

RDC – Modern beekeeping and capitalising on local know-how in Lwalaba forest

Beekeeping, once a purely masculine activity in Lwalaba, is today also carried out by women. Indeed, communities here have come to realise the importance of involving women in forest management activities in order to guarantee a sustainable and fair development of the environment.



Until recently, rural communities of Lwalaba (a district in the south of Katanga province, DRC) were completely unaware of modern beekeeping techniques. Two years ago, some of these techniques were introduced in the context of the microproject “Modern apiculture for all in Lwalaba”. This project is implemented by the Forum pour le Développement de la Femme (FDF – Forum for the Development of Women), a member organisation of REFED-Katanga, with the support of the FAO Community Development Support Project (FAO-PADC) and the provincial government of Katanga.

In the four villages targeted when the project was launched in August 2008 – Mwenekula, Lungenda, Divuma and Kisenge – the local communities were sensitised and informed and became fully involved in the project. With the support of FDF, they structured themselves democratically into four village apiculture groups, one per village, comprising a total of 150 beekeepers, 132 men and 18 women. The

members of these groups were given beekeeping equipment and clothing and were trained in modern beekeeping techniques and capitalisation of local knowledge.

Tradition and modernity

Today, the beekeepers in these villages use hives made from hollow palm tree trunks which are collected by the women and carefully crafted into traditional hives by the men. The women carry the hives on their heads to a specially set up apiary where, with the help of young male members of the group, they place them on the branches of melliferous trees.

Although the hives are traditional, the trained men and women beekeepers use modern techniques to harvest the honey. Instead of chasing away the bees by lighting a fire underneath the tree or on the branches bearing the hives as they used to, they use smokers in which they burn the green leaves of plants known traditionally to produce smoke that dazes the bees. They also wear suitable beekeeping apparel. These practices are favourable to the protection and conservation of the biodiversity since the bee colonies and melliferous trees are not destroyed by fires and the apiaries are set up and protected against bush fires using fire-breaks.

The microproject also introduced the gender approach in that men and women were elected to preside over the committees of the village apiculture groups. For the women this was their first ever participation in a decision-making body. Furthermore, the members of the groups in question said that the Dimitra publications distributed by REFED-Katanga had played a key role in raising people's



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awareness about gender, the experiences of rural women, community development and the structuring of farmers' organisations and rural groups.

Honey for tomorrow

The Groupement des Apiculteurs de Mwenekula (GAMWE – Mwenekula Apiculture Group) produces a pure, natural honey, which is highly prized by its consumers, even in Lubumbashi, where part of the produce is sold by REFED. And the village's beekeepers have predicted an even better production this year.

Since the project began, it has extended its activities to include beekeepers from Kasaji, Malonga, Mungulunga and other villages in the region, who have also received training from the microproject's coordinator and the person in charge of the GAMWE group.

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