



DIGITAL ACCESS AND RURAL EMPOWERMENT (DARE) SMART MOM PROJECT

Empowering Young Mothers through Sustainable Market-Oriented Vegetable, Rabbit Farming and Charcoal Briquettes Production in Gushegu

Progress Report (Month 1)

Implementing Partner: Diva Fam LBG

Sponsor: UNESCO

Donor: Mastercard Foundation

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Reporting Week: Week 1-5 of 24

Reporting Period: From: 10/02/2026 — To: 30/03/2026

Date of Submission: 30/03/2026

PART 2: REPORTING OFFICER DETAILS

Full Name: Abubakari Belawu Mbangba

Designation / Role: Project Lead

Project Location: Kunnaa Yili, Kpana Yapala, Wantugu, Kpugi, Tono, Zantili, Yawungu, Bolimbo Fong, & Gbagu Communities

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The DARE Smart Mom Project, implemented by DivaFam with support from UNESCO and the Mastercard Foundation, is a targeted intervention designed to economically empower vulnerable women—particularly young mothers—Physically Challenged Persons—through integrated livelihood programs.

The project addresses critical development challenges including:

- Economic vulnerability among women
- Rural unemployment
- Environmental degradation
- Limited access to sustainable income streams

Through a multi-component approach, the project integrates:

- Climate-smart agriculture (vegetable farming)
- Clean energy solutions (briquettes production)
- Livestock development (rabbit farming)
- Financial inclusion (VSLA model)
- Digital literacy and entrepreneurship
- Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) education

The overarching goal is to build resilient, financially independent, and socially empowered women capable of transforming their households and communities.

1.2 Objectives

- Provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for women through agriculture, clean energy, and livestock production
 - Strengthen financial independence via Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)
 - Promote environmental sustainability through briquette production
 - Enhance knowledge in reproductive health and personal wellbeing
 - Build leadership, confidence, and community-level ownership
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1.3 Expected Outcomes

- 400 women economically empowered across project components
 - Increased adoption of clean cooking alternatives (briquettes)
 - Improved household income levels
 - Strengthened community-based cooperative systems
 - Increased awareness of reproductive health and environmental sustainability
 - Understand and use simple digital tools

 - Sustainable fully registered cooperatives
 - Shift in mindset of participants and community
 - Understand a holistic concept of the VSLA
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2. ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED (WEEKS 1–5)

2.1 Community Entry & Stakeholder Engagement (Week 1)

The project commenced with formal community entry protocols, ensuring cultural alignment and stakeholder buy-in.

Key activities included:

- Courtesy visit to the Chief Palace (Kunnaa Yili) to formally announce the project
- High-level stakeholder engagement session involving:
 - Municipal Assembly representatives
 - MCE representatives
 - Traditional leaders
 - Ghana Education Service (G.E.S)
 - Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)
 - Religious leaders
 - Women and youth groups
 - Microfinance institutions
 - Media representatives

This engagement established:

- Strong community ownership
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration
- Trust and legitimacy for project rollout

Simultaneously:

- Participant recruitment and registration began
- Community focal persons were engaged
- Initial steps toward land acquisition for vegetable farming were initiated
- Roles and responsibilities were assigned within the DivaFam team and community structures

2.2 Participant Onboarding & Technical Preparations (Week 2)

Significant groundwork was completed to transition from planning to implementation:

- Finalization of land verification and ownership processes
- Soil testing and water source identification conducted
- Launch of the briquettes component, including:
 - Onboarding of 50 participants
 - Formation of cooperatives
 - Orientation and project introduction

Cross-cutting trainings introduced:

- Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR)
- Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) model

These sessions ensured participants were not only skilled but also socially and financially equipped.

2.3 Infrastructure Development & Skills Training (Week 3)

Week 3 marked the transition into full-scale implementation:

Agriculture Component

- Borehole drilling and mechanization initiated
- Land preparation commenced:
- Compost application
- Initial irrigation activities
- Installation of galvanized fencing to secure farmland
- Nursery and farm infrastructure development began

Clean Energy (Briquettes)

- Training of 30 young mothers (first cooperative)
- Hands-on production initiated
- Participants provided feedback for process improvement

Livestock (Rabbit Farming)

- Orientation for 150 participants
- Introduction to production systems and business potential
- Sourcing of materials for rabbit hutches

Digital & Financial Inclusion

- Introduction to digital tools and VSLA systems

Additionally:

- Project visibility enhanced through installation of signpost
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2.4 Expansion & System Strengthening (Week 4)

The project scaled both infrastructure and capacity building:

- Training of second briquettes cooperative (20 participants) in Kpana Yapala
- Performance assessment conducted for first cooperative

Infrastructure Milestones:

- Completion of rabbit hutches (15 units, 3-tier systems with feeding and waste systems)

- Construction of storage facility
- Installation of water storage tanks
- Nursery development and continued land irrigation

Capacity Building:

- Financial literacy and record-keeping training
- VSLA deepening sessions
- Orientation of 200 women in vegetable farming

Health & Wellbeing:

- Midwife-led training on:
- Reproductive health
- Holistic wellbeing

Monitoring & Visibility:

- Official visit by the UNESCO team for inspection and progress assessment

Labeling

- All assets acquired for the project [Water tanks, Rabbit Hutches, 7.0 HSP Gasoline Pump, Solar Panels] all labeled with project codes.

2.5 Production Readiness & Empowerment (Week 5)

Final preparations toward full productivity were achieved:

Agriculture

- Ploughing and harrowing completed
- Nursery beds established

Livestock

- Rabbit breeding stock sourcing initiated

Market & Enterprise Development

- Market introduction for briquettes
- Strengthening of value chain awareness

Soft Skills & Leadership

- Workshop on:
- Personal empowerment
- Mindset transformation
- Training on:
- Leadership structures
- Conflict resolution
- Cooperative sustainability

These sessions were delivered to all 400 participants, ensuring strong group cohesion and long-term viability.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

- Number of women trained in vegetable production: 200
- Number trained in rabbitry: 150
- Number of clusters formed and registered as businesses: 2 (Briquette Cooperatives)
- MOUs signed with buyers: To be updated
- Women's income before/after: Baseline: To be updated | Current: To be updated
- Social media engagement metrics: To be introduced in next phase

3. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 400 participants engaged across all project components
- 2 briquette cooperatives established and trained
- 200 women onboarded into vegetable farming
- 150 participants engaged in Rabbit Hutches assembling
- Borehole and irrigation systems established
- Farm infrastructure and security systems installed
- Strong stakeholder and community ownership secured
- UNESCO monitoring visit successfully conducted

4. SUCCESS STORIES

“From Charcoal to Clean Energy: A Shift in Mindset and Opportunity”

Women from the Kpana Yapala cooperative expressed strong enthusiasm about the efficiency and performance of briquettes compared to traditional charcoal.

Key reflections:

- Briquettes burn longer and more efficiently
- Reduced dependency on firewood and charcoal
- Increased awareness of environmental conservation

Nma Azara said:

“We now see a future here. We don’t need to travel south for kayayei work anymore.”

Impact observed:

- Increased interest in waste collection for briquette production
- Behavioral shift toward environmental sustainability
- Renewed hope for local economic independence

This transition represents not just an economic shift—but a social and environmental transformation.

“From mythical believes to real eye openers”

Young mothers openly showed interest in discussions surrounding their sexual rights and body in the SRHR training.

Key Reflections

- Women have rights to their bodies
- Family planning is an integral tool to better future
- Personal hygiene promotes health and builds confidence

Andani Memunatu said:

“I have learned how to protect myself and avoid unplanned pregnancies”

Karim Wariyatu Said: [sobbing]

“I used to be shy to ask questions about my body, even when I was feeling pains during my pregnancy and my husband used to have sex with me everyday, I still couldn’t tell the midwives. I know better now”

These testimonies signal a significant shift in knowledge, confidence, and decision-making autonomy among participants. The intervention is contributing to improved health-seeking behaviors, informed reproductive choices, and enhanced overall wellbeing, positioning women to make safer, more empowered life decisions.

“From Snap to Cash”

Participants were awed at what their simple devices could do during the digital literacy training

Key Reflections

- Simple tools usage
- Digital marketing
- Product Media Presentation

Tia Lahiri jokingly said:

“So I’m holding my Hajj ticket in my hand”

These testimonies highlight a measurable increase in digital confidence and practical application among participants. The intervention is enabling women to leverage digital tools for communication, marketing, and income generation—expanding their economic opportunities and strengthening their participation in the digital economy.

5. CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION

Key Challenges

1. Land Ownership Disputes
 - Multiple claims over acquired land
 2. Participant Commitment Issues
 - Absenteeism and lateness
 3. Stakeholder Interference
 - Attempts to influence or control project direction
 4. Transportation Constraints
 - Difficulty mobilizing participants consistently
 5. Slow Briquettes Production Process
 - Manual production limiting output
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Mitigation Measures

- Strengthening engagement with traditional authorities to resolve land issues
 - Reinforcing attendance policies and participant accountability
 - Clearly defining stakeholder roles and governance structures
 - Exploring decentralized training models to reduce transport burden
 - Assessing options for semi-mechanized briquette production
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6. NEXT STEPS

- Completion of planting phase for vegetable farming
- Procurement and distribution of rabbit breeding stock
- Scale-up of briquette production and market access
- Introduction of digital marketing for products
- Strengthening VSLA operations and access to finance

- Continuous mentoring and monitoring
- Preparation for midline evaluation

7. CONCLUSION

The first month of the DARE Smart Mom Project has successfully transitioned from community entry to active implementation, laying a strong foundation for sustainable impact.

DivaFam has demonstrated strong execution capacity through:

- Effective stakeholder engagement
- Rapid infrastructure development
- Integrated training delivery
- Inclusive participation across all components

The momentum built within this period positions the project for high-impact outcomes in economic empowerment, environmental sustainability, and community transformation.