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Entrepreneurship Training Creates Opportunities for Graduates

Unemployment in West Belesa, like in the rest of Ethiopia, is an ongoing challenge for the **youth** and the local administration. It's particularly burdensome for West Belesa since the *woreda* already houses plenty of food insecure households. It was to address the issue of both unemployment and food insecurity that CARE, through its SWEEP project which is made possible through the financial support from the Austrian Development Agency, partnered with the local Labor and Social Affairs Bureau to recruit and **train unemployed young graduates in entrepreneurial skills**.

Mulunesh Manale, Muluwork Mesafint, and Naniye Bisset, along with two of their friends, are part of the recruits that received the training provided by CARE. Upon graduating in 2017 in their early twenties, all five **struggled to find employment**. The situation became increasingly stressful for them as they continued to rely on their already impoverished families for financial support. The psychological toll of their situation, coupled with the desperation for financial stability, Mulunesh and Naniye would pursue temporary opportunities like braiding hair to **sustain themselves from day to day**.

SWEEP launched its intervention in East and West Belesa in 2017 with the overarching objective of **improving the food security and resilience** of chronically food insecure households and to **empower women to affect lasting change in the community**. To this end, along with many other ventures and approaches, the project has partnered with the local government to engage the unemployed community like Mulunesh, Naniye, and Muluwork on entrepreneurship training.

It was in 2018 that the Labor and Social Affairs Bureau recruited them for the training provided by CARE. There, they were given practical entrepreneurial training covering everything from **writing up a business plan** to **balancing the books** to harnessing the power of **good customer service** to get and retain customers.

"We were not very ambitious thinkers. When we graduated, our impulse was to look for a job like everyone else," says Mulunesh, just six months into implementing what she learned at the training, **"Opening a business was such a far-fetched idea for us. But the CARE team made it real, applicable, and attainable for us! And so here we are!"** she says, waving at the cafe she and her partners had launched.

After completing the training, Mulunesh, Muluwork, and Naniye, along with two other female friends who had also participated in the training, decided to **form an association** so they could **launch their cafe together**. CARE provided them with starting materials including pots, pans, chairs, and other necessary inputs. Ambivalent and anxious about taking a big step, the five girls started small. Offering only a single food item on the menu, they coupled that with an offering of tea and coffee. Just a month or two after opening the business, customers were flowing and team Mulunesh was getting the hang of things. They expanded their menu to offer multiple items, and even diversified their drinks offering.

"The training gave us an invaluable insight into working together, into partnership. Now, when Mulunesh is baking injera, I can attend to the customers, or when Muluwork needs my help, I have learned to make myself available," says Naniye, recalling the social skills aspect of their training.

Now, though just six months into their new venture, all five **women are self-sufficient**. **"We no longer ask for money from our families**. They are thrilled to see us leave for work each day, but more than that, they feel the relief of knowing we are taking care of ourselves," says Naniye, who, collectively with the other four partners, has saved over ETB 15,000 already.

Other women are following in the footsteps of Mulunesh, Naniye, and their partners. Just down the road from their cafe, they point to other smaller startups owned by women, "CARE may have just trained us, but its impact is greater than us. **Our neighbors** see five empowered women making a living for themselves, and they **have become inspired for themselves!**" says Muluwork.

The vision for the cafe is big for these women. They are planning to expand their offerings, to strengthen their customer flow, and to open branches in other parts of the city. "We were shy to serve the customers, we were anxious to expand our menu offerings... but we have since learned the values shared with us by CARE, the values of working hard, saving our money, and striving towards our goals are what's going to keep us afloat," says Naniye.

"God forbid, if something happens to our cafe or our income, we are setting money aside to weather those kinds of bad days. **Though we wish for the best, we are prepared for the worst,**" concludes Mulunesh, optimistic about their growing **savings culture**.

It is exactly this kind of sustainable self-sufficiency and resilience that both CARE and the Labor and Social Affairs Bureau hoped to achieve with those who received the training. However, the exemplary and inspiring nature of the band of five women, along with other trainees who have made something of themselves, has created a stir in the village. **Mindsets are changing and perspectives are shifting, women in West Belesa are beginning to expand their horizon and seeing what could be possible for them.**