

UNICEF SOMALIA MONTHLY BULLETIN

UNITE FOR CHILDREN

Volume 1, Issue 4

April 2008

A word from the UNICEF Representative

Faced with a worsening humanitarian crisis and security situation, Somalia needs the support and goodwill of the international community and its own citizens to stabilize the country to give children a chance of growing up in an atmosphere that is peaceful and conducive to development.

The outlook for Somalia this year is gloomy. If current drought conditions persist, 3.5 million people - nearly half of Somalia's population - may need food aid by the end of the year. This will mean a vulnerable population caught up in a cauldron of instability and insecurity.

Somalia has too many challenges facing children, women and the general population even in periods of relative calm and normalcy. In the past month, Somalia joined the world in marking World Malaria Day. With an estimated 700,000 cases annually, malaria is a major public health problem in Somalia that requires a concerted approach for effective control. And yet, this problem though being tackled with international support exists in a country with the barest of health facilities and institutions that serve the public.

On the nutrition front, last week, UNICEF started providing supplementary food to 44311 children under 5 years. The distribution started at nine distribution sites in the Mogadishu-Afgoye corridor which currently hosts about 250,000 internally displaced people all in need of social services. Despite the best of intentions it is difficult to meet all their needs. Amid this there are reports of an increase in admissions of severely malnourished children in feeding programmes. 2000 children have been admitted to feeding centres.

Fighting off hunger and malnutrition is much easier in an atmosphere of stability and prosperity and educating children is easier when teachers are trained and school facilities exist. Additionally, immunization of children is more easily done when vaccinators do not have to worry about their security.

UNICEF and other international and local organi-



A girl carries her sibling among the displaced in the Afgoye area. Credit: UNICEF/Maulid.

zations are trying to alleviate the suffering of the most vulnerable in Somalia, but the problem is much larger than their resources and capacities.

After 17 years without a central government, the Somali crisis is threatening to get a life of its own as a cauldron of despair, this must not be allowed to happen and it is time for new resolve to turn round the misfortune of instability to give hope to a generation of Somalis being born today.

Christian

Christian Balslev-Olesen

UNICEF in Somalia contributes to meeting Millennium Development Goals and Millennium Declaration Targets by increasing access to and the quality of basic services for accelerated child survival, development and protection.

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ACCELERATING CHILD SURVIVAL

95% of children under one in Somalia have not received the full recommended course of vaccinations. One in eight children dies before his/her fifth birthday. Somalia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world.

UNICEF and WHO work with government and NGO partners to improve young child survival by increasing access to and the quality of health centres through vaccination, nutrition and malaria prevention programmes.

Hundreds of families flee Mogadishu

Hundreds of families fled their homes in Mogadishu as intense fighting between Ethiopian troops and insurgents raged on, claiming the lives of up to 100 people. Another 200 people were reportedly wounded in the clashes, which started on 19 April. On 20 April 20 civilians – many of them clerics - were killed in and around Al-Hidaya Mosque in Heliwaa district. A group of 41 children were also detained from the madrasa school attached to the mosque, under suspicion of training as Islamic insurgents. 32 of the children were later released.

Two youths lost their lives to police fire in a demonstration in Hargeisa, Northwest Somalia ('Somaliland'). Among the issues that led to the protests were high prices of food and fuel. Calm was restored after the intervention of local elders and youth leaders.

The security situation in Northeast Somalia (Puntland) has deteriorated since the start of the year. Two staff members of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) survived an ambush in Garowe the administrative capital of Puntland on 5 April. Four gunmen were arrested over the incident. Following this incident, the UN downgraded the security phase in Puntland from 3 to 4 and reduced international staff.

A French yacht was hijacked by pirates who later released it and its occupants after payment of ransom. Some of the alleged pirates were later seized by French special forces. In another incident, Puntland coastguards seized seven pirates who tried to hijack a commercial boat headed for Bossaso port.

Somaliland children's Bill gets Presidential assent

The Somaliland "Justice for Children Bill" which has already been passed by the Parliament received Presidential assent in April to become law. The law is the culmination of a UNICEF effort to have in place laws, policies, rules and regulations to deal with children and the law. UNICEF is now going to follow up for implementation of the law which will be beneficial for all three categories of children in contact with the law - children who are accused of some violation, children victims of crimes and child witnesses.

A training workshop was held in Somaliland for organizations which handle cases of sexual and gender-based violence. About 35 participants participated. They included policewomen who run children's and women's desks at police stations. The workshop focused on response and prevention of gender-based violence in Somaliland and ways in which to offer victims assistance.

The National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Management of Gender Based Violence in Somaliland was finalized with the support of the Somaliland Ministry of Family Affairs and Social Development. The National Plan of Action envisions a situation where people in Somaliland, particularly women enjoy a better quality of life through the provision of appropriate care and protection from gender-based violence. It has an overall goal of greatly minimizing violence by the year 2015.

Somalia takes part in the 'World's Biggest Lesson'

By Denise Shepherd-Johnson

Nairobi, 6 May 2008 - Somali children last week took part in the 'World's Biggest Lesson,' joining 7.5 million people from over 100 countries in a 'lesson' to 'teach' politicians and local leaders about the importance of giving everyone a chance to receive a quality education.

Schools, youth groups and children from the peer education 'Child-to-Child Clubs' in North West Somalia (the self-declared Republic of Somaliland) and North East Somalia (the semi-autonomous state of Puntland) participated in the 'Lesson' which was supported by UNICEF, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), international NGOs and national implementing partners, the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Somalia (FAWESOM) in Puntland and the Somaliland Student's Assembly (SOLSA) in Somaliland. The event was the highlight of the Global Action Week for Education, 21-27 April. [The Global Action Week for Education is an annual event organized by the Global Campaign for Education].

In line with the global theme, 'Quality Education for All: End Exclusion Now!' the 'Lesson' served to demonstrate that halfway to the 2015 'Education For All' promise of free, universal primary education for all, the world is way off track. In Somalia, in particular, 70% of children have missed out on a quality education as a result of poverty, gender and conflict.

During the 'Lesson' Somali children sought to get public commitment from leaders to undertake specific measures to reduce exclusion and implement education policies and practices to achieve gender equality and reach marginalised and excluded learners, such as children with disabilities, nomadic communities and internally-displaced children in areas of ongoing conflict in Somalia.

Calling on parents to send children (and especially girls) to school, children conducted role plays to illustrate the circumstances that keep them out of school. These included domestic labour, uneducated parents who do not attach value to education, school fees and peer pressure to chew the stimulant leaves known as 'khat'.

In North West Somalia ('Somaliland') girls from Havoyoco youth centre implored visiting local dignitaries to, "...let us all seek the light. Education is the light

of the world...an educated person is like daylight, bright and friendly, whereas night is dull"

In response, Director of Planning in the Ministry of Education, Mr. Abdi Abdillahi, acknowledged that, "Every child must learn to read and write. Children must go back to school and parents must go visit the schools to see how their children are learning."

Religious leader, Sheikh Ibrahim Harbarwaa also emphasized the importance of teachers "[They]... should be respected in the society, [and] should be committed and work together with parents to ensure that children receive quality education in school."

At 62 years old, Sahra Iimi, a student of literacy and numeracy in the Somaliland capital, Hargeisa, was able to demonstrate that inclusion in education means no age limits. She urged parents to return to school saying, "It is never too late to learn. Today my children cannot cheat me. I am able to check their books," she declared.

By the end of the Somaliland event, the Ministry of Education had made commitments to ensure that all children access quality education; increase school enrolment to at least 75%; construct more schools; and to expand existing facilities to accommodate more children. The Ministry also pledged to double (from 2,500) the number of teachers on its payroll by 2011 with a view to seeing all school age children in school by 2015 and able to read and write.

UNICEF provided support to Somalia's 'Biggest Lesson' as part of its 'Go To School' programme, which focuses on increasing access for all children to quality basic education. The programme recognises that without legitimate Education Authorities in Somalia, families and communities have few ways of claiming their rights. UNICEF is therefore assisting the Ministries of Education in North East, North West and Central Southern Somalia to build their capacity to take responsibility for service delivery of education. Events like the 'World's Biggest Lesson' are providing a platform for parents and children to engage with politicians and education officials to candidly remind them that *all* children not only *need* education to help build a peaceful and prosperous nation but have a *right* to it.

UN agencies plan better coordination in fight against HIV in Puntland

UNICEF and UNAIDS organized a meeting in Puntland to discuss coordination of the different HIV programmes run by various UN agencies as a step towards forming a joint UN team on HIV. The process is meant to ensure closer collaboration for a more coordinated response.

Training: 37 people were trained on how to prevent stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV. The trainees included religious leaders, women, youth and community leaders.

Advocacy: 42 school teachers from 23 IDP camps in Bossaso and seven farming villages near Bossaso were trained in basic facts for HIV/AIDS prevention and control. A HIV Regional working group as well as a support group for people living with HIV were established in Bari region of Puntland.

Supplies: Supplies that included anti-retroviral drugs; drugs for treatment of sexually transmitted infections and HIV testing kits were distributed to three NGOs involved in HIV-related activities in Puntland.



Demonstrators take to the streets in Hargeisa, Somaliland during activities to mark the Global Education Campaign which was marked throughout the world. **See story on Page 3.** Picture Credit: UNICEF/0407/NWZOffice

Emergency: UNICEF responds to drought and diarrhoea outbreaks

UNICEF responded to the drought in Dhahar and Hiingalol in Somaliland by assisting an assessment team for an initial period of two weeks and providing chlorine, jerry cans and water purification tablets.

In Central and Southern Somalia, UNICEF responded to diarrhoea outbreaks in Hiran and Middle Shabelle by delivering water purification tablets and chlorine supplies to partners for immediate distribution among affected communities — Mahass, Mogokory, Helgan and Aborrey in Hiran, and Mahaday, Saba Gezira, Abdi Geledy, Mandhere and Kulmis villages in Middle Shabelle. Supplies for cholera control and prevention were delivered to Somali Red Crescent Society in Hiran.

Reports of rains in several areas of Bay, Bakool and Gedo regions were received with cautious optimism. The outlook will depend on how long the rains last to ensure regeneration of pasture and adequate water supplies to affected communities.

Water trucking is going on for IDPS along the Mogadishu-Afgoye road. Some 20,000 10 litre jerrycans have been distributed as part of promotion of safe drinking water. Construction of 600 pit latrines has also been completed. Chlorination activities at household level have started in Burhakaba town for prevention and control of diarrhoea. Meanwhile, 100 sets of sanitation tools were distributed to Baidoa, Hudur, Merka, Jowhar, and Dusamareb districts' local authorities.

For the love of learning: Baidoa Girls School brings to cheer to the lives of students

By Christine Kapka

Baidoa, Central Somalia — Emanating from a modest but completely refurbished building in the small town of Baidoa, one can hear the sound of a thousand voices resonating in song and echoing throughout the town every day. Yet only a few years ago, the only sounds of life from this plot of land were the resident chickens living amongst the ruins of the deteriorated and abandoned Doctor Abdalla Derow School for Girls. Today, songs from the students in the newly built institution bring life back to a once dreary and depressed part of town and to its citizens. Here, the teachers say, the girls sing from the sheer joy of once again being in school, reading books, and having a safe and clean place to learn.

“The rebuilding of the girl’s school by UNICEF was such a blessing to everyone in the community, and even to those who live far from here and travel to school every day from outside the district,” said Hawa Abdulahi, the school’s headmistress. “Before the refurbishment the whole neighborhood was sad. Everyone was miserable. The children had nowhere to go and were mostly in the street or were working all the time. It has, very simply, changed our neighborhood dramatically. People seem happier; but most importantly the children are clean and productive and they are learning and happy.”

Destroyed after the fall of the government in 1991, the school was rebuilt to the delight of the town by UNICEF in 2005. The only girl’s school available free of charge, the Doctor Abdalla Derow School for Girls offers education to the extremely poor and vulnerable segment of the population. This means that girls normally unable to even think of ever attending any type of schooling due to lack of funds finally have a chance to fulfill a long awaited dream. At the prospect of fulfilling this dream, young girls rushed with alacrity to apply for a coveted spot in the only free schooling program in town.

“After the school was rebuilt the radio announced that they were taking students without charge,” said 13 year old Fortuna, a student at the girl’s school. “My mother took me to sign up but there were so many people, I wasn’t sure I would be accepted. But I am here. I really like looking at the maps and learning where the different towns in my country are located and where other countries are. I’m finally meeting children my own age and making friends. I enjoy learning and like to tell my mother what I’ve learned when I come home from work.”

Like many children, Fortuna must work to help support her family. Now, however, she splits a shift with her sister, working only in the afternoons selling tea in the local market and attending school in the mornings. While UNICEF provides all materials, books, pencils and furnishings at the school, all teachers work at the school on a volunteer basis.

“Even though we are not paid, we get a lot of experience and learn so much from the children. We all love to teach and take pleasure in watching such joy in learning.” said Sara, one of the teachers.

The girl’s school offers standard education and additional teachings in hygiene and nutrition. These both have made a

dramatic difference to the health and well being of the town. In particular, worm infestations have been dramatically reduced in the area as well as colds and flu. Nutritionally, the girls are learning not only how to cook but what to cook, providing the students and their families the knowledge of a more balanced and healthier diet. Thus, the more than one thousand students who attend the girl’s school, which includes 387 orphans, are living healthier, happier lives.

“These days we are trying to mobilize the community into generating funds to provide a medical dispensary for the orphans who attend the school and have no medical care,” said the head mistress. “This is like their home but we don’t have the facilities to treat medical problems and we don’t have the



Students at the Doctor Abdalla Derow School for Girls in Baidoa. Photo credit: UNICEF/2007/CKMinihane

money to send them to the local hospital where someone would have to stay with them constantly to care for them and feed them due to lack of hospital staff and food.”

There are many orphans in Baidoa, almost all of who lack any type of medical care and most lacking any type of formal schooling. But the fact that they want to go to school is something most children probably wouldn’t understand in developing countries.

“Almost every child in this country is actually begging to go to school,” said Hersi Mohammed, UNICEF Education Officer. “Unfortunately, it’s just not possible. There aren’t enough resources right now to build, maintain, furnish and supply the necessary amount of schools at this time. That’s why this refurbished school means so much to the whole community. Now these children, who would probably never have had any type of education, can go to school and learn in a safe, clean environment. My wish is to see enough educational facilities developed here to accommodate all the thousands of children that are pleading for an education. I wish for them the chance to have their dreams come true.”

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World Malaria Day marked

Malaria Day: World Malaria Day was marked on 25 April. In Somaliland the commemoration was organized in partnership with the Somaliland administration, World Health Organization, local leaders and women's groups. Local healthcare professionals and staff of other UN and international organizations were present. Similar commemorations were held in Garowe the administrative capital of Puntland. In Central/Southern Somalia the celebrations were held in Wajid with emphasis put on educating the public on the link between malaria and malnutrition.

We are on web!!!

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Somaliland community gets relief support

UNICEF in collaboration with Somaliland Red Crescent Society and the Somaliland administration provided relief support to the population affected by hailstorms and livestock deaths in Awdal region. About 250 moderately malnourished children were provided with monthly supplementary food rations comprising of 10 kg for each child. 56 severely malnourished children were provided with appropriate food and follow-up treatment.

Training: Thirty-two participants from UNICEF partner organisations World Vision International, Gedo Health Consortium, International Medical Corps and Baidoa Hospital were trained in community based management of acute malnutrition in Wajid. Sixteen of those trained will become trainers to facilitate similar sessions.

Supplementary feeding: Preparations continued for commencement of blanket food distribution of UNIMIX to children aged 6 to 59 months in Afgoye. UNICEF staff laid the groundwork alongside those of Jumbo Peace and Development Organisation.