

REBUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES IN SOMALIA



Asli from Luuq district at her grocery place. Photo: Maurine, 2022

ABSTRACT

Trócaire has been present in Somalia since 1992, delivering a comprehensive, safe, and inclusive humanitarian and development programme in the Gedo region. Since 2019, Trócaire has been working with communities to strengthen their resilience to better prepare for and respond to future emergencies. An Income Generating Activity (IGA) component is integrated into the nutrition to protect programme participants from severe malnutrition, reduce the rate of malnutrition, and address cases of relapse.

BACKGROUND

The rate of malnutrition in Somalia continues to rise because of decades of conflict, natural disasters, the collapse of basic social services, and the gradual destruction of resilience.

Women and children are the most vulnerable members of society, experiencing high levels of displacement, limited access to food, and exposure to infectious diseases. For example, in 2018 more than 1.2 million children were malnourished, and the April 2018 Community-Based Nutrition Surveillance (CBNS) report, indicated a critical GAM¹ rate of 39.5%, where Trócaire operates. Aside from the effects of climate change and insecurity, limited access to resources, life skills training, mentorship, and general low nutrition and health literacy levels all contribute to the risk of malnutrition and death. Women often take on the role of breadwinner in an emergency environment such as Somalia, with no supporting structures for them to be able to adequately provide for their families. Furthermore, because of illiteracy, poverty, and the effects of social norms and traditions, livelihood options are limited.

¹ Global Acute Malnutrition

THE CHALLENGE

In 2019, Trócaire saw a high turnover of malnutrition cases in children because of the increased impact of food insecurity and poverty. Trócaire's CBNS report indicated a critical condition at 31.2% GAM rates. Relapses were common in cured and discharged children under the age of five. Malnutrition in children under the age of five and pregnant and lactating women was exacerbated by limited access to food, poor hygiene practices, poor child feeding habits, and a lack of knowledge of health and nutrition practices. This created the need for a long-term solution to assist vulnerable households in coping with the shocks.

“Hawo’s one-year-old child became ill and was admitted to the Dollow Referral Health Center for severe malnutrition. She received treatment until she was cured,” says Hawo

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGE

Trócaire undertook a resilience project to provide cash grants for business start-ups, to women-led households with children under five, who were at risk of malnutrition, or were admitted to nutrition stabilisation centres. The main goal was to wean children off nutrition programmes and keep malnutrition rates from rising. The action targeted women from internally displaced populations, minority clans, and vulnerable households. The women were trained on entrepreneurship and given cash grants to start income-generating activities, to ensure their families' access to basic needs, particularly basic dietary food. The IGA programme provided vulnerable households with the opportunity to generate income that helped them meet their basic needs, including food.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing drought, and the Russia-Ukrainian war; Trócaire provided targeted households, with a top-up grant in two phases, to help them boost their businesses



Hawo, a mother of four, now owns a mat-making business; her household was displaced by the 2016-2017 drought.



Willow expanded her small table business of vegetables into a bigger shop with a variety of household items.

and meet the needs of their families. Successful businesses received a top-up grant in June 2020 and 2021, and in May 2022 to encourage other women to continue investing in their businesses. During these periods, Trócaire continued to support the women through supervision sessions, encouraging them to save money by introducing Village Saving and Loans Association (VSLA) methodology. Through the VSLA methodology, women became more independent and self-sustaining. The peer support groups created as part of the approach had the added advantage of creating a safe and supportive environment which saw women to come together to discuss their lives and day to day challenges.

Willow, pictured above, is one of many female headed households who struggle to feed her children. Besides earning a small income of between \$1 and \$2 from a small table vegetable business, she had no other source of income or support to look after her family. After Trócaire's support, she now rents a bigger store with

different foods such as cereals, sugar, candies, and vegetables, among others. She used the profit she made last week to re-stock her shop from a market at the border of Ethiopia and Somalia. She explains below:

"I can't believe I've come this far after my divorce when I had the overwhelming task of caring for my nine children. I didn't have enough money to meet their basic needs. My small table of vegetables was not enough to provide enough food and take care of other household needs. Not only has the experience benefited my family, but it has also helped me grow as a woman. I feel safe making decisions; I save part of my profit and get loans through my VSLA group."

Willow, 36, Quanaxaley IDP camp, Dollow.

INTERVENTION RESULT

The project's goal was met, with over 85% of the targeted households for IGA having access to food, necessary non-Food items (clothes and sanitary kits) and services (sending their children to school and accessing basic health services). This led to a decrease in the rate of admission of children under the age of five, from these households, into the nutrition programme, from 62% to 2%. On the other hand, the VSLA component also had a positive impact as the women expressed interest in continuing with the initiative with minimal support from Trócaire while attracting more women who had not previously participated in the groups.

In 2019, Habiba, a mother of seven, and Beyniyo, a mother of five, had their children admitted to the stabilisation centre due to malnutrition. Both households were struggling to make ends meet. The two women were linked to the IGA project to assist their households in recovering from the drought and to improve their nutrition status. They began with a small shop and later expanded into a restaurant, a vegetable shop, and a boutique. The two women are also mentors to young girls in the Jazira IDP camp, where Beyniyo teaches tailoring to young girls, while Habiba has linked other women and girls to a Trócaire-run women's centre in Luuq for more life skills trainings.

"We can finally buy new clothes," laughs Habiba.

"Previously, we did not have the freedom to consider buying clothes. Our income has increased because of the share-outs in our VSLA groups. It is sufficient to feed our families and send them to school," adds Habiba.



Habiba preparing a menu for the day at her small restaurant in Luuq district.
Photo: Maurine, 2022



Habiba and Beyniyo are meeting for a weekly business catch-up. Habiba runs a restaurant while Beyniyo runs a vegetable shop and a boutique.

"Our family lives have evolved over time. We now have access to healthy food," Beyniyo says.

"I am motivated to continue with my business and support other women and girls because I am grateful for the opportunity provided by Trócaire," Beyniyo adds.

KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS AND ADAPTABILITY

- The training and ongoing support encouraged project participants to start new businesses and grow existing ones.
- The targeted households maintained acceptable food consumption scores. The proportion of women participants with children receiving acute malnutrition treatment decreased from 62% when the IGA groups were formed, to 2%.
- Women's entrepreneurial skills improved because of training on how to deal with business disruptions. The participants were able to save money, feed their families, and send their children to school. The introduction of VSLA provided opportunities for women to grow their businesses at a time when the market was underperforming, ensuring business continuity.

LESSONS LEARNT

- The provision of top-up grants following the initial start-up has been beneficial, propelling the businesses during difficult times; 85% of the participants are successfully engaged in IGAs and VSLA with regular support and monitoring.
- Women's adoption of saving practices was critical in ensuring independence and sustainability. The women testified that they can now stand on their own and run their businesses. Some of them intend to expand their businesses after the project is completed.
- Peer support sessions have empowered women to stay focused and supportive of one another.
- Observations revealed that when spouses supported the business, it performed well.
- Women have spoken of increased self-sufficiency and better-coping mechanisms for their families, because of the successes of their businesses and the savings they have had in the larger community and economy.
- The IGA component has contributed to supporting longer-term resilience by reducing vulnerability and helping to tackle root causes of malnutrition and strengthening local capacity at the individual level through business and savings training.



Hawo showcasing her produce at her compound in Kabasa IDP camp in Dollow. She makes mats, fans and brooms.

MORE INFO / RESOURCES

[Mobile Savings App empowering women in Rwanda, Trócaire 2022](#)

[Savings groups empowering young Rwandan women like Epiphany to build a brighter future, Trócaire 2021](#)

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