

**Burrow Farm Group: Working together to make a living.**  
**CARE Kenya.**  
**November 2009**

*Burrow* - a Somali word for coming together to cultivate- was formed by a group of 15 households consisting of neighbours and friends to practice farming. They collectively raised funds and bought a piece of land worth Kshs 30,000 (about USD 200) just outside of in Garissa town of Kenya's northeastern province.

*"Initially, we started with 23 members each representing a household, of which four were men and 19 were women. However our membership has increased and now we are 26 members"* says Zainab Mohamad, the chairperson of the group.

In 2009, the group received training in beekeeping from CARE International in Kenya under the Enhanced Livelihoods for the Mander Triangle (ELMT) program. After the training they were given Langstroth hives and 4 super boxes to add to the hives they had, as well as harvesting kits consisting of a smoker and protective clothing.

*"The training and the equipment was good for the group as it enabled us to improve the quality of our honey which has now become popular in our town Garissa"* explains Zainab.

The training also gave women the experience and confidence of handling bees for the first time. *"Previously it was only the men who did the handling, but now we also help, we have divided responsibilities, the men guard the hives and farm while we harvest and sell honey"* explains Zainab.

In addition, the training also taught the women the how to inspect the hives. *"Before we would disturb the bees whenever we did inspections and this sometimes caused them to abandon the hives"* adds Zainab.

Out of the group's 40 hives, 21 are currently colonized - due to a combination of drought and some of the hives being new. In June they harvested 60 litres of honey (compared to 45 litres for the same period last year despite this year's production being affected by the drought).



**One of the hives being used on  
Burrow farm/photo/Reshma Khan**

In February 2009, 15 members of the group also underwent Business Development Skills (BDS) training by CARE and this has helped them improve their record keeping and calculate their profits and losses. They were also taught about the importance of diversifying their activities. *"As a result of the training, we identified dying of fabrics as a potentially profitable activity as there is very little tie-dyed cloth available in Garissa"* explains Zainab

According to the group members, the training taught them about having '*mission-ambition*' and clarity of what they wanted to do. It also taught them to think about market demands.

The bee-keeping venture has been very successful, and this is evident in the confidence and satisfaction that the women exude. *"We are doing well and we now dream of one day exporting our honey to the United States, United Kingdom, and the rest of the world!"* she adds cheerfully, *"we will package the honey well and ensure that the labels have information about the work that CARE and a small group of women in one of the world's harshest environments are doing to improve their lives."*

Apart from the honey harvesting, the training has taught the women to practice their enterprise sustainably, and now they also use the beeswax to make candles, lotions and other products. This has increased their profits further, and the women stay strong to the Swahili saying *'Elimu Ni Nguvu'*, meaning -knowledge is strength.

Along with the bee keeping and other farming ventures, the women have also started attending literacy classes to learn English and improve their Swahili. *'One day I will speak English!'* says Habiba with determination.

The women have not always had a smooth ride in their endeavour to better their lives. They do not have stores to keep their honey, and finding transport is always a challenge for the women since their farm is quite far from the market. But perhaps the biggest challenge comes from the patriarchal culture of the Somali community that often frowns upon women working on their own to assist the family. But Zainab and the group have not to let that come in their way of success! They have learnt how to appease their husbands by keeping the best produce from the farm for them, and they have also shown their husbands how their activities are helping their families.