

## YOUTH CHAMPION GROUPS AS CHANGE AGENTS IN SOMALILAND

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<b>PROJECT</b>	Leave no youth behind: Young care leavers claim their rights in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somaliland
	Partner: SOS Children's Villages Somaliland
	Country: Somaliland
	Period: 2022 – 2025

<b>CHANGE</b>	<p>This case describes how the project has empowered Youth Champion Groups as change agents by bringing together youth with care experience and other youth to work together to address major challenges in the Somali context of substance abuse (khat) and clan-based violence. The Youth Champion Group (20 members) consisting of 60% youth with care experience and 40% other youth members in Hargeisa and Burao.</p> <p>At the same time the collaboration reduces the marginalisation and stigma experienced by many care leavers of them and give them the courage to stand up also for their own rights. It gives them a platform also to participate and engage in other issues of their interest and concern such as mentoring younger children living in residential care. The activities have reached more than 600 youth and children in two public schools located in the most populated and vulnerable areas with IDP settlements in the cities of Hargeisa and Burao. This is expected to continue, be replicated and expanded to also reach parents.</p>
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<b>CONTEXT</b>	<p>Youth who have grown up in alternative care in Somaliland face multiple challenges in their transition to independent living. They face the same challenges as the rest of the youth such as unemployment, economic hardship, political exclusion (exclusion in decision making areas), but on top of that, they face unique challenges as they navigate the transition to adulthood with poor social networks, including stigmatization, discrimination and marginalization due to the unclear family ties, which is crucial in a clan-based culture like the one in Somaliland. For those who are not members of youth associations, the transition can be particularly difficult, as they may lack access to critical resources such as trainings and mentoring and support networks. The risks for this group of youth are many and include for the girls: early pregnancies and marriages, and for the boys: homelessness, substance abuse, irregular migration, becoming in conflict with the law and radicalisation. In fact, more boys than girls are placed in residential care if they have lost parental care or the father is unknown, due to the clan-culture, where paternal lineage is key to access heritage and social status.</p>
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<b>CONTRIBUTION</b>	<p>To enable youth structures becoming strong voices for the rights of Youth Leaving Care, it is crucial to integrate youth care leavers with other youth, which will minimize the discrimination and stigmatisation experienced by many care leavers, because the community sees the youth as a whole and united and their voices will make a bigger echo and enable them to advocate for their rights and participate in decision making process through capacity building and self-empowerment.</p> <p>The project intends to capacitate the youth change agents with skills and knowledge to navigate the existing barriers to full political inclusion by educating them in their roles &amp; responsibilities, rights and participation as citizens and to advocate for their rights, hold duty bearers accountable, create networks and contribute to the overall well-being of their communities.</p>
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Participant from the Youth Champion Group in school.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	
ACTIVITY	<p>These activities increase youth participation in decision-making, by developing targeted strategies that address the challenges mentioned above and foster an environment that supports youth leadership and engagement. The programme envisions to create more youth structures containing both youth care leavers and other youth like the Youth Champion Group to empower them to engage youth also on the green agenda and to join the decision-making tables, through building their capacity as change agents, their self-confidence, and the networking skills of the youth.</p>

LESSONS	<p>Youth with care experience often feel isolated, not belonging and with poor social networks. Organising them in groups with other youth to focus on 'a common third' helps them feel accepted and empowered with a purpose. It has been difficult to get anyone to speak in public about growing up in alternative care because of the stigma many feel, so this group is in itself an accomplishment. The integration between the youth groups from universities specifically from the field of social work and the youth leaving care brought a positive change. Guidance and collaboration with other youth members in the group supported youth with care experience to use their voice as change agents. Finally, some of the youths have also started mentoring children in alternative care in order to prepare them for independent living and help them overcome the psycho-social challenges they have experienced themselves.</p>
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EVIDENCE	<p>After the initial capacity development of the two Youth Champion Groups in Hargeisa and Burao they have taken ownership of the planning and delivering activities carried out in schools. Some of them have started other activities of community service like mentoring of children in alternative care or providing education support showing that their role as change agents is beyond project-initiated activities.</p> <p><b><i>"Every morning I go to court to help my people who have no idea where to go or what to do if they have a court case or a complaint"</i></b> Shuaib, member of the Youth Champion Group, Care-experienced and a law student</p>
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DOMAINS	Development strategy priorities:	Democracy and Human Rights
	Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalization, or vulnerability	X
	Changes in laws, policies, and practices that affect people's rights	
	Changes in the capacity of organizations and communities to support rights	
	Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights	
	Changes in partnerships of groups facing poverty, marginalization, or vulnerability	X
	Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work	