APICULTURE AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN CAMEROON

Part II: Successful co-operatives

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In BfDJ79 the authors introduced the beekeeping situation in Cameroon. Here they describe their research findings.

Introduction

The objective of our study, carried out over a period of six months (Nuesiri & Fombad, 2005), was to obtain a baseline understanding of beekeeping groups in the Cameroon Highlands eco-region and their contribution to biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. Research methods included literature review and semi-structured interviews.

Apicultural initiatives

Two successful, local groups are at the forefront of apicultural initiatives in the region:

Apiculture and Nature Conservation Organisation (ANCO) Bamenda, NWP

ANCO was formed in 1992 and was known as the North West Beeparmers' Association (NOWEBA). Its goal is to promote conservation bee farming, market bee products and alleviate poverty in the rural North West Province of Cameroon. In 2002, it changed its name to Apiculture and Nature Conservation Organisation. The founder and director is Paul Mzeka. ANCO has two principal areas of intervention: apicultural training and nature conservation. The group's motto is 'plant a tree and save a bee'. ANCO sensitises the communities in which it works to shun the destructive practice of using bush fires when carrying out harvesting of honey from the wild, and actively encourages afforestation with emphasis on melliferous plants.

The group is a co-operative made up of smaller groups and does not allow individual membership. ANCO targets groups consisting of unemployed youths and women (the latter were barred from honey harvesting in the recent past). It has 230 local community groups who provide the head office with honey for sale. Working with rural community groups to achieve its goals, ANCO has trained over 2,955 bee farmers and 44 local experts' suitable as community trainers. Despite a fair amount of financial support from a number of international sources, ANCO still faces the following constraints: Lack of capacity building for new staff; Lack of transportation facilities which necessitates the use of hired transport with its attendant risks and delays; Lack of financial resources to invest in strengthening the co-operative because external funding has been piecemeal and small.

Despite these constraints, ANCO is the most well known beekeeping co-operative in the Cameroon Highlands, and ANCO's honey is marketed in all the major cities in Cameroon's forest region including Yaoundé and Douala.

Beekeeping, Development and Conservation (BDC) Limbé, SWP

Terence Njuskom formed BDC, in 2002 at the end of the DFID-funded Mt Cameroon Project Limbé. Terence had worked as the beekeeping expert, and took up the challenge of promoting beekeeping and conservation in the region at the end of the project. BDC's mission is that by 2008 the communities in and around the Cameroon mountains ecosystem range are efficiently carrying out beekeeping with consequent improvements in livelihoods, biodiversity conservation and alleviation of poverty. BDC's motto is 'more trees, more bees, more honey, more money, more happiness'. Specific objectives include: To build the capacities of communities and improve livelihoods; To establish beekeeping as an alternative to destructive use of natural resources; To promote the transformation and marketing of apicultural products and equipment; To create an apicultural research, demonstration and information unit.

BDC on average sells 13,000 litres of honey per year, generating an annual income of US$60,000 (£46,200). Located in rented premises within the Limbé Botanic Garden, with five permanent staff, one motorcycle and one vehicle, BDC works with local community beekeeping groups. BDC maintains that it cannot meet the local market demand for honey. Micro-financing has been received from Cameroon's National Employment Fund, GTZ and Cameroon's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. BDC trains groups and individuals on bee farming and in turn buys their honey and markets it. Constraints experienced by BDC include inadequate training, lack of finance for purchase of beekeeping equipment, poor government support and lack of funding for local research.

Other beekeeping organisations of note include:

- Belo Rural Development Project (BERUDEP) Bamenda was founded in 1997 by Simon Nyawainmbi and trains local communities in NWP
- Rural Development through Apiculture (RUDA) Limbé was formed in 2002 and trains local communities in the Mount Cameroon region.
- YaDIKWA Honey is a private business venture set up in 1998 by Yahyah Divine Kwa.

Nurturing apiculture in Cameroon

Cameroon's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, the nation's current development blueprint, places a strong emphasis on diversifying the nation's economy. It notes that one of the principal ways of doing this is by providing financial, infrastructural and institutional support to agric-business initiatives in rural areas. In its implementation, the emphasis has been on providing farmers with improved varieties of seeds, opening up farms to market roads, and supporting micro credit schemes. There is little in the Paper that targets the development of alternative income-generating sectors such as apiculture. There is a need to address this oversight if the beekeeping sector is to fulfil its potential of alleviating poverty while conserving the natural resource base. Governmental support is a required catalyst for private investors to invest in apiculture. To obtain Government commitment, the apiculture community has to show that the sector can make significant contribution to the Government's efforts in reducing poverty. The starting point would be a study on apiculture production and consumption in Cameroon.

A study of this kind would provide quantitative evidence on the viability of the sector, and guidance as to how best to intervene for optimal results. In addition, there is need for technical capacity building of practitioners in the sector. This can be best achieved by the setting up of an apiculture research institute in the country. This could be an independent institute or a sub department in any of Cameroon's science based research institutions. Furthermore dedicated micro credit schemes targeted at beekeepers should be established. This will help provide venture capital to groups such as ANCO and BDC who wish to diversify their product base. While African countries such as Kenya have begun exporting honey, Cameroon remains a net importer of honey.

REFERENCES

BIRDLIFE (2003) Birdlife and Cameroon Work to Protect Nations Rich Biodiversity [online]


