



Somali Family SERVICES

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Renovating and Expanding Puntland Library and Resource Center to Provide Conducive Environment for the Economic Empowerment of Youth and Women

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Amount Requested:

Background

Since the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1991, women and youth in the country have suffered from a potent combination of economic dislocation and social disempowerment. The failure to integrate these marginalized groups into formal economic and social structures has left millions without sustainable livelihoods and is pushing a new generation of young Somalis into dire poverty, crime, and political radicalization.

Somalia's northeastern region of Puntland, formally established in 1998, has made important strides towards combating the economic marginalization of women and youth. The Puntland State Constitution established a Ministry of Women's and Family Affairs and a Ministry of Labour, Youth, and Sports specifically to address the needs of these vulnerable populations.

While these efforts laid the institutional foundation for the empowerment of women and youth, they have thus far failed to substantively improve the lives of those most in need. Despite gaining access to formal legal rights, women and youth are disproportionately likely to be unemployed, impoverished, under-educated and suffer from malnutrition. Economically disempowered Somali women and youth desperately need access to safe meeting spaces, business financing, vocational training, and social networks essential to building self-sustaining livelihoods.

Description & Rationale

Puntland has developed the legal framework and social stability required for expanding economic opportunities of women and youth, but it requires a more robust civil society sector to provide the resources, skills, and networks for converting abstract opportunities into lived realities.

Somali Family Services (SFS) proposes to fill this gap by partnering with the United Nations Development Programme to renovate and expand its Puntland Library and Resource Center (PLRC) in Garowe, allowing it to provide social and economic opportunities to Puntland's women and youth. An expanded Library and Resource Center will serve as a hub for government, private sector, and NGO organizations to provide microfinance and capital access, youth vocational training and skills development, and business networking among women and youth entrepreneurs. It will also provide a valuable safety net of personal assistance and business for women and youth as they take their first steps in the formal economy.

Since its establishment in 2007, the Somali Family Services Resource Center, the first and only public library and civil society center serving all of Puntland, has proved a success on multiple levels. The Resource Center's ideal location – across from Puntland's largest soccer field - publicly accessible books, education materials, and internet-equipped computers draw thousands of youth each month for job training and education. Safe and open meeting spaces attract political, business, and community leaders to share information and best practices over tea and coffee. Finally, the center's conference halls have hosted numerous civil society and government training sessions and community forums since 2007. The success of the PLRC has allowed Somali Family Services to develop working relationships with the Ministries of Women's and Family Affairs, Youth and Sports, and Education.

It is our belief that we can harness the resources, legitimacy and community recognition of the Resource Center to dramatically improve the economic prospects for women and youth in Puntland. A renovated and expanded center would serve as a trusted and well-equipped focal point for businesses, government ministries, and NGOs to provide trainings and disseminate resources such as microfinance grants. It would also allow women and youth to access books, attend community gatherings, and utilize Internet resources. Finally, a renovated PLRC would offer a safe meeting place for women and youth who currently lack social and business networking opportunities in Puntland.

Puntland has the political framework and entrepreneurial citizenry necessary for sustainable and inclusive economic development. Until it develops civil society institutions capable of empowering, educating, and connecting marginalized economic actors, however, it will continue to under-serve its most vulnerable populations: women and youth. A renovated and expanded Somali Family Services Library and Resource Center would offer a valuable first step towards filling a gap that threatens Puntland's economic and political future.

Project Objectives

The overall objective of the proposed expansion and renovation is to provide conducive environment to economically empower women and youth for women and youth to economically empower is to economically empower women and youth in Garowe, Puntland. The specific objectives of the project include:

1. Expanding Micro-finance and Micro-grant Access Through Public-Private Partnerships: The renovation and expansion will provide neutral space whereby micro-finance and micro-grant recipients will receive resources, training, information sharing and other business opportunities. The resource center will be an ideal space whereby private sector, government, and civil society can collaborate and interact to provide business opportunities for disempowered women and youth. As banks and businesses establish themselves in Garowe, it is essential that civil society provide a the personal support and security required for marginalized women and youth to safely enter the formal economy. An expanded PLRC will offer a safe and trusted environment for women and youth to seek out the economic resources they require to start and sustain new businesses.

2. Enriching Youth and Women's Vocational Training and Skills Development: Somali Family Services is currently a leading provider of vocation training and skill development to Puntland's women and youth. For instance, SFS is currently providing essential resources and training to over 500 youth in Galkayo and Bosaso in partnership with UNDP, ILO and UNICEF. In Garowe, SFS is providing similar skill and life training to over 100 IDP's in partnership with the UNHCR. The PLRC is ideally situated to provide a safe, enriching atmosphere for youth and women in search of education and skill development. The center is located across from Puntland's biggest football field, and Somali Family Services enjoys a strong relationship with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Youth and Sports.

With this strong foundation in mind, expansion and renovation of the center will allow SFS to offer a broader range of free vocational and skills training courses tailored for women and youth. Courses on computer and internet skills, English language literacy, resume writing, craftsmanship and business strategy would assist savvy but uneducated women and youth and help them locate job opportunities.

3. Providing Safe Environment for Women and Youth Networking: The PLRC is currently the only available neutral meeting space for a variety of community members. Although an increasing number of women and youth are attempting to use the center for social and business networking, the center is not yet fully friendly to the needs of women, youth and children. For instance, we observed that at a recent microfinance dispersal meeting, none of the over 140 women in attendance were able to use the PLRC's open space for tea, conversation or prayer. This reflects that the space is currently a male dominated environment that is unfriendly to the needs of women and youth.

Therefore, an expanded and renovated PLRC will include a safe, open, and women and youth friendly tea and conversation space. The environment will empower youth and women's business networks by bringing entrepreneurial women and youth together to discuss business strategy, best practices and opportunities for cooperation. The Resource Center will also facilitate dialogue between women and youth and NGOs, civil society organizations, and businesses who may wish to partner with them. We have a responsibility to provide a safe and conducive environment to the women and youth and children of Puntland.

Project Activities

It is envisioned that the project activities will primarily include:

- Expanding the existing Somali Family Services Resource Center to include a second-floor for a multipurpose hall that will serve for youth meetings, recreation and job skills development.
- Equip the multipurpose hall with resources and tools for youth development, including basketball/volleyball courts, table tennis, and chess.
- Provide rehabilitation, mentorship and social skills workshops for Youth for Change and other at-risk youth development programs.
- Coordinating with NGOs, business community and government ministries to provide trainings and business opportunities for women and youth.
- Conducting vocational and skills training based on requests and assessment of needs of community, with special emphasis on the needs of women.

- Train additional TOT's to provide micro-finance and micro-grant recipients with financial education
- Conduct trainings for women and youth on business strategy and financial literacy
- Establish an outdoor open-air community space for women and youth to safely meet, drink tea and coffee, and establish business and social networks.

Organizational Background

Somali Family Services (SFS) is a non-profit organization that was established in 2003 with the original purpose of serving the Somali Diaspora in Minnesota and linking this Diaspora community with residents of Puntland. In recent years, SFS has shifted its focus to Puntland itself, where it has implemented various projects that aim to promote democracy and human rights and strengthen civil society. SFS is also the founder of the Puntland Library & Resource Center, located in Garowe, which is the only public library serving the region. Considering its established track record in designing and implementing civil society-related programs, SFS is an ideal candidate for educating and empowering Puntland citizens to engage in democracy, good governance and active citizenship.