

# SUMMARY BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE USAID/SOMALIA YOUTH ASSESSMENT



USAID Somalia

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

At the request of USAID/Somalia, YouthPower Learning conducted a cross-sectoral youth assessment to identify effective programs, organizations, and partnerships supporting youth (defined in Somalia as ages 15-30) to reach their full potential. The assessment results are also intended to provide donors and development practitioners working in Somalia with information on opportunities and challenges for supporting youth's journey from adolescence to adulthood. The assessment team held 30 youth-led focus-group discussions (FGDs) with 283 youth in order to capture a range of youth opinions and experiences across the country.<sup>1</sup> The team also conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with 130 staff from the Federal Member States/Somaliland, international donors, UN agencies, USAID staff, and Somali community and business leaders, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) implementing youth programs across Somalia.

<sup>1</sup> Discussions and interviews were conducted in Federal/South Central, Federal/Puntland, and Somaliland.

## FINDINGS

Using a positive youth development lens, we find that Somali youth vary in terms of their assets: those relative skills, physical and financial assets, information, access to services, and personal networks. The most vulnerable youth segments are those with fewer assets: the most at-risk youth have fewer assets than others, so that youth cohorts overlap. Youth cohorts are characterized as follows:

- *Youth living in rural areas, internally displaced person (IDP) camps, nomads:* Just over half of youth fall within this group with 22 percent living in rural areas; 26 percent are nomads and 7 percent are IDPs. These youth suffer from low access to services, including education, health, water, and sanitation. Youth in IDP camps, especially girls, suffer more from insecurity than host communities.
- *Youth from poverty-affected families:* Two out of three youth live in poverty with food insecurity.

- *Poorly educated youth:* More than half of Somali youth are illiterate; two out of three have no formal education. Out-of-school youth are dropouts or those who completed school, but unemployed.
- *Youth from marginalized families and girls:* These youth lack connections or family support, which is often related to being from one of the marginalized clans.
- *Females:* Girls forced into early marriage and those experiencing gender-based violence, which affects one out of four women.
- *Youth recruited into terrorist groups or crime groups:* Male youth are most in danger of being recruited into terrorist or crime groups.
- *Youth attempting illegal migration:* Typically, these at-risk youth are seeking a better life or services.

### What is the youth experience?

In Somalia, youth experience is largely driven by poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to education and other services. Urban youth have access to more services. Overwhelmingly, education is the number one aspiration of younger youth, while employment is the number one aspiration of older youth, especially if they already have some education. Younger youth believe that education is the way to a better life, while older youth (25-30 years-old) are dissatisfied with the education they received as it has generally not resulted in employment.

Unemployment is high among youth, although many do some sort of informal work. While the production sector (agriculture, livestock, fisheries) has been the primary employer, youth are interested in modern or mechanized production rather than manual labor. Most youth want to work in an office, although most lack the skills to do so and opportunities are limited. Major barriers to employment are lack of skills and experience; tribalism/nepotism and corruption; insecurity (lack of freedom of movement and access to land and businesses); and gender discrimination.

Youth lack access to money and assets to start their own businesses, in addition to having low education and skills.

When not at school or work, female youth are most likely to be at home, and, regardless of gender, youth are engaged in social media and texting. Depending upon where they live, youth feel more (or less) personal insecurity and risks to their health. Many communities experience treatable illnesses such as TB, diarrhea, and

malnutrition. Teen pregnancy, rape in some areas, and substance abuse appear to be on the rise and are big concerns among youth who see these issues as affecting physical and mental health.

### What do we see through a positive youth development lens?

Youth want to be engaged in their communities and with government in decision-making—beyond issues that affect youth alone. Most youth, however, see tribalism and control of decision-making by elders as barriers to participation, even in areas where youth are welcome in decision-making bodies. Youth feel excluded from leadership roles except in rare cases in which they may have authority regarding a youth-focused issue.

Youth lack safe spaces in which to engage and grow. These are necessary for emotional growth and confidence building, as well as peer-to-peer communication, and opportunities to learn conflict-resolution and other communication skills. Youth-led organizations and line ministries concur about the need for safe spaces and have called for one-stop centers for youth that include a variety of services in one place.

In terms of the enabling environment for positive youth development, a few salient themes emerged:

- *Government attitudes, policies, and regulations:* Policies and strategies supporting youth are well written and recommend some best practices for youth development, but require coordination, oversight, and follow-through. Youth believe that if they were implemented, youth would benefit.
- *Tribalism:* Youth and key informants believe tribalism/nepotism and corruption interfere with youth development, except for those youth who are connected with strong clan networks.
- *Private-sector engagement:* Some non-government key informants believe the private sector is booming and is ready to engage youth if they had the skills required to work in the private sector. They believe that government is neglecting to appropriately engage with the private sector and that public-private partnerships would enable funding for youth training, tools (such as those needed in an ICT (information and communication technology)-based workplace), and internships/future work.
- *Gender:* Youth say that traditional views of household roles are strong in their households in which women are responsible for household chores and children, and men make financial decisions. Women suffer from harassment in the workplace, which youth believe is a result of culture-based discrimination.

- *Elders control leadership positions:* Some youth want elders to “retire” to make room for youth to lead. Many youth believe that elders do not trust or respect youth. Youth want elders to make space for youth to be heard and act.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE LIVES OF YOUTH

We recommend stakeholders consider the following opportunities with high potential to make a difference in the lives of Somali youth.

**Increase Youth Earnings through Self-employment:** There is a great, unmet demand for programs that offer skills, assets, and supports for youth to obtain a stable source of income through self-employment in the informal sector. Targeting rural areas and the agriculture/livestock sector is important to reaching underserved youth, despite the trend in rural to urban migration. Successful youth livelihood interventions require integrated supports, using flexible, modular components that can be tailored to the needs of different youth segments. Develop a public-private partnership (PPP) strategy to make private-sector engagement easier for local stakeholders. Youth livelihood programs must align the aspirations of youth with the demand trends of the market.

**Increase Youth Access to and Use of Educational Opportunities:** Integrate technology, manual labor skills, soft skills, and social-emotional learning throughout education. Improve the quality of education. Strengthen technical and vocational education training (TVET) institutions by developing standards and providing progressive skills to meet entry-level, mid-level, and high-level positions so that youth can be competitive in the market and respected by would-be employers and clients.

**Increase Youth Engagement in Community and Government:** Engage youth with one-stop centers and sports in safe spaces. Be intentional about reaching vulnerable youth segments. Conduct Somalia-wide, locally tailored in public information campaigns to support youth development and civic engagement. Foster the development of youth-led projects and strengthen youth-focused institutions and line ministries to deliver youth-focused holistic programs and monitoring.

**Open Space for Youth to be Leaders in the Public Sphere to Strengthen the Rule of Law:** Youth want fairness, transparency, and justice for all, not just some. Linked with public information campaigns and civic engagement, give youth a platform and voice so that they can lead justice and reform efforts. In an environment

of elite capture and large aid flows, youth should lead accountability and implementation oversight. Given the size of the youth population, youth participation and leadership in public affairs is critical for the benefit of Somalia, not just the youth of Somalia. Youth engagement in local, regional, and central governments can support demand-driven service provision and oversight, as well as accountability, leading to the growth of citizen-government relationships and confidence in government.

**Increase Youth's Access to Finance:** Youth need access to financial services, especially safe savings opportunities and credit for livelihoods. Further investigation is needed to identify ways to open financing alternatives that support youth livelihoods. The preliminary recommendations emerging from this assessment are for a combination of existing community-based schemes (like ROSCAs that go by the name of Ayuto, among others in Somalia), microfinance, and banking in which public or private institutions buy-down risk of credit for youth, and support matched savings accounts.

**Apply Positive Youth Development Approaches within Youth Programs:** This assessment underscores the cross-sectoral inter-dependencies of youth success. Youth in Somalia place enormous importance on gaining a market-relevant education that leads to improved livelihoods. Education and livelihoods are interdependent and exigent, but youth's education and livelihood success are affected by other factors, most notably lack of livelihood opportunities, poor education, insecurity, teenage pregnancy, and substance abuse that perpetuate a vicious cycle of youth dependence. Youth want to be partners in youth-driven programs in Somalia. To enhance a positive youth-enabling environment, engage other adult stakeholders, such as parents (who often are youth themselves), teachers, nurses, police, elders, and CBOs, who play important roles in the lives of youth.

## CONCLUSION

Somali youth and other stakeholders identified a range of unmet needs and gaps in information and services that would enable them to contribute more meaningfully to the development of their country. Youth want to be engaged in their communities and with government in decision-making, addressing gaps, and expanding opportunities education, livelihoods, health, security, and youth engagement. National development policy and national youth policy indicate insecurity as a driver of poverty and instability or lack of sustainability, making addressing insecurity a priority of government. Therefore, USAID has a window of opportunity to support youth at both small and large scale in its upcoming CDCS and future activities.





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This brief summarizes the USAID/Somalia Youth Assessment Situational Analysis, which can be found in full at: <https://www.youthpower.org/somalia-csya>

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USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base related to PYD. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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