**BEEKEEPING AND PLANTATION AGRICULTURE** Alternative livelihoods for farmers

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Busho Serenity Foundation is an NGO working in south western Nigeria. Its work covers development projects with marginalised members of the communities.

The area is a trans-forest zone, with an alarming rate of desertification. The thin forest ecology is fast getting replaced by pure savannah. Persistent cultivation and poor management of land and forest resources are rampant, with an increase in the emergence of spear grass. The area continuously suffers from bush burning. Although this destroys vegetation and threatens the biodiversity, the area still supports various trees and shrubs that are good sources of bee forage. The main occupation is farming with many farmers engaged in root and tuber crop production of yams and cassava. Traditional beekeeping does not exist, but there is seasonal honey hunting, particularly in the months before the onset of rainfall (December-March). Honey is widely consumed and it serves cultural roles in various ceremonies including marriages and christenings. Honey marketing provides an opportunity for the few women who engage in trade across neighbouring villages and states, where honey is sourced during scarcity. Wax processing is non-existent; combs are thrown away after pressing out honey. This method of honey collection means destruction of the bee colonies with fire. The major discouragement to beekeeping is the well-held fear of the bee sting.

**Funding**

In 2003, the Foundation sought support from **Bees for Development** for organising a beekeeping workshop in the guinea savannah area of Ondo State. This request was granted and a **Resource Box** was received containing copies of **BfD Journal**, leaflets and demonstration charts. Since the receipt of the **Resource Box**, effort was geared towards sourcing financial support to conduct the Workshop, as the Foundation is young and lacks a financial base for executing its projects. Eventually, help came in February 2005 with a philanthropist providing financial assistance. This was used to procure beekeeping kits and materials including smokers, bee suits, veils, gloves; to provide the materials to construct a model top-bar hive for demonstration; and in the creation of a pilot training apiary. The fund also provided all the Workshop participants with a seminar pack and light refreshment.

**Workshop**

Our Workshop in March aimed to sensitise and train participants in the basic techniques of beekeeping and plantation agriculture. There were 21 participants: four women and 17 men from Iyani, Ibaram, Gedegede, and Ajowa, including retired school teachers, in-service teachers, farmers, and students from both higher institutions of learning and those in secondary education.

Participants were taken through the socio-economic importance of beekeeping, the products of beekeeping as well as hints on how to start, siting an apiary, and basic hive management. The training covered aspects of beekeeping such as honey production, processing, packaging and marketing and processing of wax. The first session was followed by a demonstration - see picture below left - and discussions around the demonstration charts (picture next page). The second session gave a comprehensive illustration on the importance of plantation agriculture for fruit trees as a complimentary enterprise to beekeeping for enhancing income and other benefits.

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