Mainstreaming Women and Marginalised Groups through Beekeeping in The South West Province Under the Project GCP/RAF/408/EC.

Within the recent months a series of activities (workshops, sensitisation meetings, farm visits, outreach programmes, radio talks) have been carried out in line with project GCP/RAF/408/EC objectives.

In the area of apiculture, these activities set out to strengthen the capacity of beekeepers in order to enable them come up with viable enterprises. Already, the workshops, sensitisation meetings, follow-up visits, outreach programmes and radio talks are yielding fruits considering the number of persons who respond to meetings, workshops and other outreach programmes. A lot of enthusiasm has been created and we are trying to keep in touch either through phone calls, follow up visits, invitations to workshops and other advisory services with the use of partners and collaborators in order to sustain this interest. In addition, more women are becoming interested in beekeeping especially in the area of value addition.

In the South West, honey is highly prized because it is used as an energy-rich food as well as for its pharmaceutical and medicinal values. From the production and sale of quality honey and wax products, it is possible for men and women alike to send their children to school, pay for healthcare, food, clothes and other necessary requirements. Beeswax is an important raw ingredient of candles, body creams, honey drinks, ointments, lotions, soaps and polishes. This is the experience gotten from the Tombel and Bangem Bee Farmers’ Association (TOBA). This is one group that has received much support from Bees Abroad in the United Kingdom.

It is better understood now in the South West that bee farming is a genderless activity that can be carried out by diverse groups of people. It is also an activity that can be beneficial to disadvantaged persons such as People Living with HIV/AIDS, handicapped, as well as rural/urban poor since it is neither labour nor capital intensive.

In the past, in the South West, women were excluded from beekeeping if it required some culturally unacceptable activity such as climbing trees. Modern, intermediate technology techniques, which are gender-neutral, make beekeeping accessible to women. More importantly, by engaging in beekeeping, women also help in preserving the bees and by extension biodiversity because these social insects help to ensure balance in the ecosystems. Women are more interested in producing things with hive products than men, so making ointments and lotions and the uses of wax, propolis, and honey and to a limited extent royal jelly for medicines and cooking, and special honey drinks are of interest to them.

Beekeeping is an activity that women can benefit from to a very large extent. Its gender sensitivity nature makes it suitable for them to get actively involved which brings about improved livelihood opportunities. This in turn increases income, the wellbeing of the family as well as the self esteem of women.

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