



ELMA PROJECT – PROGRESS REPORT

Elimu kwa Maisha” – ELMA Project – Skills for Life: Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Empowerment in Uvira, DRC

Project Focus: *Community-based vocational training, empowerment, and inclusion of youth with and without disabilities, The ELMA Project supports inclusive technical training, entrepreneurship, and self-help groups (Tushiriki) to promote sustainable livelihoods under the Tunafasi program. The project is supported by **THOM FOUNDATION**.*



1. Introduction

The **ELMA Project** – “Elimu kwa Maisha” (**Skills for Life**) aims to strengthen the economic independence of vulnerable youth with disabilities through **technical training**, the **creation of savings groups**, and **support toward employment and entrepreneurship**.

Implemented by **ADED** under the **Tunafasi Program**, the project embodies on the ground the “*Livelihoods and*

Economic Inclusion” pillar of the **Inspire2Care – Tunafasi** model, linking **vocational training**, **community life (Tushiriki groups)**, and **social entrepreneurship**. The project operates in **Uvira**, DR Congo, an urban and peri-urban area characterized by **high youth unemployment rates**, **heavy reliance on informal petty trade**, and **limited access to inclusive vocational training**. Persistent insecurity and poverty further increase the vulnerability of young people, especially those living with disabilities. In this context, **ELMA represents a concrete and inclusive response**, providing young people with **practical skills**, **greater autonomy**, and **sustainable livelihood opportunities**. *“When I heard about the ELMA project, I knew it was finally my chance to learn a real trade. Today, I’m training in tailoring, and I dream of opening my own workshop — to be self-reliant and accepted in my community.”*

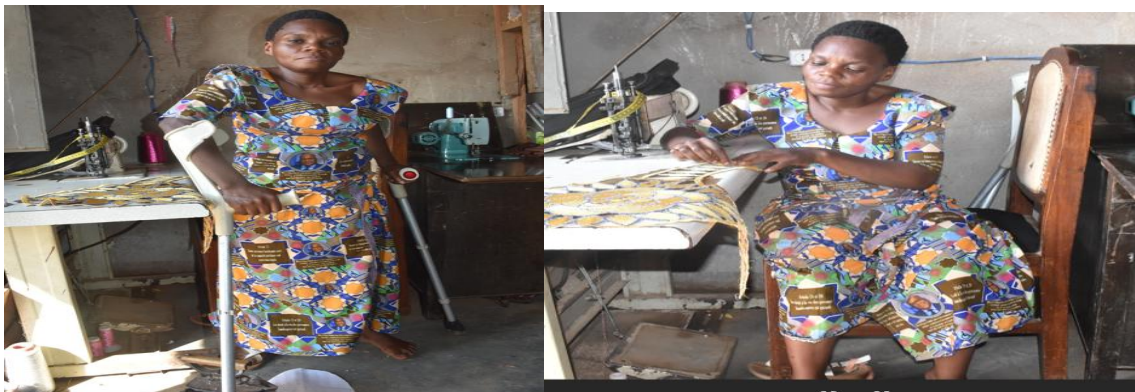


Photo 1 : MARIAMU, 30 years old, apprentice in tailoring, ©ADED 2025.

Mariamamu was unable to continue her studies due to discrimination and the lack of an inclusive environment at school and within her family. She currently lives in Kabindula, in the commune of Kalundu, Uvira.

This **progress report**, covering the period from **July to November 2025**, presents the main milestones achieved under the ELMA Project — from youth selection and baseline assessment to vocational training, group creation, and entrepreneurship coaching. It also highlights the first outcomes, lessons learned, and next steps planned for December 2025 to February 2026.

2. Call for Applications and Selection

The ELMA Project aims to support **40 young people living with disabilities** through vocational training to promote their socio-economic inclusion.

To select the beneficiaries, the call for applications was organized in **two batches**.

The **first batch** was launched from **August 4 to 12, 2025** by the **Sub-Division of Vocational Training** (*Sous-division de la formation professionnelle*). Communication was carried out through community radio, posters, and information sessions in the neighborhoods of Kabindula, Nyamianda, and Kilibula. This phase resulted in the selection of **24 youth with disabilities** (13 girls and 11 boys). Based on the large interest and additional eligible youth identified, a **second batch** was opened on **November 18, 2025**, leading to the selection of **16 additional youth with disabilities** (7 girls and 9 boys).

Across both rounds, **92 applications** were received in total. The selection committee — composed of ADED and local authorities and community members — evaluated the candidates based on:

- Motivation and readiness for vocational integration
- Socio-economic vulnerability
- Gender equity among youth with disabilities

At the end of the process, the project successfully reached its target of **40 youth with disabilities** (20 girls and 20 boys) ensuring fair representation across all targeted neighborhoods and vocational trades. This transparent and inclusive selection process ensures that the project remains fully aligned with its core objective: supporting only young people with disabilities to access training and employment opportunities.

“I had lost hope before submitting my application. When I received the confirmation that I had been selected, I cried with joy. Today, I am training in soap-making, and I want to become an independent entrepreneur.”



Photo 2: Neema, 21 years old, apprentice in soap-making, living with a right-hand mobility impairment, resident of Kilibula, ©ADED 2025.

3. Orientation to Vocational Training Centers and Provision of Training Materials (First Batch)

Following the selection process, the **first batch of 24 youth with disabilities** were oriented toward accredited vocational training centers based on their selected trades. To enable effective participation and ensure equal learning conditions, each trainee received a tailored package of essential training materials adapted to the requirements of the chosen course.

Material support included:

- **Soap-making:** gloves, protective masks, aprons, protective shoes, caustic soda, palm oil and palm-kernel oil, white and blue dye, notebooks, etc.
- **Tailoring / Mixed Hairdressing:** fabric rolls, sewing accessories, head extensions, thread, needles, hair-styling consumables, charcoal for heating, protective equipment, notebooks, etc.
- **Mechanics:** protective boots and overalls, complete mechanic tool kit, fuel for practical sessions
- **Manicure/Pedicure:** nail varnish kits, professional tools, foot washer, acetone and cotton, hair extensions, etc.
- **ICT / Driving:** access to learning materials and equipment through partner TVET schools

To formalize training arrangements and ensure inclusive and accessible learning environments, ADED **signed partnership agreements in September 2025** with **five vocational and technical training centers (TVETs)** in the Uvira area. These agreements define mutual obligations related to:

- student admission and individualized orientation
- support for learners with disabilities (reasonable accommodations & mentorship)
- accessibility and inclusive practice in the learning environment
- appointment of a **dedicated focal trainer** in each TVET center
- regular reporting on trainee progress

A joint supervision mechanism was established between ADED, the Provincial Vocational Training Service (*FPM*), and TVET management teams. **Monthly follow-up visits** are planned to monitor academic progress, assess challenges, and provide additional support when needed.

Table 1. Training Fields of Youth with Disabilities — First Batch

Training Field	# Youth	Duration
Mixed hairdressing	3	Nov. 2025 – Apr. 2026
Tailoring	8	Nov. 2025 – Jun. 2026
General mechanics	1	Nov. 2025 – Apr. 2026
ICT / Driving	5	Nov. 2025 – Apr. 2026
Soap-making	7	Nov. 2025 – Apr. 2026
TOTAL	24	—

These partnerships mark an important milestone in strengthening collaboration between public, community, and private institutions. They contribute to improving equitable access to certified technical skills and enhancing inclusion in the employment pathways for youth with disabilities in Uvira.



Photo 3: Hair Saloon where Beatrice and Sulvie work, ©ADED 2025.

Success Story — “Skills that Restore Dignity and Hope

Sulvie and Beatrice are two young mothers living with physical disabilities affecting their lower limbs. For them, the ELMA Project represents more than only skills training — it is a pathway to independence.

Beatrice, who uses crutches for mobility, has two children. For years, she faced stigma that limited her ability to earn a stable income. By choosing to train in hairdressing, she is now building a profession that allows her to support her family while gaining confidence and financial autonomy.

Sulvie lived in very difficult economic circumstances after losing financial support from her partner. Her strong mindset and motivation pushed her to enroll in vocational training and join the ELMA Project. Through her hairdressing apprenticeship at **Amazing Saloon**, she is now acquiring practical skills and rebuilding her future step by step.



“These young women show remarkable resilience and motivation. With the right support, they are on their way to becoming respected professionals in their community.”

*— Assy N. Mtu,
Manager, Amazing
Saloon*

Photo 4: Inside the Amazing Saloon, with Sulvie and Beatrice, ©ADED 2025

3. Entrepreneurship Training and Establishment of Tushiriki (VSLA) Groups

To improve economic inclusion and social cohesion among young people, the project launched entrepreneurship and financial empowerment training based on the **Tushiriki (Self-Help Group) model**. These first sessions were delivered on **12 and 14 September 2025** for the **first batch of 24 youth with disabilities**.

The modules covered:

- entrepreneurial mindset and self-confidence
- democratic governance and transparent group management
- savings discipline and internal lending mechanisms
- basic business planning and household financial management
- accountability tools for recording transactions

Following this training, **two Tushiriki savings groups** were formally established between **16 and 18 October 2025**, composing of the 24 youth with disabilities, that are mixed with 16 vulnerable youth without disabilities (that are support by the general Tunafasi program). The two Tushiriki groups each count **20 members**, saving **2,000–2,500 CDF per week (+/- 1\$)**, supported by an initial joint capital between 400-450 USD to support small internal loans, enabling the youth to begin testing income-generating activities such as **soap production, tailoring, and small street vending**.

This inclusive composition (of mixed groups of youth with and without disabilities) was chosen deliberately to ensure inclusion, diversity, equal participation, and peer-learning within the groups.

- The **first batch** of youth with disabilities (24 supported by ELMA) continues to reinforce entrepreneurship during their vocational training pathway, with advanced modules planned for the **first semester of 2026**, leading to business start-ups once skills are certified.
- The **second batch** (16 youth with disabilities) will be integrated into **two additional Tushiriki groups** during December 2025, each group also including **4 vulnerable youth without disabilities**, to maintain the same model of **inclusive economic empowerment** (supported by general Tunafasi program).

This approach ensures that youth develop **both employable skills and economic resilience** needed to secure dignified livelihoods — while working towards inclusion at its core of community development.



Photo 6: Alliance, 23 years old, member of the Kavimvira Tushiriki group ©ADED 2025.

"Before, I couldn't keep money for even a week. Now, every Thursday, I come to deposit my contribution, and I feel I'm building something for my future" – Alliance.



Photo 7: Youth with and without disabilities receiving training on the different components of the Tushiriki approach ©ADED 2025

"We learned how to calculate our costs and keep small notebooks to track our daily expenses according to our regular activities. Now we know that even small businesses can grow and help us become self-reliant if we stay organized."



Photo 8 & 9: Binja, 25, tailoring apprentice, and Maombi, 31, soap-making apprentice, ©ADED 2025.

4. Monitoring of Technical Training and Tushiriki Groups

Since September 2025, ADED has ensured regular follow-up of the first batch of youth with disabilities enrolled in vocational training, while also conducting coaching and monitoring of the two Tushiriki savings groups created in Uvira in October and November 2025. These visits by ADED together with Vocational trainers confirm **high levels of motivation and participation** among the trainees — both in their technical learning and in the management of their savings groups. These visits focused on observing practical learning progress in the centers, reviewing attendance and performance, reinforcing the use of governance tools within the groups, and addressing early questions related to savings, lending, and future income-generating initiatives.

Initial monitoring results show that:

- Youth are actively applying newly acquired skills during practical sessions
- Group committees are functioning effectively and ensuring transparent management
- Weekly savings continue to increase as confidence grows in the Tushiriki groups

This continued accompaniment will remain essential to strengthen autonomy and entrepreneurial readiness, especially as youth progress toward business activation in 2026.

Each group has a democratically elected committee that oversees transparent management of funds and ensures that all members — especially youth with disabilities — fully participate in decision-making. An ADED community coach provides regular guidance to strengthen governance practices and support the smooth functioning of the groups.



Photo 10: Youth meeting indoors for their weekly Tushiriki session in Uvira, ©ADED 2025. (Due to insecurity in Uvira, groups prefer meeting inside homes to avoid robbery or attacks at night.).



Photo 11: Véronique, 21, member of the Nyamianda Tushiriki group and tailoring apprentice, ©ADED 2025.

“Thanks to our Tushiriki group and my family’s support, I bought my first sewing machine. I repay little by little, but most importantly, I’ve regained confidence.” – Véronique.



Photo 12: First meeting of youth with and without disabilities within their groups, marking the start of inclusion and social cohesion activities under the project, ©ADED 2025.

5. Progress Indicators (as of November 2025)

Indicator	Baseline (Sept 2025)	2025 Target	Achievement (Nov 2025)	Observation
Youth with disabilities selected for ELMA training	0	40 youth	40 youth	Target fully reached
Youth with disabilities enrolled and active in TVET centers (Batch 1)	0	40	24	Batch 2 planned for January 2026
Youth with disabilities integrated into Tushiriki groups	0	40	24	Batch 2 groups to be created in Dec 2025
Tushiriki groups created and functional	0	2	2 groups	Both groups active and coached
Average weekly savings per youth (CDF)	0	≥2,000	2,000–2,500 (+/- 1\$ week)	Progressive increase each cycle
Youth accessing internal micro-credit	0	10 youth	16	Loans supporting small test IGAs
Entrepreneurship modules delivered	0	40	24	Batch 2 training scheduled Dec 2025
Business plans developed	0	40	In progress (24)	Drafts reviewed with trainers
TVET centers applying inclusive practices	Limited	5 centers	<i>In progress</i>	Physical and teaching adaptations ongoing
Trainer satisfaction regarding learner commitment	—	≥80%	High	Consistent attendance & motivation

6. Next Planned Activities (December 2025 – June 2026)

The coming months will focus on completing the integration of the second batch, consolidating entrepreneurship skills, and transitioning youth toward income-generating activities and job placement.

December 2025:

- **Training of Batch 2 (16 youth with disabilities)** on Tushiriki/entrepreneurship skills (*second week of December*)
- **Creation of two new Tushiriki groups** with Batch 2 (*second week of December*)
- **Orientation of Batch 2** to their chosen vocational trades and placement in partner TVET centers (*third week of December*)

January – March 2026:

- **Completion of Batch 1** vocational training and assessment
- **Continuation and deepening of entrepreneurship modules** for both batches (*financial literacy, business planning, cooperative management*)
- **Strengthened coaching of Tushiriki groups**, focusing on transparency, internal lending, and business readiness

April – June 2026:

- **Support for start-up of Income Generating Activities (IGAs)** for youth completing training (*individual or group initiatives linked to their trades*)
- **Job placement and apprenticeship advocacy** with private sector and local employers
- **Monitoring of Tushiriki group maturity** and performance to ensure sustainability beyond the project period