



# TURKEY PROGRAMME

## CASE STUDIES FOR WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING

### CASE STUDY 1

Three months after her husband's death in 2016, Yara left her home-town Aleppo and fled to Turkey with her three kids, a boy and two girls. She arrived to Kilis where her extended family have been residing since the onset of Syrian conflict. Starting to live with her brother's family, she soon realized that she needed a house for herself and her children, and rely on herself. However, she does not have any kind of educational certificate or profession, and had never worked before. In Syria, she economically relied on her husband. "My family do not want me to go outside the house and work," she said, and added "my son was too young, I couldn't leave him alone; so, I tried to make cakes at home and sell them."

"Before my participation in CARE's microcredit project, I had nothing to work with. No mixer, no oven... I was working with my hands, and I was selling cakes but rarely, like once a month. [...] There were recipes that I could not make. Some recipes need mixing for seven to ten minutes. It was so hard with bare hands. [...] It was difficult to shape the whipped cream. I was using the knives to shape it. I had nylon mold before but it was destroying the cake. I was forced to repeat the cake from the beginning when something goes wrong. But, when I took the credit, I bought a big mixer which cost 750 TL, an oven for 400 TL, and some cake molds, which enabled me to improve myself and the project has succeeded. I started to sell and buy new items, like stands to put the cakes, new shapes of molds, bags to form the whipped cream, cartoon bags for packaging; and I improved my work."

Being proud of herself, she showed us photos of her old and new cakes, talked about how she improved her products with the new items she bought with microcredit. Right now, her customers are generally relatives and friends, and people in their circles within Kilis. She wants to improve her skills even more and design a social media page for her work. She has increased her income through which she pays for half of the rent and bills for the house she shared with her brother's family and for the new items she needs for her work.



The photo on left illustrates an old one while the following two photos exemplify the new ones.

The items she needs to decorate the cakes cannot be found in Kilis but in Gaziantep. However, the male members of the family, especially her brothers, restrict her mobility. "Because I'm widow I should not go and travel," she said sarcastically. "If I can go and see the items to choose it would be easier for me. Now, I am asking my friend who has relatives in Gaziantep to buy for me. She sometimes brings expensive items or not necessary materials. [...] My brothers do not understand I really need to go Gaziantep." Her brothers also decided that she needs to move among four brothers' houses in every 6 months. However, she complains that she rented the house they live now and bought all the furniture herself. Her brother moved in afterwards with all his family. Being have to share the house with her brother and live in one room with her kids, she complained "now, they are asking me to leave the house!"

"The widow is not trusted by our society. We trust her but the community around us does not. When she lived alone, people were saying that we left a young woman alone in a house. If she dyed her hair, [that means] she wants to marry. If she put makeup, [they say] she is acting like adolescent. [...] The widow is, for sure, different from the married one."

Moreover, she has a lot of items now and moving all would be very difficult for her. She is also afraid of losing her customers as she will have to ask customers to take their orders from different addresses each time. She and her children want to live alone however her brothers do not allow this unless she stays in the same building. Her income also would not be enough to pay the whole rent. Yara's sister sitting next to her says "the widow is not trusted by our society. We trust her but the community around us does not. When she lived alone, people were saying that we left a young woman alone in a house. If she dyed her hair, [that means] she wants to marry. If she put makeup, [they say] she is acting like adolescent. [...] The widow is, for sure, different from the married one." She pointed out that even though very little, a married woman has some freedom compared to a widow: "she will be controlled by one person not all the family."

Yara's story shows us how strengthening women economically needs to be supported by empowering women

in other aspects of life. With CARE's microcredit project, she increased her income significantly, however her business' growth and sustainability do not only depend on her choices as business owner. Her brothers, family, and community

"Everything is forbidden, going out, talking... and because I am widow I do not have rights anymore. Just because I dyed my hair, my brother hit me and the reason is that the widow should not dye her hair. If I

have a say on all her actions. She is suffering from gender norms and roles deeply rooted within society. Yara is also getting criticized by her father because she sends her daughters to school. "My father sees no value of sending girls to school," she said. They will allow the girls just to complete this year and then withdraw them from school. When we asked Yara's opinion about girls' studying, she said "Sure, they should improve their selves to be able to take their rights, unlike me. Our right is lost," she said sadly. "Everything is forbidden, going out, talking... and because I am widow I do not have rights anymore. Just because I dyed my hair, my brother hit me and the reason is that the widow should not dye her hair. If I wear colored clothes in the house, he will punish me."

Gender is multidimensional and cross sectoral issue. Hence, strengthening women economically is never just about their employment, but first and foremost about empowering them in social sphere. CARE's microcredit project is one of the few livelihoods projects in southeastern Turkey that supports women economic empowerment activities with the sessions to engage with men and boys, and awareness raising sessions on three related topics, namely gender based violence, early marriage, and family planning.

Here, it is important to notice the relation with education and women economic empowerment and hence to understand how Yara's girls' denied access to education will affect their employability in the future. It is crucial to notice how male members' perceptions about what a woman, a widow, a wife, a mother, a girl should and should not do affect women's and girls' lives. Yara's brothers' and father's attitudes give her almost no freedom on her daily and life choices: from her mobility to living alone with her kids, from dying her hair to sending her girls to school. Therefore, engaging male members of the family and community is

crucial to achieve not only a sustainable women economic empowerment but also a more gender-equal society. In Yara's case, they deny her decisions regarding their businesses by not allowing her to go to Gaziantep for procurement and by forcing her to move among houses at the expense of losing her customers; next generations women employability by not sending girls to school; her decisions regarding her own body by gender based violence perpetration.

Yara and her sister see how all is connected: They do not want their daughters getting beaten up. They want them to complete their studies and defend their rights. They know how difficult it is to be a widow in a society where a woman without a man guarding her is seen as a threat to the community. They know how important it is for a woman to become economically independent. Yara said: "Before I was lost, and I felt we were not stable. But after I worked, I depended on myself. I think I can save my children. I can do a lot of things. On the other side, sometimes you feel you are under pressure, but at least now I can save my children because I am working. Sure, I want my children to complete their study. Whatever they became, it is better than nothing." They show us the way. We need to learn how to listen them better.

## CASE STUDY 2

In Syrian conflict, Rima lost her husband in 2013 and one of her sons was tragically killed in the following year. She and her children had to live with her stepson for a while. She had been beaten up by her stepson, and had suffered a lot. Her brothers had been living in Turkey and sent her some money to help her to cross the border. One day, early in the morning, she escaped from her stepson without taking any personal belongings with her. She just took her sons with her and left the daughters with the stepson. "When I left Aleppo/Syria, I could not take [my daughters] with me because I heard about armed group kidnapping girls and harassing them," she said sadly. The daughters came to

Turkey afterwards. At first, she came to Nizip and lived with one of her brothers for a while. Then, she moved to Refugee camp in Nizip and live with another brother's family. However, having problems with her brother's wife, she had to leave there too. Her older son, who was working in Istanbul, sent her some money so that she rent a room in Gaziantep for her and younger kids. Soon, she was threatened and kicked out of the house by the landlord.



We talked with Rima in one of her brothers' house when she was helping the brother's wife to string eggplants and hot peppers for winter. Having distinct smell of hot pepper up in the air, we were all having some tears in our eyes, and conversation would not help. She admitted timidly, "in fact, the situation is very bad. Imagine my siblings always wonder about me and my children whether we are safe or not. They cannot reach me because I have no cell phone. Yet, the house where I live now does not have a key for the entrance door. So, we do not feel safe most of the time."

Rima wasn't working in Syria as caring for children and housework were taking all her time. She added, "my husband and men in my family do not prefer women to work." The only time she worked was when she had problems with her husband, and started to live with her quite poor family, as she puts it. Having been suffered a lot

**"I bought [sewing] machine again now. I'm so happy for it. And, I saw a difference. I can make any shape [for adornment] now. [...] Neighbors come to me asking to make pillows, covers for sofas, curtains, mattresses... "**

financially since the loss of her husband, and ashamed of asking money from her brothers and children, she participated CARE's microcredit project and bought a sewing machine from her brother's friend and some sewing yarns. She said: "I had [sewing] machine in my house [in Syria] and I was just sewing for my house[hold]. When I got married my dad gave it to me as a marriage gift. He knows I like sewing so he bought it. I bought [sewing] machine again now. I'm so happy for it. And, I saw a difference. I can make any shape [for adornment] now. [...] Neighbors come to me asking to make pillows, covers for sofas, curtains, mattresses... For example, the normal pillow without any adornment is 2 TL. If there is adornment I take 5 TL for each pillow. I sew for my neighbor and take 15 TL, 20 TL, 10 TL. I say thanks God! It is good! [...] The situation has changed a lot, so happy for my machine. [...] After I receive the microcredit, I can pay the rent. I can save a little money. Before I was not able to pay the rent."

However, Rima is having difficulties with weekly repayments now: "I was happy at first. But, now because my son left the job, I have big difficulties to pay them back. [...] If a neighbor comes and wants to repair a jacket, I take 5 TL. But it is not enough. I should have a bigger job. [...] I wish if I have money to buy fabrics for example cotton fabrics because I know how to design." As Rima does not have enough money to buy fabrics, customers bring their fabrics. She only gets money for sewing, which is not enough for the household. She also mentioned that after moving to her new house, she lost her customers. Now, her brothers' wives are her only customers. "At the moment, I do not have money because no one is asking for sewing or repairing cloths," she said sadly. Rima's situation shows us how important it is for women to get assistance in terms of marketing networks. Due to the unpaid care work and housework, as women tend to stay at home more compared to men, they need to enlarge their networks. Depending solely on their neighbors or relatives is always risky. Also, women need to be supported well throughout the whole value chain, including obtaining raw materials.

Rima also has been suffering from gender norms and expectations related to being a widow in the community. Her husband's family live in Nizip, and do not want her to work. However, she is dedicated to work. She knows that she had to work, and she will work. However, to have a more stable income she needs to be supported more.

**“When I’m obliged to work, I’m going to work. They do not want [me to work] and they will talk [behind me] because I am widow. [...] If I want to work, I will not care about them. I have children. I should make their lives, so I do not care.”**