

SNAPSHOT

From Idling Youth to the Driver's Seat of Success

Training program gives out-of-school youth a lifeline where unemployment abounds



Oumalkaire Omar Djama driving a heavy weight truck at her work place Al Gamil, the largest construction company in Djibouti./ USAID/Djibouti

“This is not easy work for a woman, but I will keep doing it as long as I can make a living out of it.”

Oumalkaire Omar Djama is a dynamic and passionate 22-year-old woman from the district of Arta in the Republic of Djibouti who has made the journey from a hopeless, out-of-school youth to a successful truck driver and supervisor at one of the country's largest private construction companies.

In her youth, Djama lost her father and had to drop out of school because her mother could not cope with the family expenses. With no marketable skills, she grew up feeling idle and helpless. Still, she desperately sought a job to assist her family. Her break came when the chief of Arta District informed the community that USAID was selecting out-of-school youth for a training program.

Djama signed on and completed a four-month driving program last year, supported under USAID/Djibouti's Assistance to Education program, and implemented in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and a private sector driving school called Zaki. The goal of the program is to assist out-of-school youth acquire skills that are in demand in the job market. Djama passed all her courses and obtained a driver's license for heavy equipment vehicles, a field traditionally dominated by men. Immediately after completing the training, Oumalkaire was hired as a truck driver for a road construction company and then by Al Gamil, the largest construction company in Djibouti. Despite the fact that she is working in a male-dominated field, Djama does not feel discriminated against in the work place and has been entrusted with additional tasks due to her excellent performance. She now supervises 37 men on the construction site and is proud of her achievements.

Djama is grateful for the job – Djibouti has a 60 percent unemployment rate – and how it has transformed her life. “This is not easy work for a woman,” she says, “but I will keep doing it as long as I can make a living out of it. Women's empowerment depends on our financial independence and through this job I no longer live in a precarious situation. I have regained hope and can now assist my family.”

She also encourages young girls who drop out of school to undertake training programs when the opportunity is offered.