

PRODUCING AND MARKETING FOREST PRODUCTS: SUCCESS STORIES

MAY 2019

THE PROJECT

Poverty rates are high in the Benishangul Gumuz region of Ethiopia. The average household earns just \$90 a year.

Farming families make the majority of their money from agriculture, the demand for land means that farmers cut down trees in the region's dense forest to make space for their own crops and livestock.

Forests cover 60% of the region, but this percentage is falling fast. Farm Africa and Assosa Environmental Protection Association is working to help local communities build sustainable enterprises to profit from the forests' resources, so that not only can farmers earn more, but they'll also have an incentive to conserve the trees.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

Forest products such as honey and incense are an important and potentially profitable source of income for farmers. Incense is one of Ethiopia's biggest exports, but has traditionally been seen as the preserve of the poor. However, now it has become

clear how profitable incense is, these attitudes are changing.

Farm Africa's Producing and marketing forest products project works with forest management committees, which empower farmers to develop sustainable enterprises selling products like honey and incense. We set up and support committees, helping them to link farmers with higher-value markets, and access the finance they need for their businesses to develop.

By developing enterprises that promote sustainable management of the forest environment, Farm Africa is helping farmers increase their incomes and protect their environment.

We have provided support for the successful establishment of 23 forest management cooperatives, engaged in incense and honey production. The cooperatives are made up of 5,180 members. The successes and stories of some the individuals involved in the project are presented in this publication.

WHO ARE WE WORKING WITH?

With funding from Comic Relief, we're working with the following local NGOs:

- Natural Gum Processing and Marketing Enterprise
- The Tokuma Limited Farmers and Multipurpose Union
- The Assosa Environmental Protection Association
- The Organisation for Women in Self-Employment

We are also working with private sector partners, who are connected to other Farm Africa projects across Ethiopia.





THE SWEET SMELL OF BUSINESS SUCCESS

When Jashera's husband passed away three years ago, it diminished her income, making life an uphill battle.

To try and make ends meet, Jashera engaged in traditional gold mining activities. In Benishgul Gumuz region, many leave their villages to spend months in the forest looking for gold. Gold miners often run out of vital provisions and return home empty-handed, which is why Jashera and her neighbours don't see a stable future in gold mining.

Jashera's modest yields from her small farm are threatened by unpredictable weather conditions, poor access to agricultural inputs and tools as well as crop damage from wild animals. Jashera grows sorghum, haricot beans, maize and okra on her one-hectare farm, but her hard work rarely translates into agricultural success.

"These days, I can't make money from farming and support my family", Jashera explained. "My son has dropped out of high school as I wasn't able to cover his

expenses: food, transportation and rent. The nearest high school is really far away from here."

It was during these difficult times that Jashera and her daughter joined the project and became members of Shewle Hambre Forest Management Cooperative. Jashera and her daughter started collecting incense from the forest. Farm Africa connected the cooperative to incense buyers, providing Jashera with a profitable forest-friendly income stream.

Speaking of her achievements Jashera says, "Initially, I gathered 40 kg of incense and earned a good amount of money. That's why I was able to increase my harvest to 150 kg this year."

"Now, thanks to the project, I am not only capable of meeting my family's basic needs but also to send my son to school again", reported Jashera.

BAKING A DIFFERENCE

Birkissa Mohammed used to buy the bread that she sold to her tea shop's customers. Buying and selling bread didn't earn her very much money. A lack of capital meant that she had to curry favour with her suppliers to buy goods on credit.

Now, she wakes up early to bake bread, in her new oven, to feed her customers and family, earning herself a healthy profit in the process.

Birkissa knows the needs of her clients and works tirelessly to meet them. Her life principle is simple: work hard, serve villagers, make money to provide for her family and expand her small business.

Birkissa struggled to save the money she needs to expand her business and meet regular business costs. Everything changed when Birkissa joined Farm Africa's project.

With funding from Comic Relief, Birkissa was provided with training in basic business skills, allowing her to explore money making opportunities.

Farm Africa and the local government administration set up a Village Saving and Loan Association, which provides her with the working and investment capital to grow her business ventures.

Birkissa had lots of business ideas that she wanted to put into action. The training equipped her with the ability to visualise what to do next, how to move forward and actualise her plans.

A lack of seats meant that Birkissa used to have to turn customers away. Birkissa decided to buy four comfortable chairs for her tea shop, attracting new custom and increasing capacity.

With the money that she saved from farming, Birkissa was able to increase her maize yields from 11 to 15 quintals, which she sold for 5,500 Birr (£162).

Birkissa allocated one-third of her two-hectare farm to maize production. She applied what she was taught by agricultural experts: use improved seeds and fertilisers. With the money Birkissa saved, she hired labourers to plough and weed the family farm.

Motivated by her profits, Birkissa decided to start poultry and goat rearing as well as beekeeping. She now has eight chickens and four goats.



HOW BIRTAU WENT FROM HOUSEWIFE TO SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR

Birtau Defala used to be entirely dependent on her husband. Despite having a number of business ideas and a strong desire to add to her family's income, a lack of know-how stopped Biratu from setting up her own enterprise.

Through the project, Birtau received training in basic business skills, which focused on how to make and save money through petty trading.

Biratu has now seen her long-term business idea of fattening and selling sheep come to life. Initially, she started with two sheep and earned a good amount of profit. Encouraged by the returns, she purchased more sheep and was rewarded with even higher profits. Biratu has become a member of a VSLA facilitated by the project. The VSLA provided her with the ability to save money, take loans to expand her business and take small loans to meet family costs and keep her business afloat.

"We send our daughter to a private college. My husband had been under a lot of stress, he was struggling to pay for her tuition and pay for her upkeep. Paying for school materials was also a big challenge."



"I WASN'T ABLE TO READ AND WRITE WHEN I FIRST JOINED THIS PROJECT. EVEN READING NUMBERS WAS DIFFICULT. NOW, I CAN READ AND WRITE MY FIRST NAME AS WELL AS MAKE PHONE CALLS WITHOUT ANYONE HAVING TO SUPPORT ME"

Birtau Defala

Sharing the financial burden with her husband, Biratu now sends her daughter 306 Birr (£9) every month. "Thanks to God and the project, I am able to cover her expenses. For me, this is a lifetime achievement."

Biratu's husband is a sorghum farmer. Even though his yields were good, he struggled to feed the family. Equipped with newfound confidence and knowledge as well as capital from her goat-rearing business, Biratu decided to support her husband's agricultural efforts. Biratu rented oxen to plough the land and bought fertiliser, seeds and pesticides to boost production.

The project not only provided Biratu with a better livelihood but it introduced her to the world of words and numbers. Working with the local administration, the project facilitated a six month adult literacy programmes for its participants. Biratu is now able to read, write and do basic maths.

"I wasn't able to read and write when I first joined this project. Even reading numbers was difficult. Now, I can read and write my first name as well as make phone calls without anyone having to support me," Biratu said.



NEW BUSINESS SKILLS ALLOW FATUMA TO SUPPORT HER FAMILY

"Crop production is my family's only source of income. Limited farmland and unpredictable weather conditions meant that we didn't produce enough to feed the family and cover our expenses" explained 26-year-old Fatuma Ebrahim.

Since taking part in Farm Africa's Producing and marketing forest products project, Fatuma has maintained a stable income.

"My husband was the only one providing for the family. I had to ask him for money, even for small household expenses. Things started to change after I joined the project and received training."

"I was trained in basic business skills, which was an eye-opening experience. The training taught me how to save and do business. It helped me generate and grow business ideas. I agreed with my husband to join a VSLA and, using our small income, started saving on a regular basis from our small earnings."

"I then started fattening and selling sheep. I only had two sheep when I started. The profit I gained inspired me to move

forward. I have now managed to increase the size of my herd to seven sheep."

This is only one of Fatuma's fruitful enterprises. She also owns a small shop, which provides her with a regular source of income. The project has also helped her invest in an irrigation system and start growing tomatoes.

"The return from the tomato production is encouraging. I earned a total of 15,946 Birr (£469) from my first harvest and I expect to get much more from the next one."

Years ago, owning a savings account in any of the national banks was a far-fetched dream for Fatuma. Overcoming her challenges with the skills she gained through basic business skills training, Fatuma has now deposited a good amount of money in her account: 9,000.00 Birr (£263.92).

"Two years ago, the prospect of me owning several small businesses would have been unthinkable. Now, I am looking far beyond my limitations. My total capital has reached 35,000.00 Birr (£1,026.39) and I am thinking of buying a house in Assosa Town. I am happy I can support my family. I no longer worry about providing school materials for our children."





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