Development news

Bee farming

New strategies raise farmers' hopes

Bee farmers of the North West province are hopeful that the new strategies being put in place to identify the challenges of the sector and seek solutions will not only help to improve production of honey but also standardize Cameroon honey and open up markets for their produce at home and abroad.

This hope was expressed recently following a North West regional meeting for the revitalisation of the Federation of Bee-farmers of Cameroon jointly organised in Bamenda by the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).

Held as a follow up to the November 2006 Cameroon Honey Marketing Forum which took place in Limbe, the workshop identified as priority for the revitalisation of the Federation of Bee-farmers of Cameroon the need for an umbrella organisation to organise and represent the honey sector.

The Limbe meeting had resolved that bee farmers in the various provinces were to organise themselves into provincial unions as prerequisite for the revitalisation of the Federation of Bee-farmers of Cameroon at the national level. The absence of such an organisation has been responsible for the numerous problems that were identified at the levels of production, processing and marketing and for Julius of SNV thought that time was ripe for the bee-farming sector to take centre stage.

"In Cameroon, bee-farming has been a secondary activity but the time is now to give the sector its own identity," Fon declared.

And for the sector to have its own identity, the FAO project, Mobilisation and Capacity Building for Small and Medium Enterprises for Non Timber Forest Products in central Africa, will be fully involved in identifying the problems the sector is facing in collaboration with the farmers and seeking solutions through capacity building with the general objective of improving the revenue of these enterprises.

One of the components of the project will be to develop the market chain so as to enable actors to get more revenue from the market chain which has been a headache to farmers who have been unable to evacuate their produce in a satisfactory manner.

Meanwhile earlier attempts to create a federation of bee farmers in the country hit the rocks and participants at the workshop identified reasons for its failure and resolved to avoid the same mistakes in the process of coming up with an umbrella organisation where concerned individuals will start with the putting in place of divisional associations by December 17, 2007. It is expected that meetings towards the creation of a provincial union will start in January 2008.

The Bamenda meeting brought together forty participants including bee farming groups and support organisations.

"I am satisfied with the workshop as a start to a process," Waingeh Albert Ndim, Honey Farmer, Fundong.

"I will say I am satisfied with the workshop as a start to a process and my satisfaction comes from the fact that we may really get organised and produce something uniform in the area of honey. I am satisfied because I now have the hope that the future for honey producers in Cameroon will get brighter.

The platform, if it works should be able to bring some uniformity into our packages of honey. It will also give some uniformity in the quality because it is true that bad producers spoil the image of honey. We need people who produce honey and everybody is calling it honey which is from different areas and obviously of different quality. If we were able to bring a uniform quality to our honey and make it good enough then we will be able to have honey as Bonita white honey from Oku. There are groups which can have up to 20 tons annually and others up to thirty tons. There are also organised cooperatives such as the ANCO which has a network of producers with an annual production of 50 tons. This is the same with HONCO.

"Do they have a market for their product? Honey produced is not evacuated at the level of the producer. Those involved in marketing collect the produce on credit and the time producers wait for money discourages investment in the sector and stunts production. We are thinking that if traders involved could access better and more organised markets it would lead to a faster turnover of honey to the producers and prevent them from being shortchanged. Furthermore we are also reflecting in the direction of issues like venture capital which could enable the cooperatives and other traders in the sector to pay upfront the price to the producer so that it can motivate them to continue to produce. These intermediaries will be involved in the processing, packaging and marketing.

"What is venture capital meant for? Venture capital is meant to facilitate marketing. It is basically towards acquiring the inputs, which have been made available by the supporting organisations such as traders in the beekeeping sector on how to acquire local materials like hives and smokers at low cost. This will be taking place in the weeks ahead within the framework of this program."

"Do you envisage the processing component? Processing is a very important sector because as far as our production is concerned. It is very pure but we envisage contamination at the transition from harvesting through building and marketing. It is important to see into the issue of building the necessary capacity in this process and we are working towards the exchange of skills between the different actors already in the field doing very well and also looking at the capacities of other manufacturers who could provide this processing equipment to the different groups."

Interviewed by Joy Ful

"There is a need to empower local communities to do bee farming," Ndyoe Oussayyou, Regional Coordinator, Mobilisation and Capacity Building for Small and Medium Enterprises for Non Timber Forest Products in central Africa.

"The market chain is still very informal and needs to be more formalised. A platform needs to be created where all actors will share information. There is a need to encourage local communities to do bee farming. They should be organized and initiated towards improved financial and stock management creating group enterprises for Non Timber Forest Products in central Africa. The farmers will have to minimise the residue so as to improve the quality and the labelling. We have some pockets of honey producers with some grades of honey like the white honey from Oku. There are groups which have up to 20 tons annually and others up to thirty tons. There are also organised cooperatives such as the ANCO which has a network of producers with an annual production of 50 tons. This is the same with HONCO.

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"We are coming to work with the farmers," Tangem Elvis Paul, Mobilisation and Capacity Building for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, NTPF, NWP.

"What they are interested in is that we are going to work to gather. We are not coming here to introduce a new activity but to change the approach to improve the sector because we are convinced we have had so far the sector mainly ready for development and improvement especially at the level of capacity building for the farmers. No one is interested in making more confusion in something new. We are just going to improve on what farmers are doing now by bringing in ideas that have been learnt from other countries which are already advanced. It is a new project still being put in place and it will start off officially on the 15th of November 2007. I can say that it has a clear problem solving system and since we are going to be very ambitious and the readiness that the farmers are showing to the workshop, you can say that there is great room for success. I can say it is still another opportunity for farmers to improve their production.

"We do not have a ready package on what we are building capacities. We are going to talk with the farmers and carry out a baseline survey to understand what level needs improvement. Today the farmers who are going to identify influences on their ability to grow and improve on their livelihoods."

The Farmer's Voice n°148 November 2007