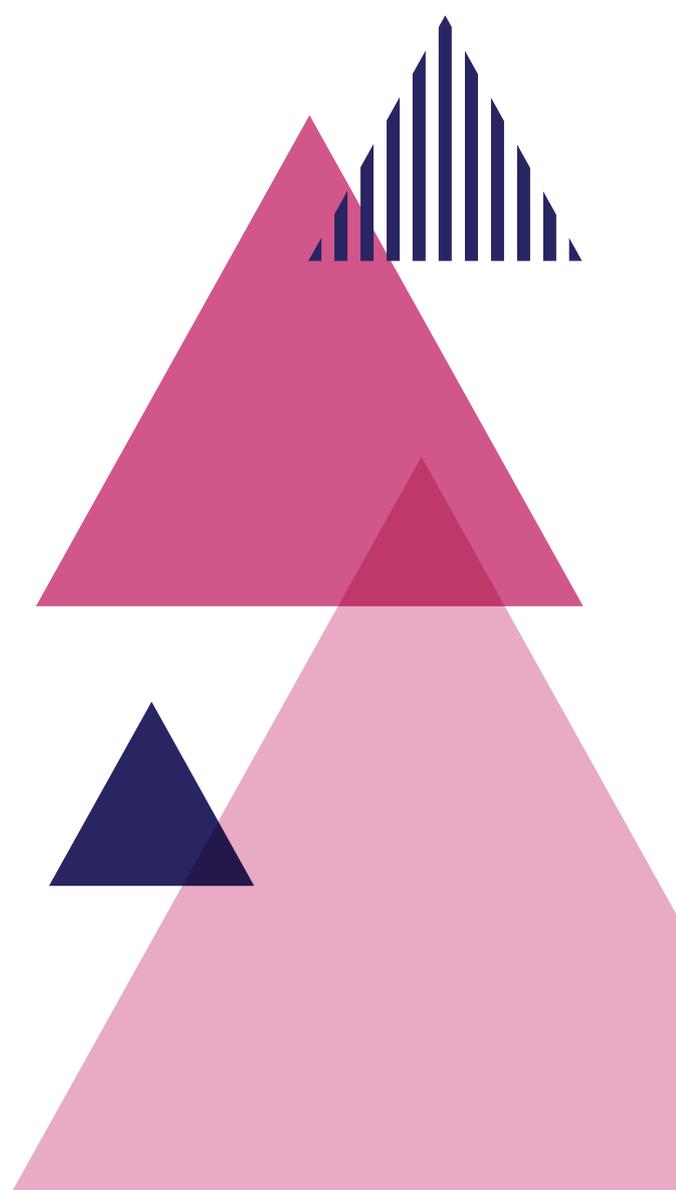
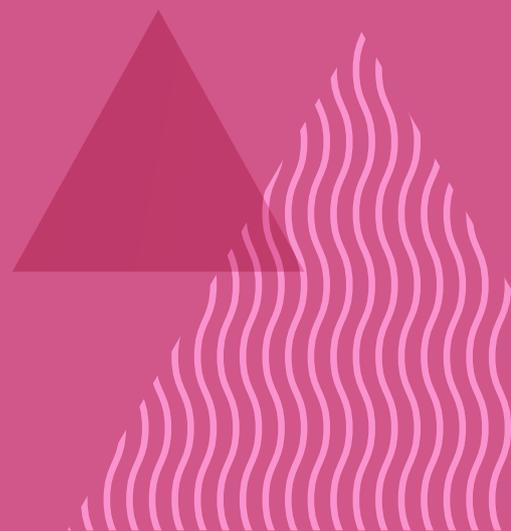


# Programmatic approaches to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education: Lessons from 2020

Case study: Somalia Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T)

By Lotte Renault, Senior Research and Learning Advisor, Care International and Abdifarhan Farah Gure, Project Manager, SOMGEP-T





# Case Study: Somalia Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition (SOMGEP-T)

Improving marginalized girls' learning outcomes and transition rates in rural and remote areas of Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug



## About the programme

SOMGEP-T aims to improve learning outcomes and increase transition rates for 27,146 girls and 30,053 boys in 148 primary and 51 secondary schools in rural and remote areas of Northern-Central Somalia affected by drought and conflict. The programme also supports accelerated learning classes for 3,712 girls. SOMGEP-T uses evidence from longitudinal research to inform an integrated approach to identifying and addressing barriers to adolescent girls' education. Our research indicates that girls' learning outcomes are affected by multiple, interconnected factors – with traditional gender norms driving exclusion and normalising violence playing a fundamental role. Therefore, our activities address gaps in content delivery and teaching methodology, but also seek to transform social norms contributing to exclusion from education. Through activities such as Girls' and Boys' Empowerment Forums, coaching of Community Education Committees and teacher training, SOMGEP-T brings communities and schools together to shift gender norms and promote long-term social change.

## COVID-19 Context

The first case of COVID-19 was identified in Mogadishu on March 16, 2020. By June 27, a total of 2,878 cases had been identified, with 90 deaths. The country's economy has been severely affected, with a reduction of 30-35% on the volume of remittances from the Somali diaspora and increased food prices leaving an estimated 3.5 million people in need of food assistance during the dry season.<sup>1</sup> The closure of schools from March 18 2020 is likely to have resulted in major learning losses and increased the risk of subsequent drop-out. Marginalised adolescent girls are likely to be among the most affected by the crisis - their high chore burden and vulnerability to gender-based violence, early marriage and child labour reduces their ability to study at home and return to school after the crisis.<sup>2</sup>

---

## Programme response to the gender-related impacts of COVID-19 on education

With schools closed, SOMGEP-T worked with existing community and student groups to mitigate the impact of the crisis. SOMGEP-T used a four-pronged approach: (1) ensuring the continuity of education; (2) strengthening child protection mechanisms; (3) addressing mental health issues emerging as a result of the crisis; and (4) disseminating COVID-19 messaging and providing response supplies to affected communities.

### Ensuring continuity of learning

During school closures, Ministries of Education provided lessons via radio, tv and online, but learning continued mostly through the use of learning materials provided by the programme, with teacher support via phone or in person (observing social distancing). In programme locations with data coverage, teachers have formed WhatsApp groups to share information among themselves and with students. A recent assessment indicated that WhatsApp can be accessed in 64% of the programme locations, compared to 32% radio coverage and 49% television access.<sup>3</sup>

### Addressing emerging mental health issues and strengthening child protection mechanisms

Our longitudinal study has identified adolescent mental health as a key factor affecting girls' learning and transition. Female students reporting severe anxiety or depression have lower literacy and numeracy scores than their peers, and lower transition rates. Adolescent mental health is closely linked to experiences of violence and deprivation of basic needs, and the current combination of crises in Somalia is likely to exacerbate existing issues. The programme is working with Community Education Committees (CECs) and teachers to follow up with students and their families, identifying and addressing child protection issues and the exclusion of specific subgroups of students from remote learning, particularly girls and students with disabilities. Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEFs) are conducting girl-led actions to mitigate the impact of the crisis on girls' well-being, following up on at-risk students and disseminating messages about COVID-19 prevention. The project provided remote coaching to Community Education Committees, female mentors of Girls' Empowerment Forums and teachers through WhatsApp and phone.

1 Fewsnets May 2020 Bulletin, accessible online on <https://fewsnets.net/east-africa/somalia>

2 [Adolescent girls' education and COVID-19: What is happening in the field?](#) (2020) Care International

3 SOMGEP-T monitoring data, July 2020

## Disseminating COVID-19 messaging and providing response supplies

Through other programming in the same areas, CARE is supporting the provision of hygiene supplies and water. SOMGEP-T is also supporting previously trained Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) to maintain household financial capacity through the crisis. The programme is coordinating with the Education Sector Committee and the Education Cluster on messaging and the provision of supplies during the crisis. Our activities are contributing directly to the national COVID-19 Response Plan to Education, and have been designed in consultation with government partners, responding to issues identified at community level.

## Programme outcomes

Monitoring data shows that 96% of the female students in SOMGEP-T schools were studying remotely, with 78% practising lessons by themselves and 28% learning via phone (including WhatsApp sessions with teachers).<sup>4</sup> 49% of the students were spending more than two hours a day studying at home during school closures– a remarkably high figure considering that 52% reported that their workload at home, including caring for family members, was a barrier to remote learning.<sup>5</sup>

The proportion of students in SOMGEP-T schools facing mental health issues has increased dramatically with the combined crises, with 44% of the girls reporting severe anxiety or depression.<sup>6</sup> 55% of the students affirmed that their anxiety levels have increased since the COVID-19 crisis started, and 53% reported that their levels of depression have worsened.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, participation in Girls' Empowerment Forums (GEF) is mitigating the impact of the crisis on mental health. The proportion of girls facing anxiety and depression is significantly lower among those who have received support from GEF mentors – 38% and 40%, respectively, compared to 52% among those who do not receive support from a GEF mentor.<sup>8</sup>



4 CARE (2020) Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project - Transition: Key Findings from the Girls' Empowerment Forum COVID-19 Survey, p.3

5 Ibid

6 CARE (2020) Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project - Transition: Key Findings from the Girls' Empowerment Forum COVID-19 Survey, p.6

7 Ibid

8 Ibid

## Learnings and challenges

Somalia's well-developed phone network allowed for ongoing support to participants, and teachers have adapted quickly to the use of WhatsApp groups for remote learning. While there is an urgent need to expand access to radio, TV and online learning in rural and remote areas, it is also important to consider its effectiveness for different subgroups of the student population and address 'hidden' factors impacting students, such as mental health issues.

It is likely that students struggling with foundational issues – in particular basic literacy and numeracy – will be among the most affected by learning losses, as remote learning strategies are often catered to more advanced students. It is crucial to support teachers to develop effective strategies to help students facing foundational gaps, and to develop tailored materials to reinforce the practice of basic skills at home. It is also key to synchronise academic support with interventions from female mentors and Girls' Empowerment Forums, as our data indicates that struggling students are often facing other issues – anxiety, depression, limited agency and loneliness – which are being aggravated due to the pandemic.

---

## Looking beyond the immediate COVID-19 crisis

In a context where school closures are often common as a result of conflict and natural disasters, the strategies developed during this period will likely enable teachers and students to mitigate the impact of future crises, including new waves of COVID-19 infection. SOMGEP-T will continue to work with teachers, Community Education Committees and Girls' Empowerment Forums to refine strategies for remote learning synchronised with child protection actions and peer support to struggling girls. The programme is closely tracking trends to identify emerging issues through participatory monitoring as well as phone surveys, and quickly shifting strategies to address emerging issues.

SOMGEP-T is working with Community Education Committees and education officials to support schools to operate safely after reopening, and to ensure that students return to class. As the situation evolves, the potential for drop-out is increasing, particularly for at-risk subgroups, including pastoralist girls, girls with disabilities and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The support from Community Education Committees and Girls' Empowerment Forums will be essential for timely tracking and case management, ensuring an inclusive approach in returning to school.





### More resources to explore:

[Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme – Transition \(SOMGEP-T\) - CARE](#)  
Programme resource page

[Adolescent Girls' Education and COVID-19: What Is Happening in the Field?](#)  
(2020) Care International

### Contact the authors:

**Abdifarhan Farah Gure** [gure.farah@care.org](mailto:gure.farah@care.org)  
Project Manager, SOMGEP-T

**Lotte Renault** [Lotte.Renault@care.org](mailto:Lotte.Renault@care.org)  
Senior Research and Learning Advisor, Care International

### Photo captions/credits:

Page 5 - © Nawal Saed/CARE. Essential supplies being distributed at a local school.

Page 6 - © Nawal Saed/CARE. A Girls' Empowerment Forum meeting (post-school reopening) in session.



United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017

 /UNGEI

 /UNGEI

 /ungei

 /ungirlseducation

 ungei.org

 info@ungei.org