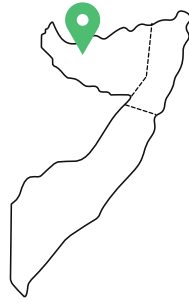




Unlocking Solutions for Youth Employment and Enterprise





CATEGORY

Technology and Innovation
Skills Training Program
Entrepreneurship

LOCATION

Somaliland

DURATION

April 2016 – December 2023

PROJECT

Work in Progress
programme

PARTNER

Oxfam Novib

CONTEXT

Livelihoods
Vulnerable Youth

DONOR

Ministry of Foreign Affairs-
Netherlands

Leveraging Technology to Transform Lives

The youth make up approximately 70% of Somaliland's population; according to Somaliland's National Development Programme, unemployment among youth is 75%. The inability to access skills, capital, and education are core barriers to employment or starting a business.

Shaqodoon, in partnership with Oxfam Novib, founded Hargabits Academy, a youth-based social enterprise established in 2016. The Academy offers specialized ICT, entrepreneurship, and life skills training to less privileged youth between the ages of 17 and 28 to realize their full potentialities and access meaningful work opportunities.

At the age of 19, Araale Adan was unemployed and lacked skills. He graduated high school in 2019 with an ambition to become financially independent. *"I was uncertain about the future, including a journey I should start to find a paid job and the kind of competence to sell to employers."* Said Araale as he contemplated his future.

Like thousands of youths in Somaliland, Araale began looking for a job, but it was unclear what competencies he would need to secure employment. He never imagined starting a business; in an interview with Shaqodoon, he recounts, *"... the path to entrepreneurship was rough, hard, and long... the financial resource or start-up capital was one of the major barriers which hindered me from thinking about starting my own business"*.

HARGABITS

WWW.HARGABIT.COM

INSPIRATION
TEAMWORK
CREATIVE
IDEAS



Araale is right; SMEs struggle to access finance and lack services to support their growth – most function informally and require training to help professionalize their operations.

Despite the uncertainty, Araale believed there were opportunities, so he embarked on finding information. *“I started looking for information about available opportunities in Hargeisa, especially the burning need for me was acquiring technical skills.”*

Through his friends, Araale found out about the skill-building programs that Hargabits Academy provides to youths. He followed Shaqodoon and Hargabits on social media and eagerly waited for updates on the programme. In late 2019, he saw an announcement on enrolling a new cohort of youth for the programme. Araale immediately applied on Facebook and nervously waited for a response.

“I was shortlisted for an interview, and finally, luckily, I was among the new candidates that had been admitted; I enrolled in the graphic design and web development course.” Said Araale with a smile on his face, reminiscing of when he got the news.

The Hargabits Academy specific target Youth group living informal settlements, IDP and refugees who are a significant portion of the society. These youth are faced with many socio-economic challenges that hinder them from progressing in life and making a meaningful contribution to their societies. Key among these challenges is lack of education and employment opportunities, which leaves these youth idle and despaired and leads them to engage in vices such as drug abuse, joining extremist groups, illegal migration, and petty crime.

The Digital Design Academy is part of the broader Bits schools' umbrella “WeAreBits.” Other members include the AddisBits in Addis Ababa, AruaBits in Arua, KampaBits in Kampala, NairoBits in Nairobi, ZanziBits in Zanzibar, IndusBits in Jamshoro and TamaBits in Ghana, EkoBits in Nigeria, HargaBits in Somaliland, and CairoBits in Egypt.



Persistence is key in Overcoming Challenges



"A few months later, my skills had grown, and I was able to design a non-functioning website, and six months later, our group of four created a functioning website. Some of the clients were paying clients while other services I offered for free."

Maan

Araale joined the cohort and began classes. After two months of taking the course, Covid 19 was declared a pandemic, and the teaching method shifted to online. This was difficult for everyone; in Araale's cohort, Maan Muhumed Ahmed, an ambitious classmate, recalls the difficulty, *"the situation was discouraging as I did not have a personal computer at home and could not practice lessons with my smartphone,"* Maan kept persisting through the course as both her and Araale's future path become more apparent. Maan began testing her skills by designing invitation cards for weddings and events. *"Some of the clients were paying clients while other services I offered for free."*

Hargabits Academy provides skills training which includes business development services to cultivate an enabling environment for youth startups and SMEs. This gave Maan an idea, *"the skills I learned drove me to think about starting my own business and becoming an employer instead of hunting for jobs. I picked three other male colleagues who I believed would be the right partners (this includes Araale) that will help me to achieve my goal to be an employer."*



The team came up with different business ideas but settled on one idea. Adeega Creative Agency was formed and won an investment from Hargabits Academy to kick start their business. *“I was encouraged by the immediate result of earning our first revenue after Adeega existed only for two days. Said Maan.”*

Adeega is now operational for six months and has clients. *“I achieved the two main goals that drove me to think about acquiring skills and finding a job; first, I created a source of income which is independent of my family, and I am now a businesswoman. I also enrolled in an English language course, and I can pay my tuition fee.”* Maan reaffirms as she continues to set her life goals.

In an interview with Araale, he proudly states, *“I am one of the founders of the Adeega Creative Agency that provides web development services, digital marketing, media production, and graphic design. I’m also the manager. We are growing fast; we are developing the capacity of the nine staff we’ve employed.”*

Since its inception, Hargabits Academy has trained 572 students, of which 45% were female, and 55% were male graduates. Approximately 70% of the graduates got employment, and 10% started their own business.

The success of Hargabits has resulted in several entities reaching out to the academy to have capacity building for their staff. Recently Hargabits Academy trained 12 staff from the Somaliland President’s Office on communication.

Youth should be economic contributors who need a conducive enabling environment for economic opportunities generating equal access for everyone in the society. More needs to be done collectively to transform the approach in reducing the barriers to youth self-reliance.

Resource

For more information on Hargabits Academy, please visit www.hargabits.com