

BETTER MARKETING CAN LEAD TO MORE SUSTAINABLE COMMON RESOURCES USE: HONEY IN ZIMBABWE¹

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The Zimbabwe Farmers' Development Association was established through participatory meetings in which a group of farmers identified problems associated with harvesting honey from communal woodlands. The problems involved the cutting down of trees to access bee colonies, the stripping of tree barks to make traditional hives, lack of organized, competitive markets for surplus honey and lack of information and technologies for production of good quality honey. The farmers were interested in exploiting the honey in the communal woodland so as to improve their incomes. There was also a wider concern at the destruction of trees in the process of wild honey harvesting. The farmers needed to come up with a socially cohesive approach that met the needs of the individuals harvesting honey. Currently they were free to harvest honey in the communal woodland making it an open access resource vulnerable to degradation.

The Initial Situation

Statistics showed that Hurungwe District in Mashonaland West Province was a major producer of honey with considerable potential. It was estimated that with development and good marketing some 40 tonnes could be produced generating some Z\$220 million a year (2004 prices). Processors from Harare bought and bottled the honey for sale. The honey was mainly harvested from naturally occurring beehives found in tree trunks. Individuals also made traditional beehives that were set in the communal woodlands to attract bees. This situation was unsatisfactory in several ways.

First, in harvesting honey in the woodlands, the individual cut and damaged trees in order to access the honey. In the majority of the cases fire was used to smoke the bees out so as to harvest the honey. This is because of lack of appropriate protective clothing. Secondly, those individuals who made traditional beehives stripped bark off the trees to make the hives. This contributed to damage of the trees. Community leaders and government agricultural and natural resources officers were concerned with loss of indigenous tree resources. The practice was considered a potential threat to the environment as it worsened deforestation already considerable due to land clearing for arable agriculture. As the woodlands are an open access resource, it was not possible to control or regulate the behaviour of the individual in harvesting the honey.

Markets were not viable because of several related reasons. In the first instance, there were only two processors who came to buy the honey in the District. This created a monopolistic marketing arrangement with respect to prices offered. Since the purchasers dealt with the individual honey harvesters, the latter had limited bargaining power. Generally farmers considered the prices offered as too low.

The market for honey was not organized for the individual farmers to benefit. In some instances, the processors did not turn up to buy harvested honey at scheduled time periods. The individual honey harvesters were then forced to travel to sell their honey to the processors in Harare, 300 kilometres away. In such circumstances, the individual harvester did not have much negotiation power on the price offered. More often the seller was forced to accept a price that just covered travel costs.

¹ This example of improved honey marketing was compiled by Godfrey Mudimu and Liliosa Maveneka

Collective Action

During meetings with communities, honey was identified as a potential non-wood product for commercialization. The communities outlined problems they faced in harvesting and particularly marketing the honey. It was suggested that those with an interest in honey should get together and form an association to market the honey. The association would bulk honey from the individual harvesters and source markets. Alternatively the association was to negotiate with honey processors who purchased raw honey. The association would also be a forum for training and knowledge transfer to enable the honey producers to produce quality honey that would be sold at more lucrative prices.

It was also observed that bee keeping and investing in improved beehives to be located at the homesteads would save trees in two ways. First, individuals would not have to de-bark trees to make traditional beehives. Second, individuals would not have to destroy trees to access natural occurring honey. The practice of burning or smoking bees was also to stop as the honey would only be bought if it had not been smoked and beekeepers would be trained to use protective clothing.

Community leaders were interested in resolving conflicts that arose as honey harvesters accused each other of raiding each others' beehives located in the communal woodlands.

The Outcome

It was agreed to form a trust to promote the interest of those involved in honey harvesting and production. The Zimbabwe Farmers' Development Trust (ZFDT) was established in 1992. ZFDT was structured as an affiliate organization of honey producers' clubs. Honey producers in a given locality were members of an association or club which in turn was affiliated to ZFDT. Chairpersons of the Clubs made up the Executive Committees. A twelve- member Trustee Board was put into place. The Chairperson of the Executive Committee and five other members were Trustees. Six technical experts active in NGO development initiatives were invited to be members of the Trustees Board. These were from the University and Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services and other NGOs.

The goal was to promote bee-keeping and honey production as source of cash income among smallholder honey producers farmers in Hurungwe District. ZFDT was tasked to:

- i. purchase raw honey from farmers
- ii. process and package the honey for marketing
- iii. source markets and wholesale the honey
- iv. undertake some market research on customer needs and packaging
- v. train honey producers to improve bee keeping and produce quality honey.

To achieve its goal ZFDT applied for a Kellogg Foundation grant to established a pilot processing and marketing infrastructure at the local rural service centre, Magunje Growth Point. ZFDT engaged four farmers, with experience in honey production, as extension workers. Each was provided with a bicycle. ZFDT needed to use the experience of such farmers to promote bee-keeping and honey production. The farmer extension workers were each responsible for a specific area to provide extension, training, organize the selling and buying of honey and facilitate the formation of new bee-keeping clubs/associations and strengthening existing ones.

Most of the beekeepers in the areas ZFDT operates have more of the traditional beehives than the modern Kenyan Top Bar (KTB) beehives being promoted. They cite the reason as limited funding to purchase the KTBs. The younger beekeepers tend to have more modern than traditional beehives.

ZFDT promotes honey production, buys raw honey from the producers at the most competitive price, processes the honey, and markets it ensuring that the farmer benefits from his sweat. ZFDT crafted a number of rules for its affiliate clubs and their members. First, ZFDT was only to purchase honey extracted from bees kept in improved beehives. Second, ZFDT members were to plant trees, particularly fruit trees in their homesteads. These were done to reduce tree destruction in communal woodlands. Grading was introduced to eliminate honey extracted using fire. A tree management committee was tasked to monitor tree cutting for honey harvesting. Club members were required to mark and register their bee-hives. Any honey whose source was not known was not purchased.

ZFDT has also been established in Mutoko where there are some 1200 beekeepers operating through very active Associations. The potential yields in Mutoko from indigenous woodlands are lower than in Hurungwe. Hurungwe is estimated to have a potential for producing more than 40 tonnes of honey per year. In Hurungwe there are 900 active beekeepers.

Impact of ZFDT on Farmers

The individual beekeeper in Hurungwe benefited in a number of ways: The producer price of honey increased as commercial traders were forced to increase their buying prices in response to ZFDT's competition. The farmer was no longer exploited by the absence of a choice of where to sell his honey. The farmer could now harvest and sell honey at any time of the year.

An impact study undertaken in 1995 showed that honey production contributed on average Z\$2 500 per annum to household income. This was 20-30% of income from both farm and non farm activities. It was observed that bee-keepers had planted substantial trees in their farms. There was a noticeable decrease in tree destruction.

ZFDT has not been able to meet the demand for honey in 2004. In addition to supplying some of the big supermarkets like SPAR and TM and some pharmacies with bottled honey, ZFDT also supplies bottled honey to the National Aids Council because of its medicinal value. Bulk honey is supplied to CAIRNS Foods for sweetening foods, to a number of private companies and to pharmaceutical companies for use in making medicines.

The ZFDT brought about a change of attitude in how farmers view honey as an income provider in their farming enterprises. As a result more clubs are being formed and more bee-hives sited in communal woodlands and homesteads. Bee-keeping has been a male dominated enterprise. However, a few women in Hurungwe have taken an interest in the enterprise.

The honey producers traditionally used the barks of trees as beehives. Conservationists have for years been fighting against this practice as it entailed the removing of a bark from a big tree resulting in the eventual death of the tree. A more sustainable bee-keeping practice which did not promote destruction of trees from which the honey came from, had to be promoted. ZFDT set up a beehive-making workshop and hired two carpenters who now work in the workshop on a daily basis. ZFDT subsidizes the price of beehives to club members with the prices agreed upon by the executive committee.

Jameson Chikara, who started beekeeping in 1972 and became associated with ZFDT when it started operating in Hurungwe in 1992 has this to say :

" Before ZFDT came to Hurungwe it was difficult to market and get a reasonable price. When ZFDT came we were able to get money for school fees and buy seed. Selling honey is now easier. We have been helped in many ways like knowing more about beekeeping--- also to grow crops that help beekeeping. The modern beehive makes more honey. Even with the old beehives, we also use the new way of getting honey with the smokers. We do not use fire. Just as we leave honey for bees in the modern bee-hive also we now leave some in the old kind of hives so bees will stay there!" (23 November, 2004). His main farming activity has, over the years, become beekeeping.

ZFDT has relatively high overheads for administration, training and support and it last received donor funding in 2003. Although significant income is coming from honey sales (over \$207 million for January to October 2004) more donor support is required because of the very high cost of operating and the need to establish wider acceptance of the more environmentally friendly system.