



Transforming Lives

Promoting girls' education in Somalia through female teacher training scholarships

Young women are receiving training to become teachers, and to change perceptions of what women can accomplish with an education.



“For all the people that believe that a woman can't learn or can't teach, I want to stand up as a role model, we need to get rid of the perception that women can't!”

-- Nawal Ahmed, 25 years,
Recipient of the teacher training scholarship

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Nawal Ahmed is a 25-year-old teacher trainee from Qardo, a community in Puntland, Somalia. As the sixth child in a family of 15, she recognized from an early age that she would have to compete with her brothers to earn the opportunity to attend school. As a dedicated student nicknamed 'professor' in high school, she worked hard to gain an education that ultimately led to her becoming a teacher.

Immediately following high school, Nawal started volunteering at Bosaso High school as a biology teacher with no formal training. She experienced many challenges, including mistreatment by male students and a lack of support from male colleagues. She vowed to change this and sought opportunities to gain more skills. When Nawal heard about the scholarships being offered by Mercy Corp's Somali Youth Learners Initiative (SYLI), funded by USAID, she quickly made the journey from her hometown to Garowe and was among the first to register for the two-year teacher training course. “My dream has always been to teach, even as far back as middle school, I was always studious and loved teaching others.”

Today, Nawal's motivation is to change the perception of what girls can do. While in high school, she recalls that people would tell her, “Girls can't do sciences, girls always fail, and there are no female teachers because girls can't teach.” Rather than being disheartened, she saw an opportunity to change that narrative, to show young girls that it is possible and ok to be different. Through SYLI, 36 young women are now training to be teachers in Puntland and are expected to graduate in July 2016. Nawal says the training has not only provided her with invaluable teaching skills, but more importantly she has gained the confidence to teach, which she believes is something she would not have had without this training.

Her goal now is to return to Sheikh Osman secondary school in Qardo where she completed her secondary education and serve her community by being a role model for the young girls in her hometown. An added advantage Nawal says is that she can now prove all the naysayers wrong who said that “girls fail and girls can't teach.”