




# Gender Transformation Through Beekeeping: A Case Study from Coastal Kenya and Tanzania

## INTRODUCTION

Beekeeping is a vital livelihood activity in many rural areas, offering both nutritional and economic benefits. In coastal Kenya, however, this activity has long been gendered, with men exclusively managing hives and controlling income from honey sales. Cultural perceptions and religious beliefs marginalized women from participating in the value chain, reinforcing economic dependency and limiting their agency. This paper explores how a gender-responsive beekeeping model, introduced through the Transboundary Marine and Coastal Conservation and Sustainable Management project, is transforming gender dynamics in Kwale, Kenya and Tanga, Tanzania. The model's success demonstrates how inclusive livelihood interventions can be leveraged to dismantle patriarchal norms and create more equitable communities.

## ABSTRACT

For generations, beekeeping in Kenya's coastal communities has been regarded as a male-dominated practice, deeply entrenched in traditional and religious norms. Women, particularly those of reproductive age, were systematically excluded due to cultural taboos, such as prohibitions against engaging with hives during menstruation. This exclusion denied women access to the economic and social benefits associated with honey production. However, the *Transboundary Marine and Coastal Conservation and Sustainable Management project* implemented in Kwale, Kenya and Tanga, Tanzania, is disrupting these gender norms. Through gender-inclusive training and mentorship, the initiative is driving gender transformation, promoting economic empowerment, and enhancing community resilience.





## Transformative Impact of Gender-Inclusive Beekeeping

### 1. Challenging and Redefining Gender Norms

Traditionally, societal norms restricted women's participation in beekeeping, especially during menstruation, which was considered a taboo in relation to hive management. The project's gender-inclusive approach directly challenges these cultural restrictions by involving both men and women in training and hive management. By creating safe spaces for dialogue and education, the model has sparked a cultural shift, enabling communities to re-evaluate and revise harmful gender beliefs.

### 2. Empowering Women Economically

The program trained 56 community members—35 men and 21 women—in beekeeping techniques, marketing, and value addition. These skills are equipping women with a source of income, enhancing their financial independence, and increasing their participation in household and community decision-making. By earning their own income, women are now able to contribute to family welfare, support children's education, and invest in small-scale businesses.

### 3. Creating Role Models and Inspiring Future Generations

Women beekeepers have become visible role models in their communities. Their success is shifting perceptions among younger girls and encouraging them to explore livelihood activities traditionally dominated by men. The presence of successful female beekeepers is slowly transforming societal expectations about what women can and should do, laying the groundwork for sustained generational change.

### 4. Improving Livelihoods and Community Resilience

Increased female participation has led to improved honey yields and market diversification. The shared responsibility in hive management has enhanced productivity and knowledge-sharing between genders. Households now benefit from dual incomes, resulting in better food security, education, and healthcare access. In this way, the model contributes to overall community resilience and economic development.

### 5. Fostering Cross-Border Learning and Solidarity

Operating in both Kwale (Kenya) and Tanga (Tanzania), the project encourages cross-border collaboration. This not only enhances learning and replication of best practices but also fosters solidarity across cultural and national lines in addressing shared gender challenges. The regional approach helps scale the impact of gender transformation beyond individual communities.

### Conclusion

The beekeeping model introduced through the Transboundary Marine and Coastal Conservation and Sustainable Management project is a compelling example of how targeted interventions can catalyze gender transformation. By breaking down cultural barriers, empowering women economically, and fostering intergenerational change, the initiative has redefined gender roles and promoted inclusive community development. This approach is not only a pathway to equity but also a strategy for sustainable livelihood improvement and ecological stewardship in coastal communities.

### Recommendations

- a) **Scaling the Model:** Expand the initiative to other regions with similar socio-cultural dynamics.
- b) **Policy Integration:** support the inclusion of gender-transformative approaches in national natural resource management and livelihood development policies. This can be done in collaboration with the GIZ Sustainable Agricultural Systems and Policies, AgSyS – Kenya and Tanzania
- c) **Continuous Monitoring and Learning:** Implement participatory monitoring frameworks to track gender outcomes and adapt interventions accordingly.
- d) **Male Engagement:** Deepen strategies to involve men as allies in promoting gender equity within traditionally male-dominated sectors.