



CARE on Capitol Hill

Meet Zemzem Nori

'We will always go forward.'

Written by Emily Janoch

There was a time when Zemzem struggled to find meals, feed her family, or send her kids to school. Describing her life as a sorghum grain farmer, she says, "We had to limit ourselves because there was no money. We had to limit our aspirations. We could only spend money on the most important things. We couldn't grow."

Then, Zemzem found **Livelihoods for Resilience**, a U.S. Government Development Assistance-funded project implemented by CARE and local partners, including the Government of Ethiopia. The project helped her community set up a VESA—a Village Economic and Social Association—where people come together to save, to learn, and to build solidarity. Most groups are made up of about 25 men and women.

Learning how to save was just the first step. Zemzem also attended trainings about gender equality, about the social norms that hold everyone back, and how to build business skills, which gave her the confidence and creativity to come up with her own business ideas, including baking bread amidst the backdrop of war.

"Just a few days before the war, I had taken a loan of 3,000 birr (about \$52 USD) for my business. I used that money to survive. When things started to calm down,

I still had a little bit of that money left. I used it to bake bread, since that had been one of my businesses before, but it was harder during the war.

All the roads were closed, so I couldn't get any flour. But we didn't stop... I repaid that whole loan, and I am still running my business."

"I have completely changed. I learned from this project. I got knowledge. I can teach my children," Zemzem said.

The secret to Zemzem's success? Smart investments in long-term training, information, and equality. In the face of a single crisis – like war – a financial savings group might have been enough. But Zemzem and her community have faced numerous other shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, locust invasions, severe drought, and armed conflict.

But Zemzem continues to bounce back stronger and more confident than ever. "I see what I am capable of, and what I can do. That makes me motivated. It means I can do more. I want to keep going and keep moving forward."

For example, during COVID-19, Livelihoods for Resilience gave her soap and training on how to keep economic activities going safely. During the locust invasion, she and the other members of her VESA got 5,000 birr (about \$100 USD) to keep their businesses running and rebuild their food stocks using what they learned from previous training.


Those skills, resources, and connections helped Zemzem and her community survive the crisis and bounce back afterwards.

This is why U.S. Government Development Assistance, which funds projects like Livelihoods for Resilience, is so important.

Every \$1 invested in building global resilience saves up to \$7 in future humanitarian response that is needed for events like global pandemics and armed conflicts.

Development assistance is a down payment today for peace and global stability later by helping to build more resilient communities before crisis strikes.

No matter what comes her way, Zemzem sees a bright future for herself and her family thanks to development assistance — one where she has the skills to make the changes she wants in her own life.



“I don’t expect anyone to just give me money or give me things. I don’t want to beg. That’s not what I want or need. I am most proud of the way I think now. I have plans for the future.”

