

# The Impact of Education in Garowe Prison – a research-based article

An investigative case study of Al-Shabaab child soldiers

High-quality Research Support programme (HQRS)

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Garowe prison was built by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to house 500 inmates, making it one of the largest initiatives undertaken by the organization. It was funded by the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia and the Governments of Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom during 2011-2014. According to the Prison's factsheet, it has been

*...constructed to provide the necessary facilities required for a humane detention, including medical facilities and space for educational activities and exercise. The new facilities have enabled UNODC to provide access to medical support and educational programmes, and inmates are also provided with personal items such as blankets, cooking utensils and sports equipment. To help inmates find meaningful work upon release, UNODC also provides vocational training programmes in areas such as construction, sewing, carpentry and brick-making.*

It is one of the largest initiatives of its kind. When it was opened in 2014, Alan Cole, Programme Coordinator at UNODC said: "The opening of the Garowe Prison is an important milestone because it shows that building capacity in law enforcement and criminal justice processes is equally as important as pursuing pirates at sea."

The opening of the prison was an important news event in Puntland but it made the headlines again in March 2016 following a battle in Puntland when Al-Shabaab (AS) soldiers launched an attack from the coast. Among the arrests were 54 children, child soldiers who were fighting as part of AS. The story was reported around the world. Michael Keating, the UN Special Representative for Somalia, told the CNN news channel "It's very important that they will be well treated. This will be more productive in terms of ensuring that these children don't go back, and also understanding why they joined in the first place." The Puntland President, Abdiweli Gas, promised they would be rehabilitated after being questioned. The prison was built to house adults and specifically pirates but the Puntland Government had to do something with the children arrested, so it was decided to send them to Garowe Prison, which is said to have the best facilities in East Africa. The prisons where AS soldiers tend to go are typically very bad.

I had been interested in the prison and the emphasis that was placed on rehabilitation through education and when I learned that a new education programme had been developed by UNICEF, supported by the Government of Puntland, who pledged to help these children I was intrigued to find out more. Through contacts, I was able to arrange a visit to the prison to see the facilities for myself and to meet the Programme Director.

The prison is located a couple of kilometers outside of Garowe. It is surrounded by high walls with wire and lookout towers. You have to pass numerous checkpoints in order to reach it. I had managed to get a letter of authorization. It was with a real sense of excitement that I entered the prison. I was fascinated to see it. It was so big and new. The prison is well prepared and designed in terms of security and

infrastructure. It is built of 4 big sections/blocks (labeled A,B,C,D) which are used for different categories of prisoner. Each block is two floors high and houses 125 inmates. On the ground floor of each of the blocks are dormitory rooms and toilet and shower blocks. I didn't see the cells but it was with pride that the officers explained that everyone has their own bed and that there are only 10 beds to each cell. Each floor has its own security guards. There are also big halls, a small health clinic, the education centre, a laundry room, kitchens and storerooms. Within the prison too is a military court, offices for the prison commander and deputy commander, and 3 rooms/offices for admin and finance. Outside is a large sports field for exercise.

The Prison Factsheet also revealed that it makes use of digital technology. Garowe Prison is the first UNOPS project to have live Internet video streaming via a satellite link to provide real time, remote monitoring and evaluation of its work.

### **The Education Programme**

The children who are benefitting from the education programme are aged between 13 and 18; they are the only children in the prison and they are awaiting trial.

The aim of the education programme is to support the children whilst they are in prison but also to rehabilitate them and prepare them to return to society. There is a range of abilities between them, a few had never been to school whilst most reached secondary school. They are all taught together and on Saturdays they play football.

The programme, like the prison, falls under the Ministry of Justice but the funding and support comes from Unicef. It was initially a six-month programme but is likely to be extended for at least another six months. The curriculum consists of four subjects: Somali language, mathematics, Arabic language and Quran and Hadith. The classes start at 8am from Saturday till Wednesday. On Thursdays they play football and Friday is a rest day.

I asked the director what he felt the successes were. He answered that all the children have made progress and said that they frequently adapt the curriculum to ensure it is meeting the needs of the students as they develop. He was also keen to stress that they were getting a balanced education which stretched them academically and gave them physical exercise too.

All prisoners are expected to change their level of education and it is expected that the rest of prisoners will get access to an education programme.

As for the challenges, he admitted that the courses were limited. They also struggle to provide adequate classroom resources, even basic items such as books and pens. There is no library, yet a library with novels and textbooks would benefit all prisoners. My impression was that the facilities are new and

clean but limited. Improving knowledge in prisons should be a government priority. Another limitation is the duration of the programme, although the director is optimistic it will be extended beyond the initial six months.

Overall, the education programme seems to have had a positive impact but it is limited. It must be acknowledged that this is an innovative programme in its first phase and there has been a good start with rapid growth for prison education in Garowe prison. Despite the positive benefits though, there are concerns about the quality and range of the education provided. There is definitely scope to add other academic courses and some vocational ones too.

Education in prison is important and it should be publically discussed so the wider population, higher institutions and international NGO's can support its growth and help offenders return to society. There is much that the Puntland Government can learn from this programme in terms of wider policy and when extending education programmes to adult prisoners. Furthermore, there should be a Prison Education Board which can implement, monitor and evaluate standards and the programme should be extended to create more opportunities for learning. In this way there is a far greater chance prisoners will be rehabilitated into society. There is a huge opportunity for research into this important issue.