# Executive Summary

## Project Background

The Bar ama Baro - “Teach or Learn” program (BAB), supported by USAID/Somalia, aims to increase access to quality accelerated basic education for out of school children and youth ages 9-16 in targeted areas of Somalia. An international consortium, led by Creative Associates, International, began program implementation in August 2021 in 197 schools with 808 classrooms across 11 target districts in Somalia. They recruited 808 teachers (24% female) and enrolled 39,930 learners (48% female). Over the course of this 5-year project, BAB plans to establish 500-700 Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) centers/schools using the BAB model across 11-15 districts in Somalia and reach 100,000 unique learners.

## Evaluation Approach

USAID contracted with a multidisciplinary evaluation team led by the Evaluation and Learning Research Center (ELRC) at Purdue University, in collaboration with Makerere University (Uganda) and the Somali Research and Development Institute (SORDI) in Somalia, a member of Makerere University’s Resilient Africa Network (RAN), to conduct an external evaluation of the BAB program. The evaluation has three primary objectives, namely to: (1) understand the effectiveness of the Bar ama Baro (BAB) ABE program in urban, rural, and IDP contexts; (2) document learning outcomes of diverse learners and examine the impact of learner, community, and school characteristics on learning outcomes; and (3) supply feedback to improve program operations and inform evidence-based decision making. **This baseline evaluation lays the groundwork for program evaluation by: (1) establishing starting values for project indicators and serving as a baseline for calculating growth in learning outcomes after one and two years of BAB and formal school instruction; (2) identifying/verifying contextual factors that may affect outcomes; and (3) informing sample selection and program implementation strategies.**

In addition to investigating the effectiveness of the BAB program, this evaluation is examining learning outcomes for children and youth attending public, community, and private education programs that are co-located with or near BAB sites. Data from this investigation will provide information to the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education (MoECHE) and other education stakeholders to inform education policy, benchmarking for reading and math, and understanding of the impacts of different educational models on diverse learner populations in Somalia. Because a variety of internal and external factors can influence learning outcomes, this evaluation takes a holistic approach that examines the interplay among learner, family, teacher and school, community, and environmental factors.

The external evaluation uses a multiple measure longitudinal cohort design to examine learner growth over time. This design will allow us to document changes in outcomes for individual learners through two years of programming. By following individual learners over time, the external evaluation will be able to examine the impacts of educational interventions on each learner -- both BAB and non-BAB -- (including learning outcomes, retention, and dropout rates) based on gender, age, SES (Social Economic Status), location, and other relevant demographic and contextual factors.

## Methods

The external baseline evaluation focused on describing learner, teacher, and head teacher characteristics for both BAB and non-BAB components of a longitudinal cohort; testing the quality and performance of data collection tools; and examining expected correlational associations between variables of interest. Data for this baseline evaluation came from two sources, primary longitudinal cohort data collected by the evaluation team (teacher, head teacher, and learner surveys – including EGRA and EGMA) and secondary data collected by the ABE implementing partner, Creative Associates (including community and household surveys and cross-sectional cohort EGRA and EGMA data). Data collection for both the longitudinal and cross-sectional samples took place in September-October 2021 using random sampling methodologies.

The longitudinal evaluation includes children and youth beginning as level one (BAB) or grade 1 or 2 (non-BAB) learners in late August 2021. The longitudinal cohort used a random sampling approach that purposefully oversampled rural and IDP locations to mitigate expected challenges in these areas due to population mobility, access, and other considerations. The sampling framework also considered state and district distribution, as well as funding type for non-BAB schools (community, public, or private). The evaluation team also randomly selected formal school classrooms from each site hosting a BAB longitudinal sample classroom to create the non-BAB longitudinal cohort. In cases where a BAB longitudinal site did not host a non-BAB grade 1 or grade 2 class, we identified a non-BAB sample from a nearby school in the same community.

The longitudinal baseline sample included 2912 learners (1714 BAB learners and 1198 non-BAB learners), 54 teachers, and 42 head teachers from three states (Jubaland, Southwest, and Hirshabelle) and the Benadir region and 11 districts. Additional contextual information and baseline evaluation measures (Household survey, Community Survey, cross-sectional learner measures) derived from data collected by BAB as part of their AMELP, program records, or other secondary sources.

## Key Findings

The longitudinal evaluation cohort showed **little variation between BAB and Non-BAB learner samples at baseline on learner characteristics including age distribution, gender distribution, and prior school attendance.** Both the accelerated program learners and learners attending non-accelerated schools varied in age from below 5 to above 19 years of age with median ages for grade 1, BAB ABE learners, and grade 2 at 10, 11, and 12 years, respectively. While overall, both the BAB and non-BAB cohorts showed gender balance, disaggregation by school funding type revealed higher enrollment of male learners in community and private schools, while public schools enrolled more females than males and BAB schools were gender balanced.

Examining the baseline data for differences across school type (community, public, private, and BAB) revealed distinct patterns suggesting that **the various school types serve different populations of Somalia children and youth.** Cohort learners attending private schools scored highest on all baseline indicators. Private school learners are relatively affluent with more boys than girls, speak Maxaa tiri as their primary language and are more likely to have both prior personal educational experiences and more educated mothers. Not surprisingly, private school learners also scored highest on baseline assessments of literacy and numeracy.

Community schools, at the other end of the spectrum, also serve more boys than girls, but they are significantly poorer, speak predominately Maay, and their mothers are less likely to be literate. Learners attending community schools also scored lowest on all psychosocial scales, except safety, and had the lowest baseline literacy and numeracy scores.

Public schools in the longitudinal cohort sample enrolled more girls than boys and served children that are only slightly more affluent than their community-school peers, although they report maternal literacy rates that fall midway between those of private and community school children. Public school learner scores on psychosocial indicators and baseline numeracy and literacy scores are also intermediate to private and community schools.

BAB schools served boys and girls in about equal proportions. Children attending BAB schools report among the lowest levels of maternal education and SES scores. Despite these indicators of economic deprivation, BAB learner scores on psychosocial measures and baseline literacy and numeracy scores are very similar to those measured for public school learners and between community and private school learners.

**Where learners live also influences socioeconomic indicators, psychosocial measures, and baseline skills and competencies.** While we saw little difference in gender balance, median learner age, or prior educational experience based on location type, learners from IDP and rural areas were far more likely to report low maternal literacy rates and fewer family resources than their urban counterparts. Rural learners reported the lowest perceptions of equity, engagement, and quality of life indicators of all groups and all scored significantly lower on baseline literacy and numeracy tests than learners from either IDP or urban areas. Contrary to expectations, learners from IDP areas, while resource poor, outperformed both rural and urban learners on baseline literacy and numeracy tests – perhaps indicative of other support resources available in these areas.

## Sample selection considerations

The external evaluation compared literacy and numeracy scores at baseline for the longitudinal sample with a cross-sectional sample collected by Creative Associates. Sample selection for both cohorts used a random sampling approach, however there were key differences. The longitudinal cohort purposefully oversampled rural and IDP schools and included all learners in selected classrooms. The cross-sectional cohort drew sample classrooms proportionally and randomly selected 10-12 learners in each. The differences in sample selection methodologies reflected the different purposes for the data and resulted in quite different samples. The longitudinal sample is significantly different from the cross-sectional sample in every demographic aspect except gender. Most notably, the longitudinal sample includes a larger proportion of lower age learners, rural learners, and IDP learners.

The external evaluation compared results from BAB’s cross-sectional EGRA and EGMA baseline assessments with results from the longitudinal cohort assessments to examine the effect of sampling on baseline measures of learner skills and competencies. The longitudinal sample has many more learners categorized as non-learner or emergent learners on both the EGRA (64%) and EGMA 61%) at baseline than the cross-sectional sample (43% on both)[[1]](#footnote-1).

**The baseline evaluation verified expected correlations between a variety of factors and learner performance on baseline measures of skills and competencies (literacy and numeracy).** **Baseline learner skills and competencies in our analysis correlate most strongly with student age, but they also correlate significantly with learner SES, maternal literacy, and quality of life indicators.** Urban learners outperformed rural and IDP learners on all measures. As the longitudinal cohort over-represents rural learners, who score lower on these constructs in our analysis, it is not surprising that longitudinal baseline scores at all age levels are lower than the cross-sectional scores at the same age.

Sample characteristics are important when considering education targets. For example, benchmark scores for literacy are commonly set using the first quartile of the Oral Reading Fluency score (in correct words per minute) plotted against reading comprehension scores at the 80% correct level. These measurements yield varying results based on cohort characteristics. The score derived by this method for the longitudinal sample is 49 correct words per minute, compared to 32 correct words per minute for the cross-sectional sample.

## Conclusions

This baseline evaluation 1) established starting values and identified key differences among learners based on location, school type, demographics and family characteristics, and psychosocial measures; 2) verified correlations among these variables and measures of learner skills and competencies, and 3) identified sample selection and program implementation considerations. Key conclusions and recommendations include:

* Both formal (community, public, and private) and ABE classes in the baseline sample included learners across a broad spectrum of ages from 5-19 in entry level classes. This indicates a strong need for ABE to help older learners gain basic education skills rapidly, while making room in formal classrooms for larger numbers of younger learners.
* Baseline data reveals resource inequities across location types, with rural learners under-resourced compared to both urban and IDP learners. As skills and competencies at baseline are strongly correlated with socioeconomic and psychosocial indicators, directing resource allocations to these high need communities should yield positive outcomes.
* Natural disasters, violence, or unrest in the community resulted in depressed learner scores on psychosocial indicators. These results highlight the need to equip teachers through ongoing training and mentoring to meet the educational needs of all learners while supporting positive socioemotional development and health, especially during times of uncertainty, stress, or trauma.
* Moreover, these findings underscore the need to collect data that captures the role of external factors on student outcomes.
* Although learner gender balance varied by school type, males dominated the teacher workforce by a ratio of nearly 3:1. Developing and implementing school policies and procedures that prioritize gender-balanced teacher recruitment will enhance education and role models, especially for girls.
* Finally, variations in baseline measures resulting from different sampling strategies illustrates the need to use holistic data collection strategies that provide adequate representation across location and populations and to understand the strengths and limitations of data sources when developing educational standards, benchmarking, or making other policy decisions.

1. As Somalia does not currently have defined national literacy and numeracy performance levels, we adopted the performance levels described in the Leave No Girl Behind, AGES project (page 97) (Machova, Miettunen and Peterson 2020) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)