



HIRAAD INSTITUTE
for Public Policy Studies

POLICY BRIEF

Reshaping the Somali Region Education System

Impediments, Efforts and Achievements





Executive Summary

Ethiopia's shift from access-based education expansion to quality-focused reform has exposed deep learning inequalities in the Somali Region, especially between public and private schools. Evidence from a larger study on education conducted by Hiraad Institute for Public Policy Studies shows what shapes Grade 12 performance — severe shortages of textbooks, laboratories, electricity, and internet access, alongside weak foundational learning, automatic promotion, the Grade 9 transition to English, teacher demoralisation, and declining community confidence in education.

The Somali Regional Education Bureau and its stakeholders need a coordinated response that prioritises public-school resource allocation, teacher support, foundational learning recovery, English bridge programmes, stronger continuous assessment, and school-level accountability. Without urgent action, public education risks becoming a pathway that reproduces inequality rather than opportunity.

Equal examination standards require equitable learning conditions — public-school students cannot compete fairly while facing major shortages of resources and support.

Background

For many years, Ethiopia's education policy focused mainly on expanding access — building schools and universities. This achieved important progress in enrolment, but recent quality-focused reforms have revealed that access alone is not enough. Students must also acquire the foundational knowledge, language skills, and learning support needed to succeed.

This brief is based on a larger mixed-methods study in the Somali Region: a questionnaire administered to 364 Grade 12 students, in-depth interviews with 20 teachers and 4 school principals, and five focus group discussions with regional education stakeholders.



Context of the Problem

The Somali Region faces a major public education quality and equity problem. National University Entrance Examination results show a sharp divide between private and public schools — a gap closely linked to unequal learning conditions rather than student ability alone.

72.4%

Private-school respondents who passed

5.8%

Public-school respondents who passed

Public schools face shortages of textbooks, laboratories, electricity, internet access, and structured academic support. Students with better access to learning materials and internet performed far better than those without.

The problem is also rooted in weak foundational learning. Automatic promotion has allowed students to move through grades without mastering basic skills, while the Grade 9 transition to English as the medium of instruction creates an additional barrier. Teacher demoralisation, high turnover, and declining community confidence further weaken learning outcomes.



Policy Implications

The national examination results should be treated as a warning sign of deeper weaknesses in public education, not as a failure of students alone. The shift to a quality-focused, criterion-referenced system has exposed long-standing problems in learning, resources, teacher support, and assessment.

For the Somali Regional Education Bureau, the key implication is that equal examination standards require equitable learning conditions. Public-school students cannot be expected to compete fairly with private-school students while facing major shortages of textbooks, laboratories, electricity, internet access, teacher support, and English-language preparation.

RISK WITHOUT ACTION

A two-tier education system: private schools as pathways to opportunity, and public schools as pathways that reproduce disadvantage. Policy action must prioritise public-school improvement, foundational learning recovery, teacher motivation, and stronger accountability.

Recommendations

1 · Prioritise Public Schools

Needs-based resource allocation, with urgent attention to textbooks, laboratories, electricity, internet access, and basic learning materials.

3 · English Bridge Programmes

Before and during Grade 9, to support the transition from Somali to English as medium of instruction.

5 · Stronger Continuous Assessment

End automatic promotion without mastery; use diagnostic and formative assessment to catch gaps early.

7 · Rebuild Community Trust

Public dialogue, local success stories, parent engagement, and campaigns that challenge the normalisation of failure.

2 · Learning Recovery Programme

Focused on English, mathematics, science, reading comprehension, and exam readiness for Grades 9–12.

4 · Teacher Retention & Motivation

Retention mechanisms, professional development, supervision, recognition, and support in disadvantaged schools.

6 · School-Level Accountability

Involve school leaders, parent committees, teachers, and communities in monitoring resources and progress.

Conclusion

The poor results in the Somali Region are not only an examination problem — they reflect deeper weaknesses in public education. Public-school students are disadvantaged by limited resources, weak foundational learning, language transition challenges, teacher demoralisation, and declining community confidence. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated, sustained action led by the Somali Regional Education Bureau and supported by schools, communities, civil society, and development partners.