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The Role of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in Poverty Alleviation and Biodiversity  
Conservation  
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**Market Access for Cameroon Honey: An opportunity for income and employment for the  
rural poor**



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**Abstract**

Natural resource dependent communities have more often than not been coerced to conserve their surrounding resources by introducing alternatives for income and employment. In this respect, honey production has developed extensively in Cameroon as a conservation-based NTFP. The honey sector already provides income in rural areas for the resource dependent communities, employing a cross-section of the population including older men, women and youths. Exploiting this position further is only possible by expanding market channels to enable the honey producers to walk their way out of poverty.

The honey and bee products market chain development is increasingly gaining ground as having an impact on not only conservation, but also on income and employment. A study of the honey market in Cameroon revealed that honey supply comes from a range of geographical areas with large variations in demand and supply. Some producing provinces had saturated local consumption, other areas had production and consumption equilibrium and in some provinces, particularly with major urban areas, demand exceeds supply. A huge diversity exists in product packaging and distribution strategies.

Potential for income generation and employment in the honey sector can be enhanced by raising product awareness and setting commodity standards. In this light developing standards and a Residue Monitoring Scheme for export of Cameroon honey to Europe could benefit potential exporters as well as give the sector a boost, given that the sector can competitively produce export quality honey. This will provide a target market to aim for, thus giving people the incentive to increase their production and quality. Such a scheme is only possible if bee farmers are organised to lobby with other stakeholders. An organised group of bee farmers is currently forming at national level in Cameroon to explore opportunities with the central government and development organisations. The diverse market potential in different regions of Cameroon could be exploited to increase local consumption, as well as neighbouring CEMAC countries. This will entail the different actors appraising their strengths and weaknesses as well as comparative advantage and market positions, which could lead to marketing gains. With bee farming being predominately an activity of the rural poor, having the potential to be a foreign exchange earner, means that policies to develop this sector could create employment and reduce poverty. It also has strong potential to assist in sustainable management of natural resources, particularly forests, which perform vital ecosystem functions that can contribute to poverty alleviation, such as watershed protection, combating land degradation and providing other sources of income generation timber and non-timber forest product.

**Key words:**

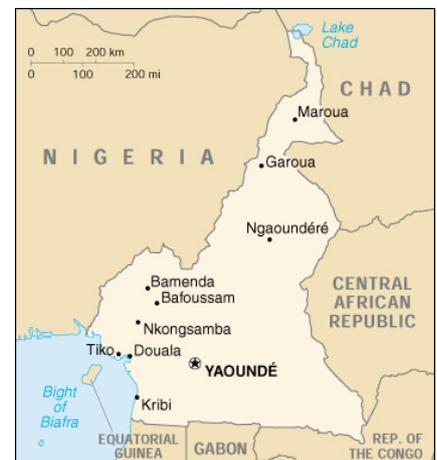
Non-Timber Forest Products, honey, bee products, marketing and market chains, poverty reduction, employment, income generation, natural resource management, Cameroon.



### 1. Introduction

More than 1.38 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. Poverty is about a lack of income and employment, a lack of access to and sustainable management of the natural resource base, the lack of access to basic services, inequality and inequity and the prevalence of vulnerability, insecurity, conflicts (SNV, 2006). The stubborn persistence of poverty and the slow pace of progress in reducing its incidence have raised concerns about the ability to attain the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The importance of employment as a key link between growth and poverty reduction and increasing employment is increasingly being perceived as a route out of poverty (Osmani, 2003). Achieving a high level of employment is virtually a universal goal among policy makers. Recently, expanded analysis of economic institutions offers new insights for developing and implementing poverty reduction strategies by taking a more comprehensive approach toward treatment of the potential and limitation of the role of markets and government (von Braun, 1995).

There is broad recognition now that poverty alleviation is not only about economic changes and technical improvements. It is about empowerment, governance, sustainability and improving the capacities of individuals, organisations and societies to solve their problems and act and continues to do so (SNV, 2006). SNV Cameroon engages in advisory services to intermediary organisations geared towards the fight against poverty. In the domain of income, employment and sustainability, the commercialisation of NTFPs is seen to have a strong potential to assist in sustainable natural resources management, particularly forests, which perform vital ecosystem functions that can contribute to poverty alleviation, such as watershed protection combating land degradation and providing other sources of income generation timber and non-timber forest product.



Cameroon's forests offer a large supply of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) used for subsistence and medicinal purposes and traded in local markets and abroad. This trade amounts to thousands of millions of CFA (millions of US dollars), representing an important contribution to the country's rural economy. NTFP markets in Cameroon offer income opportunities not only for large-scale, specialized traders, but also for many poor traders who rely on them to obtain their small cash income. In 2006 honey and bee products from the four main producing areas (North West, South West, West and Adamoua Provinces, also known as the Western Cameroon Highlands, due to its volcanic mountain range) had a value at least 3 million euro, comprised of approximately 3,225 tonnes of honey and 50,000kg of wax (Ingram, 2006). NTFPs such as honey provide small but significant sources of income, particularly for women and for families that do not have access to agricultural markets. It can supplement food supplies during periods when agricultural crops fail or are otherwise scarce. Transportation costs in the rural areas that are the most predominate honey producers largely determine the sources of rural household income: low value-to-weight ratio agricultural crops that can be produced consistently in large quantities or high value-to-weight ratio NTFPs such as honey, that are available inconsistently in relatively small quantities. Most of the traders are women, although those trading on the largest scale were men (Ruiz Pérez *et al*, 1999). Rural dwellers and traders deal simultaneously with NTFPs and agricultural commodities. Because of their seasonal nature, NTFPs such as honey complement agricultural commodities in improving the welfare of rural households and market traders. NTFP markets are generally very dynamic and hierarchically organized into a widespread network around local, provincial and national nodes. Supply constraints for some products lead to a fairly elastic response in prices. As well as being a critical conservation based non-timber forest product (most beekeepers protect and regenerate their natural environments, particularly forest areas, to maintain honey production), honey is important as a nutritional food and medicinal product and in some lowland forest areas, has significant cultural value. Bee play a key ecological function in agriculture and forestry through pollination.



In Cameroon, long term projects<sup>1</sup> over the last 15 years, mainly with nature conservation goals, have been agents of change in providing training to local organisations and communities, resulting in hundreds of individuals becoming bee farmers and setting up their own beekeepers organisations in the Western Cameroon Highlands. Collection of wild honey has also long been a traditional, small scale income generating and subsistence activity in the Highlands forests and Adamoua plateau. A major concern now of actors in the honey and bee products market chain is how to organise and develop this market for the commercialisation of the honey and bee products (SNV & Tata, *et al*, 2006). However, the honey market in Cameroon is un-organised, un-regulated and without policy, actors in the chain are often unknown to each other, and access and dissemination of information, both indigenous, traditional knowledge and modern techniques, across the sector is low.

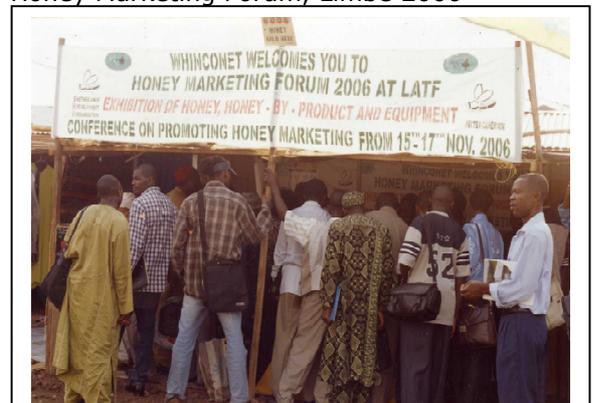
SNV Cameroon, upon the request of a client WHINCONET<sup>2</sup>, a network of 22 organisations concerned with conservation and sustainable livelihoods in the Western Highlands (which includes honey producers), engaged with non governmental organisations (NGOs), researchers, government agencies and the private sector to address the issue of honey marketing. The major problem areas recognised were extensive beefarming, product quality, packaging, marketing strategies, finance and access to credit, setting fair prices for the product, effective lobbying and a lack of organs representing actors in the chain. This paper presents the various processes undertaken by SNV Cameroon to date in a quest to develop the commercialisation of honey by producers in Cameroon with the goal of sustainable and equitable poverty alleviation.

## 2. Methodology

In mid 2005, during workshops with SNV on marketing their products and services with members of WHINCONET prioritised honey and bee products as perceived as being major NTFP income earners and the most important potential income earning products for members. However, market information to assist the members develop marketing plans was lacking and difficult to obtain. Subsequently, a sector wide analysis for honey was undertaken in 2005 based on interviews with WHINCONET honey producers and review of secondary data. This gave insights into the information and knowledge gaps in honey and bee products marketing and the need for a more detailed market survey. Lessons from a similar exercise in Zambia were also drawn (SNV Zambia, 2005). A honey market survey was designed, to provide knowledge on the national market and market chains for honey and bee products, assess the competitiveness of honey from various regions of Cameroon in terms of price, packaging, product quality and promotion and provide recommendations for developing the market.

The honey marketing survey (SNV Tata *et al*, 2006) focussed on the key production provinces and urban centres which act as destination markets. Field visits and interviews with producers, wholesalers, retailers and consumers and were undertaken in the target areas to investigate the supply and demand for honey and bee products and analyse product quality, using tools developed for this purpose. The data collected was analysed to provide a multi-regional picture of the honey and bee products sector, in terms of the inter- regional flows of honey and bee products, the similarities and contrasts between regions and the potential for more effective networking.

Honey Marketing Forum, Limbe 2006



<sup>1</sup> Kilum Ijim & Bamenda Highlands Forest Project, NW Province, the Mount Cameroon Project, the Capacity Building Programme, Mount Kupe and Korup National Park Projects.

<sup>2</sup> Western Highlands Conservation Network (WHINCONET) Tel; +237 336 20 72 or 237 750 14 50 Email: [whinconet@yahoo.com](mailto:whinconet@yahoo.com) Website: [www.geocities.com/whinconet/index.html](http://www.geocities.com/whinconet/index.html)



Following this survey a promotion event was held in November 2006 involving over 70 national and international stakeholders in the honey sector. Intense lobbying and publicity led to mobilisation of funds to organise the first ever Cameroon Honey Marketing Forum, organised in the form of keynote presentations, technical demonstrations, field visits and panel discussions on topical issues of policy, honey marketing in Cameroon, processing, quality, value and financing possibilities in the sector. Action trajectories were arrived at in the workshop to exploit what was perceived as the enormous potential in this sector for the benefit of all actors, the national economy and a positive conservation vector. These are now ongoing.

### 3. Outcomes

The Government of Cameroon has recognised the bee farming sector and its role in poverty alleviation; seen by the creation in 2006 of a national department in the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock responsible for bee farming. A project funded by Cameroon's Highly Indebted Poor Country relief initiative enabled government agencies to evaluate the sectors needs and provide technical training. However, concrete action in the development of the apiculture sector, policy or plans is lacking, the sector remains unregulated and is not addressed in the national Sectorial plans for livestock, agricultural, environmental or forestry.

The development of this sector therefore in practice depends on the efforts of the private sector and civil society. At national level, a weak bee farmer's federation existed five years ago. In order to play the role of lobbying for appropriate policy and support in this sector, this federation is undergoing revitalisation to facilitate representation, mainly for producers, at local, provincial and national levels. This is being led by local bee farmer's organisations in several provinces, supported by WHINCONET members and development organisations such as SNV, INADES<sup>3</sup> and CERUT<sup>4</sup>. A viable federation is seen as vital to lead the process of honey quality assurance for export.



Honey supply in Cameroon comes from a wide range of geographical areas including montane forests, plateaux, sub-savannah plains, dense forest and agricultural areas at the edge of city centres. This ecological variation results in a different honey types, ranging from a dark, smoky brown from the lowland tropical forests to a creamy, granulated, white, butter like honey from the high mountains. Honey supplies indicate the wide variation in production and supply across the country, with some provinces having a saturated local market and therefore supplying the urban centres, others having low supply and high demand. Here, the principal challenge is how to finance, collect and package the honey from small producers to package and supply to the areas of high demand. Quality is an

important pre-occupation both for producers and consumers. Producers want to ensure that honey sold in the market is consistently of high quality, while consumers have fears and preconceptions about the purity of some types of honey sold in the market. There is a lack of awareness amongst consumers about these product variations, as well as generally about the nutritional and medicinal values of honey, which is compounded by exaggerated claims made by some producers and traditional medicine practitioners.

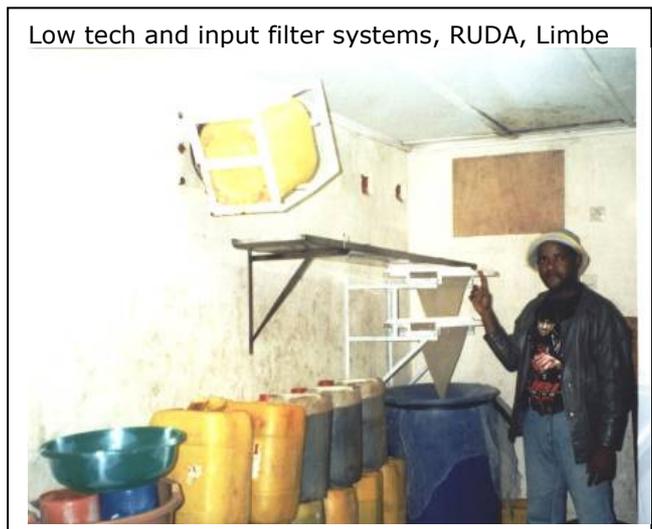
<sup>3</sup> INADES Formation, PO 252 Bamenda, [inadesforba@yahoo.fr](mailto:inadesforba@yahoo.fr) [www.indadesfo.org](http://www.indadesfo.org)

<sup>4</sup> Centre for Environment & Rural Transformation, PO 70 Limbe, [cerut@iccnnet.com](mailto:cerut@iccnnet.com)



Many honey farmers in North West, a few in the Southwest and an increasing number in Adamoua and the West, have been trained in modern beekeeping techniques, which generally results in increase production and quality (such as when to harvest, how to process and transport) and more environmental friendly practices (resulting in fewer bush fires during smoking, and increased planting and regeneration of forest areas). However, many of the farmers, who are also first stage processors, as well as processing organisations, are unaware of transformation techniques that can add significant value to honey, and exploit other bee products such as wax, nectar and Propolis. A number of organisations already experiment with honey wines, body creams, ointments, soaps, propolis based ointments, honey breads and candles – and although in high demand with high profit margins, these are often only available locally, produced on a small scale, and of variable quality; A key focus for development here is the exchange of information, through the emerging Federation and associations, as well as through demonstration and pilot projects via initiatives such as VSO<sup>5</sup> wax processing demos in Adamoua, and the recently stated project to support small scale enterprises in the NTFP sector, with honey as one of the sectors, lead by the FAO<sup>6</sup> and SNV, which will facilitate demonstrations, pilots and information exchange on value adding and product developments.

Some regions in the country experience equilibrium in production and consumption. Distribution channels here include specialised co-operatives and associations which collect honey from small scale farmers and process, then package and market in shops. However, a good portion of the product is sold directly to consumers in recycled containers. Established cooperatives which package and label honey are able to supply chain stores and supermarkets. However, reticence of farmers to be part of the cooperative movement is related to the prices offered and the waiting time to receive payment for products supplied. Through increased consumer awareness, the consumption rate of the honey could increase and lead to a faster turnover by the honey cooperatives. More professional business management skills and entrepreneurial innovation, as well as increased access to capital, could also solve some of these issues. This can reduce waiting time for payment to farmers and increase the volume of honey marketed. Also, increasing honey volumes can ease distribution methods and lower costs to final consumers, which will also increase the incentive to supply. Anecdotal evidence since the Honey Marketing Forum indicates that there is increased interaction between actors in the chain, increases in clustering and production.



The major cities in Cameroon import honey from other provinces and from abroad. With the price of national honey being comparatively lower, appropriate marketing strategies would widen the range of consumers of the product and create incentive for more farmers to engage in bee farming. A tool to do this is awareness rising on the benefits and values of honey, such as the Honey Marketing Forum facilitated with its wide media coverage and some local organisations<sup>7</sup> poster campaigns.

<sup>5</sup> UK Voluntary Service Overseas

<sup>6</sup> Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), EU financed Project GCP/RAF/408/EC Mobilisation et renforcement des capacités des petites et moyennes entreprises impliquées dans les filières des produits forestiers non ligneux en Afrique Centrale

<sup>7</sup> Belo Rural Development Agency (BERUDEP) Berudep@yahoo.com www.berudep.org



Honey production in Cameroon is mainly organic. This means that the product can potentially access organic and fair trade markets. There are several international and local actors already interested in honey export, both to neighbouring countries as well as Europe. However, the absence of a national Honey Residue Monitoring Scheme, a requirement of the European Union for imports of honey to its member countries, as well as the lack of organic and fair trade labelling, means that this export market opportunity is not being exploited by bee farmers in Cameroon. This is combined with an absence of entrepreneurial skills that enables honey producers and retailers to evaluate the feasibility of profitable exports and interesting markets. Improvements in the quality of wax extraction are however creating scope for export of other bee products to the European market, as there are no requirements with respect to certification in the export of wax. Bee farmers are now increasing their income by clustering and selling of good quality wax to exporters.

#### 4. Discussions

Investment in apiculture to battle poverty is not uncommon in developing countries. In 2007, Nigeria and Uganda respectively provided farmers with a honey factory to produce 1000litres and 500litres of honey per day (Kasozi, 2007). It therefore goes without saying that the presence of a ready outlet for honey and bee products is the principal motivation for farmers to engage in apiculture. With much effort in the past focussed on training farmers in bee farming, it has now become imperative to look further down the market chain and invest in commercialising and professionalizing the honey and by products sector in Cameroon. The development of the sector largely depends on the existence of market outlets for the product, matching demand and supply. The diversity of supply in Cameroon and ready existence of alternatives such as sugar for honey's most common use as a sweetener means that appropriate mechanisms to raise public awareness could lead to increased demand in consumer areas and more income for producers and traders. This can increase turnover and provide an incentive for more farmers to be engaged in the sector. The organic nature of production, means that direct relationships between some farmers and consumers allows direct sales to consumers, however, new and often more distant markets and higher production volumes require increasing shelf life through processing, quality standards and improved packaging. Honey currently employs approximately 20,000 farmers in Cameroon, generating an annual income of at least 3 million Euro. The contribution of the sector to the national economy can be further enhanced if the Government of Cameroon is fully engaged in supporting the development of the sector, both economic and conservation value. The major development issue is how the public, private and civil society interact and network with each other and participate to regulate and develop an efficient value chain for honey marketing, both to consumer satisfaction, to generate incomes and employment and increase production.

Communities with degraded forests increasingly see the need to protect the remaining patches of forests and watersheds as critical sites for bee farming. Thus bee farming can stimulate forest regeneration and conservation. A key issue here is creating a win-win between the oft competing needs of bee farmers, conservationists- particularly in protected areas and other forests users, with rival land users such as farmers, graziers and increasing urbanisation.

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