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Somalia, Education
Somalia: Education Implementation and Human Rights Advocacy

Young women are having their genitalia mutilated and as a result, children are growing up without an education. A world without education is one where basic life skills are not learned, and survival becomes a bigger challenge. Somalia is a country located on the northeastern coast of Africa. The country borders Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. It is 246,201 mi² in size (similar to the size of the majority of the west coast combined of North America) and is home to 15,893,219 people (Nations Encyclopedia). Many of these people rely on the agriculture and livestock sector for jobs. Their families are on average 5.9 people. Within these households, the majority are children (World Bank). The nomadic lifestyle of the Somali people leaves education as a lower priority. Education is favored towards young males, leaving a gap in education for young girls. Sanitation is an issue when it comes to letting their children go to school, which is why education is an issue. The funding for education for children is hard to come by for the parents of these families, so with all of these factors, education is a rarity (Unicef).

Somalis have a semi-nomadic culture. They often practice abstinence farming and similar traditional practices. Their nomadic lifestyle; however, has been disrupted in recent decades. The people have been displaced. Somalia's pastoralist communities, which is about 60% of their population, must move in order to find water sources and places for pastures. According to Cultural Atlas, 42% of the population live in urban areas, 26% are nomadic, 23% live in rural areas and 9% were displaced internally. To be displaced internally means that someone stays in their own country, but is constantly moving, according to the UN Refugee Agency. In relation to the cultural nomadic lifestyle, the reason for displacement is the civil war that occurred in the late 1980s- early 1990s. This civil war resulted because of tribal and clan-related conflict with the government. Clans dissent from genetics related to the paternal side, where loyalty comes before anything else. The competition between clans and the problematic government led to a civil war and the effects are still seen to this day in the country. The problems went from political to clan-based.

Clan-related conflict can be a reason why education is so hard to keep stable for children. 1 out of 5 children in Somalia are displaced, meaning that they do not have access to education. The schools are overcrowded, and the water and sanitation are of poor quality. According to USAID, more than 3 million children of 5 million children in Somalia are out of school. The situation is worsening as more and more kids are not enrolled in primary school, let alone secondary school. The nomadic lifestyle of Somalis makes it difficult for children to regularly attend school. 30% of the kids in Somalia have access to learning opportunities in the urban population, but in rural areas, the situation is worse, where only 17% have access to education.

The imbalance between young men and women in schools is because of a major human rights issue. Young women go through female genital mutilation (FGM), often when they reach the age at which they go to secondary school. FGM is a term that defines procedures that involve the removal of the external female genitals and organs for reasons that are non-medical, according to End FGM European Network. There are four types of FGM. According to the World Health Organization, the first is one in which the external hood of the clitoral glans is removed. The second is where they completely remove the clitoral glans and the labia minora. The third is known as infibulation, where the vaginal opening is narrowed

through the creation of a covering seal. Lastly includes all other harmful procedures that are performed for non-medical reasons. At the age of 11-12, according to Al-Fanar Media, teachers see these girls dropping out because they have undergone the procedure and cannot return to school. This is a human right's crime and forces them to leave school, and not receive an education. 40% of the 30% of children going to school are girls, but many leave because of FGM, which is common in the country. Children in the new generations are greatly affected because education is getting harder to access. According to Somalia²⁸ Too Many, the prevalence of FGM in 2011 was 98%. As these girls move up higher in their education, they drop out of school because of the debilitating effects of this procedure. It was proclaimed as a human rights issue by the United Nations in 2008 (Health and Human Rights Journal), yet is a common practice in Somalia.

Education and the battling of FGM go hand in hand as issues. To help battle education rates for the children across Somalia we must publicize the consequences of FGM, and to be able to warn against these effects, we must educate the people of Somalia on this. FGM is rooted in their cultural practices. However, the fact that it was brought to attention to the United Nations speaks to the fact that there are young women suffering because of FGM and its harmful effects. Effects of the procedure have a range from mild to severe: fever, severe pain, infections, urinary problems, menstrual problems, excessive bleeding, death, according to the WHO. Deeply rooted cultural practices are hard to warn against. 76.4% of women believe that FGM should continue and 18.9% believe that it should not. On the other hand, according to the US Department of State archive, women have been working to eliminate this practice since 1977. This problem must be addressed further than just proclaiming it as an issue. Educating women on the effects of the procedure and the importance of keeping their daughters in school will open their minds to an alternative option for their children. A way of doing this would be bringing in OB/GYNs to talk about the harmful effects of FGM and how it affects a person's health. The doctors could be provided by doctors who are experts on this subject who are willing to come and educate citizens in Somalia. Tackling the sanitation state of the schools and the resources for teachers can be handled by non-profit organizations or volunteer organizations in the U.S. Organizations such as Unicef, which is an organization that has already made strides in Somalia with education programs, and Pathfinder International, which is an organization that advocates for reproductive rights in areas around the world, according to Pathfinder International's website. Instead of just building new schools in more frequent locations, we can also sanitize and improve the already existing schools by other's past efforts. Unicef and other organizations have moved forward in their effort to aid the education problem in Somalia. If it is publicized more, any sort of new funds can provide sanitation supplies for the already existing schools.

Fitting into the nomadic culture is another challenge in the solving of these issues. Since these clans and tribes already travel in search of water and pastures, setting up other resources near these water sources will be an effective way to get the word out. Setting up a small education center near water sources could attract clans and be a way to educate people and give them resources. When building new schools, working with other NPOs and United Nations agencies who are helping with the water crisis to also set up educational centers on the consequences of FGM and also build the schools. If non-profits hear about the education problem and the human rights issues going on in Somalia, not only will there be more schools, but there will be more education funding from people who fully believe in the cause. The teachers who volunteer or work there will have more experience teaching with large class sizes. This is important because, according to Unicef, classrooms are often crowded and well-trained teachers are hard to come by. More jobs are created for the people to build the schools which give the opportunity to citizens to earn for their families. And one of the biggest payoffs would be creating a relationship with local authorities to provide education to those children in nomadic communities. This relationship being established will help continue a child's education as they move across the country at different centers to

get resources from the authorities. Fitting the education curriculum into their lifestyles is something that will help promote this to families because if they are worried about the sanitation at the schools or their culture has them moving around for basic needs, the education can move with them. Between the different schools, there can be a set curriculum so that the education can be stable and continuous. At these learning centers, they can also be used for other purposes such as medical buildings.

Not all of the funding needs to come from non-profit organizations, because they may not be able to get the money quickly since people may not donate at first. A result of money not getting collected quickly will be only a few schools being built and less education on the effects of FGM. This is why another solution involves the United Nations. FGM has already been recognized as a human rights issue by the UN, so getting funding will not be as difficult because they are aware that it is a problem that needs solving. Education being at such a low rate is also another human rights issue, and with these two things combined, funds may be allocated to help build schools and learning centers around the country at water sources. Water sources may be wells created by non-profit organizations, the United Nations itself, or even bodies of freshwater.

Education and FGM are issues that need to be addressed in Somalia. Advocacy for both of these issues is essential to solving these problems. Education is not only important for learning life skills taught in other countries around the world but can also teach them about how to manage their food and when to plant crops. Education betters people's chance at survival throughout life. Startling statistics create an effect like no other, but it all comes down to the effort by the people across the world to help these children and affected women in Somalia.

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