

# Programs Targeting Marginalized Groups

Somali Family Services (SFS) believes that every Somali has a stake in the country's security and development. Therefore, every Somali should also have a voice in the building of that peace and the country. Since its establishment in 2003, SFS has been committed to engaging and empowering those groups typically excluded from these discussions and decisions. The organization designs and implements all of its trainings, forums and other programs to ensure that women, youth, girls and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are actively engaged and provided opportunities to succeed.

In addition to working with these marginalized citizens directly, SFS provides support to other civil society organizations (CSOs) that are assisting and empowering marginalized groups through the venue of the Puntland Library and Resource Center, which provides CSOs with the safe space to carry out their work, as well as by providing skills-building workshops for such CSOs.

- **Youth.** The exclusion and marginalization of youth from decision-making roles, along with their lack of education and job skills, creates an environment ripe for violence. Because many of Puntland's youth see no alternative means of having their voices heard and lack employment opportunities, they are especially vulnerable for recruitment to gangs, piracy, armed militias and criminal activity. Recognizing their vulnerability and exclusion, SFS carries out programs to help youth engage in constructive ways, share in the decision-making responsibilities for their communities, gain productive skills and find employment. To this end, in 2011, SFS provided life-skills training for nearly 200 of Puntland's youth (15-24). These youth learned practical skills that are valued by employers, including communications, accounting and technology. By the completion of the training, SFS had placed nearly a quarter of the participants in paid jobs, another quarter as interns to continue developing their skills, and had commitments from local organizations to place another 30 percent of the young people in paid positions or internships. SFS continued to provide support to those who were not placed, as well as actively search for positions for them.



- **Women.** Traditionally, Somali society relegates women to second-class status. They are not usually part of decision-making processes, and their rights are often violated. SFS recognizes that only when the female half of the Somali people are empowered and engaged can Somalia reach its true potential. Therefore, SFS aims to empower women with the tools they need to ensure

their voices are heard by their families, communities and governments. To accomplish this, it ensures that at least one-third of all of the participants in its trainings and forums are women. They are empowered with the same skills and knowledge as their male counterparts in the safety of an environment where their contributions and input are respected equally. SFS also hosts human rights workshops to bring women's rights and similar issues to the attention of a diverse range of community members.

- **Girls.** In addition to incorporating girls at near-parity levels to boys in all of its youth initiatives, SFS has also implemented programs specifically for Somali girls. One of these was a leadership training that empowered 30 young women in Qardo with the skills and confidence to be change-makers within their communities and country. SFS informs Somali girls of their rights so they may demand that those rights – including the right to education – be respected.



- **Internally Displaced Persons.** IDPs are especially vulnerable to human rights abuses and often lack basic services and opportunities for employment in their host communities. To empower IDPs to have their voices heard and their unique concerns addressed, SFS trains IDP representatives on human rights and advocacy. SFS has also hosted forums that provided IDPs with opportunities to meet government officials and voice their concerns directly.