

Women-Led Beekeeping Enterprise

Testament of women's potential and indispensable role in sustainable development in Ethiopia, and in Africa in general

BLURB... The More Young Entrepreneurs in Silk and Honey (MOYESH) project is a partnership between the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (www.icipe.org), and the Mastercard Foundation's Young Africa Works. The five-year initiative aims to see 100,000 young men and women in Ethiopia secure dignified and fulfilling work along honey and silk value chains. The initiative is implemented through a framework of inclusive development; the ideal that every individual, regardless of their identity, is instrumental in transforming their societies. Thus, one of the goals of the MOYESH project is to enable more women in Ethiopia to enter and thrive in beekeeping. Historically, in Ethiopia, beekeeping has not been considered a female occupation. Moreover, cultural perceptions create difficulties for women to engage in gainful employment, relegating them to traditional domestic roles and duties. This segregation leads to income inequalities and reduced decision making for women in the households. The MOYESH project aims to reverse this trend through a number of strategies. First, the initiative has set itself an explicit target of having 60 percent of the partnering youth as women. Second, the project is employing a number of engendered pathways, including the formation of women-led beekeeping enterprises. As illustrated in this story, these enterprises are enabling women to gain legitimacy as entrepreneurs. They also stand as a testament of women as a symbol of hope, courage and determination, and an integral part of sustainable development.

Tigist Entahun and Lawaye Awoke and, Meselech Workneh and their Friends Beekeeping Enterprise, is a predominantly female beekeeping group. Formed in 2021, the group is located in Shenkurta village in Awi zone, a highly productive agricultural area in Amhara region, Northwest Ethiopia. The enterprise is led by three determined, ambitious and resourceful women: Tigist Tesfahun (chairperson); Lawaye Awoke (secretary); and Meselech Workneh (cashier).



Tigist Entahun displays a jar of table honey produced by her enterprise.

Different paths led the three women, who are all in their 20s, to beekeeping. Until 2017, Tigist was a student at the University of Adigrat, Tigray Region, when she was forced to drop out due to factors beyond her control. She is married, and she had been trying to eke a

Why are women-led or predominantly women beekeeping enterprises necessary?

Research has shown that women-only networks are highly effective. For one, they harness unique gender characteristics. For example, women connect and interact differently from men; they use different conversational techniques. The networks also help to rebalance opportunities in women's favour, especially in male-dominated sectors and activities. In specific regard to the MOYESH project, the Women only-CIG (Common Interest Group) enterprises are inspired by several factors. In some cases, women beekeepers may be uncomfortable working in mixed-gender groups because of perceived domination of their male counterparts. Women might also lack the nerve to speak up, to contribute ideas, ask questions or challenge operational aspects, in a mixed-gender group. Further, women-focused beekeeping groups are allocated convenient beekeeping sites, in terms of proximity, accessibility and compatibility with domestic duties.

living by making and selling a popular local brew. Although the other two young women envisioned various career paths in their youth, they did not proceed beyond grade 10.* Prior to joining the MOYESH project they were single and living with their parents.

Tigist was selected to lead the enterprise because of her more advanced academic background. Moreover, she had shown leadership skills at an early age. As one of the older children in her family, she was tasked with taking care of her younger siblings. When in grade 8, she was selected to peer-mentor a group of students, to help them improve their activeness in school as well as their academic performance. The enterprise consists of 15 members, 13 of them female. Two men, both experienced beekeepers, have been incorporated into the group, to assist the women.

Like all other MOYESH project enterprises, the Tigist Enterprise has undergone a range of training, the first being entrepreneurial skills development. This course includes hard skills; the competencies and abilities needed for specific tasks and processes; as well as soft skills, which are the personal qualities and traits, necessary for enterprises. The aim is to enhance the knowledge of the youth partners on owning and successfully running a business, as well as their personal development, with a positive mind shift towards developing a personal responsibility for one's success and failure.

The youth enterprises also receive training in beekeeping, covering topics such as bee breeding, including bee biology and queen bee rearing; transfer of colonies from the traditional hives into either modern or transitional hives; colony multiplication; inspection and control of honey bee disease pests and predators; postharvest training to support proper harvesting, quality control in processing and packaging of honey and beeswax.

The MOYESH project enterprises are allocated land by the local government, for their activities. This is usually land in dire need of rehabilitation. The land allocated to the Tigist was sloping and prone to soil erosion, raising the dual challenge of apiary construction and cultivation of bee forage. To resolve these obstacles, the enterprise members established bench terraces; platform like, conservation structures that are constructed along the contour of sloping land, converting it into a series of level steps.



The main pillars of the soft skill training provided through the MOYESH project are based on the 30 behaviours of successful entrepreneurs and 10 major competencies that can be applied by anyone regardless of their educational status, gender and living conditions. The hard skills training includes team building elements, financial record keeping, and business plan preparation. The training is conducted using a conventional training provision methodology. Government representatives are recruited from the MOYESH project key partners, the regional Technical Vocational and Enterprises Development (TVED) Bureau, job creation offices, women youth and children affairs, regional, zonal, district and village administration offices. The selected individuals are trained as training of trainers (ToTs) by the MOYESH project team, expert trainers from institutions such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), consulting firms and nationally certified trainers. After certification, the ToTs then train the youth partners at village level.

Tigist Enterprise apiary in Shenkurta village in Agew Awi zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia.

*The Ethiopian school system consists of eight years of elementary education, divided into two cycles of four years, and four years of secondary education, divided into two stages of two years (4+4+2+2). Primary school: Grade 1-8; Junior Secondary: Grade 9-10; Senior Secondary or preparatory level: Grade 11-12 (for those who qualify in the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate, EGSLCE); University or Technical Vocational Education and Training (based on performance in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Examination, EHEEE).

The spaces between the steps have become water catchment areas that are ideal for planting bee forage. The enterprise has opted for a mix of perennial and pollination dependent crops like rue, potato, coriander, coffee, hop, cabbage, sunflower, pumpkin, basil and maize. These crops are a source of food for the bees especially during the drought period, they also generate additional income for the enterprise, helping to expand their business and supplement their household nutrition.

The MOYESH project uses a cost-sharing model, where the enterprises provide half of all inputs, from modern hives to bee colonies. The Tigist Enterprise has 37 beehives with bee colonies; 30 langstroth hives and seven traditional hives. They are also planning to add more bee colonies in 16 transitional hives.

“Before joining the enterprise, we mainly our lives revolved around domestic tasks like cooking, fetching water from long distances, and looking after children and livestock. When we made our first honey harvest in 2021, we felt like a miracle had happened in our lives,” recalls one of the members.

Tigist has blossomed a leader. She is enthusiastic, ambitious, self-confident and strong, and has her eyes firmly cast on the success of the enterprise.

“I like that our enterprise is largely composed of women. We plan and implement most of the activities on our own. We are free with each other. We talk, we laugh and we can ask any question,” she says.

She adds: “As a woman, I am aware of the overall workload that the members have in their homes. Thus, I am empathetic. For example, I know the suitable time for them to work at the apiary.”

But there are some challenges. Since the business is still young with modest returns at this point, she must motivate and constantly sell the dream to the group members. When morale dips, she has learnt to step in and raise their spirits. So far, no one has dropped out of the enterprise.

Overall, projections for the enterprise look good. As of October 2022, the enterprise had harvested and sold 300 kilogrammes of honey, earning ETB 90,000. In 2023, they are projecting to harvest around 750 kilogrammes of honey, earning around ETB 225,000, in one season.

The enterprise members oversee almost all the activities, including bee colony transfer, beehive inspection, honey harvesting, as well bee forage cultivation. However, men are not excluded from the group. For example, their husbands and male family members helped in the construction of the apiary site, ploughing, transporting, overnight guarding and other activities.

Currently, the enterprise is focusing on colony multiplication, buying and splitting additional bee colonies. They also plan to take advantage of a small stream near their apiary site to start irrigation and produce more bee forage to strengthen the bee colony and earn more income. Their progress has also opened the eyes of the community in regard to beekeeping as a viable business.

The motto of the enterprise is that “Let’s work hard to have a better life for tomorrow.”

Notes for Editors

About Mastercard Foundation

Mastercard Foundation seeks a world where everyone has the opportunity to learn and prosper. Through its Young Africa Works strategy and Canadian EleV program, the Foundation works with partners to ensure that millions of young people, especially young women, access quality education, financial services, and dignified work. Mastercard Foundation was established in 2006 through the generosity of Mastercard when it became a public company. The Foundation is independent with its own Board of Directors and CEO. For more information and to sign up for the Foundation’s newsletter, please visit <http://www.mastercardfdn.org/> Follow the Foundation on Twitter at @MastercardFdn

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