
- We addressed poverty as an aspect of exclusion by providing payment for participation. paid a \$25 fee, transferred by mobile phone, for every time each participant spoke with us. This ensured that people would not be excluded by being unable to spare the time. It also communicated, in a material way, that we valued their time, as well as helping them financially. We found no evidence that this introduced bias into our findings.
- We addressed minimal access to technology by enabling participation with a basic phone. Around 50% of the adult population of Somalia/Somaliland have at least a basic mobile phone most payments are made by text on basic mobile phone rather than cash or into bank accounts. Use of a basic mobile phone did not prevent participation in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as we put incoming calls on speaker.
- We addressed illiteracy by having staff read or summarise materials (including the draft report) pitched to the individual's level of understanding.
- We engaged with participants in their preferred language and dialect (standard Somali, the Somali dialect Maay and Arabic as well as English).
- We were respectful of participants' time: we called back when convenient for them.
- We were responsive to participants' questions: we called back with answers.
- We developed rapport with participants by speaking with them on at least five occasions.
- We prioritised making the participants comfortable by being informal and flexible so that they did not feel intimidated by the process. This was especially important for those unfamiliar with research methods.
- We communicated to participants that we wanted to be sure that their voices would be heard.
- Interviews and FGDs were semi-structured: in addition to asking our questions, we always gave opportunities to the participants to say whatever they wanted to say.
- We returned to issues to reflect more deeply and analyse surprises in findings.
- We made extensive use of quotes to facilitate participants' views being articulated more fully.
- We forestalled potential biases in FGD participation by establishing commitment to ground rules of inclusivity, active listening and trust.
- We analysed inclusion as part of the research.
- We sought the input of the participants into the questions we were asking and how we were asking them.
- We gave participants an opportunity to comment on the draft analysis and findings.
- We translated the research into standard Somali and the Somali Maay dialect.

- We asked the participants to tell people about our project, but only if they were comfortable to do so. We left it completely up to the participants on how to do this, whether that was talking with family and friends only, posting on social media or talking with journalists. This is part of our co-production method in that it gave participants real control over much of the dissemination process. This approach underlines our commitment to inclusion; the work reached people who would otherwise have been excluded from learning about the report if only more formal and centralised dissemination methods were used were included.
- 100% of the funding for this research went to Somalia/Somaliland.
- Research such as this creates a relationship with participants. We managed expectations so that were clear about the benefits that we could and could not deliver.

## Findings

The journal article summarised the findings of the research as follows:

Positive views of the general availability and quality of education were based on comparisons with the past period of civil war and state collapse. Nearly all participants agreed that education had been harmed severely by COVID-19 control measures. They also tended to agree the educational inequalities that disadvantaged girls, the poor and rural populations had been exacerbated by COVID-19 control measures and by education provision to compensate for educational institution closures. Building back better in education as a response to COVID-19 is not happening when looked at overall, as even the positive efforts, while laudable in themselves, are exacerbating inequalities. The findings were similar for both locations. The research highlights the need and potential support for a more inclusive approach to responding to COVID-19 in the education sector (Herring et al. 2020a, 200).

The article elaborates on the findings regarding availability and quality of education and impacts of education sector responses to COVID-19 (extent of harm to education, positive education responses and impacts on disadvantaged groups).

The starting point of the research is participants' perceptions of education quality and availability and perceptions of the impacts of responses. However, we do not simply present a summary of perceptions. The research also explores in depth areas of agreement and disagreement across those perceptions and related this to the individual's direct experience or role in education (e.g. as a parent, a student, an educator or an official with responsibility in a particular education sub-sector). We found

high levels of agreement among the participants and between their perceptions and the more general academic and grey literatures: that said, this was the first research on COVID-19 responses and education in Somalia/Somaliland. Levels of agreement were not high in all respects. The research considered primary school, secondary school, Alternative Basic Education/Non-Formal Education (ABE/NFE), Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education (HE). Some participants claimed that lower levels of education and TVET were relatively neglected in terms of compensatory responses for educational institution closures but we were not able to validate those claims against other sources.



## Methodological Implications for future TESF research to be COVID-19 responsible

As explained above, the research showed that it is possible for TESF to be COVID-19 responsible by engaging in fully remote research, while still being inclusive. The fundamental requirement is a skilled and trusted local partner.

## Recommendations for further research related to the findings

We recommend the following in terms of further research related to the findings:

- Baseline analysis of the availability and quality of education;
- Impacts of responses to COVID-19 on education (extent of harm to education, positive education responses and impacts on disadvantaged groups);
- Areas and extent of agreement or disagreement among different groups on these issues;
- Relationships between perceptions and realities on these issues; and
- Measures to make responses to COVID-19 and other emergencies more optimal both as a short-term measure and as an enhanced foundation for sustainable futures.

## References

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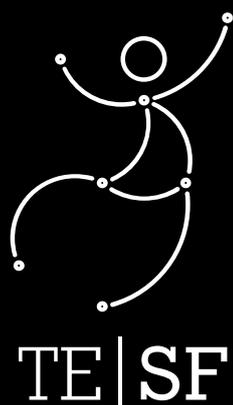
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We undertake collaborative research to Transform Education for Sustainable Futures.

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