

Supporting Somali women towards economic empowerment and transformation

BBC Media Action's 'Somali Women towards Economic Empowerment and Transformation' (SWEET) project aims to help Somali women to better participate in the informal and formal business sector. This study found that the radio content and local discussions are helping to achieve that goal.

Context and the project

Women in Somalia face multi-layered barriers to accessing the labour market and bear the brunt of the hardships resulting from poverty, conflict and clan-based culture which promotes strict male hierarchy and authority. This challenging situation worsened with the arrival of Coronavirus, which impacted on the economic situation. Within this context we have been delivering the SWEET project, funded by Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), since 2018. The second phase of the project had an additional emphasis on supporting women to continue working safely during COVID-19 and ran from July 2020 to December 2021.

The project continued the production of 'Mawjaddaha Baraarugga' (Making Waves) a weekly national radio magazine

programme which included a 15 minute drama segment and engaging social media content. Capacity building was conducted with five partner radio stations to help them produce their own localised versions of *Making Waves*, and 400 Somali women attended business development training undertaken by Shaqodoon, (a non-profit organisation based in Hargeisa).

Research methodology

This evaluation, conducted at the end of phase 2, sought to understand how target audiences engaged with the radio programmes and what impact the project was having on encouraging women's greater participation in, and benefit from, economic activities. Using a mix of face-to-face and remote methods; 12 mini focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with target audiences and five key informant interviews (KIIs) with influential men and women working in the formal business sector. This study also explored the effectiveness of mentoring provided to the five local radio stations through in-depth interviews conducted with producers and station managers at partner radio stations. Qualitative and quantitative data was also collected to understand the impact of the business development training.

Key findings

Listeners were engaged with the programmes and saw them as important and educational. They appreciated the expert advice that showed them ways to improve their business. **The programmes**

were seen to encourage women in business, and listeners reported that the programme helped them to understand and use preventative measures during COVID-19 and enabling them to still carry on with their business.

“The programme has given us a lot of confidence, including perseverance and patience.”

Female Radio Hargeisa listener working in informal business

Husbands, fathers and influential men reported that the programme had encouraged them to feel more confident in women’s ability to succeed in business and this had encouraged some to support their wives/mothers. Some men reported that they had invested in their wives’ businesses and supported them by sharing what they had learned from the programme, such as how to manage their finances.

Listeners said they usually discuss the programme’s topics with others. There was some evidence that male listeners have discussed the role of women in business and the importance of men supporting women. Some listeners of the programme said they were able to change their peer group’s perceptions that a woman’s role is limited to the home.

“There is a friend of mine...he believed that women can’t do anything and their responsibility is to be at home. He was impressed when I sent him the programmes...he said, these are one of the things that changed his mind and we discussed it.”

Male business owner, Mogadishu

The managers and producers reported that the mentoring support by BBC Media Action helped them to select different topics and contributors, including experts and women who have overcome challenges in business. They also reported **learning the importance of including voices of different groups of marginalised women.** The staff we interviewed hoped to continue producing the local discussion programmes in the future.

Research that focused on the business training by Shaqodoon found that participants learned a range of basic financial skills. The majority of trainees said the **most useful session was financial record keeping.**

“the training was helpful, I made a book to know everything I sell and spend, and also I learnt the loss and profit”

Female trainee (non-marginalised)

Implications

This research has highlighted that the programming is encouraging men to support their wives in business. Changing gender and discriminatory norms is difficult and takes time and in future, the research could investigate gender norms in more depth to understand better the challenges that women face. Phase 3 will continue to follow the popular format and theme of the current radio show with a mix of discussion elements and drama, and there will be further emphasis on expanding the social media content. Programming will continue to address discriminatory norms around perceptions of women’s capability, and their role within the home, to build wider support for women in business and work.

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