

Getting into Bees Business – a life-changing experience generating community income and social inclusion.



Six months ago, Mr. Omar Dioffo was just a honey reseller. While the demand in Niamey for honey was relatively good, Omar was never sure of the amount and quality of supply he would get. The honey was produced in Tamou (60 miles away from Niamey) mainly using wild bees without any organized maintenance. The cost of transport to and from Tamou was adding to the expenses (12,000 FCFA round trip) as well as the worry of leaving a family behind for several days while on the trip. The rustic

and inefficient production Omar was getting his honey from made him think about starting his own honey production where he would control the quality and amounts of harvested honey. Apiculture (beekeeping) is quite a serious endeavor, maintaining colonies of thousands of honey bees in hives. It is not an easy process, as beehives do not thrive in just any environment; honey bees require flowering plants and lots of water, and they must feel secure to start a colony. Honey bees are crucial to pollinate crops. Many studies have shown that colonies of bees bolster the surrounding environment and can increase production of fruits or vegetables that are cultivated in proximity*. With help from a few professors at Abdou Moumouni University in Niamey, Omar found on internet the basics of how to start a beekeeping business, but he still needed land and financial support to start his big idea that would benefit not only his family but an entire community.

Today, Omar and his cooperative (the Nogaré community – a Fulani village on the banks of the Niger river) are the first beekeepers and producers of 100% natural honey in Niamey. They are also farming on about 50 acres, growing corn, onions, tomatoes, eggplants, and other vegetables.



One of the 22 beehives on the site. The top part comes off to collect the honey.



Omar's motivation to become self-sufficient and generate an income for his community led him to submit his project to the U.S. Embassy as part of the Ambassador's Special Self-Help program (SSH). SSH is an approach to respond quickly and directly to communities and associations in Niger. Those communities must demonstrate a good level of organization and present a sensible proposal to develop sustainable activities that generate income. Each proposal is examined by the SSH coordinator and presented to a committee for approval. The final approval is granted by the Ambassador. Typically, the program funds about 15 projects a year with grants between US\$1,000 and \$ 10,000 (about 500,000 to 5,000,000 FCFA).

In September 2012, Omar's dream came true. He and his cooperative received a grant from SSH that enabled the cooperative to purchase seeds, bees, and material to built hives. Omar and his cooperative benefited from

US\$7,137 invested in the project for one year. But it was an unexpected good deed by one of our embassy local staff members that cemented the project and enabled the installation of the beehives. Mr. Abdou Yorontou (who works in the Office of Security Cooperation) donated part of his land to install the beehives. *"For me it was a way of giving back what I owe to my community. It is part of a tradition. Helping them is to help our own communities and it's the least I can do"* says Abdou.

Last week was the community's first harvest and they wanted us to see the efforts they have made to produce the first drops of honey and to deliver succulent vegetables to the market. *"Thanks to this project I was able to become socially independent, and will soon become economically independent as soon as I start selling my harvest,"* says Omar. He later adds: *"It's like having access to eternal food storage, we are so thankful to the American Embassy for supporting our project"*. One of the very important aspects of this project was its reach to multiple beneficiaries. While visiting the site, we learned that through the program, the cooperative trained five handicapped men and women to use honey in making soap, balms, and ointments. The cooperative wanted to include disabled people in the community so that they become economically independent and participate fully in the society. The cooperative's next project is to help the disabled start a potato farm.



Harvesting onions from the community field.

This project strengthened an entire community economically, enhanced the ecosystem in Niamey, and built real community ties by including handicapped people in a society that often leaves them behind. We wish the community of Nogaré best of luck in continuing their farming and beekeeping activities. For more information on the SSH program, please contact Mireille Gbetholancy-Kun at Gbetholancy-KunME@state.gov or 99 49 90 70.



From left to right: Mireille Gbetholancy-Kun -SSH Coordinator, Adam Weise –Political Officer, Omar Dioffo – Beekeeper, and Kallam –Research Student in Agriculture from Abdou Moumouni University.

If you would like to purchase honey from the cooperative, please contact Karolina at ortonka@state.gov or x 4147.

To learn more about honey bees' impact on agriculture and more specifically on the U.S. economy, you can read these two articles: [Honey Bee Losses Impact Food System and Economy](#) and [Pollination – a grower's last chance to increase yields](#).