

HONEY CARE AFRICA LIMITED, Kenya: Fighting Poverty with Honey



In Kenya, approximately 80 per cent of land is suitable for beekeeping. Yet, the potential of bee keeping and honey production has not been fully tapped in areas where the agro-ecological and climatic conditions as well as the land use patterns are near perfect. Traditionally, lack of market knowledge and the poor quality of the honey from rudimentary hives meant that honey sales were usually to producers of local liquor. Also, beekeepers were prone to exploitation by more knowledgeable middlemen. With the diffusion of its model of sustainable community-based beekeeping, Honey Care Africa (HCA) has been able to provide solutions to overcome these impediments.

An original model of sustainable community-based beekeeping
This private sector company, established in 2000, links environmental conservation and poverty reduction, by providing beehives and related beekeeping equipment to organisations, communities and individuals. It guarantees market access for the honey produced by small-holder farmers, which it collects at farm-gate and pays for on-the-spot at fair trade prices. On the supply side, there are significant economic benefits. The project provides a second and possibly even a third source of income to small farmers. These farmers do not have to own large tracts of land, as beekeeping requires minimal land and, further, does not require large amounts of time to be spent on tending hives. The income generated through commercial bee-



keeping is sufficient to take all beneficiaries over the poverty line, defined as US\$16 per month¹³. In addition to the income generated through this project, the beehives will, indirectly, lead to additional pollination, thus increasing the yields of crops currently planted in the area.

All community beekeeping projects begin with a site visit. The area is studied with respect to potential for beekeeping and ecological suitability. Training is provided through both on-site and off-site demonstrations and field work. All training sessions have a variety of information embedded – information on HIV/AIDS, malaria and messages on the importance of education and health. Ongoing field visits are carried out to ensure farmers learn the right techniques and are implementing the project in the most efficient manner. As the harvest season approaches, Honey Care Africa's Project Officers assist in the harvesting and collection of honey, while ensuring timely and efficient payments to farmers. They also provide additional services, including siting of the hives and assistance in best practices for honey harvesting, and ways to maintain quality standards and ensure maximum yields from the hives. On-going support is defined as at least two visits to the beekeeper's apiary by HCA staff per year. Once collected, raw honey is processed and distributed in honey packs by Honey Care. These packs are pure high quality honey in 20g plastic tubs.



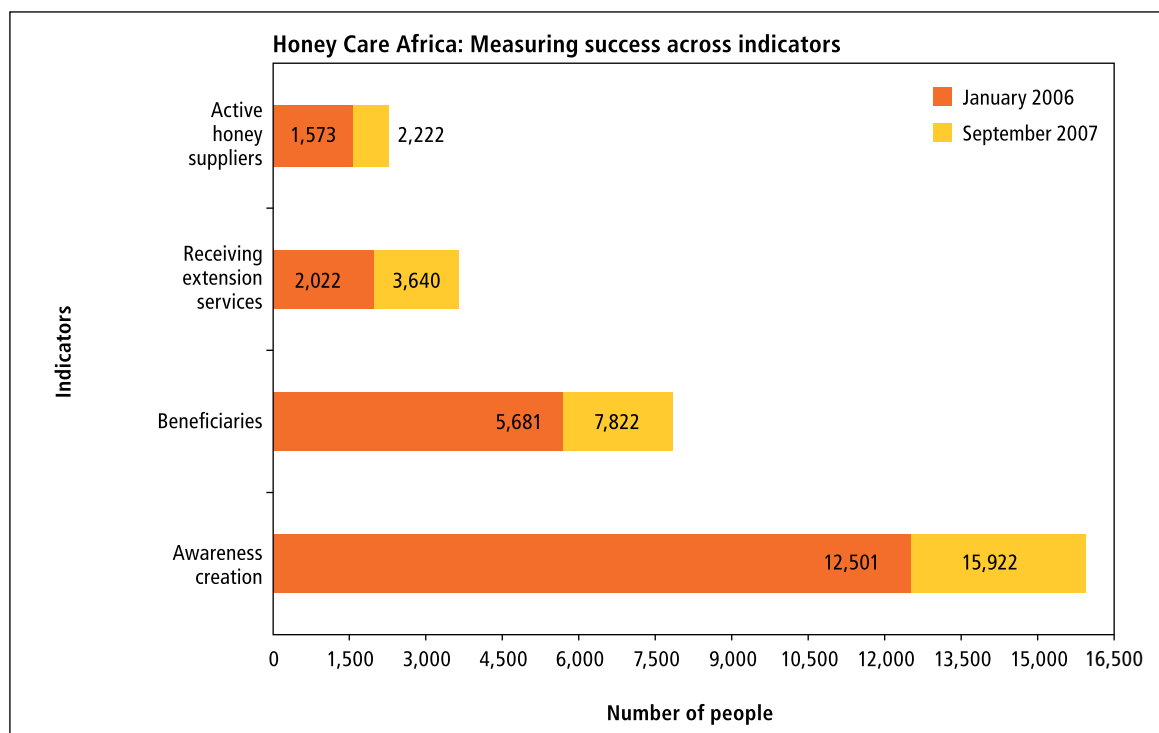
Moving out of poverty

Honey Care Africa currently operates in all provinces in Kenya, with the exception of the North Eastern province, and has 7 collection centres across the country. It purchases and markets 65-100 metric tons of honey annually from roughly 20,000 hives managed by rural communities in Kenya. It works with over 4,000 beekeepers, who earn on average US\$1.76 per kilogramme of honey they produce. This represents additional income of approximately US\$250 on an annual basis. This initiative creates additional employment opportunities through contracts (bee suits & smoker manufacture) and upstream and downstream (timber & packaging materials) linkages. The total number of beneficiaries, which includes farmers who have been paid for honey collections as well as farmers who have received hives as samples or financed through micro-credit schemes or donors, increased almost 1.5 times in 18 months (January 2006 - September 2007) to 7,822.

Since the creation of Honey Care Africa, 15,922 individuals were informed and exposed to beekeeping in Kenya. Women and youth have been particularly encouraged to participate in the initiative. Awareness creation activities involve free training sessions on honey production, harvesting, cleaning of hives and processing activities. Honey Care Africa also organises trips for local farmers to view the product at supermarkets.

The environmental impact has also been significant. Honey Care Africa established a practice called “Bees for Trees,” where communities and individuals working to promote agro-forestry and the conservation of forests are given hives as a direct and immediate economic incentive to encourage them to plant and protect trees. It also promotes the use and protection of local sub-species of bees.

The following graph shows monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data that has been tracked over 8 quarters, January 2006 to September 2007.



Vision

Honey Care Africa's goal is now to increase beneficiaries by 400 farmers every year, translating to an additional 2,000 Langstroth hives annually, and the number of distributors would increase in tandem. As it expands its distribution network for honey packs, some of the beekeepers and their relatives could also act as distributors, earning additional income. New partnerships will be built throughout the project areas with distributors and focus groups. There are also plans to extend facilities and provide more value-added services to farmers. Pilot projects are underway to create libraries in collection centres. These centres consist of a 2-room structure – with facilities for honey extraction and storage and for farmer payments. The eventual goal is to process honey at these centres by involving farmer groups in the processing phase so as to further supplement their incomes.

For marketing purposes, leaflets and posters advertising the various flavours of honey on offer and highlighting the advantages of honey will be disseminated to the communities. There are also plans to supply the product to schools. In addition to selling the honey packs, the distributors will also work with Honey Care Africa to disseminate other information relevant to good health and healthy living. Besides, a strategy is under development to collect waste tubs for shipment to Mombasa and processing into value added products like straws.

Honey Care Africa will forge linkages with a network of women groups through the Kenya Women's Finance Trust. It is also in the process of linking with institutions that grow horticultural produce such as green beans. It will invest in the training and sensitisation of these communities to beekeeping and will provide a guaranteed market for the product. Further leverage will come through co-sharing of the collection centres for products other than honey – as this would build critical mass and increase usage.

