

Gender in Higher Education in Puntland: From Accessibility to Creating Supportive Environment for Women in Higher Education and Research

KEY POLICY MESSAGES

1. Put in place gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion process in HEIs.
2. Establish new or strengthen existing bodies/committees to implement and monitor the impact of the Gender in Higher Education Policy as well as the Female Teachers Training Policy within the HEIs.
3. Initiate research on higher education, particularly from a gender perspective, to produce responsive and relevant institutional policies.
4. Strengthen the implementation of local and international scholarship programmes and research courses aimed at motivating and upgrading the skills of girl/women interested in pursuing research.
5. Accelerate gender policy dissemination and translate the policy into tangible actions.
6. Initiate/enhance deliberate policy provision to ensure that the HEI environment is sensitive to the needs of female students and lecturers in the areas of infrastructure, academic programme, and social environment.
7. Initiate a community awareness programme to curb negative stereotypical attitudes towards women, women's education and leadership in society.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Female educational attainments are associated with women's capacity to make informed decisions about various aspects of life, including health, marriage, and reproduction. Similarly, there is a positive relationship between educational attainment and economic productivity, ability to exercise social and political responsibility, and the authority to advocate for individual and group rights. Thus, women's education does not only benefit the woman but results in the collective wellbeing of the whole society.

Unfortunately, females have been underrepresented in higher education throughout Somalia. Accessibility to higher education in Somalia has been characterized by high structural inequalities with regards to rural or urban regions, socioeconomic status, and gender. Of all these factors, gender has been the most widespread and persistent basis for inequality in opportunity for access to higher education, and educational

output and outcome (Kathleen Lynch, 2009). This can be attributed to the fact that gender inequality is deeply rooted in the Somali patriarchal society, resulting in marginalization of women in almost all sectors of the society, including higher education, research and decision-making positions.

Between 2011-2016, Puntland State of Somalia was one of the regions that experienced the fastest growth of female enrollment in secondary and university education (Eno, Mweseli, & Eno, 2015; Department of Policy and Planning, 2015), partially due to advocacy for girls' and women's education, leading to policy resulting in different manifestations of affirmative action - focusing mostly on increased access. Today, however, there is a growing concern that the effects of affirmative action focusing on access, while necessary, has led to the neglect of qualitative indicators of gender equality in higher



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ACCESSIBILITY

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Policies

While gender policies exist in HEIs, they are often not applied or relevant.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (Continued)

education. Facilitating access for women has not taken into consideration the fact that the physical and social environments in higher education institutions (HEIs) are not necessarily conducive to women's academic and career advancement. It is therefore an opportune time to focus on creating supportive environments that enable women to advance and excel in their pursuit of higher education and leadership positions in HEIs. To discuss the challenges and opportunities facing women in higher education and possible solutions, SIDRA arranged a knowledge exchange

conference to discuss 'gender in higher education in Puntland, Somalia on 21-23 November, 2016.

While gender policies exist in HEIs, they are often not applied or relevant. This policy brief is based primarily on the output of the conference. In response to the challenges of women under representation in HEIs and research, the following key recommendations are proposed:

1 INTRODUCTION

The status and quality of higher education are useful indicators of a country's social and economic development. Equally important is gender equality and empowerment of women, which is a development goal in its own right and essential for achievement of other goals in socioeconomic, cultural and political development. In recent years, Somalia has witnessed growth in women's education after years of stagnation and setbacks caused by the civil war in the 1990s, insecurity and the following destruction of the social and economic systems. However, this growth has not included girls and boys equally, leading to female underrepresentation in HEIs. To tackle issues of gender representation in HEIs and research, SIDRA hosted a three-day knowledge-exchange conference in Garowe on the 21-23 November 2016, on "Gender in higher education in Puntland".

There has been little published on gender and HEIs in Somalia, hence the production of this policy brief, mainly based on the outcomes of that conference. Higher education in this paper refers to post – secondary education provided by a college or university.

The conference was attended by high-profile guests including; the Ministers for Education and representatives from the Ministry of Women Development & Family Affairs (MOWDAFA); the gender unit of the Ministry of Education (MoE); the United Nations (UN); civil society; women's associations; and academia.

In Somalia, as in many African countries, participation by gender in higher education reflects the societal norms and constraints, the policy priorities, the possibilities, and the hindrance for social progress. However, gender remains the most

universally entrenched, compounding the effects of other socio-economic factors on the opportunities of individuals and groups for educational achievement and socio-economic attainment. The job market operates under patriarchal filters, which generate cultural restrictions on women's career development and asset ownership. Women are excluded from qualified jobs due to lack of technical skills or English language skills, clan-biased recruitment practices, and the private sector not providing female-friendly working environments.

For example, Puntland has the highest women's participation in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector at 40%, followed by Somaliland at 36%, and 33% in South Central, most of them in unqualified manual jobs. However, more educated female entrepreneurs and returnees from the diaspora are breaking this trend by venturing into traditionally male-dominated sectors such as the livestock, fisheries, construction and petroleum importing sectors (UNDP, 2014). Education as a social institution, therefore, has the potential to play a transformative role and create a new foundation for gender relations and equal opportunities for men and women as well as provide the ground and momentum for social change within Somalia. Unfortunately, education systems and their respective spaces for the acquisition and production of knowledge reflect gender patterns in the society. In the labour market, women face discrimination in access to qualified work. Worldwide, women with advanced education have higher rates of unemployment than men with similar levels of education worldwide (Kathleen Lynch, 2009) and this situation also applies for Somalia. Similarly, women in higher-education institutions (HEIs)

1 INTRODUCTION (Continued)

have been consistently under-represented in teaching, research and academic administrative positions. In addition to their small numbers, they tend to be clustered in the lower levels of the academic occupational ladder (N'Dri, 2009).

Drafting policies to increase access to education for girls and women is not enough as it does not ensure women the full benefit that education ought to offer in terms of economic and social wellbeing. Educational benefits must therefore

be analysed in relation to socio-cultural environments and fundamental issues of human rights, which entails equal access to every level and type of education. There must also be opportunities to use the knowledge acquired to bring informed insight into social, economic and political decision-making processes, and in the production of various forms of knowledge, for the benefit of public policy and collective wellbeing.

2 THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN SOMALIA AND PUNTLAND

In 2013, there were an estimated 50 HEIs with a student population of 50,000, functioning across Somalia (Eno, Mweseli, & Eno, 2015). The prolonged periods of insecurity in parts of the country, and the absence of a central government and strong local authorities in Somalia has enabled and encouraged the privatization of the higher education sector. The quality of education has suffered considerably in the absence of regulation by governing authorities in all three regions of South-Central, Puntland and Somaliland (Ibid). Studies have also shown that teaching staff at these institutions often have low capacity. An alarming 86% of surveyed HEIs in 2013 complained about low capacity of teaching and administrative staff (The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2013). This is likely to impact the quality of education that students are receiving, and the qualifications and competencies of graduates entering the public and private sector in Somalia (Ministry of Education, Puntland, 2011).

Puntland has 14 HEIs consisting of 11 universities, one teacher's college, one veterinary college and one unspecified college. Together they have a student population of 11,554 (Department of Policy and Planning, 2015). The total undergraduate enrolment in Puntland, has been growing at an average annual rate of 52.7% between 2013/14 and 2015/16, with females accounting for a higher growth in enrollment rate at 56.8% compared to 50.3% of males (fig 1). While the rate of enrollment has grown for females, they still represent a lower proportion of overall enrollments than males.

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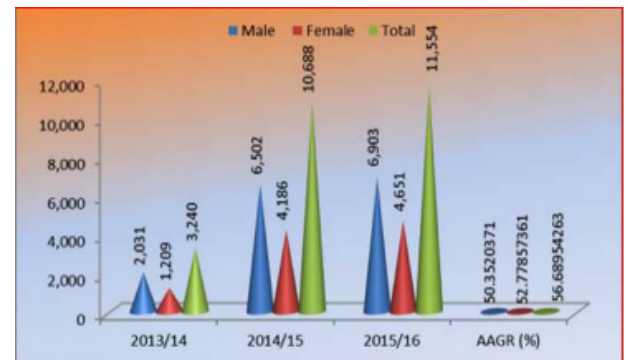


Figure 1: Higher Education Enrollment Trends by Sex (Puntland Ministry of Education 2015)

There is very little data and information on research activities in Somalia and Puntland, let alone information on women researchers. According to the Heritage Institute of Policy, the production of research studies in universities is extremely low, with universities producing an average of one research paper in 2013 (The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2013). There is no available data on Somali women researchers. However, there are broader research initiatives that have been developed since 2014 with the establishment of, among others, the "Somali Research and Education Network or 'SomaliREN' which is a network Universities Network or the "Somali REN". Unfortunately, there is no information on gender participation in SomaliREN.

Researchers play an important role in higher education and society in general as they shape knowledge production, control the transmission of knowledge, create opportunities for learning, acquire the tools, the capacity and legitimacy to conduct research into new areas, and ultimately influence decision-making processes in important societal areas. Thus, it is important to create supportive environments to enable more women to engage in research.

3 WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOMALIA AND PUNTLAND

DATA

In education, there is lack of data on gender inequality in terms of access, attrition, and retention at different levels within the education system.

The Government of Somalia is a signatory to major international conventions and agreements on human rights and gender equality such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Beijing Platform of Action, the Dakar World Conference on Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals; and as such has committed to pursuing gender equality in all spheres (UNDP, 2014).

However, there is a lack of research and data on gender inequality in Somalia or Puntland, and this makes it difficult to measure progress against the intended goals of gender equity and equality. In education, there is lack of data on gender inequality in terms of access, attrition, and retention at different levels within the education system.

The only available data in the Ministry of Education is limited to school enrollment and graduation. Data on research and the role of women in research is non-existent. This does not necessarily mean that there are no women researchers, but rather that there is a lack of documentation and data.

Gender inequality in higher education, and research for that matter, is generally a reflection of broader societal structural inequality (N'Dri, 2009). During the knowledge-exchange conference on “Gender in Higher Education in Puntland”, (henceforth called “The conference”), participants presented and discussed research papers, highlighting the opportunities and barriers facing girls and women in HEIs as students and employees, and possible solutions. The barriers that perpetuate gender imbalances have been grouped into socio-economic and cultural, socio-political, and institutional factors.

1. Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors

- The community and family preference for male children often puts girls in a disadvantaged position in a country like Somalia where poverty is pervasive. Hence families unable to send all of their children to school have typically prioritized the education of male children over girls. This practice of exclusion has led to higher rates of illiteracy for women, as well as lower levels of participation in the workforce and in decision-making bodies.
- Many female students drop-out of school and universities due to lack of transportation and fear of rape in usually insecure routes to institutions of higher learning.
- Early marriage and traditional gender roles hamper women from pursuing higher education, research, or other qualified careers as they are expected to shoulder the household chores, regardless of if they are married or living with their parents.
- Negative and stereotypical attitudes towards career women often constrains women from pursuing careers in public office, leadership positions, research or other careers that might be regarded as counter to the culture and religion. For example, engaging in research might mean working late and entering public spheres that are traditionally men's spaces.
- Due to the existing inequalities mentioned above, there is limited guidance, mentorship or counseling services for girls to select applicable careers or to help girls to enroll and complete tertiary education. Due to these constraints, there are few female role models in both HEIs and the research sector.
- Parents and peers play a crucial role in framing subject preferences and job/career preferences. Changing the attitudes of parents and peers is as crucial for challenging gender stereotypes as is changing the attitudes of teachers.

ATTITUDES

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3 WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOMALIA AND PUNTLAND (Continued)

2 Socio-Political Factors

- Lack of security and long distances between residential areas and HEIs deter many girls, especially girls from low-income families, from attending higher education.
- While there are policies and strategies for increasing girl's enrollment in schools, there are no government policies promoting research and therefore research is not highly valued in the society.
- There are limited scholarships for women seeking tertiary education or for pursuing leadership programmes and research positions.
- Lack of economic incentives such as research funding discourages many women from pursuing a career in research.
- Lack of infrastructures such as scientific database to facilitate research work.
- Poor or lack of implementation of affirmative action. For example, in 2007, the Puntland government endorsed a strategy for changing the recruitment system in order to increase the number of qualified women hired, in line with the Presidential Decree of 2007.⁶⁵ which has a 30% quota for women in public administration.

SCHOLARSHIPS

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3 Institutional Factors

- Lack of gender sensitive physical and psychosocial environments. For example, lack of facilities that cater for women's needs such as separate toilets, dustbins for sanitary pads, restrooms/staffroom for female staff. Poor psychosocial environment includes physical, social and sexual harassment, discrimination and bullying of girls.
- Insufficient local policies and action plans to promote the advancement of women in careers within HEI and lack of supportive environment to ensure that highly-qualified women participate fully in the decision-making processes in HEI.
- Lack/insufficient scholarships for female students, especially those from poor families.
- Poor control of the quality of access to HEIs, content of the programmes regarding both the formal curriculum and informal education in terms of the systemic values in educational institutions that hinder or promote a real gender-sensitive context.
- Lack of studies with regards to gender and the job market. This includes research to understand the socio-economic environment and access to specific occupations, and also the enabling context that can harness the capacities and full potential of women.

4 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of our analysis, we put forward the following policy recommendations:

Institutions of Higher Learning and Research

- Implement affirmative action in state-owned Universities to increase the recruitment of women to faculty, board and other decision making positions in colleges and universities in order to increase the number of women decision makers. These women will also serve as role models for female students.
- Create supportive and gender sensitive environments for female students and staff members. This includes; separate toilets, staff-rooms for female workers and restrooms for female students.
- Establish secure boarding facilities for female students to curb drop-outs due to lack of transportation and insecure traveling routes. Boarding facilities will also cater for students from remote areas.
- Ratify and implement action plans and policies against the physical, psychological, and sexual harassment of women within HEI.
- Harness the power of Alumni to generate money for scholarships for female students.

4 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (Continued)

Government

- Monitor gender-mainstreaming targets at all levels of the education system consistently. Targets should not be limited only to access and enrollment.
- Create, and where it exists roll out, training and capacity building for research and leadership programmes for women.
- Establish gender responsive budget strategy for capacity building in leadership and research for women.

Civil Society

- Create a network to support women in higher education and research. The network will support women in higher education and research in that there will be a forum where

the women easily communicate, easily disseminate resources and information and also ask each other questions and support where necessary.

- Arrange events such as career fairs and organize workshops for capacity building in English language and research skills for women researchers.
- Harness the power of social media to connect Somali female researchers from around the globe to compensate for the lack of role models and mentors in Somalia/Puntland.

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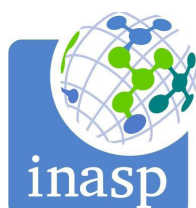
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ABOUT SIDRA

SIDRA is a registered independent, not-for-profit Research and Policy Analysis Think Tank based in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia.

OUR VISION

Somalia in which social justice prevails and inclusive economic growth benefits all and improves the well being of all people.

OUR MISSION

A centre of development and research that generates relevant and original knowledge for dynamic policy environment support, institutional capacity development and alliance.

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