

Saving lives, one donkey-cart at a time

Zeinab Mohamed knows the pain of losing a child, only too well. Her daughter Amina had had recurrent disease, which Zeinab tried to cure with traditional home remedies. With the situation worsening, Zeinab had to walk two hours to the area's health centre and seek medical attention, if only to save her daughter's life.

"There was no other way to reach the hospital but to walk," Zeinab recalls. "I had to carry Amina when the journey became too exhausting, imploring her to take one more step. It was too much; I lost her shortly after arriving," she trails off.

The only rickety mini-van that plies Zeinab's Malmalley village route in Bula Hawa district makes irregular round trips to and from the village, as per the day's demand. Most families here can hardly afford the fifty thousand Somali shillings or approximately three dollars it would cost them to access the health centre in town. Due to the bad road conditions, the mini-van is frequently grounded awaiting repairs and maintenance. Families here have little choice but to brave the long distances by foot, even in ill-health.

"We only live 20 kilometers (12 miles) away from the town, but yet we feel so far away and disconnected from everything because we can hardly reach there, especially when you need to see a doctor or get medicine. You live with the fear of losing your loved one if you don't get there fast enough," Zeinab reiterates.

But things have taken a turn for the better. Trócaire has purchased and distributed 29 donkey carts to remote health posts for referrals and transportation of essential medical supplies, in inaccessible areas. Community-managed, these carts are readily available and, most importantly, affordable for patients who need urgent medical attention. Zeinab recently used this service, free-of-charge, when she had to seek specialized care for her six-year old daughter, Fatima suffering from grade 1 Odema.

"I was so worried thinking that I might lose Fatima as I did my previous girl. But I'm grateful to Trócaire for providing the donkey cart that really helped in saving my daughter's life. I don't want to imagine what would have happened, otherwise," Zeinab said.

For Trócaire, accessing medical care on time is a key component in saving the lives of thousands of vulnerable families living in Gedo region.

"The donkey carts are a simple, affordable yet highly effective means of transport for families desperate for medical help," said Rosemary Heenan, Trócaire Somalia's Country Director. "It is a local solution benefitting the entire community that goes a long way in saving numerous lives."

Trócaire supports a holistic integrated primary health-care programme that provides curative care for common diseases, along with preventive care for mothers and children, including antenatal and postnatal care.

*Written by Faith Kasina
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