

Key issues that Progressio has been addressing in Somaliland:

- Building the capabilities, confidence and skills of local NGO partners
- Improving basic health services and the skills of health care professionals
- Fighting for the rights of people with disabilities
- Improving higher education facilities and staff skills
- Raising awareness on HIV and AIDS and helping to prevent the spread of the disease



The Republic of Somaliland declared itself independent from the rest of Somalia in 1991. A 14-year civil war that began in 1988 devastated much of the two countries and Somaliland remains one of the poorest places in the world to live. Although regional statistics have been hard to gather due to the war and subsequent insecurity in the region it is estimated that life expectancy is low at around 46 years, only 28% of the estimated 2 million population have regular access to health care services, under 5 mortality is one of the worst in the world at 225 per 1,000 births and the overall literacy rate is a mere 17% (UNDP Human Development Report 2005).

Progressio-Somaliland

Progressio has been working in Somaliland since 1995. Our early work focused on supporting the emergence of non-state actors (e.g. local NGOs, civil society organisations (CSOs) and people's organisations) within the newly liberated civil society in the country following independence. This was carried out through the placement of experienced Development Workers (DWs) who helped develop the technical skills of our local partner staff and improve organisational structures, strategies and project activities. This work continues today and our local partners represent a wide range of local interests including women's rights, the disabled, youth, minority groups, human rights as well as those working to help improve the lives of the poor generally through livelihood projects, reconstruction, education and democratisation.

Given the lack of quality health services in Somaliland, an early area of focus for our work was the improvement in the provision of basic health services, with DWs working alongside traditional birth attendants, midwives, nurses and doctors as well as regional health offices, health clinics and Hargeisa Hospital.

Progressio began addressing issues surrounding HIV and AIDS in Somaliland from 1999, initially through a joint project with the World Health Organisation (WHO) to estimate the rate of infection in the country. Prevalence of HIV in Somaliland is low and this therefore provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the issue and attempt to prevent the emergence of an epidemic. Progressio DWs and staff have worked alongside local religious and community leaders, NGOs and government institutions to educate, reduce misunderstanding, stigma and discrimination, build resources on HIV and AIDS and address the need for testing and treatment centres in the country. Progressio also works to educate and fight against the cultural practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Since 2000 we have worked alongside Amoud University, a community and diaspora supported institution that began in 1998 with 3 lecturers and 60 students and today has 5 faculties, with over 6,000 students supported by around 60 lecturers and professors. Amoud University is also the only institution training teachers in the region and has the best library in the country.

Progressio in the UK has also been heavily involved in highlighting the excellent progress the Somaliland government has made in democratisation and stabilising the country, we have also been linking diaspora groups together to support Somaliland and Progressio led the international monitoring team for the 2006 parliamentary elections and the establishment of the Somaliland Focus UK network.

Key Achievements

- Progressio DWs built the skills and capacity of a wide range of health care staff and helped co-ordinate the rehabilitation of the hospital laboratory, several wards, pharmacy and the blood-testing centre. The WHO now considers Hargeisa Hospital as a regional Centre of Excellence.
- The HIV and AIDS programme has helped establish the first Voluntary Counselling & Testing (VCT) centre at Hargeisa Hospital with eight additional sentinel VCT sites in the region overseen by a Progressio DW - these also provide antiretroviral (ARV) treatment for infected clients.
- Local Imams and community leaders now regularly highlight appropriate messages surrounding HIV and AIDS
- Progressio DWs have worked to build excellent educational resources available in the Somali language on HIV and AIDS and trained NGOs and the media in their use.
- Progressio DWs have built the skills and capacity of SONYO staff – a youth umbrella organisation established in 2003 which has successfully developed 26 youth organisations across all 6 regions of Somaliland – to the extent where donors including UNICEF are confident enough to entrust project budgets and activities directly to the organisation.
- Progressio was integral in the formation and success of the Somaliland National Disability Forum, which represents 11 local disability organisations.
- Progressio was the lead agency in overseeing and coordinating the international team of official observers during the successful parliamentary elections of September 2005.
- A Progressio DW has set up three networked computer laboratories, two Internet satellite systems and trained seven technicians, lecturers and professors and hundreds of students at Amoud University – as a result IT is now an integrated part of the university with students also undertaking online courses.
- A Progressio DW helped establish the country's best library at Amoud University holding over 100,000 books.

The Challenge

There continues to be a need for Progressio to engage and help local NGOs and other civil society actors develop their skills and practices in Somaliland. Many local NGOs remain very much nascent organisations with unclear operational structures, ill-defined roles and responsibilities and poor strategies. Additionally, due to the disruption to the education of Somalilanders as a result of the civil war, many staff lack skills, knowledge and experience - ultimately meaning that they are less successful at implementing projects to help local communities and in raising funds for long-term sustainability. Progressio has been working on building the capacity of local partners in Somaliland for over 10 years and have built up a wealth of experience and achievements in this field.

Although HIV infection rates remain low in Somaliland with the continued recovery of the country's infrastructure and economy, trade and the movement of people will increase both around Somaliland itself and to other neighbouring countries, where infection rates are typically higher, increasing opportunities for the infection to spread. The level of awareness at the community level concerning the disease remains low, particularly in the rural areas. Progressio has now built up in-depth knowledge and experience of working in HIV and AIDS in Somaliland and has been instrumental in opening up public debate on the issue and fighting stigma and discrimination. It has also been driving appropriate responses to the disease including establishing the first VCT and treatment centre in the country.

In 2008 Progressio plans to develop new partnerships in Somaliland around the theme of Sustainable Environment - aiming in particular to help address issues surrounding deforestation, promoting sustainable farming methods and the conservation of water resources.



Progressio UK,
Unit 3 Canonbury Yard,
190a New North Road,
London
N1 7BJ

Web: www.progressio.org.uk
Registered charity: 294329

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