

Herat's Beekeeping Pioneer: A Story of Women's Empowerment

In the village of Dar Band, in Injil District of Herat Province, an extraordinary transformation is taking place—led by a woman who defies expectations at every turn. Ms. Ghoncha Gul Karimi is not only an accomplished beekeeper but a local symbol of courage and innovation. Known for being the only woman in the area to openly ride a motorbike—both in rural and urban streets—even after the change in political landscape, she is changing the narrative around what women can achieve.



Leading a beekeeping group of eight women, Ghoncha Gul has partnered with the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan (DCA) to receive beehives and technical training. “I started with just a few hives, and now, we’ve created a livelihood that empowers not just me, but many women

in my village,” she shared with a proud smile. “Beekeeping became my voice when others tried to silence it.”

Herat was once considered unsuitable for beekeeping due to its strong winds. But Ghoncha Gul’s journey—sparked by a training she attended 16 years ago with Catholic Relief Services (CRS)—has demystified that belief. She now raises native Herati bees, well-adapted to the local climate and far more resilient than imported species.

The impact of this project extends far beyond honey. With Herat honey selling between 1,000 and 1,500 Afghanis per kilo, Ghoncha Gul’s initiative has created a reliable income source, especially for young women barred from attending school. “Many of the girls who work with me were losing hope after being suspended from education,” she explained. “Now they have a purpose—and a paycheck.” Among the young women in the group is 19-year-old Shayesta, who found new purpose in beekeeping after her high school was forced to close. “I knew nothing about bees and was honestly terrified of them at first,” she recalls. “But now, I feel confident handling them—and proud to contribute to my family’s income.”

With support from the European Union, DCA has scaled this initiative across four provinces—Badakhshan, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Herat—benefiting 225 women-headed households. On average, each household harvests 8 to 12 kilograms of honey per season, translating to \$114–\$171 in income.

But the road isn’t without its bumps. Disease outbreaks, mites, predatory birds, and lack of proper winter feed threaten the sustainability of the hives. The few medicines available in the market are often ineffective—or even lethal to the bees. “We need better access to safe, affordable treatments for our bees,” Ghoncha Gul emphasized. “And stronger connections to the market so we can sell directly and earn more.”

Despite the challenges, Ghoncha and her team continue to push forward, serving as a model for other communities across Afghanistan. “We are not just producing honey,” she said. “We are building dignity, resilience, and hope—one hive at a time.”