

# Education System in Somalia

Abdus Sattar Molla

**S**OMALIA is a republic (previous official name: Somali Republic, now called only 'Somalia') located in Eastern Africa, bordering the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, east of Ethiopia. The nation state Somali Republic was formed in 1960 on independence from the. A coup in 1969 ushered in an authoritarian socialist rule that managed to impose a degree of stability in the country for a couple of decades. After the regime's collapse early in 1991, Somalia descended into turmoil, factional fighting, and anarchy. Beginning in 1993, a two-year UN humanitarian effort was able to alleviate famine conditions, but when the UN withdrew in 1995, having suffered significant casualties, order still had not been restored. A two-year peace process, led by the Government of Kenya under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), concluded in October 2004 with the election of a new President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia and the formation of an interim government, known as the Somalia Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs). While its institutions remain weak, the TFG continues to reach out to Somali stakeholders and work with international donors to help build the governance capacity of the TFIs and work towards national elections in 2009.

The total area of Somalia is 637,657 sq km (over 4 times larger than Bangladesh) and it harbors only about 10 million (9,558,666) people (about 1/15<sup>th</sup> of Bangladesh population). Population growth rate is 2.8% that is more than Bangladesh's 2%. The per capita income in Somalia is only about US \$ 600 (2007 estimate). The literacy rate is about 37.8% (male: 49.7%, female: 25.8%). Somalia was spending only about 0.3% of its GDP in education, now increasing.

Education is the known way to enrich people with required knowledge, skills and values in any country. Requirement for these qualities changes over time and curriculum requires periodic revision. Bangladesh completed the third revision of the primary curriculum and such a revision is now

overdue on the lower secondary, to be followed by upper grades. We can have a look into the education system of this African country influenced by the UK system (just like us) to find some lessons for us, even though education system in this country cannot be much developed due to abject poverty. The description follows the usual format having Education Policy & Administration, the Structure, Program of Study, Assessment System and lastly Lessons for Bangladesh.

## I-Education Policy & Administration

The government of Somalia is non-functioning. Before the collapse of the state in 1990, the European Commission (EC) was active in education development in Somalia; it assisted primary and secondary school development. Since 1993, the EC Somalia Unit, part of the Regional Delegation of the European Commission in Kenya, has been the major donor to the education sector in Somalia.

In early 1993, communities and teachers began reopening schools (particularly in urban centers). However, schools continue to operate on a sporadic basis and it is not known when normal academic processes will be reestablished. In 1996, the Somalia Unit started to work systematically in the education sector in Somalia by developing a programme to help the Somalis create a sustainable education system through active participation of the communities. From that time onwards, the European Commission has invested about 20 million Euros for the development of education in Somalia.

## II-The Structure

Primary education is sometimes divided into primary and intermediate levels, each of four years duration. But usually it is merged constituting an 8-year long basic. Secondary education lasts only for 4 years in both general and technical streams. The Bachelor Course lasts for 4 years. Therefore, the structure becomes (4+4=8) + (4) + (4).

## Higher Education

There are both non-university and university level higher education. The first one is offered in specialized institutions which provide courses that last between one and

four years in such subjects as Industrial Studies, Public Health, Veterinary Medicine, Telecommunications, and Commerce.

University level first course (Bachelor) lasts for four years and leads to the Bachelor's Degree or *Laurea*. Students must first spend two years in national service and sit for a competitive entrance examination. A Master's Degree was just being introduced in Somali National University in Mogadishu, founded after 10 years of independence in 1970.

## Teacher Education

Primary school teachers are trained at *Scuole Magistrali* one year after completion of secondary education. They are awarded a Diploma. Secondary school teachers are trained for three years at the University or at the Technical Teacher Training College for vocational and technical education. Entrants to the TTTC are selected from among those who have completed three and four years of technical secondary education. The minimum requirement for the rank of lecturer is a Master Degree and a minimum of three years teaching experience. The rank of Professor requires a PhD, scholarly publications and a minimum of five years' service at the University.

## III- Program of Study

The primary education is for reading, writing, and arithmetic. The language study is mainly that of Somali, and Arabic as the second language. Social studies were introduced in the seventies of the last century. The 4-year secondary curriculum consists of Arabic, English, Somali, Mathematics, Geography, Islamic Studies and Home Economics. The program seems to be integrated.

## IV-Assessment System

Students are continuously assessed through coursework and verbal and written examination. At the end of secondary school, students take a national examination set by the National Examinations Board. This is Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Examination.

Two grading scales in use at the National University are: one is a 0-100% scale on which the lowest passing grade was 60%; the other grading scale is based on the Italian system in which all subjects are

marked out of a possible maximum of 30 with 18 as the lowest passing mark is also in vague.

## V- Lessons for Bangladesh

Somalia doesn't have a followable good system of education; rather this is a negative case to have lessons for us. These can as follows:

Somalia has a low per capita income of only US \$ 600. She spends only about 0.3% of her GDP in education. Both the per capita income and percentage spending in education explain why her literacy rate is so low and gender-biased. Bangladesh spends about 2.4% of GDP and should try to reach the UNESCO standard of 7% gradually.

The duration of integrated primary & secondary education in Somalia is total 12 years. The case is NOT to follow but to see that lengthy integrated system is for beginner nations (like Somalia), not for those who are trying to excel (like Bangladesh). So our country should create more space in the secondary level for diversification as in developed countries like the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia and our Asian Japan where there are scopes of studying a diverse array of subjects, though they don't channelize the system like science, arts or business study streams.

Both assessment and grading in Somalia are still rudimentary. There is a single public examination before entering the higher education. We have two at grade 10 and grade 12 very near. Many other countries have provisions for Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) as here in Singapore. We can follow that to create a pressure on primary education towards standardization. Two more public examinations, one (Lower Secondary Certificate=LSC) at grade 9 (that I have long been proposing in place of SSC) and the other HSC as usual at grade 12. But that should be after some logical period of teaching-learning in place of the present practice of dragging students to examination on completion of virtually one year study in the name of two years.

The writer is a PhD Researcher in NIE, Singapore; e-mail: [asmolal@yahoo.com](mailto:asmolal@yahoo.com).