





Achieving success with beekeeping development

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Achieving success with beekeeping development

- Aid or development?
- Apiculture is not a simple field
- Projects focus too much on technology delivery
- Beekeepers' constraints are diverse
- Transition from *subsistence beekeeping* to *beekeeping as a business* is crucial
- Trade and development can become tangled
- Characteristics of successful projects
- And nobody reports failures....

- Most of the world's poorest people practise subsistence agriculture
- Many of these people are beekeepers or honey hunters
- Therefore many of us in the 'bee world' are motivated to assist



Aid – is a quick fix – rapid assistance

For example:

- Food to flood victims
- Shelter for people made homeless by earthquake



Aid – is a quick fix

For example:

- Giving cash
- Food in times of famine
- Shelter for those made homeless by earthquake

Development – is long term change

For example:

- Access to credit
- Ensuring food security
- Government housing programmes

Aid – is a quick fix – rapid assistance

Example of BfD beekeeping aid:

- Provision of hives to beekeepers in Chile following Chaitén volcano



Development – is slow, long term assistance

Helping
beekeepers to
move from
subsistence
beekeeping to
significant
income
generation



Aid – is a quick fix – rapid assistance



*In some cases,
beekeeping
projects are
providing 'aid'
when what is
needed is
'development'*

Empty hives – a common sight in some places

Confusion between - beekeeping aid -
and beekeeping development



Providing equipment and a brief training does not move poor people out of subsistence agriculture and poverty

Selling small volumes of honey



- Beekeepers are often poor and remote
- Honey provides a 'safety net' in times of need
- How to change this into beekeeping as a business?

The apiculture world is not simple



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Subsistence beekeeping
is characterised by:

- Local bees
- Local methods
- Many beekeepers
- An extensive system
- Highly sustainable
- Cost effective: 'traditional' systems may seem unproductive and unreliable at the level of a single hive, but viewed as an extensive system, they are efficient, low risk and cost-effective.

Extensive beekeeping



- Hives are simple, cheap and effective – this allows beekeepers to have many hives
- Indigenous honey bee populations – healthy and evolving
- No medicines or chemicals used
- Minimal manipulation and management
- Bees swarm and migrate as they need
- Bees live as they would naturally

Extensive beekeeping

Sustainable beekeeping is well exemplified by tropical beekeeping systems. Sustainable:

- For the individual honey bee colony
- For the whole honey bee population





Conventional, globalised beekeeping,
is frame-hive beekeeping with
Apis mellifera honey bees.

The apiculture world is not simple



Industrial beekeeping is intensive

- Based on *Apis mellifera*, exotic bees (in Asia)
- Global methods
- Large numbers of bees and colonies, kept close together
- An intensive system
- Cost effective on a large scale
- Sustainable?



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Globalised, intensive beekeeping

Frames and boxes give the
beekeeper control over the
colony

The focus is at the level of
the colony - not on the
whole honey bee population



The apiculture world is not simple

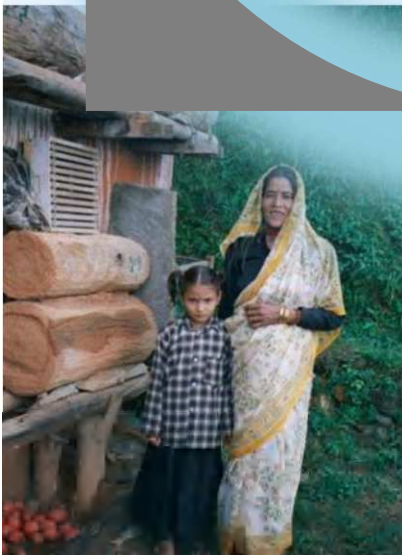
Subsistence beekeeping

- Local bees
- Local methods
- Many beekeepers
- An extensive system
- Sustainable
- Cost effective
- Bees are indigenous - beekeepers are utilising part of a much larger, natural bee population



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Apiculture development

Is made difficult by continued confusion between extensive and intensive beekeeping systems, and poor understanding of extensive systems:

- Most texts refer to beekeeping with European races of *Apis mellifera*
- Most experts are expert in intensive, globalised, ‘*melliferised*’ beekeeping
- Intensive is regarded as ‘modern’
- Extensive is named ‘traditional’
- Yet the poorest, most remote people, are likely to be practising extensive beekeeping, low cost and effective

Many beekeeping projects have failed.
Too often – donated hives remain empty



There can be good business in hive and
equipment provision to projects



The developing world is full of honey processing plants like this - not working



- Emphasis on “modern” , imported technology
- Emphasis on increasing production per hive
- Packing plants remain empty - honey volumes remain low, because market systems do not work

Nobody likes a failure



- Unsuccessful projects tend not to be reported
- It is only after the project has closed that the lack of success is evident - to those who are interested
- Often the beekeepers are blamed
- Many donors have become fatigued with beekeeping projects

Project planners, donors, government departments

- It is not easy to assist people who are poor and remote
- PMAs [Plans for Modernisation of Agriculture]
- Capital inputs are easy to deliver, and provide fast, tangible, visible evidence of support
- Globalised methods appear easy to provide – standard inputs (bees, equipment, know how)
- And one bee can look much like another..



Why do projects persist in focussing on equipment delivery? –This approach rarely brings significant benefits.

- Poor situation analysis – planners believe (wrongly) that provision of equipment is the key intervention point for ‘commercialising’ and ‘modernising’ apiculture

Sustainable, but subsistence



**Beekeeping
contributes
to the
livelihoods
of thousands
of poor
households**

How to make the transformation from beekeeping at subsistence level to beekeeping as a business?

**Subsistence to business is a paradigm shift:
beekeepers need help to make it**



**I can produce honey,
but there is no market**



Market access challenges



**We can produce
honey, but there is no
market**

The problem was perceived to be “poor market”
The real problem is a lack of a functioning
market chain.



**There are no
intermediate traders**



Selling more honey means finding new markets.

This places new demands on beekeepers to organise and meet market quality expectations.



Local markets

| Advantages | Disadvantages |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easy• Low market requirements• No overheads and marketing costs• Cash sales• High profit margins per kg | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Few customers• Little money• Customers are also beekeepers• The total volume sold remains low |

Distant markets

Advantages

- Many customers
- High volume of sales
- Some “special” market opportunities e.g. organic

Disadvantages

- Quality demands are high
- Volume demands are high
- Regulatory hurdles

In poor areas, the business environment (credit, infrastructure, inputs, reliable data) is weak.

- This makes the transition from subsistence to business difficult
- Beekeepers lack information about the market, trends, and other stakeholders.
- They take decisions without good information.



Poor project logic

- Many projects help to sell produce on behalf of beekeepers
 - Unsustainable
 - Hidden subsidies
 - Unfair to other entrepreneurs
- Projects recommend beekeepers to market their own produce
 - May not be cost effective
 - Beekeepers often inexperienced at trade – how to cost and price
 - Beekeepers often lack contacts and know-how
 - Cash flow issues arise



Consider issues of market access

Producer organisations are crucial for beekeepers to engage profitably in the market chain

They must be:

- Business focussed
- Main objective is collective marketing
- Producer owned and managed

BUT costs must be kept low or the organisation will fail



Uganda honey trade 2008-2014

- Long term development project funded by Comic Relief
- Making market chains work

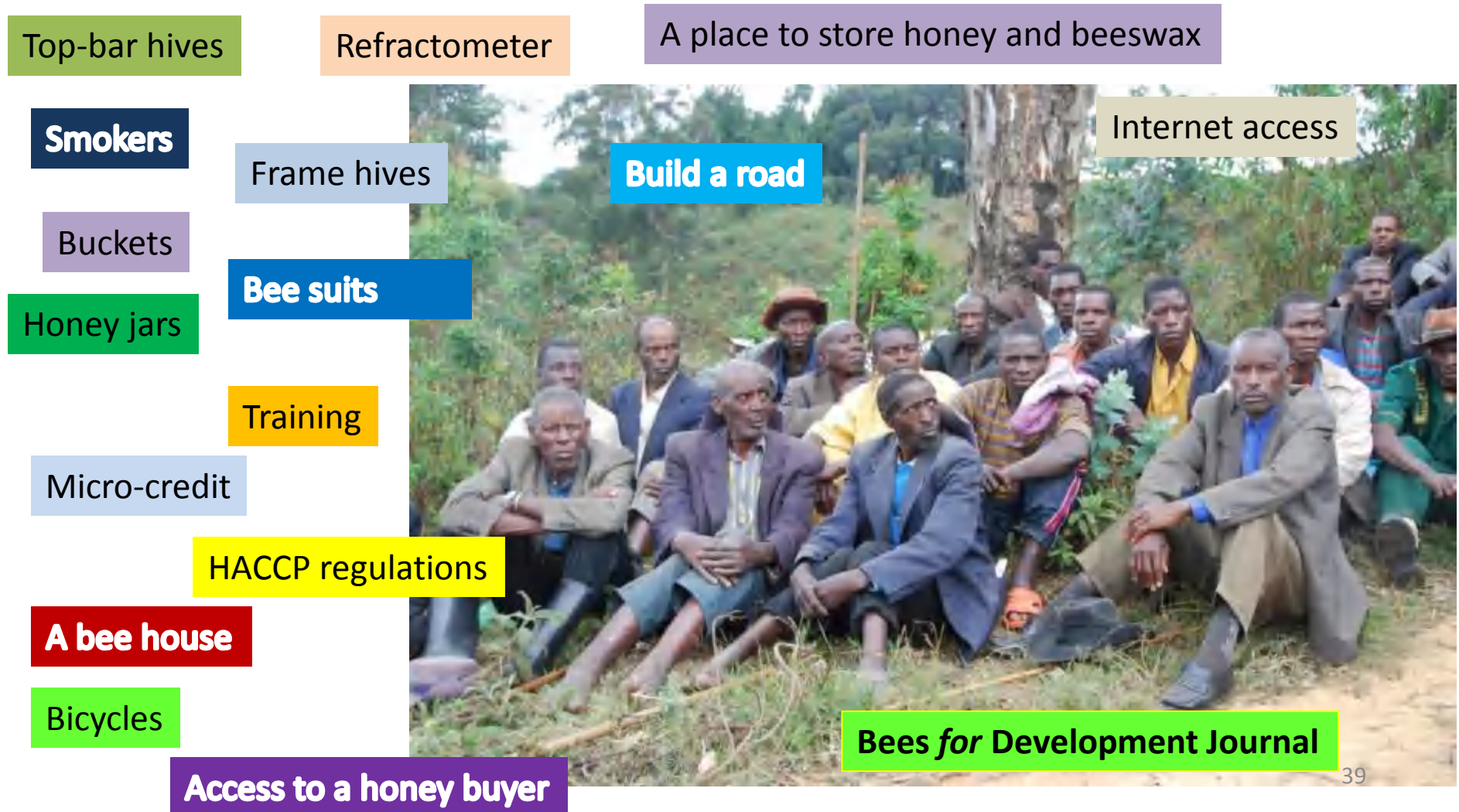


Beekeepers constraints are diverse



Is beekeeping a feasible route out of poverty?

- What is the best way to help these beekeepers?





Recommendation 1

Identify the true constraints facing
beekeepers

1. Biological?
2. Technical?
3. Institutional?
4. Financial?
5. Market?

And find out what
interventions have
taken place
already





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Beekeeping is an effective way for poor people to strengthen their livelihoods and fight poverty. Bees for Development provides information to assist them.

We work at the heart of an international network of people and organisations involved with apiculture in developing countries.

African Beekeeping Information Portal

Our new African Beekeeping Information Portal is now open on this site. There are hundreds of new pages and reference materials, and we will be adding more over the coming months. Take a look, and do let us know what you think. We welcome your suggestions and recommendations.

This new service has been made possible with funding from the Wales for Africa Fund of the Welsh Assembly Government and the Rowse Family Trust.



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Our aim is to assist people living in poor countries to achieve sustainable livelihoods through beekeeping. [More information.](#)



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A valuable and regular source of information, up-to-date news and experiences about apiculture worldwide. [More information.](#)



Network Centre

Contact members of the global beekeeping community to share knowledge and experiences. [More information.](#)



Information Portal

A gateway to the largest range of beekeeping information relating to developing countries. [More information.](#)



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Recommendation 2

Use local bees wherever possible

‘Local bees’ may be:

1. Indigenous species
2. Indigenous races
3. Locally adapted races of exotic bees

Because:

local bees are adapted to their environment

No risk of importing pathogens

Use local bees wherever possible

- This may mean that you are working with honey hunters rather than beekeepers





Recommendation 3

Gain knowledge of local bee biology and behaviour

Learn about local bees' nesting, swarming, migration and absconding behaviour

Tropical honey bees have biology and behaviour different from temperate zone races of honey bees



Recommendation 4

Never ignore local apicultural skills

Understand the knowledge of local beekeepers - their management of bee colonies may be better than first appears



Recommendation 5

Understand the issues around
technology choice

Consider:

1. Paradigm shift
2. Risk minimisation





Bees for Development



Technology choice: the best hive is one that is:

- appropriate for the biology and behaviour of bees being housed inside it
- appropriate for the resources available to the beekeeper
- facilitates good care of the colony
- enables efficient honey and beeswax harvest
- takes into consideration the behaviour of local pests and predators
- is suitable for the prevailing climate



Moving from subsistence to commercial beekeeping requires many changes

- Skills in harvesting and post-harvest handling to ensure high quality products
- A market
- Market access
- A beekeeping system in which costs are less than income
- A business approach to beekeeping

Recommendation 6

Be prepared to invest in training and follow-up support

1. It takes two years to train a beekeeper
2. Trainers must know more than beekeeping. They must provide also business skills to run the apiculture enterprise

Recommendation 8

Understand the issues around honey quality

1. The best quality honey is in the bees' nest
2. Excellent handling is of utmost importance



Honey *quality* means different things:

The principle of maintaining honey just as the bees perfected it, *or*

- ‘Quality’ according to defined standards and market criteria, e.g. national or EU criteria
- ‘Quality’ according to the consumer’s personal preference: taste, colour, consistency
- ‘Quality’ of the shelf product: good packaging and labelling

Recommendation 9

Fully explore and saturate the domestic market before considering export. Add value to products.

1. Create niche products by telling the story of their production
2. Create secondary products



Recommendation 10

Aim to build a business that is sustainable in every aspect



Beekeeping projects must not subsidise honey production or trade



BfD's ten recommendations for successful beekeeping development

1. Identify the true constraints facing beekeepers
2. Use local bees wherever possible
3. Gain knowledge of local bee biology and behaviour
4. Never ignore local apicultural skills
5. Understand the issues around technology choice
6. Be prepared to invest in training & follow-up support
7. Consider issues of market access
8. Understand the issues around honey quality
9. Add value to products. Fully explore and saturate the domestic market before considering export
10. Aim to build a business that is sustainable in every aspect

What was the best way to help these beekeepers in Rwanda?

Top-bar hives

Refractometer

A place to store honey and beeswax

Smokers

Frame hives

Build a road

Internet access

Buckets

Bee suits

Honey jars

Training

Micro-credit

HACCP regulations

A bee house

Bicycles

Access to a honey buyer



Bees for Development Journal

Access rights to Nyungwe forest





*A glimpse of beekeeping in the
developing world -
feasible, sustainable and should be
profitable*

www.beesfordevelopment.org

