**BEE PRODUCTS IN ETHIOPIA**

Ethiopia is a regional leader in bee product business development. It far exceeds other countries in Africa in terms of volumes of honey and beeswax harvested and traded, and levels of investment in the formal sector. However stakeholders in Ethiopia know that there is more to be done to develop the sector into a robust industry offering significant income-generating opportunities.

**The way forward**

The Ethiopian Honey and Beeswax Producers and Exporters Association hosted the ‘Developing Business in Bee-products: The Way Forward’ Seminar and Workshop, from 16-18 January, at the International Livestock Research Institute in Addis Ababa. The focus of the meeting was to find ways to develop a progressive and sustainable industry, able to harness the full opportunities of the market place. Participants came from Ethiopia, other African countries and Europe, and included bee product development specialists, business women and men, and people experienced in organic and fair-trade certification.

Ethiopia produces significant quantities of honey with estimates ranging from 24,600\(^1\) to 43,000\(^2\) tonnes per year. Uncertainty about the exact figure is inevitable given that data is collected irregularly and the majority of the honey trade is informal. 95% of production is by means of local methods, and beekeepers use a range of materials to make hives. It is typical to find colonies housed in clay pots, baskets and hives made from grass and bamboo. The vast majority of all honey harvested goes to make Tej, Ethiopian honey wine, and it is clear that the demand for this wine is driving the honey industry. Beeswax is also harvested, and an estimated 3,000 tonnes are exported each year.

**Market development**

There is interest to develop the market for table honey with a view to meeting domestic demand, and for export. Private investment in processing and packing plants is impressive, and participants witnessed the fruits of this investment at the ‘Ethio-Millennium Agro Industry Fair’ taking place during the same week as the Workshop. Nearly a dozen different honey companies displayed high quality products with excellent packaging and labelling. SOS Sahel, an Ethiopian NGO, has been helping beekeepers in Amhara Region to set up local collection centres to increase marketing efficiency, and honey from these co-operatives is also sold as table honey.

Bees for Development has been playing an advisory role to this project for many years and it is gratifying to see the successful outcomes of this work. The current within-country trade in table honey is estimated to be less than 500 tonnes. The sector is also being supported by the SNV BOAM Initiative which is working to increase the sustainability and profitability of the honey and beeswax value chain, through a range of strategic intervention areas.

**Workshop programme**

Day One of the Workshop consisted of a series of informative presentations discussing the status of the Ethiopian honey industry, how to set up internal control systems for certification purposes, current trends in the UK honey market, and how to design development interventions through value chain analysis. Day Two consisted of a series of panel sessions with questions and answers, followed by working group discussions. On the final day, Ethiopian stakeholders met to formulate a strategy for further development, building on discussions from the first two days.

**Further action**

A summary of the Workshop deliberations emphasised that domestic, regional and export markets remain untapped and inaccessible to Ethiopian businesses. The Residue Monitoring Plan (due to be submitted in March 2007) will open the way for export to the EU. There remains much work to be done in product promotion and development. The Workshop urged the government to support the sector with research, outreach and the provision of technical support. However success lies with the perseverance of the private sector to overcome challenges and interventions, and initiatives should be encouraged.

Lessons can also be learned from the coffee sector, where co-operatives are successful in empowering producers, while at the same time being commercially oriented. The importance of establishing a sector-wide co-ordinating trade body was also recognised. Finally, building traceability into the supply chain, and strict adherence to quality standards is essential for the sector to gain credibility.

**The Workshop was funded by the SNV Support to Business Organisation Access to Markets (BOAM) Programme, SOS Sahel Ethiopia, Irish Aid and Cordaid.**

Bees for Development acknowledges the sponsors and the Ethiopian Honey and Beeswax Producers and Exports Association for enabling Janet Lowore’s participation in the Workshop.

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1 Seminar and Workshop Background and Introduction Document, 2007
2 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ethiopia, 2007