

21 April 2021 – Years of conflict, violence and recurrent climatic shocks have led to long-term displacement and economic adversity in Somalia. Currently, about 2.6 million people are internally displaced, 40% of whom live in extreme hardship. This situation has led to widespread trauma, social deprivation and substance abuse, with devastating consequences on people's mental health. A 2010 WHO situation analysis estimated that one third of Somalia's population suffers from some form of mental health problem, in a country where two thirds of the population is under 30 years of age and has had to live with violence their entire life. Despite this, mental health and psychosocial support services remain largely non-existent in the country, while stigma prevents many from seeking help.

It is in this context that WHO, as a lead agency in health, partnered with Somali health authorities, UNICEF, International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund to develop a unique project called "Improving psychosocial support and mental health care for young people affected by conflict in Somalia: a socially-inclusive integrated approach for peace-building." The overall objective of the project is to improve access to mental health and psychosocial support services for young people affected by conflict in Somalia, using an approach that contributes to peacebuilding through community reconciliation and social integration. The project was officially launched during a ceremony in Mogadishu in March 2020, in the presence of the Federal Ministry of Health, H.E. Dr. Fawziya Abikar Nur.

To achieve this goal, all project partners will work together to: train health workers to integrate care and treatment of mental illness into the primary health care services delivery at health facilities; establish community-based psychosocial support structures and services where youth are mobilized in delivering such services themselves and awareness-raising activities; and conduct a study on the linkages between mental health, conflict and peace-building in Somalia, with a particular focus on youth and gender dynamics. Indeed, these activities are aimed at helping to reduce stigma associated with mental health and psychosocial disorders, improve social cohesion, and reduce disenfranchisement and marginalization of young people – a recognized driver of conflict – thereby directly empowering youth to be agents of peace and positive change in their communities.

The project directly targets 26 500 individuals living in camps for internally displaced persons in Kismayo, Baidoa and Dollow, with a focus on young women and men, as well as their families. It is expected that an additional 288 520 individuals will indirectly benefit from this project as well.

As the first venture of its kind in Somalia, whereby institutional response to mental health and

psychosocial issues is being undertaken as a means to address a critical barrier to
reconciliation and sustained peace in the country, WHO and all project partners look forward to
leveraging this unique opportunity in favour of improving and expanding access to mental health
services across the country.

WHO expresses its sincere thanks to the Youth Promotion Initiative of the United Nations Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund for its generous support to this critical project and encourages other partners to step up their support to address Somalia's silent mental health crisis.

THE PROJECT IN A SNAPSHOT	
DURATION	
21 months (November 2019-August 2021)	
LOCATION	
LOCATION	
Kismayo, Baidoa, Dollow, Mogadishu, Galkayo	
BUDGET	
US\$ 1.5 million	

BENEFICIARIES	
DENEFICIARIES	
26 500 direct beneficiaries	
288 520 indirect beneficiaries	
ACTIVITIES	
Training of health workers	

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Psychosocial support services in IDP settlements using existing primary health facility as the entry point
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Develop a youth-led, peer-to-peer mental health/substance abuse awareness programme with marginal
Academic study
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For photos of the launching ceremony, please visit the official WHO Somalia Flickr account

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