

THE STORY BEHIND THE RESULTS: WOMEN HONEY PRODUCERS IN CASAMANCE (SENEGAL) BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT THROUGH INNOVATION

Initially, there were 25 women. Today, there are only seven. But those who remained were right to persevere. Because of their tenacity, fearlessness and enthusiasm for their work, and also thanks to the Canada-funded Economic Development of Casamance Programme (2009-2018), they have turned their village, Saré Souma, into a hot spot for honey production in Senegal.

The beekeepers of the Groupement de promotion féminine [women's advancement collective] of Saré Souma, in the Kolda region, produce a honey known throughout Senegal and beyond. They produce several varieties of honey and also collect beeswax, which is used to make candles.

While their production quintupled in less than 10 years—from 1,463 kg in 2004 to 7,961 kg in 2013—and their revenue increased sevenfold over the same period—from 1.4 million CFA francs (approximately \$3,000) to 9.8 million CFA francs (\$21,000)—their journey was not an easy one, even though they benefited from constant support from the Government of Canada in Senegal!



Country: Senegal © Fatou Guèye

In the village, beekeeping had been practiced using traditional hives, hung in trees, but it was reserved for “caste” members* and elderly persons. In addition, it was considered inappropriate for a woman to practice beekeeping. The budding beekeepers not only chose to break taboos, they also opted to introduce a more modern type of hive that offers significant technological advances. At the same time, the collective benefited from the construction of a honey processing facility, which improved both the quality of the product—the honey met Canadian standards—and the financial viability of the activity.

In 2011, thanks to the program and the women's involvement, the restructured beekeeping facility increased its processing capacity to nearly 15 tonnes per harvest.

In addition to equipment, the members of the collective benefited from capacity-building sessions focused on harvesting techniques, honey processing and packaging, the use of raw wax, and administrative and financial management. The women also took leadership training. But they obviously had determination, since they stuck with it in spite of resistance. Their former detractors are now the first to encourage the women of Saré Souma. The increase in their incomes has translated into a marked improvement in household living conditions. In reality, all of Saré Souma is benefiting from the vitality of the women beekeepers. For example, the women financed the rehabilitation of the village's well and provided the school with tables and benches.

“Beekeeping has had positive and encouraging results in our community, helping to increase incomes and create jobs,” said the president of the collective, Fatoumata Niamadjo. “It has also allowed members to establish solid and productive social relationships. The social position of women has clearly improved in terms of marital harmony and access to basic social services.”

The success of the women of Saré Souma has had a ripple effect in Casamance. The program is currently supporting eight other, mainly women's, collectives that want to set up beekeeping facilities. It contributes to the economic empowerment of women and to gender equality in one of the most disadvantaged regions of Senegal. Nearly 3,000 women have received support from the program.

* Several West African societies are structured according to a caste system that determines certain hereditary professions, especially craft-related ones.