

STORY OF CHANGE

Title: Hawanatu Thullah and Safiatu Forna becomes self-reliant after years of uncertainties

Introduction:



Safiatu

Hawanatu

One glorious morning on 2nd February 2020, two beautiful women who are very close friends visited the eWomen Innovation Hub. You could guess they were desperate to get a job that could earn them a living. Without wasting time, they explained their plight of being jobless. They narrated that they have learnt some skills at the Women of Hope Organization (a CBO that caters for under privileged persons) but they were still struggling to get a paid job or start their own businesses with the skills they had learnt. Their visit was timely because eWomen Sierra Leone with funding from SGP Sierra Leone was implementing a project titled “Using innovative products to fight against exclusion of marginalized persons, poverty and global pollution. Project No. SLE/SGP/OP6/Y5/CORE/PWD/20/09/2019/60). Impressed with the enthusiasm of these two ladies, eWomen Sierra Leone recruited them as trainees because their situation fits well within the target population of the project.

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The challenge (what needed to change).



Hawanatu and Safiatu were jobless and among people with disabilities with uncertain futures, this made them very eager to get jobs. Their plights were very serious and needed quick solution. Safiatu is a single mother with one child while Hawanatu has three children with her late husband but currently, she lives with a fiancé who is also a person with disability. They hate being beggars, but they had no option but to resort to begging in the streets of Makeni city, Northern Sierra Leone because all avenues to be productive and care for themselves had failed to yield any dividend. This was a situation that they strongly wanted to change. Their strength or advantage was the good skills they had already acquired from Women of Hope which shaped them to be hopeful and willing to work hard to earn a living. eWomen Sierra Leone presented them an opportunity to improve on their skills and utilize them for their livelihoods. For them, all

was not lost and they were optimistic to change their stories.



SGP Project intervention.

With the project titled *“Using Innovative Products to fight against exclusion of marginalized groups, poverty and global pollution”* and funded by Small Grants Programme Sierra Leone, eWomen Sierra Leone embarked on researching on innovative products (eWomen Innovative Products (2019-2020)) that can change the stories of marginalized persons especially persons with disability and women. The idea has led to the development of products and in the process, beneficiaries have mastered the skills that are needed to make these products. Target beneficiaries are often recruited to be part of the process of learning these skills. Such skills include the production of innovative trash bins from waste tyres, barefoot sandals, bead slippers, eco-friendly charcoal from coconut and palm kernel shells, sanitary pads, facemasks, flower pots from waste tyres, bamboo guards to protect tree seedlings, bamboo cups and artwork and plastic bottle farm fences. Once the skills are learnt by the beneficiaries, eWomen SL then supports them to start a small business from the skills they are most interested in. Key stakeholders in the process are community people, partner organizations and eWomen Board of Directors. Partner organizations are often encouraged to give inspirational talks to these beneficiaries. Featuring our beneficiaries in the UNDP magazine in Sierra Leone is also well appreciated. Not to forget about the excellence the board of directors are showing in directing and promoting eWomen SL by linking them with reputable people and established institutions like the University of Makeni, Sierra Leone (UNIMAK).



Strengthening community led innovation to promote national development in Sierra Leone

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The change (result).

Due to eWomen intervention, these two friends were recruited as volunteers for four months at the eWomen Innovation Hub. They proved to be wonderful and surprisingly very fast to learn the skills they were interested in. The experience they got from Women of Hope helped them to be punctual, humble and respectful at work. Hawanatu and Safiatu were interested in learning various skills but they chose to master the production of the innovative trash bin covers, using a compressor to paint the bins, production of very nice bead slippers and barefoot sandals and production of bamboo cups, dishes and spoons. It's amazing seeing these ladies using lightweight machinery tools to do their jobs. As of now, these two ladies have established their own small business in bead slippers and barefoot sandals. To facilitate the selling of these foot wears, Women of Hope has given them a space in its shop at its office space. eWomen SL has also contracted them as trainers (ToT) others on the production of bead slippers, barefoot sandals and trash bin covers. Besides, eWomen SL is also paying them for each trash bin cover they produce thus contributing to their livelihood. The ripped waste tyres are now supplied to them at home to make the covers and get paid for each cover produced. Apart from that, whenever eWomen SL gets contract to make bamboo cups and other bamboo artwork, they are immediately hired on contractual basis to do the work. Amazingly, these women have also expressed their interest to be involved in agribusiness. eWomen SL is currently working on the establishment of a Food Market in Makeni City. Hawa has expressed desire in growing vegetables especially pepper, tomato and cucumber. Hawa grew up as a passionate vegetable farmer until a mysterious illness led to the amputation of her leg in early 2018. With this new hope in her life, she wants to get back to farming. Safiatu was a trader mainly trading in farm produce from village communities and selling them in big towns and cities before a mysterious illness led to the amputation of her leg in late 2014. She is also interested in kick-starting this business again. Both women will be part of the supply chain of eWomen SL's Food Market.

Below are the innovative products that are changing the stories of Hawanatu and Safiatu



Busy making the Trash Bin Covers



Barefoot Sandals and Bead Slippers



Innovative Trash Bins



Bamboo Cups



Conclusions.

The results are magnanimous. Thinking of the attitude of people towards work eWomen SL was less expectant to see these women quickly start their own small business within the 3 months' timeframe agreed on. Besides, their speed was incredible in learning the skills which they were interested in. Different strategies were needed to address the challenges of these beneficiaries. Coming late to work is a serious issue for some but this was not an issue for Hawanatu and Safiatu. To address the issue of lateness, eWomen SL introduced interventions such as rewarding those who are prompt at work and reprimand those who are always late. In general, the intervention proved to be very effective in changing the stories of their beneficiaries. It is really encouraging to record this story of change at eWomen SL and to further add to the importance of eWomen Innovative Products 2019-2020. eWomen SL desires to see long lasting and transformational change. All these are manifested in these two ladies. Sudden illness that led to the amputation of their legs was a big shock to them. With the funding support from UNGP/GEF/SGP to eWomen SL's , they now have skills that will last with them forever and they are absolutely convinced that they can make their living from such skills if the whole world will appreciate their efforts by contributing through purchase and promotion of their products or even contracting them as trainers to train others. The Women of Hope organization has started demonstrating support for these two ladies by giving them platform to be successful. The organization offered a space in its shop at its head office in Makeni City to sell products made by these women. Hawanatu and Safiatu are also hopeful to see close collaboration between eWomen SL and Women of Hope to organize workshops led by them as trainers. Their friends at Women of Hope are eager to learn from them about the production of barefoot sandals and bead slippers. This is a manifestation of how far the transformational change has created. Additionally, the COVID 19 social safety net provided by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) was an opportunity which they won and has further strengthened their position to establish their own businesses. Hawanatu and Safiatu are doing extremely well in changing their stories. Let us support them! We can support the process by purchasing a trash bins and donating it to schools, churches, mosques, public offices and institutions. We can also order nice barefoot sandals, bead slippers and bamboo cups made by these young women. It is all about making their transformational change sustainable. Yes we can!

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