

“We became friend with the bees!” – ACi beekeeping pilot activities in Northern Ghana

Six women are waiting under the palm leave roof of the local restaurant in Tuna, about 50km north from Bole, one of the districts in Ghana’s Northern Region. They wear simple T-Shirts and colorful fabrics, entwined around their waists as long skirts, and simple plastic sandals. They sit on plastic chairs or the on straw mats on the floor. One or two show their female elegance in modern earrings and fancy looking mobile phones.



Women at ACi beekeeping training in Tuna, Northern Region, Ghana.

After one year being involved in the activities they want to review and summarize their experience together with Dennice Okrah, Junior Agriculture Advisor of the African Cashew initiative (ACi): The initiative has supported them to start beekeeping in cashew plantations - as the first women groups in Ghana. As it is still mostly the men in Ghana who own the land and who are actively involved in the cashew farmers’ associations and cooperatives ACi innovates the creation of “side” activities for their wives to get them more involved. “Beekeeping in cashew plantations has a multi-sided impact: it is creating an independent income-opportunity for women on the one side, on the other side the pollination of the cashew trees by the bees is immensely supportive and has a positive influence on the Raw Cashew Nut quality.

One of the beekeeping products - the propolis - is even used to cure certain digestive diseases in the children here!” explains Dennice. After she, arriving from the ACi country office in about 400 km away Sunyani, greeted every woman, one older woman snaps right for the start into the round, using the local language Wali: “None of my five bee hives have been cultivated - the bees came and left again! Since half a year I am waiting now and still have not harvested anything!”

The others laugh at her. They know that there is still much to learn until the honey production will run smoothly. “Maybe you put the hives into the sun! The bees don’t like sun, the hives need to be placed in the shade of trees!” says one of the elder women. A younger woman adds that the ants are the worst problem: the legs of the metallic bee hive holder structure have to be placed into tins with water to keep ants off. “Don’t forget to add new water at least once a week and put some little branches in the water: The bees will sit on the branches and drink the fresh water - they will like it so much that they will stay!” recommends another woman of the group.



ACi beekeeping group in Tuna, Northern Region, Ghana.

ACi has provided 40 women from two different women groups the necessary material to start the pilot project: five bee hives from wood and metal stands for cultivation, one smaller “catcher” bee hive for catching bees within the plantation, protection clothing, special knives for cutting the honeycomb and smoking device.

Dr. Kwame Aidoo from the Agriculture University in Cape Coast, a specialist in beekeeping, has held training sessions. Aside of the general training on beekeeping and honey harvesting Dr. Aidoo taught the women how to produce honey wax, body cream and also make fruit juice, using the byproducts of the honey harvest.



ACi training session on beekeeping.

The groups are supported by volunteers and the ACi Ghana country team in following-up on their activities. "I found it extremely helpful that Dr. Aidoo took us one time to the cashew plantation of Mr. Oxford Bayuori. He owns this restaurant here and lets us use the place for our training sessions. He has been doing beekeeping in his cashew plantation since a couple of years already and we could learn very much from the scientific expertise on the one and the practical expertise on the other hand." says Grace Afia Dakoree-Viala. Grace has been very active in the beekeeping activities from the beginning. She has eight children. They are between 12 and 25 year old, only two of them could find paid work until present. The others are still living at home, the younger ones visit the local school, the elders are helping on the farm. Grace's husband is blind. "We are entirely depending on agriculture and have many cashew trees on our land. We are benefitting from ACi's training for harvest and post-harvest techniques and how to maintain our farm. I know that this will bring us more money in the next cashew harvesting seasons" she says as she is showing a group of visitors from Accra around on her farm later in the day.

"But we are especially thankful for this new activity. We really became friends with the bees", she laughs and shows to the wooden boxes standing under one big cashew tree in the center of the plantation, bustling with bees. The next honey harvest is expected from September. "The market is big - the pharmacies in the region are very interested in the bee wax and the propolis to produce natural medicine. And for one liter of honey I can get 13 GHc [~ 8.50 US\$] - this is easing our difficult income situation tremendously".



Women group facilitator with bee hive in a cashew plantation during follow-up visit.

Half of the income the women are raising from their bee keeping activities has to be paid into a group owned bank account. It will be collected to purchase beekeeping equipment for other women in the region. "I will be the first to step in to teach others about the beekeeping - it is good to share the success with the neighbors and friends!" says Grace and waves good-bye as she walks under the cashew trees towards her little farm house where the children are waiting for her.

Contact

Bernard Agbo (Production Manager)

e bernard.agbo@giz.de

Nii Orleans Chinery (Country Coordinator GH)

e orleans.chinery@giz.de

p + 233 302 77 41 62

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