

USAID/OFDA Livelihood Projects in Bakool, Somalia

The people of Bakool Region struggle to survive under precarious conditions in one of the most neglected regions of central Somalia. More than 80 percent of the population of Bakool relies on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods. Recurrent drought frequently results in loss of crops and animals and greatly strains existing water and food sources. International Medical Corps (IMC), with funding from USAID/OFDA, conducts community-based interventions to help drought-affected families recover and reduce their vulnerability to drought and other environmental shocks.



*Abaqbedey Women's Group gathers in Bakool Region.
Photo courtesy of IMC.*

Beekeeping Project

Outside of farming and livestock, communities in Bakool have few sources of alternative income to fall back on in times of drought. To strengthen families' ability to cope in times of crisis, IMC has introduced a beekeeping project in coordination with local women's groups. The production and sale of honey provides households with additional income that can be used to purchase food and increase access to basic services, including health and education.

As part of the project, IMC trained four women's groups on the production and processing of high quality honey. After the training, each group received ten improved beehives to initiate a beekeeping business. By employing modern beehives, groups were able to harvest honey eight times a year, as opposed to twice a year with traditional hives, significantly augmenting production.



Modern beehives provided by IMC. Photo courtesy of IMC.

After the first harvest, groups recorded a significant improvement in the quantity and quality of honey produced with the upgraded equipment. Groups supported by IMC earned an average of \$480 a month from the sale of honey in contrast to \$100 a month generated from traditional beehives. Beneficiaries of the project anticipate that increased income from honey will generate an additional 40 to 55 percent of their family income.



Safiyo Shariif, member of Abaqbedey Women's Group. Photo courtesy of IMC.

Safiyo Shariif, member of Abaqbedey Women's Group, noted the diverse benefits derived from improved honey production. "The project is good for us. The quantity of honey is better and the project is easy for a woman to manage. In addition to earning income, we also use the honey as food for our families and medicine for our children."

Salado Mad Abdirahman, chairperson of Banjanay Women's Group, relayed her group's intention to expand their current beekeeping operations. "We members of Banjanay women's group are very happy with the beekeeping project. This season, we harvested 79 liters of honey. We divided part of the money among us and were able to provide our family with essential things like clothes, food, and medicine. In the next season, we are going to increase the number of beehives so we can further access larger markets in neighboring regions with full confidence."

Another member of Banjanay Women's Group, Salado Mohamed echoed support for the project. "Our group received training and ten modern beehives. Now, I am able to buy necessary things for my family and invest some of my earnings to form a goat herd and purchase chickens which will further enhance my income and improve the nutritional status of my children. Markets exist throughout Somalia for small businesses such as honey production, but without start-up money or collateral, it is virtually impossible for poor people like me to establish a small business. By far the greatest gift provided by the beekeeping project is giving me the ability to send my children to school."



Salado Mad Abdirahman, Chairperson of Banjanay Women's Group. Photo courtesy of IMC.

The project has been highly successful, and beneficiaries are now sharing their experience and knowledge with women from neighboring villages. In Korkor, another group supported by the project is currently training other beekeepers from neighboring villages with the intention of expanding beekeeping in the region and increasing honey production.

Seed Voucher Project

More than 80 percent of people in Bakool are struggling to meet food needs. In response, USAID/OFDA is funding IMC to distribute nearly 100 metric tons of maize, bean, and sorghum seeds through a seed voucher program to approximately 8,500 households hard hit by successive droughts. Women represent more than half of the beneficiaries.

Timely provision of quality, locally-available seeds significantly improved the sorghum yield as compared to previous seasons. Seed fairs were conducted in 41 villages where households

identified by a joint committee of IMC personnel, community elders, and district leaders received a \$6 seed voucher enabling families to purchase seeds from local vendors, replacing stocks lost to drought and enabling farmers to sow their fields.



Mr. Suqal's healthy maize farm. Photo courtesy of IMC.

Commenting on the success of the seed distribution project, Sheikh Aden Ahmed, a village elder from Quracle village in Rabdure district said: "This time seed distribution was on time and good quality seeds were distributed – even the method of distribution used (seed voucher method) was good and peaceful. I think this was a blessing because the seeds also did well, especially sorghum."

Farmers, in addition to village leaders, note the improvements resulting from IMC seed distributions. Yussuf Suqal is one of the farmers who has benefited from the project. He grows maize and sorghum in Rabdure district. "Our area was hit hard by recent droughts. The seed distribution project improved a lot of lives in my district, and the people are very grateful."