

# Biovision

Newsletter June 2019

**Beekeeping opening up new prospects**  
Income opportunities for young entrepreneurs



A future for all, naturally



Aynalem Sefiew  
beekeeper in Kozba kebele,  
Ethiopia



“In our first year we harvested 80 kilograms of honey and sold it at the local market.”

Project: Beekeeping  
for young entrepreneurs  
(start date 2018)

The project supports young men and women to produce high-quality honey and beeswax, providing them with an income and offering them a future. Bees also improve the pollination of local vegetable gardens and so the project encourages the growing of plants that contain nectar.

- **Aims of current project phase:**
  - Set up and activate 30 start-up groups with 300 young people and 900 beehives
  - Produce 15–25 kg honey from each beehive
  - Establish and operate 30 organic tree nurseries (one per group)

• **Project Budget 2019:** CHF 157,000

• **Account for donations:** PC 87-1933093-4

• **Sustainable Development Goals**  
The project contributes directly or indirectly to 4 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals: Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 2 (Zero hunger), Goal 3 (Good health and wellbeing), Goal 15 (Terrestrial ecosystems, soils, biodiversity):



# “We have discovered a pot of gold”

In the remote Dehana District of Ethiopia, young people try to escape poverty by embarking on a daring journey of entrepreneurship. For this, they rely on Biovision’s support.

Nina Zenklusen, Biovision

When Aynalem Sefiew talks about her recent honey harvests, she forgets her shyness and her eyes start to sparkle. “We have already produced 80 kilograms and sold it at the local market,” says the 22-year old with pride. Aynalem is married with a young son and like all the other newly trained beekeepers was unemployed and without land when she joined the beekeeping project for young entrepreneurs some 12 months ago.

Young people living in this remote, arid and upland part of Ethiopia lack prospects and so youth unemployment and rural migration are commonplace. Modern beekeeping and the production of pure, high-quality honey offers them a genuine chance to escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

**Those who dare, win**

A total of 300 young entrepreneurs are participating in the Biovision project. They are divided into 30 groups and each group is supplied with 30 beehives. They are trained in modern beekeeping techniques and also how to produce and process high-quality honey and beeswax. Group members are responsible for acquiring their own bee colonies and to do this they had to take out loans, a risk in itself. However, those who dared to take that risk have been well rewarded. “With the profit from honey sales we have already been able to repay most of the loan,” says Aynalem with obvious

pleasure. Her group – called “Edget Lesira” (it means “Work for Growth”) are now growing vegetables, which provide them with another source of income. It has not all been plain sailing for the young entrepreneurs from the kebele (neighbourhood) of Kozba as the group has also had problems. For example, they had to sell a goat and some sheep after the animals were attacked by hyenas during the night. In addition, the lack of access to water has made vegetable growing more difficult.

**Entrepreneurial spirit required**

Nevertheless, the members refused to be disheartened by these setbacks and simply decided to turn their hand to something different. They are now planning to buy grinding stones for the production of teff flour. Teff is the main ingredient in Ethiopia’s national dish “injera” and ground flour commands a higher price at market than the unground grain.

“The story you told us about the gold prospectors who never gave up but simply kept on looking helped a great deal and encouraged me to keep trying,” says Aynalem Sefiew with a grateful look at Lulseged Belayhun from *icipe*\*, who is supporting and mentoring the group as part of the project. “Our first honey harvest has provided us with our own pot of gold, which we will continue to mine in the future,” she adds with determination. In return, Lulseged Belayhun gives her an approving smile.

\* *icipe*: International insect research institute in Nairobi, Kenya

More information:  
[www.biovision.ch/dehana-en](http://www.biovision.ch/dehana-en)



- 1 The dry, barren Dehana District in Ethiopia is located some 2000–3400 metres above sea level. Life is hard for its inhabitants.
- 2 The Group has built up a creative, economically successful company called “Edget Lesira” (Work for Growth): Aynalem Sefiew is first from left in photo. After just one year the Group has already repaid most of the loan used to buy the bees.

- 3 The project provides start-up help in the form of 30 modern beehives for each group.
- 4 Kies Kiros Wodaj, young entrepreneur and priest is pleased with his first honey harvest and thanks to the produce from his new kitchen garden, he can provide his family with better food.



# Ethiopia on the cusp of change

When it comes to gender equality, it seems that Ethiopia is now in the fast lane. In October 2018, the country appointed its first ever female president Sahele-Work Zewde and since then, there has been equality in government as well: Women now occupy 10 of the 20 seats in the Ethiopian cabinet.

In rural Ethiopia, however, equality between women and men is still far from being a reality (see also article on right and on Page 2). However, impatience at this state of affairs would be misguided, particularly given the situation in Switzerland. In terms of gender equality between women and men, Switzerland remains the most conservative country in Europe, even though women are now better educated than men.

Switzerland has major inequalities, e.g. only 7 % of those in senior company positions are women; to which must be added wage discrimination and the difficulty of reconciling work and family life. In parliament, where the country’s future is decided, women only account for about one-third of members. The situation is somewhat better in the Federal Council with its three women and four men, i.e. almost the parity achieved in Ethiopia. Things need to change for women in both the Global South and North. This change is now even more urgent, given the need to overcome challenges such as climate change, poverty, hunger and social tensions.



**Maya Graf**  
National Council member and Biovision trustee



In the Ethiopian project “Bees for young entrepreneurs”, participation rates for men and women are not yet equal. Even in the group “Mulusagaje & Friends” in the kebele of Arfa in Dehana District, women are clearly underrepresented.

## Barriers for women are higher

Although gender equality is fundamental to Biovision development projects, it is often challenging to promote women.

*Loredana Sorg, Biovision*

When Biovision develops new projects, the equal participation of women is an essential element. However, what about the reality, e.g. in the bee project in Wag Himra area of Ethiopia, a community project started by Biovision and its partner *icipe*\* in 2018? As part of the project, local agricultural advisers and *icipe* bee experts encourage female participation but those advisers and experts are all male. Even though there has been gender parity in the Ethiopian cabinet since 2018, at the local level in Dehana District we have so far only managed to recruit male instructors. Young people living in the area covered by the project lack female role models, making the participation of both women and men even more important.

This may be one of the reasons why we were not immediately able to allocate 50 % of places on the courses in beekeeping and entrepreneurship to women, even though the preparatory work by the project management team paid particular attention to encouraging women.

### Setting the direction of travel

It is sometimes a long haul from strategy to actual implementation, i.e. to achieve an increase in the female participation rate and to maintain that increase. From earlier projects, the *icipe* project coordinator Dr Workneh Ayalew and his colleagues are aware that certain requirements for participation represent insurmountable hurdles for women and girls. If participants are required to read and write proficiently, that already excludes most women living in rural Ethiopia. For that reason, the only conditions placed on those seeking to join one of the small companies established under the Biovision bee project are that the young adults have no land, no job and live in one of the selected water catchment areas.

### Overcoming barriers

In the new bee project (see Page 2), women face other barriers that make it difficult for them to join the labour market. “Women have to cope with challenges that are often invisible”, says Dr Workneh Ayalew explaining the fact that the local administration of the working group is solely in the hands of men. “Women are expected to look after the children and their husbands and are often at the bottom of the queue when it comes to participation in training courses”. He suggests that one possible solution would be to try and set up a group consisting solely of women. Although this would be contrary to the project’s philosophy,



In rural Ethiopia, including Siraro District, it is commonplace for women to have too much work, to be poorly educated or discriminated against in terms of schooling.

which seeks to encourage cooperation between genders and generations, this radical approach might, under certain circumstances, serve to eliminate some barriers.

### Motivating stories

Many problems still remain. For example, several women had to leave their beekeeping group when they married and moved to a distant village. Others lacked the required financial resources because they were unable to take out a micro-loan in their own name or because their husbands refused to sign the joint contract – a condition of participating in the project. As a result, the business management courses for the young adults include bookkeeping principles and stories about human ingenuity and perseverance in the business world. The group “Azmeraw Debasaw & Friends Enterprise” has used what they learned to good effect. Economically, it is the most successful company in the bee project and the only one in the hands of women. Four of the five founding members were women between 20 and 30 years of age and three of them already had children. They are earning an additional income from the sale of grain and vegetables and the proceeds are then re-invested. Beekeeping and honey sales, although promoted in the project, are only likely to become their main source of income in the medium term.

### Progress for both men and women

Without the support of their husbands, the situation even for these four women would have been difficult. For example, the men do

the night shift and keep watch on the hives. For Ethiopian women, this would have been an absolute impossibility. The women who work continue to do the housework and prepare meals for the entire day before setting out each morning for the hives and vegetable fields. They have no choice but to combine their professional and domestic work. However, more and more women are prepared to do that so that they can pursue a career and improve things for themselves and their families.

### Role models sought

At present, women account for 34 % of those actively participating in the project for young entrepreneurs in Dehana. Based on predictions for 2019, this percentage is likely to increase to 42%. It would appear that efforts by both *icipe* und Biovision to bring more women on board is slowly



**Loredana Sorg**  
is a graduate agronomist from ETH and project officer at Biovision

starting to bear fruit. Hopefully, the willingness of these pioneers to display their commitment in public will encourage other women and young girls.

\* *icipe*: International insect research institute Nairobi, Kenya

## Biovision and gender

Biovision places a very high priority on gender equality in its projects. As a result, the Biovision Strategy 2016–2020 expressly identifies “gender”, “participation” and “added-value chains and income generation” as cross-cutting themes:

**Gender equality:**  
“The equal participation of both men and women in development and change processes is crucial. All Biovision projects

*reflect gender-specific requirements, skills and opportunities. Issues such as the position of women, the impact of population growth on health and the use of resources are decisive elements in the formulation of sustainable policies and programmes”.*

The full Biovision Strategy is available on our website:  
[www.biovision.ch/strategy](http://www.biovision.ch/strategy)



# Experiments in “Living Labs”

Michael Bergöö, Biovision

A “Living Lab” is a concept that allows a productive dialogue between public and private sectors, civil society and science. It focusses on mutual learning in an experimental environment. The experiments call for close cooperation between stakeholders in industry and society, making it possible to test whether potential strategies can be realised and are effective.

The Hunziker Areal development at Leutschenbach in Zürich-Oerlikon is one of the best-known Living Labs in Switzerland. The development has set itself ambitious energy consumption targets – a 2000-Watt Society and no more than 1 metric tonne CO<sub>2</sub> per capita per year. In order to achieve this, it has already implemented several major structural measures, (e.g. the Minergie-P-ECO Standard). However, purely technical solutions cannot on their own bring about further reductions. There needs to be a fundamental change in the behaviour of residents. This is what the cooperative “More than Housing” is seeking to achieve at the Hunziker Areal. It sees itself as an innovation and learning hub and working with residents and the development’s management it is trialling new forms of urban coexistence, e.g. it has launched a self-service depot, stocking, for example sustainable foods and offering a meat box subscription with reduced quantities.



Residents in the Hunziker Areal in Zürich-Oerlikon test sustainable lifestyles on a 1:1 basis.



Cooperation between stakeholders from science, politics, civil society and industry is essential if we are to develop the knowledge required to bring about a transformational change in favour of sustainability.

## Tackling a hot potato!

In September 2015, the international community signed the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Its implementation, however, is sluggish. Through SDSN Switzerland, Biovision is seeking to counter that.

Michael Bergöö, Biovision, CEO SDSN Switzerland

Agenda 2030 contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals designed to tackle the most urgent challenges facing the world and so safeguard the lives of future generations. However, countries are finding it hard to implement the required measures.

This was why in 2017, Biovision in cooperation with the Interdisciplinary Centre for Development and Cooperation (CDE) at the University of Bern established the Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Switzerland. Comprising 35 knowledge institutions, SDSN Switzerland seeks to strengthen research and education that promotes a sustainable future for Switzerland.

### Create transformational knowledge

Agenda 2030 requires signatories, including Switzerland to tackle difficult issues, e.g.

climate change, sustainable food systems, fighting poverty, digitisation, loss of biodiversity and responsible entrepreneurship. This is easier said than done because the issues are complex and are influenced by a wide range of dynamic and ever-changing factors. In addition, strategies that could address those issues are rarely tested and often unpopular socially and politically.

The scientific community must place a higher priority on identifying how existing patterns of behaviour can be changed to more sustainable practices by 2030. This requires transformational knowledge that is developed through the interaction of research and practice.

SDSN Switzerland is starting this process. The network creates the conditions necessary for partnerships between researchers from various disciplines and stakeholders from each of the target groups. Research into sustainability remains a niche area in Switzerland and so the Federal Council and Parliament must include encouragement for transformational knowledge in the next Dispatch on the Promotion of Education, Research and Innovation 2021–2024.

More information:  
[www.biovision.ch/sdsn-en](http://www.biovision.ch/sdsn-en)

# Biovision creates clarity

The term “agro-ecology” is of increasing importance in the debate about agriculture. As there is no precise definition of this specialist term, Biovision has set up an interactive website that explains the main terms and provides relevant background information.

Here is one of the shortest definitions of the term: Agroecology is the “application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agricultural ecosystems”.

More information (website in English):  
[www.agroecology-pool.org](http://www.agroecology-pool.org)



Example of applied agro-ecology in a Biovision project “Reviving traditional knowledge”, Marimanti, Kenya

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Sounding Soil makes audible the life in our soils: For example, the noise from springtails (collembola), who live primarily in humus layers several metres deep provided the soil is not too dry.

## Sounding Soil on Tour

**The Sounding Soil makes the world beneath our feet audible... and what a noisy world it is! In August 2018 Biovision launched with great success a campaign to increase awareness of the importance of healthy soils. We are now looking for volunteers to take part in our research into soil sounds.**

Martin Grossenbacher, Biovision

“Unlike air pollution or clean water, most people have little awareness of the importance of healthy soils,” says Sabine Lerch, joint project manager for Sounding Soil. It was this that prompted Biovision in Autumn 2018 to start a multi-year project to highlight the importance of our soils. The preview of the Sound Installation at the Paul Klee Centre in Bern, which included sounds from more than 30 soils in Switzerland, attracted great interest and an enthusiastic audience. “What I liked most was that it gave a voice to the soils that are so important to us,” said one young man.

### Raising awareness continues

From the end of May – following a hardware and software update – the Sound Installation is off on its travels: From 25 May to 23 June 2019, it is in Münsingen at the offices of Bio Schwand AG ([www.bioschwand.ch](http://www.bioschwand.ch)) and from 28 June to the end of July 2019 at the agri-

cultural training centre Plantahof in Landquart. The loss of healthy soils also has a negative effect on climate change as the sustainable use of soils helps to reduce greenhouse gases. Healthy soils are more resistant and better able to adapt to new climatic conditions. “Almost every day, I receive emails from people who want to take part in the project. It is an opportune moment for a project to raise awareness of the importance of healthy, natural soils,” says Sabine Lerch with obvious pleasure when talking about the next stage of Sounding Soil.

## What does your soil sound like?

Would you like to become a researcher? We can lend you equipment so that you can make your own sound recordings and discover what the soils under your feet sound like. Take part in the “Citizen Science” element of the Sounding Soil project and help to plot a map of soil sounds in Switzerland.

More information:  
[www.soundingsoil.ch/participate](http://www.soundingsoil.ch/participate)





## Story from the life of Atena Wodaje, bee expert in Amdework (Ethiopia)

# Walking 55 kilometres to school

Loredana Sorg, Biovision

Atena Wodaje has returned home and he plans to stay there. He completed his studies in Ambo, some 100 kilometres west of Addis Abeba but his heart belongs in Northern Ethiopia or to be more precise to the animals and people living in the barren but enchanting mountain region of Dehana District. Today, the 29-year old is an enthusiastic livestock officer for the Woreda local authority. He is also our local contact in the Biovision project “Beekeeping for young entrepreneurs”.

“My father and I also keep bees and I am always looking for ways to improve our honey production,” explains the charismatic civil servant. He was born in the village of Chilla, located some 2,500 metres above sea level. Even as a young boy he and his friends looked after the goats and he helped his father with the bees. He attended primary school in the village but for his secondary education he had to travel to Sekota, the main town in the Wag Himra zone. Sekota is some 55 kilometres from Chilla and to get there he walked – it took

him and his friends just over 8 hours to complete the journey.

“Every two to four weeks, we returned to the village to stock up on food,” he recalls. “It would have been too expensive to buy goods in town. We also cooked for ourselves in our tiny accommodation”. Despite that, both he and his sisters completed their secondary education in Sekota. For children living in the Dehana District that was by no means a matter of course. His brother is now a teacher in a neighbouring village, one sister is a care assistant in Sekota and the other helps her parents in Chilla, which now has its own secondary school.

Today, Atena Wodaje lives with his wife and their two-year old daughter in Amdework, the main town in the Dehana District. Before his current job, he was responsible for livestock farming in three different kebeles (neighbourhoods). Two years later, he was appointed the bee expert in Amdework,

a new challenge for him. He is delighted that the Biovision project specifically targets unemployed youngsters and combines beekeeping with other agricultural activities.

Last December, this energetic mountain resident and several young entrepreneurs from the Biovision bee project attended an international beekeeping conference in Addis Abeba where they shared their experiences with other participants and displayed their local honey produce. They have already found two potential customers who next year will buy larger quantities from them. Atena Wodaje also has his own beekeeping plans. “I should like to increase the number of hives on my father's land so that we can be more professional and use modern hives,” he stresses.

“A new challenge  
that delights him”

