

HOUSEHOLD POVERTY REDUCTION THROUGH BEEKEEPING AMONGST UGANDA RURAL WOMEN

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Abstract

Majority of Uganda population lives in rural areas. Approximately 85% is engaged in agriculture and lives in poverty. Poverty is not just the lack of incomes but also the lack of means to satisfy basic social needs, a feeling of powerlessness to break out of poverty and insecurity. 48% of the rural population is below the absolute poverty line. The principal dimensions of poverty in Uganda include livelihood, location, seasonality and gender. The division of labour amongst men and women in agriculture is complex in Uganda rural society. Food production is the domain of women. Men concentrate on livestock and cash crops for income generation. In many cases women have to top up the labour force for the man's activities. Yet women have little or no control over resources realised from the sales of products, coupled with not owning land and other production factors. Given the scenario, the reduction of household poverty must involve the participation of women in those economic activities of areas in that they can have control. Beekeeping has been identified as one of the economic activities with very high potentials such as abundance of natural resources, easy integration in crop production, low technology requirements and indigenous knowledge and skills, a rich variety of bees e.g. *Apis mellifera scutellata*, *Apis mellifera adansonii* and *A. mellifera monticola*. However there are constraints to the developments of beekeeping e.g. lack of policy and legislation, training and information, quality of honey and other hive products, limited market and limited access to production credits. The Uganda government now has in place a 25 years programme called the Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture with one of the seven pillars called National Agricultural Advisory Services (extension) delivery system particularly targeting the women and the poor. Implementation of the NAADS programme is planned to assist the women beekeepers/farmers to invest in beekeeping through organised viable and sustainable groups development to enable them to produce and sell honey, to negotiate realistic prices and be able to raise tradable volumes of honey and other hive products. This will be realized through the development of special unifloral honey, promotion of organic quality products and marketing organisation for reduction of the household Poverty.

Keywords: rural / poverty / gender

Introduction

In Uganda, the majority of the population lives in rural areas, is engaged in agriculture, and lives in poverty. The Government has since 1990s made the eradication of poverty a part of its development framework. This has been operationalised as the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). A key goal of the plan is to raise smallholder farm incomes and cause rural economic transformation and the modernisation of agriculture in the next 20 – 25 years.

During the last decade the country has witnessed modest increases in agricultural production mainly as a result of increase in production area and to a limited extent, use of improved technology. These increases have not, however, resulted in increased profitability of agricultural production, and household incomes. Uganda's population of 24 million (National Census, 2002) remains largely poor, with at least 40% of the people living in poverty, and many of the rural poor remain outside the monetary economy, mainly producing for subsistence.

Poverty In Uganda

Poor people define poverty as not just the lack of incomes, but also the lack of means to satisfy basic social needs, as well as a feeling of powerlessness to break out of the cycle of poverty, insecurity of person and property. Poverty has faces and is caused by factors that include among others, inadequacies in access to natural resources, human factors, financial assets, social capital and physical infrastructure. The multitude of these causes of poverty clearly show the frustration poor people face in trying to move out of poverty.

Poverty is mainly a rural phenomenon as 48% of the rural population is below the absolute poverty line, compared with 16% of urban dwellers. Since more than 85% of the population live in rural areas, any interventions must first and foremost focus on these areas. Statistics show that one of the main ways of reducing poverty in rural areas of Uganda has been the ability to produce and market traditional cash crops, specifically coffee. Households in the food crop sector have experienced only modest rates of poverty reduction compared to those producing cash crops.

The gender dimension of poverty

The principal dimensions of poverty in Uganda include gender, livelihood, location and seasonality. Women have not benefited as much as men from the decreases in poverty noted in recent years. The main reason for this is that, women do not have as many opportunities for social and economic development, particularly in rural areas. Secondly, the division of labour in agriculture in Ugandan rural society is complex. Food production is the domain of women, whereas men in general, concentrate on livestock and cash crops that have greater potential for income generation. Further, women have little control of resources or the incomes realised from sales of products.

In general, women lag behind men in terms of education levels and income earnings. They face barriers in participation in community development activities due to lack of mobilisation, lack of time and failure to see the benefit of their participation. Women may also be discriminated against in land and other production factors. When they are involved in production of crops that generate incomes, they do not benefit from the intra-household sharing of this income.

Women, in general, do not own land, although they have access for growing food. Often the increasing workload of women in cultivating cash crops and the subsequent reduced cultivation and variety of household food crops may in some cases, result in decreasing the welfare of the family although household incomes have increased. Given this scenario, the reduction of household poverty must involve the participation of women in those economic activities in areas that they can have control.

The potential of beekeeping in household poverty reduction

Uganda is endowed with a rich variety of bees e.g. *Apis mellifera scutelatta*, *A. mellifera adansonii*, and *A. mellifera monticola* and several species of stingless bees, that can be exploited, especially by women, for the reduction of household poverty. The exploitation of bees provides a sustainable, environmentally beneficial food and income source for people in Uganda. The estimated honey production is at between 8000 – 9000 tonnes annually. The potential for honey production has not been exploited given the several factors that favour apiary development.

Abundance of natural resources for beekeeping

There is a rich variety of indigenous honeybee populations free of major bee diseases and parasites. This is coupled with an abundance of flowering plants and crops and water to provide the natural resources necessary for successful development of beekeeping as viable economic enterprise.

Indigenous knowledge and skills

Honey hunting and exploitation of honeybees is well understood and has been practiced in time immemorial. There is therefore rich indigenous knowledge and skills that can be easily developed through training. Farmers have hunted for honey and beeswax as a way of obtaining high carbohydrate and protein food with no financial cost. When a buyer is available, this has been a way of poor people quickly obtain cash.

Easy integration in the crop production systems

Crop production in Uganda is compatible with apiculture. Major food crops, which include tree crops, cereals, pulses and spices, benefit from pollination by bees and provide very useful forage sources for the bees. Even more relevant is the fact that, pesticide use is minimal in most crop production systems. This minimises the danger of killing of honeybee populations.

Low technology requirement and ease of processing

There is abundance of traditional management technology, and harvesting and processing skills that have stood the test of time. Low-technology bee keeping can be done near to the homesteads making bee keeping especially suitable for women. Low technology hives can be made from cheap, locally available materials. It is possible to harvest good quality honey and beeswax from local hives. Capacity to meet their costs can be developed by increasing the quality of honey and beeswax, and the possibility of higher yields. Effective processing of honey can be achieved using only simple tools such as a straining cloth and bucket.

No landholding requirement

Apiculture is especially a suitable enterprise for women. In Uganda, it is still possible to site beehives in community held land such as thickets, forests and woodlands. In fact beekeeping does not compete for resources used by other forms of agriculture. This fact allows women, even when they do not command control over land and other production resources, to manage and operate beekeeping enterprises.

Constraints to development of beekeeping

Lack of policy and legislation

Apiculture is for its development under the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries. There is, however, no national policy or relevant legislation relating specifically to the development or promotion of the sub-sector. This means that issues like setting market criteria and quality standards for honey are not under any government control, although there is a project attempting to do this now. The absence of an official policy may be viewed as the greatest constraint to the development of the sub-sector. Interest is now, however, being generated mainly by private sector, projects and NGOs to promote the industry.

Training and information

Most farmers have had no training in beekeeping and there is scant relevant training information available. Effort has focussed on introduction of expensive technology and techniques that are not feasible, especially for women farmers. Information available is to a large extent brought in from outside the country. There is inadequate access to written material on how to use the expensive technologies that have been introduced.

Trainers receive little technical training on beekeeping except whatever they pick-up on the way. Senior technical officers have often received their training in foreign lands and their knowledge and skill are of little relevance to the poor farmers. This is aggravated by the fact that women do not easily have easy access to these professionals or even information.

Quality of honey and beeswax

Traditional harvesting techniques generate a product that is a mixture of honey, broken wax honeycomb, bee larvae and pollen. This product when sold is of low quality and results in farmers losing out on the income that could be obtained if beeswax was processed and sold separately. The quality of the honey and beeswax suffers from the harvesting techniques, but improved construction of beehives and training can, however, allow women to easily harvest good quality honey.

Limited market access

Market access for the beekeeping enterprises is limited by the marketing system that is in place. The middlemen predominate in the marketing of honey, making the supply chain very long. Small poor farmers, especially women, do not receive a fair share of the actual market price. Specific constraints in market access include: the quality and volume of honey harvested by individual farmers; poor road network; absence of standard qualities and prices. There is generally little organised marketing although there are institutions now being put in place for handling honey for the export market.

Limited access to production credit

A shift from traditional beekeeping to making it the profitable enterprise can potentially be, and allow women active involvement; it requires some investment in improved technology, such as improved beehives. Specific resources are needed for this, and there is a general lack of credit opportunity. This constraint is even more critical for women farmers.

Way forward

Light is beginning to appear at the end of a long tunnel for many women farmers who wish to invest in apiculture. The Uganda Government has embarked on a programme for agricultural transformation that is

being guided by the Plan for the Modernisation of Agriculture (PMA). The PMA is designed to drive agriculture away from predominantly subsistence to commercial production.

To attain its goal, the PMA must overcome the key factors undermining agricultural productivity that include among others; poor husbandry, low use of inputs and limited access to technical advice. In addition, profitability of agricultural production has not been realised in spite of specific but modest gains in production that have been achieved. This has resulted from limited access to markets and market information for profitable enterprise selection by farmers.

Implementation of the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS)

The NAADS programme has been developed as a new approach to advisory service (extension) delivery. The fundamental aim of the programme is to develop a demand-driven, farmer-led and private sector serviced agricultural service delivery system particularly targeting the poor and the women. Among its guiding principles are: empowering farmers to take charge of agricultural advisory service provision; targeting agricultural advisory services to the poor men and women farmers who constitute the majority of agricultural producers; mainstreaming gender issues. NAADS is supporting the organisation of farmers into enterprise groups for provision of production advice and market information. It is also assisting them to develop their capacity for organised group marketing.

Implementation of the NAADS programme is planned to assist women farmers who wish to invest in beekeeping to organise into viable and sustainable groups that can then access public funds to procure advisory services that they need. In addition, NAADS will support their group development so that they can market their honey in bulk, negotiate realistic prices with traders and be able to raise tradable volumes of honey and other products. Better farmer organisation in groups has several spin-offs than include contribute to charting the way forward. These include:

- *Development of speciality unifloral honeys* - Women groups involved in bee keeping will need to target production of speciality honeys such as the shea nut honey types in Northern Uganda. This can be promoted and marketed as speciality honeys through the apex apiculture organisation that the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries and NAADS are supporting the formation of.

- *Promotion of organic quality production* - Most of Ugandan honey is produced from nectar originating from organic agricultural production. This provides potential again of marketing the country's honey as organic quality product. Both organic quality and speciality unifloral honey should be marketed at such to get premium prices. Better women farmers' organisation can allow the maintenance of these qualities to ensure the speciality markets.

- *Separation of honey and beeswax* - The implementation of the NAADS programme will assist women farmers' access to the technology and advice required for the processing of honey to allow the separation and marketing of honey and beeswax. This must become the focus of the farmers so as to maximise on the revenue from beekeeping

- *Market organization* - The opportunity that now exists both in the PMA and NAADS component of the PMA must be exploited. Through the farmer groups being formed and strengthened in the NAADS, the marketing of honey and bee products should now be easy to make.

Conclusion

The participation of women in both domestic and national economy is hampered by their often lack of direct control of production assets at the household level. This means that many a time their involvement is only on reproductive activities and they do not have a say in the use of the results of their labour. This greatly curtails their contribution to reduction of household poverty.

Bee keeping provides a good opportunity for women to contribute to reduction of household poverty as this enterprise has no significant requirement on land, which women may have no direct control over.

Implementation of the NAADS programme will play a big role in supporting women groups to organise better for bee keeping as an economic enterprise. In addition, this support will be through increased access to production advice, knowledge and skills as well as organising them for marketing.

The formulation of a national policy to guide and promote apiculture development offers women with a good opportunity to increase their capacity to contribute to the reduction of household poverty and the advancement of household incomes.

The formation of a beekeepers national apex body is a requirement to ensure that, issues of quality and marketing of honey and bee products are brought to the forefront and benefit all producers including women. The NAADS programme can support women's groups' participation in such an apex body.

Current initiatives by Government provide the much-needed support to women to access factors of production such as credit, to open up the way for them to invest in productivity and quality enhancing technologies for profitable bee keeping.

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¹MAAIF = Ministry of Agriculture, animal Industry and Fisheries.

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