

“Commercial beekeeping improves our livelihoods and supports the protection of our forests and water streams, preventing drought and flooding”

Honey production and honey hunting are traditional practices for the communities in the Karamoja sub-region of Northern Uganda; however, commercial beekeeping is still in its infancy. Men are accustomed to making traditional log hives from indigenous trees in the forests, particularly on the hillsides. Beekeeping is a highly promising livelihood venture owing to the naturally occurring large bee population, particularly in the hundreds of hills and forests across this region. However, such eco-enterprises face several challenges, including, but not limited to, scarcity of bee forage due to extensive degradation of the ecosystem through burning (which is a common practice in the pastoral communities in quest for fresh pastures for their animals), a lack of knowledge, skills, and equipment to produce and harvest quality honey to meet competitive market standards, and the use of rudimentary hives. These factors have limited the participation of women in apiculture activities because of the social norms surrounding the perception that bees are harsh and cannot be managed by women.

In the framework of the Eco-DRR project, Wetlands International in partnership with CARE International, Uganda, and Cordaid, are supporting 30 smallholder farmers from the Upper-Agago sub-catchment in Abim District, Northern Uganda, to boost their beekeeping activities to a commercial level with a view of improving their livelihoods and building resilience.

The beekeepers were trained on the current concepts and practises of commercial beekeeping. The trainees were then equipped with 330 baited Kenya Top-Bar Hives (KTBH), metallic stands, and other assorted beekeeping materials. Technical assistance for hive installation and post-training follow-up visits were also provided.



As a woman, I have benefited a lot from the Apiary project. We can harvest 17 kg of honey from each hive, and right now we have 6 kgs here. Each kilogram sells for 12,000 shillings (3.2 USD), totaling 72,000 Shillings (19.2 USD), and this amount can support us in several ways, like paying for school

- Akello Rose, Beekeeping Chairperson, Gin Alo Obanga Women Group, Otudu Village



Figure 1: Field session on apiary selection, installation and management as well as protection from predators and pests

A total of 100 beekeepers were selected from three beekeeping associations. From these, thirty-three individual beneficiaries – 15 women and 18 men – were organised in three clusters under the leadership of three champions, each linked to ten other beekeepers.

Building on the existing indigenous knowledge on beekeeping, the groups were trained on improved beekeeping practices, use of different beekeeping equipment and honey harvesting kits, value addition to honey and other bee products such as beeswax, propolis, and bee venom, as well as market access. In addition, restoration and planting of tree species that boost bee forage were integrated in the beekeeping sites, and a community-tree growing campaign was rolled out in the beekeeping sites, with the support of the National Forestry Authority.

As a result of the training, the hives are now set up - both in the national forest reserve and on privately owned forested land, with the aim of contributing to the protection/restoration of 8000 ha of forests and improving the livelihoods of the local communities.

Engaging and supporting the beneficiaries with training helped them gain considerable experience and confidence. Their knowledge, skills, and attitude were much improved, and they looked forward to following the next actions of inspection, colony multiplication in order to ensure that all the hives are colonized. Feedback received during the follow-up monitoring visits indicated that the beneficiaries will successfully apply the acquired skills and knowledge to continue commercial beekeeping using modern technologies. The Bee Champion Extension Service Model will further reinforce learning among beneficiaries. To date, 37% of the 330 hives that were established in total are already colonized.



Figure2: Members of Gin Alo Obanga Pe group supported by the Eco-DRR project, harvesting honey from their Apiary site



I am excited about being part of the Bee champions, it has saved myself and my family the hustle of rudimentary beekeeping! In the honey harvest season between January and March, my husband would melt into the night carrying hot coal and fresh shrubs to light up and smoke out the bees from the hives. Once the bees abandoned the hive, he would then pick out the combs by hand. Having no protective gear, he was forced to endure inevitable bee stings. Thanks to the skills and the protective equipment, we can now go about bee keeping with minimum bee stings, and restore our ecosystems as well

- Acheng, a female bee champion from Alerek

