

Education Access Outlook in Somalia: A Decade of Progress?*

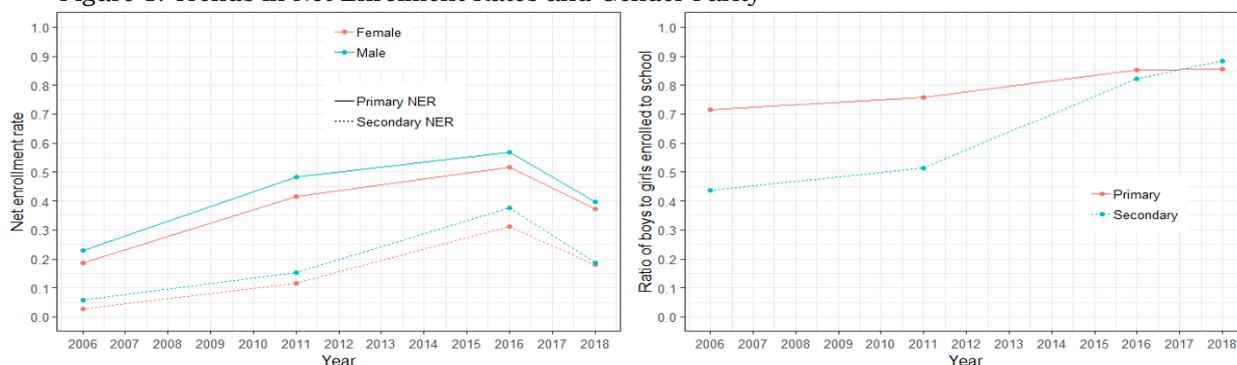
Background

Education is the cornerstone to recovery from over two decades of conflict in Somalia. Despite the country being cited as having one of the lowest access to education index in the world, progress is rarely examined. We draw our analysis from four publicly available household-level datasets in the country, that is, the UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2006 and 2011) and World Bank's High Frequency Survey (2016 and 2018).

Trends in Enrolment Rates

Children between 6 to 17 years attending school have more than doubled over the last decade from an average of 23% in 2006 to 58% in 2016. However, after the 2017 drought, enrollment declined to 41%. While below primary school net enrollment, net enrolment in secondary schools shows a growth pattern similar to what is observed among primary school-aged children (Fig 1a). Across the years, boys and girls start at a nearly equal footing in terms of school enrollment but the gender disparity increases as children aged. As shown in Fig1b gender gap in both primary and secondary school has steadily narrowed down since 2006.

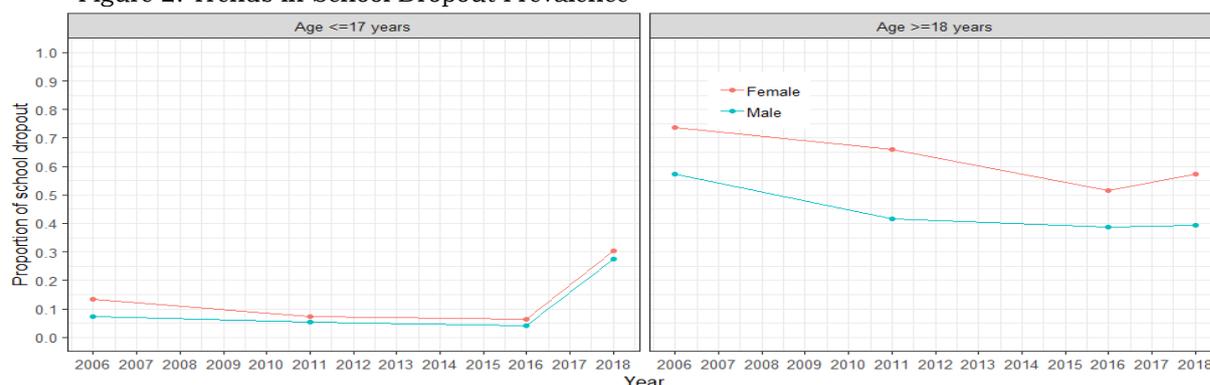
Figure 1: Trends in Net Enrolment Rates and Gender Parity



School Dropout Prevalence

As shown in Fig1a, at any year, a significant portion of school-aged children are out of school, two plausible could explain this, either the children dropped out of school or never enrolled to formal schools. We define school dropout as whether a child was not currently enrolled to school but had previously attained education levels less than grade S4. Within the ten-year window, there was a declining dropout trend in both children below age of 18 as well as students aged above 18 years. **Before the 2018 data, dropout prevalence among children averaged below 10%, however this tripled to 29% in 2017.** Results show irrespective of child's age, girls and boys drop-out from formal education system was nearly similar across ages. Divergence emerges as soon as children become adults, here male dropout increases with age at a slower pace compared to their female counterparts.

Figure 2: Trends in School Dropout Prevalence

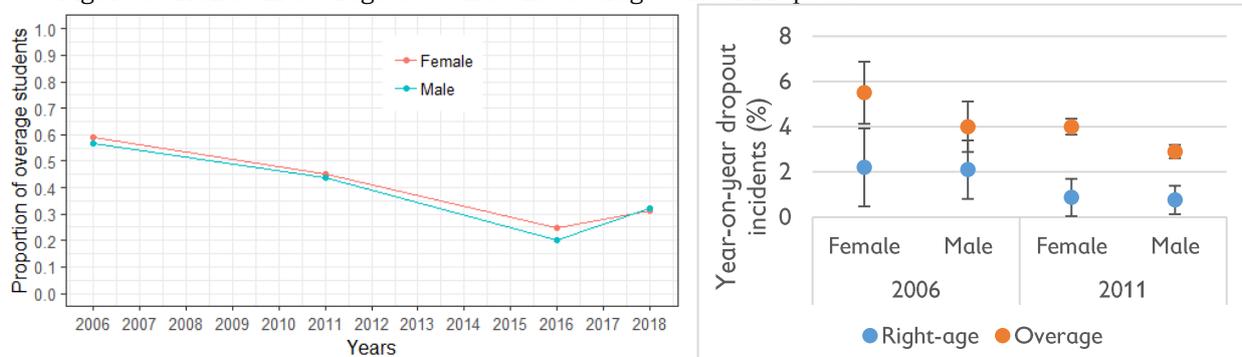


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Over-age Students

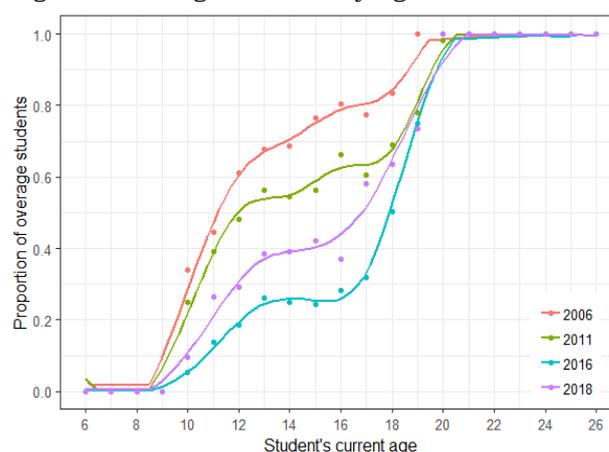
The opportunity cost of being in school increases as a child grows older with communities weighing the value of staying in school against taking up work or being married. As such, over-age enrolment into primary education limits the time that students have in school before they succumb to pressures and drop out of school. In Somalia, many children attending primary school start school much later than the country's recommended starting age of six, **in this study, less than a third of children had started primary school at age six**. Since there is negligible grade repetition (<2% annually), children that enrol in school at the age of six should complete secondary school by the time they are 18 years. To establish the prevalence of over-age students included a variance of up to three years for grade specific ages such that children in grade one were deemed to have right age-for-grade if the student was aged between six and nine years but over-age otherwise. Results show decline in proportion of over-age students over the years, from a high of 58% in 2006 to 23% in 2016. Further examination reveals up to two-third of secondary-school-aged children were still in primary school in 2018. The sudden dropout in 2017 among younger students occasions sharp increase in the proportion of over-age students. In 2006 and 2011, **over-age students were twice as likely to drop out of school**.

Figure 3: Trends in Over-age Students and Over-age School Dropouts



School dropout heightened among young children in the 2018 data. This can be directly linked to drought situation, households withdraw young children from school as a coping strategy not to further strain their household income or help in generating household income or rampant displacement in search for food. In some cases, schools closed down as teachers, caregivers and children moved. Among children enrolled to school, for any age, the proportion who are lagging behind in terms of age-appropriate grade has been declining over the years (except the 2018 data). **The 2017 drought not only increased the proportion of children not attending school but also led to delay in attaining age-appropriate grade.** Most probably, the children momentarily dropped out of school and re-enrolled back to school. Proportion of school dropouts who re-enrol to school remains unknown.

Figure 4: Over-age Students by Age



There have been significant progress in children enrolment to basic education with a notable decline children dropping out of school and progress towards gender parity. However, school dropout remains rampant among over-age students, especially over-age girls. There was sudden increase in school dropouts during the 2017 drought. To curb school dropouts in future, interventions should seek to have younger children enrol to school on time and provide accelerated learning among over-age students. In addition, there is need for campaigns to bring back children to school who dropped out due to the 2017 drought. Research to examine extent of children re-enrolling to school is needed.