

20 Making Money from Honey: Linking Rural Ugandan Women with Export Markets

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Background

This chapter is based on research in Uganda undertaken by a team of researchers from the New School University, New York, during the summer of 2005 (Nadelman *et al.*, 2005; Carr *et al.*, 2007). At that time, the Uganda Export Promotion Board (UEPB) was about to implement a strategy that aimed to increase honey production from the 2004 level of 3,000 metric tons to 13,000 metric tons by 2008 and to simultaneously improve quality with a view to breaking into rapidly expanding export markets. The country has progressed since 2005, increasing production to 5,000 metric tons, but has fallen far short of its goal (Kasozi and Kato, 2009). Fully realising this goal, while only a small step towards achieving Uganda's annual production potential of over 500,000 metric tons of honey, will still require attracting an additional 200,000 farmers into beekeeping. This target will be difficult to achieve without the full involvement of women.

At the time of the research, there were several approaches available to the Government in support of increasing women's beekeeping practices and improving the quality and production of bee products. Of the several potential approaches covered in the research study, two are highlighted here:

1. *Providing support to strengthen women's beekeeping co-operatives by linking with agricultural support services, training and savings and credit programmes.* There were already several of these small-scale production enterprises, although their number was still limited. However, many of them showed evidence of an ability to produce significant supplies of good quality honey, as well to innovate with new processes and products. There was also evidence that these women-owned community-based organisations (CBOs) could link with global markets. Once established, they seemed to have the potential to give members a great deal of control over their own enterprises, thus contributing towards the UEPB's production and export goals, while increasing women's empowerment and ability to control their livelihoods and build assets.

2. *Assisting with the expansion and replication of successful commercial companies that source honey from small-scale farmers (including women) and turn it into high quality product in a central, highly mechanised factory.* There was only one such company operating effectively at the time of the research and this was showing good promise of breaking into export markets. Several measures to address specific training and other needs of women were incorporated into the company's operations. However, while it provided income for rural women, this model seems unlikely to provide women farmers with any control over their participation in the production chain.

A variety of approaches were found between these two ends of the spectrum, including socially owned businesses in which members have shares and that employ staff and cover their own administrative costs from profits. Although they are similar to community-based organisations (CBOs) in that they are member-owned, they are much more formal and share some of the characteristics of private sector companies.

This case study looks at the experiences of a women's co-operative, the Kitgum Women Beekeepers Association, and a commercial company, Bee Natural Products, with a view to examining the potential for up-scaling each as part of an attempt to achieve the dual goals of reaching the Ugandan Government's export promotion goals, and reducing poverty among women producers and building women's empowerment.

Women in beekeeping

First, however, it is useful to review some basic issues involving women in beekeeping in general and in Uganda in particular.

While wild beehives have been harvested by men in Africa for centuries as a means of supplementing food supplies and income, changes in the industry have far-ranging implications for women's economic empowerment. First, there is a sizeable and growing market in North America, Europe and Japan for honey and other bee products, along with many other non-timber forest products. In many cases, there are also large and untapped domestic and regional markets for such products.

Second, many new production and processing technologies have been developed that can significantly increase output of honey and other bee products and improve quality to meet international standards. In addition to enabling African countries to respond to increased demand in export markets, these technological changes also offer the possibility for farmers to contribute to household income on a more significant basis through beekeeping enterprises. For example, research in Bolivia and Mexico shows that NTFPs

can represent either a ‘safety net’ activity in times of crisis or a gap-filling activity that can be carried out on a more regular basis and contribute 7–95 per cent of household income (Marshall *et al.*, 2006).

Third, the introduction of new technologies has been accompanied by efforts on behalf of governments, development agencies and NGOs to increase the involvement of women in the industry to improve growth and reduce rural poverty. Since the early 1970s, thousands of improved or non-traditional beehives and associated processing technologies have been introduced to women’s groups in Africa and elsewhere in the South with mixed results. More recently, however, there has been a switch in approach with both governments and NGOs seeking to integrate women equally with men into mainstream plans and programmes for expanding the output and export of apiculture products in response to growing domestic, regional and international demand.

Women and beekeeping in Uganda

There are a number of factors that make Uganda particularly interesting for an exploration of the potential of beekeeping for women farmers and their ability to link with export markets. They include the following:

- Gender-sensitive policies and strategies for the reduction of poverty in rural areas – such as Uganda’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP)⁴⁴ – have as their central goal raising the incomes of rural producers. As part of this they aim to modernise agriculture, where the majority of the poor (especially women) are concentrated, and to promote equal access to land and other assets (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2000).
- There is a favourable trade environment for the export of honey and other bee products, including the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which allows free import of products from Uganda into the USA; the award of a licence to export honey to the EU; and an ambitious apiculture export strategy for 2005–2009 developed by the UEPB and the Uganda National Apiculture Development Organization (TUNADO).
- There is increased government investment in agricultural support services, including National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) launched in 2002.⁴⁵ Funded by public and private sources, NAADS supports increased agricultural productivity and profitability through a demand-driven, farmer-led agriculture service delivery system targeted at subsistence farmers.

- Women are under-represented in apiculture compared to other agricultural sectors (20 per cent compared with 70 per cent), thus representing a huge potential for expansion.

Opportunities and constraints for Ugandan women beekeepers

Although the overall environment for increasing women's involvement in beekeeping seems promising, in practice women face several constraints – especially when it comes to entering export markets.

Beekeeping has traditionally been an independent or family activity in Uganda and is monopolised by men. The structure of the industry has been changing, however, as a result of the availability of new technology and also a new focus on organising both women and men in beekeeping groups or associations. In 2005, the numbers of organised beekeepers involved in these enterprises varied from 3,900 (private companies) to several hundred in the case of associations and/or CBOs, and 20–30 in individual groups. Although more women farmers are becoming involved as a result of these changes, they still represent a low proportion (less than 20 per cent on average) of the members of groups and associations.

Socio-cultural factors play a major role in this low participation of women. These relate specifically to apiculture, as well as to women's involvement in enterprise activities more generally. One reason beekeeping has historically been seen as a man's activity is because retrieving wild nests for harvesting involves climbing trees, an activity taboo for women. Although new models such as Top Bar and Langstroth hives enable both colonisation and harvesting to be done at ground level, thus in theory making beekeeping much more accessible to women producers, the cost of equipment and hives (and women's more limited access than men to credit and to training in new techniques) still hamper women's full participation in beekeeping.

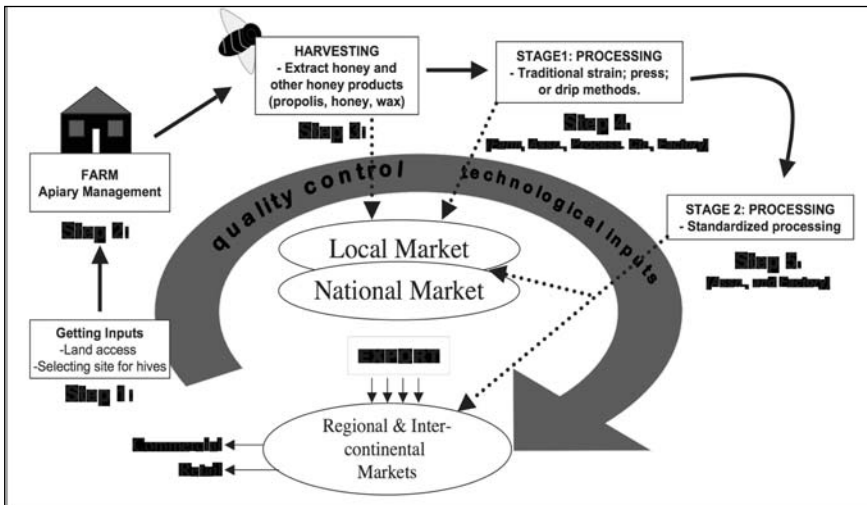
Women's time poverty is a further constraint. It restricts their ability to attend meetings which can provide initial information about beekeeping and to travel away from home to attend training courses. Additionally, the best time for harvesting is normally in the evenings when the bees are less active, and this is when women are particularly busy with family commitments.

Even if women overcome the constraints of starting a beekeeping enterprise, once they are involved they find that it provides only a supplemental source of income. This income can be critical – for example, helping cover school fees or providing stability during emergency periods – but does not provide enough to sustain overall livelihoods. In a country where the average income per annum is around US\$250, average incomes from beekeeping recorded in the case studies vary from around \$2–80 per farmer or household.

In order for women to move beekeeping from a supplemental to a primary income source, they would have to increase the quality and quantity of honey production and diversify their products. However, there are several obstacles to achieving this, including lack of credit, technology, training and information.

In addition, women are often confined to the less skilled activities along the bee product value chain (see Figure 20.1), such as clearing ground for the hives, providing water and primary level honey processing (using traditional methods). Women’s activities are primarily focused on Step 1 (obtaining inputs), Step 2 (apiary management) and Step 4, Stage 1 (product processing), all areas where there are no direct returns or financial rewards; this results in lower returns for women than for men.

Figure 20.1 The bee product value chain



Source: Nadelman *et al.*, 2005

Organising structures and interventions

Organisation of some type is essential for individual farmers to move beyond traditional beekeeping – and vital for moving from local production to production for export.

Membership in self-help groups, producer associations or community co-operatives can enable women beekeepers to access key assets to improve their production, including obtaining loans for hives and shared processing technologies; bulk purchase of inputs; training and information to ensure product quality; bridging information gaps; linkages with consumers; and

identification of new market niches (Shreckenber *et al.*, 2006). Alternatively, women can become contract farmers/beekeepers for the private commercial sector and earn at least some income from the sale of their honey to a central source.

As shown by the following examples, the Kitgum Women Beekeepers Association (KWBA) and Bee Natural Products (BNP) Ltd, the ways in which women are integrated into the bee product supply chain varies considerably. In particular, there are notable differences in women's ability to influence the balance of power and returns within the supply chain – both between themselves and male beekeepers, and between themselves and buyers and retailers.

Experiences linking women with export markets

Kitgum Women Beekeepers Association

KWBA has involved women in the entire value chain, diversifying products and coping with internal tension from gender issues and external tension from ongoing conflict that has plagued the region for 20 years.⁴⁶ In addition, its leader has taken the first steps towards linking with export markets by leveraging funds to attend international trade fairs and specialist meetings.

Margaret Ogaba established the KWBA in 1995 in the belief that women working together would have a better chance of success in beekeeping than women working alone. The Association has been able to provide a supplementary income to many women who face challenges related to HIV and AIDS, as well as increased burdens and isolation resulting from the conflict. KWBA has grown into a well-known organisation and has been strategic by tapping into membership connections to access government-supported training and support programmes such as NAADS, which has funded it to extend its membership and to provide training to other groups and associations in Kitgum. In 2005, KWBA recruited and trained 150 beekeepers under the NAADS programme with the goal of reaching and training between 500 and 600 beekeepers.

KWBA has also received support from other domestic and international sources, such as advanced hives from the UEPB, equipment and supplies from the British High Commission and harvest and quality-control training from German donors. It has also leveraged funds to support growth, both from the Government, through 'gender-mainstreaming policies', and from NGOs, which have supported the integration of women in sector strategies. The exposure and the ideas accrued at trade fairs and specialist meetings have enabled KWBA to diversify and be at the cutting edge of the beekeeping industry. The experience has also been put to wider use throughout Uganda. For example, Ms Ogaba has worked with the Ministry of Agri-

culture on a 12-week informative radio programme to disseminate information on beekeeping.

Challenges for KWBA

KWBA has faced many internal and external challenges. Internally, it has struggled with gender dynamics, including conflicts between members and their husbands who have tried to restrict women's participation. Ms Ogaba has tackled this problem by drawing on her experiences during training in Denmark, where all family members are invited to join enterprises to prevent feelings of exclusion and resentment. With husbands invited to join their wives in KWBA, family tensions have been reduced and productivity has increased.

Externally, the conflict continually threatens production. Just a few years ago, KWBA was producing three tons of honey a year, but by 2005 this had fallen because it was no longer safe for members to reach their hives. Women who had moved to refugee camps were having particular difficulty in traveling, and their hives were subject to theft by rebels throughout the year. The group handled the loss by developing honey-added and value-added products such as groundnut-honey spread, furniture polish and beeswax candles. This solution has allowed KWBA to stay in business and expand production in ways that will provide sustainable incomes even while the conflict continues.

To make up for lost production, KWBA has turned to purchasing honey from local farmers for processing and sale. Still, at times they cannot purchase as much as they could process because they lack available cash to pay the farmers and, although they are trying to build a loan programme with the local village bank, usually they cannot access loans to cover purchases until they sell the final product.

Although the Association has several well-educated members, many have minimal education and are hampered by illiteracy. While beekeeping itself does not require reading skills, training and technical information tends to be available only in written form, while important business activities like accounting and record-keeping are beyond the capabilities of members. This barrier prevents these women from improving their practice and moving into more lucrative beekeeping activities.

Bee Natural Products

BNP is a private company that provides farmers in the West Nile region with training, a guaranteed market, harvesting services, loan programmes for hives, 'farm-gate' purchasing and immediate payment. Yet the high quality standards that qualify BNP for export and its advanced processing systems

mean that the majority of women (and men) remain at the bottom of the value chain with little ability for advancement or greater income generation beyond selling raw materials.

BNP was founded in 2002 as a private company with a vision of building a sustainable industry that would have ‘social and economic benefits for poor rural communities’.⁴⁷ Located in Uganda’s West Nile region, BNP brings a viable industry and economic opportunities to an impoverished area, while also taking advantage of the region’s natural habitat that is favourable for the production of honey and other bee products. Designed to compete with international honey production, the Arua-based factory has a full annual capacity of 600 metric tons, utilises cutting-edge processing technology and evaluates all production according to internationally determined health and quality standards.

BNP has changed the landscape of beekeeping in Uganda. Initially, BNP procured honey from a group of 126 traditional beekeepers, but by 2005 it was buying honey from over 4,000 farmers (25 per cent women) and operating in five West Nile districts. The number of active beekeepers has continued to increase annually, with an estimated 6,300 in operation in 2007. BNP is credited with having fostered the conditions for this significant annual growth and is thought to contract with a majority of these beekeepers. While most contracted bee farmers only provide BNP with raw bee products, there are some opportunities for advancement by becoming assistant and lead farmers who harvest for and train other beekeepers. As of 2005, eight women had been hired as lead farmers in three of the districts, which increased both their earning ability and their status within the community. Besides farming activities, BNP offers employment in the Arua factory, where it employs 45 workers. Women comprise 60 per cent of the factory staff, but most work seasonally, sorting and packing the honey and very few are in full-time managerial positions.

BNP is unique among bee product buyers because it facilitates the production and sale process for all farmers registered with the company. This includes loan programmes to acquire hives, training opportunities, harvesting services, provision of hygienic storage equipment, bee product purchase at the ‘farm-gate’ and investment in developing lower-cost beekeeping inputs such as locally artisan-made protective gear kits. All registered farmers can purchase hives and beekeeping equipment through loans from BNP (repayable over four years either from profits or directly with honey). This means that small producers can afford to access advanced hives. Although farmers are not expected to repay loans until their hives are colonised, farmers must sell exclusively to BNP until their debt is repaid.

All harvests, whether by farmers or field officers, must utilise BNP buckets

to ensure the hygiene of the products. BNP field officers travel directly to producers' apiaries and exchange money for honey at the producer's doorstep, so that they receive payment immediately. BNP pays US\$1,000 per kilo for Grade A honey and US\$800 per kilo for Grade B honey.⁴⁸ This is lower than the rate of US\$1,500–2,000 per kilo that buyers in other regions offer. BNP justifies its lower pricing by explaining that contracted farmers save the expenses associated with buying and cleaning buckets and transporting honey that are necessary with other vendors. Even given the benefits, BNP's lower payments have caused some farmers to surreptitiously sell some of their honey to other buyers or to abandon their relationship with BNP altogether.

NAADS contracted BNP to provide training and other beekeeping support, recognising that the company could stimulate honey production in the region not only for newcomers to the industry, but also for farmers whose hives had been dormant because of insufficient training and/or limited access to markets. This public-private partnership has enabled BNP to develop a decentralised training and technical support system which allows it to reach more farmers and to develop a supplier network of high quality honey. Lead farmers are central to BNP's training programme and as the NAADS-BNP partnership expands, so do leadership opportunities for farmers.

BNP tries to include training activities that address women's particular circumstances and encourage their participation. Training confronts issues such as the lingering stigma of women's involvement in a traditionally male activity by helping women overcome their reluctance to wear trousers as part of protective harvesting suits. As in many rural areas of Uganda, women in the West Nile regions wear only skirts and have been taught to feel immodest if they are seen in trousers. BNP addressed this issue by providing harvest gear that includes very large baggy trousers that look like a skirt, adapting the harvesting trousers so that a skirt can be worn over them, and encouraging women to try on trousers during demos and training sessions so they can begin to feel comfortable with the 'costume'.

BNP's aim in 2005 was to reach its production capacity of 600 metric tons per annum, for which there is a large domestic market and also export opportunities. Yet by 2008 it had reached only 100 metric tons, 17 per cent of capacity. Even operating below its potential, however, BNP is recognised as the national leader in the honey and beeswax value chains. The 2005 opening of the European market to Ugandan exports can be attributed to the significant expansion of West Nile's apiculture industry, which BNP has fostered. By 2007 the region supplied 70 per cent of Uganda's bee product exports (Wiegratz, 2007).

Before 2002, Uganda, like other African countries, could not penetrate the European market due to stringent entry conditions. However, after certi-

fication for export to Europe was gained in 2005, market opportunities are wide open for bee products. The country is looking to the West Nile region to, among other things, overcome the challenges in meeting export demand. Locally produced honey is now fast outcompeting imported honey and demand conditions in export markets are extremely favourable.

Challenges for BNP

Sourcing sufficient high quality honey from farmers remains a challenge. Farmers' regional production remains far below the factory's production capacity or the consistent level needed for successful export.

BNP also has limited capacity to support producers in scaling up their production. Although lead farmers initially harvest for others with the intention of training them on the job, several factors, including lack of protective clothing, have resulted in long delays in hand-over. This not only gives officers and lead farmers less time for training and the other activities necessary to expand BNP's production abilities, but also prevents producers from learning a key skill that could enable them to scale up their own businesses later. If producers use the resources and training provided by BNP to develop their skills and increase their production, they are likely to move from simply supplying raw materials for a private company to operating and managing their own small enterprises.

Challenges for women farmers who sell to BNP

- While BNP's loan, training and purchasing systems make it far easier for farmers to sell unrefined honey, the majority are locked into the role of raw materials producer with very limited means to move into more lucrative beekeeping activities, such as selling processed honey.
- Assistant and lead farming positions provide advancement opportunities for individual women, but positions are limited and many women beekeepers explain that it is difficult to access the necessary training for these positions and impossible for some women (due, among other reasons, to family responsibilities) to be available for the travel the positions require.
- Even for groups that have members who have learned to harvest, lack of protective gear has meant continued dependence on BNP.
- BNP is first and foremost a business. While it recognises the poverty within its producer population and the poverty reduction possibilities the enterprise offers, it puts its own economic needs as a viable business before the challenges and needs of its suppliers, women or men.

Lessons learned and future directions

So what is the future of women in beekeeping in Uganda and what role do women have in plans for the expansion of the apiculture industry?

If the Government is to achieve its targets for increased production and export, several hundred thousand farmers will have to be attracted to the industry, which will only be possible with the increased participation of women. For this expansion to contribute significantly to poverty reduction in rural areas, women must be able to enter the industry at all levels in the production chain – including those that yield higher returns. Thus, strategies are needed to enable thousands more women to become involved in beekeeping enterprises and to participate in both high and low value activities.

As has been seen in the case studies, there is every reason to believe that this is an achievable objective. While earlier income-generating projects implemented by NGOs and development agencies to involve women in beekeeping have had limited success, newer strategies involving civil society and private companies offer more opportunities for the expansion of apiculture in a gender-sensitive way.

The case studies point to two successful paths to sustainable growth with a more equal distribution of benefits between women and men farmers. These are:

1. Support for CBOs and socially owned businesses, such as KWBA, that supply a range of needed services to their members who are engaged in beekeeping (through links with governments or other support agencies);
2. Investment in private companies that contract supplies from the individual farmers, women's groups and beekeepers associations that are registered with them (the BNP model).

The common factors leading to success in each of these approaches are:

- Their imperative to promote beekeeping and encourage increasing numbers of farmers into the industry;
- Their ability to leverage available governmental (e.g. NAADS) and non-governmental resources and to link their members/suppliers with necessary sources of financial and technical support;
- Their ability to organise producers so that issues of quality and quantity of production, transport and marketing are taken care of;
- Their interest in modernising the industry and their ability to make innovations in processes and products so that returns to farmers, processors, traders and retailers can be increased;

- Their interest in developing backward linkages to local artisans who can manufacture hives, protective clothing and other inputs, so that rural employment is created with widespread benefits to the community as a whole; and
- Their provision of opportunities for women to participate equally with men in modern beekeeping by ensuring that they receive training in all aspects of the production chain and by creating opportunities for them to earn incomes through providing training and other services to fellow beekeepers.

These are all essential steps to increase production, initially for local markets and eventually for export.

There are, however, some noticeable differences between the two approaches. First, the BNP model is very much a top-down affair and although it represents a relatively quick way to provide income to farmers from the sale of honey, it does so without giving them a great deal of control over their participation. By contrast, the KWBA model is very much a bottom-up approach. This can be slower in reaching farmers but, once established, gives members a great deal of say and control over their own enterprises. The small enterprise/CBO model has also been characterised by a wealth of innovation at the grassroots level. This could be usefully shared among groups and associations if support was given to networking at the national level.

Second, with an increasing proportion of the expanded output of honey and other bee products aimed at the export market, issues of quality, cost, volume and timeliness of supply become much more important. The BNP model – because of its large-scale (600 metric tons a year capacity), its sophisticated processing and packaging equipment, and its mechanisms for quality control – is well suited to supplying such markets. In contrast, CBOs are smaller, quality control is more difficult and filling large orders in a timely manner is more complicated as it depends on collaboration. However, the social advantages of CBOs are sufficient to warrant paying serious attention to assisting them to overcome the constraints involved in competing directly in export markets. As was seen with KWBA, CBOs are more than capable of making their own international links, but support will be needed to allow them to federate nationally to deal with quantity and quality of produce, transport issues and negotiating power. Given that the Government sees expanded honey production not just as a source of economic growth and increased export earnings, but also as a means of poverty reduction (and given that women make up a large proportion of the poor), support to a network of women's beekeepers' associations would seem to be particularly important.

In practice, given the potential for growth of the industry, both paths will probably need to be followed simultaneously. Neither will succeed, however, without the countrywide support in terms of outreach, training and technical assistance that only government can supply through programmes such as NAADS. It is also essential to establish an overall policy framework that is conducive to the growth of output and exports, and to the equal distribution of the resulting benefits. Several CBOs look to TUNADO as the body best able to advocate for policy changes on their behalf.⁴⁹

The policies and institutional support programmes to promote the expansion of beekeeping in Uganda are in place, and the case studies have shown that women can both contribute to and benefit from such policies and programmes when they are enabled to do so. The lessons offered by these individual cases now need to be fed into national strategies for increased production and export promotion, so that success can be achieved at the level of the individual women producer in the informal economy, the household, the community and the nation as a whole.

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Manufactured Exports

