



## **Lady Luck takes a detour Fate hangs by a silk thread**

Courage and determination are certainly not lacking in Emily Sikuku Ogweno from Othoro and the 120 members of her Kabondo Silk Group in Western Kenya. But they are lacking in luck. Kabondo is an amalgamation of five different farmers groups with various foci, and a large community project, which is quite literally hanging by a thread. A few years ago the group was chosen by a member of the national parliament and icipe in Nairobi as a model project for silk production on account of its impeccable performance record. Othoro lies in a hilly area on the Eastern bank of Lake Victoria. Thanks to daily orographic rainfall the climate there is ideally suited to cultivation of mulberry trees and breeding of silk worms. In this way the group qualified for the pilot project 'Income Generation in Rural Areas'.

After agreement from the group on collaboration, eight members were carefully trained in silkworm breeding, machine preparation of silk and loom operation. At the same time, the remaining 110 women and 10 men began growing mulberry trees at home on their farms. When these trees had grown sufficiently, the farmers were provided with silk spider eggs, from which the larvae soon hatched. These were kept by each member in a wooden frame in their homes and fed with leaves from the mulberry trees until they pupated 28 days later. The spinning machines and a large hand loom were meanwhile installed in an empty building. When the first pupae were delivered, silk production was able to begin in Othoro under expert guidance from icipe.



*Continued on page 2* ▶

### **Cotents**

- Outdoor testing of wild silk page 2
- Editorial
- A Day in the Life of Asenath Akinyi page 3
- TOF-Radion on-air
- BioVision Foundation Board page 4
- Advance of the internet
- Beeswax candles from Cabesi

## Editorial



Jubilation broke out in Chemaley in the middle of October as I, and the rest of the Foundation Board were handed a glittering BioVision logo made from glass beads. A birthday present from West Pokot: 10 years of BioVision! We made use of this joyous event to get an on-site picture of some of the projects in Kenya for ourselves. Together with project partners we evaluated the work done so far and considered the strategy for the coming year. All the dedicated people in the project and their performance record encouraged me enormously. They are living proof that we can change things if we take the chance! Ten years ago, BioVision was just an idea – the vision of a better world with healthy people and development in harmony with nature. Today we have already come far on our path, and we have been able to achieve a great deal in a short time. Through us, thousands of people in East Africa get the chance to improve their lives with newly-gained knowledge and fresh opportunities. I thank you and hope to count on your continued support in the future.

Dr Hans Rudolf Herren  
*President of the BioVision Foundation*

*Continued from page 1*

### **Bad luck often has company**

Whole village had a big party when the group presented their first 60 metres of silk. But a savage storm brought the celebrations to an abrupt end. Enormous gusts of wind completely wrecked the electricity supply and the factory. Thankfully the machines withstood the bad weather without sustaining any noteworthy damage. Emily Sikuku Ogweno and her people picked themselves up and gathered the means to rebuild the factory building. Then fate struck again. First they were deceived out of their money by corrupt middlemen. Then the devastating riots after the Kenyan presidential election brought the project to a standstill. But the Kabondo Silk Group and its president still were not beaten. Hope was too strong and the project was too important. Emily Sikuku describes the reason for their iron will in this way: "This is the chance to reduce poverty in our region". Young mother Shelamea Otieno agrees: "We are putting everything into making Othoro a silk production area and into creating new opportunities for income generation for hundreds of farming families." Recently these motivated women farmers were able to convince the Kenyan authorities to provide the group with state support. BioVision steps in to provide the remaining necessary funds. "We are only a small step away, really" – Verena Albertin, Project Co-ordinator, explains the positive decision. "In Othoro we see the opportunity to expand the horizons of many people, often still young, with little expenditure." According to icipe, the demand for African silk today is already very high and continuing to rise. So the chances are still good that Lady Luck will find her way back to Othoro.



*BioVision Project BV EH-06*

### **BioVision Project Cabesi**

## **Wild silk as a market niche for Africa**

At icipe, possibilities for the commercial and sustainable use of insects are being researched. Particular interest is granted to the African silk spider and its relationship with the wild acacia. According to head of department Dr. Suresh Raina, the demand for African wild silk is enormous and the production of this in the semi-arid zones therefore constitutes a very promising market niche. "It would be a great chance for the already disadvantaged people in arid and semi-arid areas to use their natural resources in a profitable, environmentally friendly and sustainable way." In Chesegon (Pokot) experiments in the breeding of wild silk worms are taking place. In order to find out how many silk spiders a tree can support, and to protect the grubs from predators, they and their host tree are wrapped up in a net. The health and development of the animals are regularly monitored by project workers.

*BioVision Project BV EH-02*



## ■ A Day in the Life of Asenath Akinyi in Muga **Mother, widow and seed producer in Oboch**

"I am clutching the money tightly in my fist as the cock crows and wakes me from my sleep. My uncle gave me the money, together with new shoes and beautiful clothes from Nairobi. When I lay finally fully awake, my hands were empty and my disappointment was enormous. It was only a dream. I am 25, I have three children and I have been a widow for nearly seven years. Simson, my husband, died at the age of 45 and left behind three wives. I am the youngest. Pamela, the middle wife, is 32, has five children and is a primary school teacher. The oldest of us, Consolata, is 45 and on a pension. She has no children of her own, so she adopted five orphans. When I was nineteen, Simson asked my parents for my hand in marriage. They asked me if I agreed, and I accepted. In our culture the men make all the decisions. I was warmly and openly welcomed by my companions; the older wives, and I still feel comfortable in their company. We are Christians and we follow the Bible. In the Bible it says David had many wives. We all have our own houses, cook for ourselves and our children, and are each responsible for our own housekeeping. Living with two 'co-wives' has its ups and downs. It is an advantage to not have to struggle through on my own. We look after each other's children, care for each other when we are ill and help out with the cooking when necessary. There are disadvantages of course, but I don't want to talk about them. My day always begins at 6am on the dot. I lie in bed for about 20 minutes until I am fully awake. Then I get up, clean the house, prepare the breakfast and wake the children, who make their way to school after eating. Then I carry out the rest of the household chores and work in the garden until about ten o'clock. I produce seeds, which I sell in front of the house on the street: maize, beans, rice, sorghum, cassava and amaranth. But what I make is barely enough to live on. At twelve I make lunch. At our house, lunch and dinner consist alternately of ugali with vegetables, rice with beans or sweet potatoes with green beans

– in various combinations. After lunch the children go back to school and I return to my stall. They return at half past five and do their chores: collecting wood, fetching water, looking after the sheep and goats, and every second day they must wash their uniforms. When I go back to the house at six, I make myself comfortable in my room. My favourite thing to do is to lie on the sofa and relax for a minute before I make the dinner. We usually eat at eight. After that I count the takings from my shop and the children do their homework. If they have problems, Pamela our schoolteacher can help them. At ten the children all lie down in the big bed together under the mosquito net. I retire to bed as well, but often the worries of the next day will keep me awake for a long time.

*Recorded by Peter Lütthi in Oboch,  
October 2008*



## ■ TOF Radio on-air **Agricultural advice on the airwaves**



Every Thursday evening between quarter past and half past eight, the audience rate soars for the National Kiswahili Service of the Kenyan radio station KBC. This is because nearly three million farmers in Kenya and the neighbouring border area of Tanzania are cranking up their transistor radios to hear the latest tips, trends and background information on organic agriculture from TOF-Radio.

The radio program corresponding to the BioVision farmers' newspaper *The Organic Farmer* (TOF) has been transmitted in Kiswahili every week since the end of August, thanks to the support of the Liechtenstein Development Service, LED.

You can hear a sample of TOF-Radio at [www.biovision.ch](http://www.biovision.ch) under 'News'.

*BioVision Project) BV IS-02*

## BioVision Foundation Board

### Close contact with the projects

On the occasion of Biovision's tenth anniversary, the Foundation Board visited various project sites in Kenya. "Personal impressions gained on-site are always an important supplement to the project leader's report", says Ruedi Baumgartner, professor emeritus of ETH postgraduate studies in developing countries and member of the BioVision board since 2005. A subsequent planning seminar with partners in Africa was combined with intensive exchange of experiences. "I am impressed with the professionalism and great motivation of our African partners in the field", remarks Mathis Zimmermann, lawyer and founding member of BioVision. Both of the Foundation Board's scientists, Barbara Frei Haller and Hans Herren, discussed new trends in malaria research at the Mbita Point research station. "Bringing research to application", so the unanimous opinion goes, "continues to be BioVision's goal."



Lake Victoria, Oktober 2008: vlnr: Ruedi Baumgartner, Barbara Frei Haller, Mathis Zimmermann, Hans Herren in Mbita Point, West-Kenia.



[www.infonet-biovision.org](http://www.infonet-biovision.org)

## Advance of the internet in Kenya Web access for all regions

All along Kenya's main transport arteries, an army of workers is currently digging deep trenches, into which will be laid a fibre-optic cable to bring broadband world-wide-web connection to the states of East Africa. This is a great advantage for the project [www.infonet-biovision.org](http://www.infonet-biovision.org). Infonet is the free web platform developed by BioVision to provide people with current and locally relevant information on organic farming, environmentally friendly techniques and health promotion in East Africa. "Connection to the internet helps Africa strengthen its position in the world information system and improves access to information. The flow of information between North and South can be improved in this way without incurring astronomical costs", enthuses Monique Hunziker, Infonet project leader at BioVision.

## Beeswax candles from the Cabesi Project Sweet scents for Christmas

Since the end of 2003, BioVision has supported the Cabesi project in West Pokot, a marginalised region of Western Kenya, where natural resources are increasingly over-exploited due to a lack of alternatives. The core of the project, the Cabesi Marketplace in Kapenguria, was inaugurated last March amid much festivity. In this new factory and market store, raw materials sustainably generated by the rural population are prepared, packed and sold. Big sellers include the favourite Cabesi organic honey, beeswax candles and beautiful cards decorated with insects made with glass beads.

The production of beeswax candles is currently on an alpine tour. A set of three candles costs CHF 6 (ex. P&P) and can be ordered from TERRA VERDE, which is also involved in project development:

Tel. 044 342 10 00

[www.biovision.ch/cabesi](http://www.biovision.ch/cabesi)

[www.terraverde.tv](http://www.terraverde.tv)

*Delivery normally takes place between 4 and 10 days after order is placed. Express delivery is available at additional cost. Lake Victoria, October 2008: from left to right: Ruedi Baumgartner, Barbara Frei Haller, Mathis Zimmerman, Hans Herren in Mbita Point, West Kenya*



Hope for Africa!



BIOVISION

Many thanks for your donation.

PC-Konto 87-193093-4

BIOVISION Schaffhauserstr.18, CH-8006 Zurich

Tel. 044 341 97 18

[info@biovision.ch](mailto:info@biovision.ch)

[www.biovision.ch](http://www.biovision.ch)