

Strengthening Female Youth Resilience in Somalia

Learnings from AGES and SOMGEP-T

Impact Brief

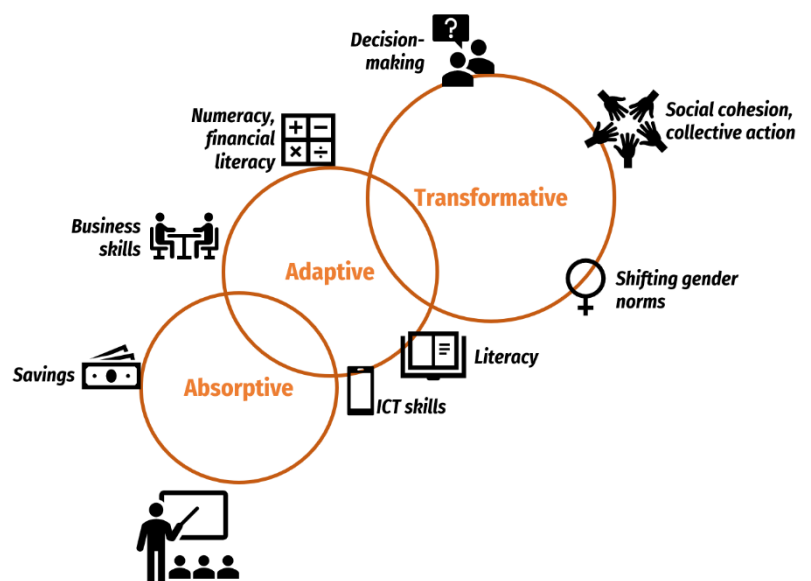




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A quality, relevant education is core to **adaptive capacities** for resilience, equipping children and youth with the skills to cope with shocks and adapt to new livelihoods.¹ Schools and non-formal learning environments may also contribute to develop **transformative capacities** for resilience: strengthening social cohesion through peer support networks; equipping students for collective action and participation in decision-making; and shifting gender norms. Education also has the potential to build **absorptive capacities** for resilience through engaging adolescents and youth in informal savings groups, strengthening preparedness for shocks, and providing safeguarding mechanisms. Developing resilience capacities is relevant for all, but particularly for adolescent girls coming of age in crisis-affected contexts and those living in displacement.

Investing in the development of youth’s individual and collective capacities to strengthen resilience is critical in contexts experiencing recurrent shocks and large-scale displacement. In Somalia – where about 65% of the population is of pre-school and primary school age – it becomes an imperative for human capital development and stabilization. As of 2023, about 8.25 million people remain in need of humanitarian assistance in Somalia, out of whom 1.85 million have been



¹ USAID/REAL (2018) Resilience and Resilience Capacities: Measurement Options, pgs.3-4

displaced,² following multiple natural disasters - droughts, floods, cyclones, locust swarms –long-term conflict, and instability. Such vulnerabilities lead to negative coping strategies - reducing food intake, non-enrolment in school, dropout.

Somalia’s fragile education system has one of the world’s lowest primary enrolment rates, standing at 24%.³ Those able to enter primary school often drop out before acquiring basic skills: the school-life expectancy of 1.6 years (1.48 for girls)⁴ is too short for students to learn basic literacy and numeracy. The children and youth in need of humanitarian aid are also disproportionately more likely to belong to subgroups historically excluded from education: Pastoralists,⁵ minorities,⁶ and women. Girls are less likely to access education at all levels, corresponding to 58% of the out-of-school children.⁷

In these conditions:

- How can education approaches be adapted to build resilience capacities among adolescents and youth, particularly vulnerable girls?
- What adaptations are proving to be effective?
- What lessons are we learning about strengthening resilience through education programming in Somalia?

Strengthening adaptive capacities through education

The education we need: Integrated content, short duration

Somali children enter school late and drop out in late adolescence, when accessing education at all. A subnational learning assessment study conducted in 2022 found that the average age of grade 1 students – both girls and boys – was 10 years.⁸ The probability of enrolment declines sharply after grade 4.⁹ As a result, a huge number of Somali adolescents and youth are in need of accelerated/ non-formal education opportunities catering to the needs of those who are working, are married, and/or have children. For this group, “relevant” education implies **quickly developing applicable skills** – literacy, numeracy, financial literacy – and connecting those with savings, entrepreneurship, and health content. It also means **unlocking the potential to transition into other education opportunities** – vocational training, continued formal education, and more advanced levels of accelerated education.

They learn when they have time: Flexible approaches

To enable sufficient exposure time for acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy skills, students need a combination of in-class lessons with remote learning and remedial support. Somali students face **high rates of absenteeism** resulting from child labor, household chores, disease outbreaks, and insecurity. This is particularly true among girls facing a disproportionately higher burden of domestic chores and caregiving responsibilities. A study conducted in late 2022 in formal schools found average attendance rates of 55-65%

² Somalia 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, pg.4

³ Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Annual Statistics Yearbook 2020-2021, pg.21

⁴ Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (2022) Education Sector Analysis, pg.69

⁵ Pastoralists have the lowest gross attendance ratio in country (2.3% overall, 1.7% for girls); source: Directorate of National Statistics, Federal Government of Somalia. *The Somali Health and Demographic Survey 2020*, pg.38

⁶ The research conducted by the AGES project indicates that girls belonging to an occupational minority had significantly lower literacy skills at the project baseline – a difference of 18 percentage points- potentially reflecting a history of lower exposure to education in emergencies. Source: Machova, Z., Miettunen, J., & Peterson, B.D. (2020) Adolescent Girls’ Education in Somalia: Baseline Evaluation, pg.114

⁷ Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (2022) Education Sector Analysis, pg.75

⁸ Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education of Somalia (2022) Study on Learning Outcomes for Students in Grades 1-4, pg.22

⁹ Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education of Somalia (2022) Education Sector Analysis, pg.68

in grades 1-4.¹⁰ A second study found an average attendance rate of 65% among older girls enrolled in non-formal education.¹¹ The ability to study at home in their own time through **remote learning materials significantly improved older girls' learning outcomes**, increasing literacy scores by 33 percentage points above average and numeracy scores by 24 percentage points above average.¹² For those learning in a second language – particularly occupational minorities – remedial support and multilingual strategies are crucial for success.

Learning for markets

Market-oriented vocational skills training plays a critical role in enabling youth to transition into employment. Transitions are faster and more efficient, however, when youth are able to **learn by doing** - through apprenticeships and internships, which also enable business owners, including women, to expand their businesses. CARE's AGES project has partnered with 53 companies to provide on-the-job training to female youth, enabling them to transition into employment and acquire skills to set up small businesses.



As a part of building resilience, AGES is linking local youth with community-based vocational training and apprenticeship for wage or self-employment opportunities in different market-based enterprises to help the future generation move away from traditional livelihoods affected by climate change.

Strengthening absorptive capacities through education programming

CARE adapted its widely successful Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) approach to economic empowerment for integration in accelerated basic education (ABE) and non-formal education (NFE) courses. Through the participation in VSLAs, adolescents and youth – particularly girls – apply financial literacy skills, strengthen peer support networks, access group capital to start small businesses, learn about entrepreneurship, and build safety nets. Through FCDO and USAID funding, CARE's AGES project **trained 9,326 severely marginalized girls to form 482 youth VSLAs** in South Somalia. AGES has also **linked youth VSLAs with financial institutions** and provided the groups with start-up grants to implement business plans, enabling female youth to diversify livelihoods. Youth participating in AGES VSLAs reported improvement in their business skills (89%), budgeting and money management skills (87%), decision-making skills (92%), and communication skills (90%).¹³ Among those who took loans, 51% reported to have used it to start a new business and 27% reported to have used it for expanding their ongoing business.¹⁴

“At first, I used to stay at home, but now I am working and I have become self-dependent and also a person who can cover her own expenses like education fees for the children and sometimes family bills, so there is a big change. Previously, we usually expected to get assistance from our relatives, but now we can do our daily life by ourselves.”

¹⁰ Consilient (2022) Education Sector Program Implementation Grant: Endline Report, pg.18

¹¹ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.144 (draft)

¹² Madden, P., Vasilyeva, A., Peterson, B.D. & Wicaksono, N. (2022) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: Midline Evaluation, pg.55

¹³ CARE (2022) AGES Financial Inclusion Study (draft)

¹⁴ Ibid

Strengthening transformative capacities through education programming

Schools are more than learning spaces: they can also become platforms for adolescents and youth to work together, building positive relationships and engaging in collective action. Classrooms can become spaces where traditional gender and social norms are challenged, creating opportunities of equal success for girls, adolescents with disabilities, minorities, and other marginalized subgroups. The investment in **social-emotional skills development and gender norms change** is critical to build transformative capacities through education programming.

Developing girls' social-emotional skills – voice, self-confidence, vision, organization, decision-making, negotiation, controlling emotions – has a dramatic impact on learning outcomes and positive transitions. Findings from two CARE projects funded by FCDO/USAID, AGES and SOMGEP-T, show that **the participation in Girls' Empowerment Forums is a predictor of major increases in literacy and numeracy scores**, ranging between 15 and 17 percentage points.^{15 16} Moreover, girls participating in Empowerment Forums are also **significantly more likely to experience positive transitions into education and employment** – an increase of 11 percentage points.^{17 18} Empowerment Forums provide a platform for girls to develop social-emotional skills, have access to mentorship sessions, network with peers, and jointly lead civic actions on issues of their choice.



What does resilience look like for female youth?

Adaptive capacities: Lifelong learning & increased income

Girls participating in AGES's non-formal education course in 2022 improved their reading comprehension scores by 20 percentage points.¹⁹

Three years after completing their non-formal education course (2019), 20% of the girls participating in AGES's first cohort have transitioned into other education opportunities (formal education, ABE). They are now between the ages of 20-24 – when most Somali girls have long abandoned their education.²⁰

Girls participating in AGES have been able to transition into employment/ self-employment – 30% after four months, 62% after three years of completing their NFE course. Most importantly, **girls' income has increased dramatically** – from \$15 to \$24 four months after completion, increasing to \$34 after a two-year period.²¹ Among **girls who were already earning an income at the onset of the course, the average income increased from \$41 to \$171 – a 417% increase.**²²

¹⁵ Miettunen, J., Peterson, B. & Robert, S. (2020) Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition: Midline Evaluation, Round 2, pg.123

¹⁶ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.131 (draft)

¹⁷ Peterson, B., Forney, J. & Ha, S (2019) Somali Girls' Education Promotion Project – Transition: Midline Report, pg.130

¹⁸ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.65 (draft)

¹⁹ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.127 (draft)

²⁰ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.58 (draft)

²¹ Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.118; pg.163 (draft)

²² Consilient (2023) Adolescent Girls' Education in Somalia: 2nd Midline Evaluation, pg.163 (draft)

Transformative capacities: Changing life choices

A longitudinal study showed that the participation in SOMGEP-T had a major impact in preventing early marriage, six years after the project ended:

- Girls who participated in the SOMGEP-T project were **5.8 percentage points less likely than the comparison group to get married before the age of 15**. SOMGEP-T girls still living in rural areas were 9.4 percentage points less likely to get married than the comparison group.²³
- Overall, girls who participated in SOMGEP-T **married around 1.4 years later**, in average, than the comparison group.²⁴

The participation in SOMGEP-T has also dramatically **changed gender norms**. Girls who participated in SOMGEP-T were 25 percentage points less likely than the comparison group to accept wife-beating in a scenario where a woman argued with her husband. SOMGEP-T girls were also 14.5 percentage points more likely to have input in household decisions,²⁵ and **6.7 percentage points more likely to be employed**.²⁶

She can study and do something for her parents. And it can prevent her from getting sick or dying and being forced into marriage. Sometimes she might fight, and sometimes she will have difficulty in school. She can change her mind if she wants to. She learns that she can do something for her children. It helps her to do something for her mother and their family.
[AGES graduate, Bay]

²³ University of Portsmouth and Consilient (2022) Six Years Later, What Has Become of Them? A Cohort Study of Somali Women and Girls Who Participated in the Somali Girls' Education Promotion Programme, pg.21

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid, pg.23

²⁶ Ibid, pg.22



For more information, visit: <https://www.care.org/our-work/education-and-work/education/>

