



Transforming Lives

Creating opportunities for young girls in Somalia

A young girl takes part in teacher training and gains meaningful employment.



“We need more programs geared toward female empowerment; education makes a lot of positive difference in a girl’s life.”

-- Hibaq Feisal Hassan, 21 years
Recipient of the SYLI teacher training scholarship

In a country recovering from a 25-year civil war, there are very limited opportunities for advancement, especially for women. In Somalia, men hold most government and civil service positions. As a result, the government and civil society have made a concerted effort to establish educational and employment opportunities to empower Somali women and girls.

Through USAID’s Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI), young women are finding education opportunities leading to meaningful employment. Hibaq Feisal Hassan is one of many young women that SYLI supports. Born and raised in a remote village in the outskirts of Hargeisa in Somaliland, Hibaq was sent to live with relatives in the city, as there were no schools in her village. She went to the big city with dreams of one day becoming a teacher. But prospects of a bright future were quickly tarnished. While in Hargeisa, Hibaq was obligated to do household chores and other tasks for her host family. Each day, she spent hours collecting water, doing chores, and cooking. She dropped out of secondary school twice and moved from one relative’s house to another. Despite all these difficulties, Hibaq persevered and was able to successfully complete her secondary education.

Although she never considered education beyond secondary school to be an option for her, Hibaq heard about SYLI’s pre-service female teacher training program. She applied for the program and received a scholarship to participate in the two-year diploma course, specializing in biochemistry. This changed the course of Hibaq’s life forever. Within months of completing the course, Hibaq was recruited by the Ministry of Education. The proud biology teacher now brims with joy as she teaches dozens of students in her class at Gacan Libax Secondary – one of Hargeisa’s largest public schools.

“I joined this program because it aims to bridge the gender gap and provides a better learning environment for girls so they can stay in school. The girls participate in class when I teach. They feel confidence to express themselves,” said Hibaq.

Through teacher training courses that target and recruit women, SYLI empowers women and increases enrollment and retention of girls in school. Although the teaching profession in Somalia has historically been dominated by men, that is now changing thanks to Hibaq and many other women like her, who are transforming the lives of Somali youth through teaching and through her personal story of resilience and determination.

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