

INTRODUCTION

In order to overcome the economic and social malaise experienced in some developing countries, many people are looking to the private sector and the growth of small-scale enterprises as a way to salvation.

The engine for economic growth is strongly influenced by the performance of the local, usually rural, population. These are the people that produce the raw materials and in fact constitute a large part of the domestic market. This sector, therefore, needs to have some, albeit limited, real spending power. A financial power which, although small for the individual, does not depend on or contribute to the destructive downward spiral of debt – loan – debt. There is one very obvious activity that could offer families and individuals the micro-enterprise that tips the economic balance in favour of constructive growth as opposed to at best stagnation or, all too often, decline. That activity is beekeeping.

Beekeeping provides rural people in developing countries with sources of income and nutrition. It is a sustainable form of agriculture which is beneficial to the environment and provides economic reasons for the retention of native habitats and potentially increased yield from food and forage crops.

There is an export market ready and waiting for beeswax, while honey is rather more dependent on the quality of the product offered and the vagaries of currency exchange rates. Other hive products could also be considered for marketing in due course, while ultimately the bees themselves, as queens and packages, can be traded. The range, quality and potential of the products grow in line with the development of apicultural skills.

Complex processing methods are not required and the whole industry can be highly cost-effective. The main item required is the dissemination of information in order to develop skills amongst those interested in making a success of 'Bee Businesses'.

The term micro-enterprise normally refers to family businesses operating in the informal sector. They may have as many as 10 workers although the usual number is one or two. In this way, micro-enterprises provide a living, or a modest but vital margin above mere subsistence, for millions of working poor and their families.

Many developing countries at present face a number of difficulties and challenges. The biggest must be to generate enough work to keep pace with population growth as young people flood into the labour market each year. In these countries, as much as 25% of the overall labour force is

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employed in micro-enterprises and this is the most dynamic sector of the economy growing at the rate of up to 15% per year.

Against this background, traditional donors are re-assessing their policies in regard to rural development. The focus is on encouraging a range of activities which secure rural livelihoods and which allow individuals and communities to build on their own strengths and realize their potential. Fundamental to this approach is the ability to earn some revenue. Beekeeping provides a good example of one activity which has a strong local tradition in many African countries, where there is a market, and which is environmentally beneficial. However, in the short term, aspiring beekeepers are suffering. There are many men and women keen to improve their apicultural skills. They do not ask for hand-outs of cash, they want the opportunity to acquire knowledge and this is repeated again and again almost everywhere in the developing world.

The joy of the beekeeping business is that it does not need expensive ongoing aid. There is no need to expose well-meant donations to misappropriation or any other reason to divert such money from the intended purpose. The demand is for information and this publication is an attempt to make a start in meeting that demand.

This text replaces an earlier publication entitled *Beekeeping in Rural Development*, which is now out of print. Requests for this text are still regularly received by both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the International Bee Research Association. Therefore it was considered timely to revise the information and produce a text for use at field level. Funding for the work was provided by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. We are grateful to all those who, over the years, have been prepared to share their experiences and whose contributions make up the bulk of this book. Particular mention must be made of Dr Eva Crane, founding Director of IBRA, whose tireless research started and helped to accumulate the vast fund of knowledge stored in the IBRA library. Also, to Dr Margaret Adey and Dr Nicola Bradbear who, during their time at IBRA and since, have done so much to promote beekeeping as a sustainable economic activity. Also, to Peter Paterson for his generous and ready help in sharing his East African beekeeping experiences. Access to such information can only benefit beekeepers wherever they may be.

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RICHARD JONES

Director

International Bee Research Association

BRIAN KERR

Chief Programme Officer

Commonwealth Secretariat

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