

2SCALE

Women and youth
sensitive apiculture



Gender Cases

2SCALE Consortium



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1. Introduction

Beekeeping has been practiced in Ethiopia for over 5,000 years, with evidence dating its presence as far back as 3,500 to 3,000 BC. Folklore rumours that the Queen of Sheba brought honey back to the country after her famous visit to King Solomon in Jerusalem, a visit that is of significant historic importance in Ethiopia's national mythology (ATA, 2017).

Since then, the beekeeping sub-sector has been an integral part of agriculture in Ethiopia. It has been contributing to the household income, poverty alleviation and national economy through export. Ethiopia is known for its variation of agro-climatic conditions and biodiversity, which favoured the existence of diversified honeybee flora and a considerable number of honeybee colonies. On the official Ethiopian Investment Commission site (2020), it is stated that Ethiopia is the tenth largest honey producing country in the world and the largest in Africa.

Changing the conventional forest-based and male dominated honey production system into a women and youth led transitional one is the core idea of the 2SCALE partnership with Bench Maji Forest Coffee Producer Farmers' Cooperative Union LTD. The latter is a farmer based business organization established in July 2005 as a cooperative union by 14 founder primary cooperatives to operate in Bench Maji zone, South West Ethiopia. Presently, the Union is engaged in the production, processing and export of coffee, spices, and honey. It has 64-member primary cooperatives with 9,822 (1,566 Female) smallholder

members. 34 primary cooperatives and 2,655 (412 female) members are engaged in honey production, apart from coffee and or spices.

The dominant honey production system in Bench Maji area consists of hanging a traditional beehive on a very tall tree in the natural forest. This system is risky for the producers because people fall down from the trees while hanging the hives or harvesting honey. In addition, only men beekeepers are engaged in this production system and are travelling long distances from the villages. The current production system has also a negative effect on the forest and the environment, as the beekeepers use smoke during harvesting to pacify the bees, at times causing accidental fire in the forest. Moreover, the productivity of the traditional bee hives is very low (about 5 kg/hive) and very poor in quality. Honey is mixed with bee broods, dead bees, wax, smoke, tree leaves, wood and un-ripped honey during harvesting. In addition, farmers' honey production and beeswax extraction practices and skills are still traditional and need upgrading.

The Bench Maji honey partnership came up with the business idea of using improved beehives, with an introduction to technologies and proper information dissemination systems. Improved business communication with potential buyers, and back and forth linkage with stakeholders along the value chain are also believed to be crucial for the transformation of the sector, from the current traditional way to a more competitive agribusiness.



Sample beehive prepared after the youth and women inclusive technical training



An empowered women in her own bee-hiving area



Tesfaye Abebe (the male youth in the picture) is one of the beekeeping public extension agent who provides support in the area - on site extension service provision.

2. Gender based constraints in the sector

Male-dominance

The dominant honey production system in the Bench Maji area involves setting beehives on extremely tall trees in the forest. This production system requires climbing trees, using ropes, and harvesting honey with plastic bags or leaves of “Ensete”. Harvesting caused at times death of both the beekeepers and the honeybees, damaged the hives, and resulted in low quality of honey products. In addition, it was neither socially acceptable nor physically possible for women, preventing them from participating in the sector, which led to men dominance in the honey production value chain.

Limited experience in training women

The quality and quantity of honey has been constrained by the lack of proper skills and knowledge of beekeeping. The apiaries were kept far away from

women’s homes, which made it difficult to consistently check the progress and take immediate measures when necessary. Even when there were trainings and awareness creation forums on apiculture, they did not include women. There was no mechanism to make sure that women farmers were included in training and conditions were not conducive for them to voice their needs or issues.

Time management

Women face a challenge in balancing time between beekeeping activities and house workloads. Responsibilities of childcare and domestic tasks outweighs the beekeeping and income generating activities. Even if the bee hives are located in the backyard, it still is time consuming to ensure maintenance, cleaning and inspection tasks for women who were engaged in multiple household responsibilities.



On site extension service provision - considerate of women & youth

3. Best practices of the partnership

Inclusive capacity building

The business champions wanted to turn the conventional forest-based honey production system into a modern backyard production system, using improved beehives and stimulate women to step into the honey value chain. The partnership creates employment opportunities for the smallholder farmers, women, youth, and unemployed sectors of the community at production, processing, and marketing levels of the value chain.

Accordingly, training on improved backyard apiary management for model farmers and experts was provided to break the traditional cycle of honey production. Ketema witnessed the accident which caused the death of his father at the age of 16. Even though the trauma remains, he explained that he did not know any better or have any other economical means, except to follow his father's footsteps.

"Until the training, which is an eye opener for me, I had no clue about how to resolve the challenge. Even if I knew that I would put my life in danger I kept doing it for six years." – Ketema Getachew (model Youth SHF)

Wusti Godie is a single mother (to her only son) and in her 40's. She witnesses her father, brothers and her late husband do the traditional honey production

for a living. The beehives location and the harvesting mechanisms have been major obstacles, but now things are changing for the better: *"In the past, considering women in honey production was out of discussion but now the door is open. It is up to us to choose how far we want to participate. My aim is to lead and initiate other women in honey production. If I don't get followers immediately after the training, I will still do it on my own and become a role model for others because if they get to see my success I know they will change their minds and join my journey soon".*

Men's engagement

The partnership promotes utilization of modern beehive through continuous training provisions to farmers on transitional and modern beehives management system. Such interventions not only help to transfer knowledge and capacitate farmers, but also exposes women to this men-dominated sector.

Partners and relative's support are key to ensure women's efficiency in carrying out different farming and off farm activities. Gradually, the attitude towards women in honey production is changing thanks to the efforts of development actors who have put significant effort to bring the change. The strategies managed to overcome men's resistance to women's engagement in honey production and encouraged husbands'



Ketema Getachew - model youth smallholder farmer



Wusti Godie - beehive smallholder farmer

involvement in supporting their wives. The women were able to get involved in decision-making and leadership.

The political will of the government to give priority and special attention to agriculture played a significant role in changing gender dynamics in this Western region of Ethiopia, which is already in favor of more gender equity. The policy initiatives broken down to specific activities and up to the lowest government structure, the Kebele. This allowed women to organize themselves into groups/cooperatives and work on the honey production on their own via the opportunities provided by the government and access to land, which is free of charge. Moreover, technical assistance is being provided by the government extension workers in consideration of women's special needs. These interventions were key success factors in bringing the change in the households producing honey and contributed to make the partnership interventions more fruitful.

Bensha Shureka is a model farmer who took the training and is in the process of shifting from traditional to modern beehives. He tried the transitional beehives made from local materials (chefeka kefo) and was able to raise his productivity from 8 -10 kgs per season using a traditional hive,

to a current 18 kgs per season/hives. In addition to changing all his traditional beehives into modern/transitional ones, he committed himself to engaging women in the sector.

“There is an exclusively women primary cooperative whereby they produce and sell honey. Since my wife is a member of the cooperative and they are new to the sector, I am willing to assist them in tasks such as preparing the land and shades, transferring bees, constructing transitional beehives, and honey harvesting, especially at night time. I wish other men in the community could help women as I do. Because I believe our support will certainly bring economic changes in the household. If my wife is successful in the business, our economic status will be improved.”

Andenet is a member of the few women led backyard honey producer primary cooperatives. It has 18 members, all youth (below 35 years of age). They have expressed the need for consistent support from their families and their husbands in particular. This was identified as a critical factor by some women leaving the cooperative. Moreover, land ownership and access to their backyard is another critical factor which limits women's participation in beekeeping. According to Fantayhu Temesgen, a member of the cooperative, *“the support system we have from the community and*

our close relatives is how we were able to survive in this challenging sector”.

“Our association came from three different women groups. The reason for our merging is that most of the members (almost 12 of them) withdrew from their membership. The household burden is one of the significant reasons behind their frustrations and dropout. Backyard beehives need consistent follow up and inspection, such as cleaning and protection from insects/animals. As women, we have multiple chores in the household, in addition to the help we provide to the husband in the farm. If the husband does not understand how time consuming all the tasks are and support us, our fate will not be different from these dropout women”.

Sege Baje is one of the participants who has practiced traditional beekeeping for decades. He said that it is the younger generation’s responsibility to modernize the beekeeping sector. He regrets all the unnecessary efforts they used to put and the risks they took. Hence, he plans to change the way he practices beekeeping for the sake of himself and his children.

“Before, I did not want to change into transition/modern beehives because I thought changing the location of the beehives would cause the loss of the bees. Now, I am able to practically see how and when we can transfer bees. Since I understand bee

management, I have decided to change 300 traditional beehives into modern ones at my back yard. I have also decided to engage my sons and my wife and am willing to give her a piece of our backyard so that she can join the women cooperative on her own “.

Youth inclusion

2SCALE’s support in this partnership will transform the honey production system from a forest based to a backyard honey production system that favors more integration of women and youth. This requires a holistic support through 2 SCALE’s intervention. The partnership aspires to create off-farm additional job opportunities for 15 men and 20 female youth. Eden Tilahun, 21 years old and a second-year accounting student, testifies:

“My mother has 14 modern beehives in our backyard. I ordered an additional 30 modern beehives because I want to expand the business. If I manage to increase the income for myself and my family, I am thinking of considering it as a full time employment. Even if my father used to do it for years and after his death, my mom continued to do the business in their backyard, I was not fully knowledgeable about the sector. Such training and awareness creation forums are eye openers for us and I recommend the same for the youth.”

For youth like Negist, who is only 18 and a 9th grader,



Negist - beehive youth smallholder farmer



Fantayhu Temesegen - member of Andenet women cooperative

the modern backyard honey production is the only hope to ensure a sustainable livelihood. Her father left her mother and her younger siblings, and that is when she started supporting the family by engaging in farm activities via the women cooperatives. Now she believes that she has found a great employment opportunity, as the partnership facilitates and smoothens the way.

The role of extension workers

Andenet women cooperative used to be affected by lack of knowledge and skills. According to Fantayhu Temesegen, member of the cooperative, during the past two harvests, they were forced to sell the honey produced at a low price, due to poor quality.

“The first year we did not collect the honey in time, so we jeopardized both the quantity and quality. In the second year, I managed to collect 20 kgs and I sold it to the Union for 80 ETB per kg. To be honest, none of us were satisfied with the generated income but we could not negotiate, mainly because we did not know how, and the quality of honey was poor. I do not think we will face such challenges anymore because the extension workers equipped us with technical knowledge and practical skills. Hence, we are hoping that we will improve our quality for the next harvesting

season and generate more money, of course!”

Tesfaye Abebe is one of the beekeeping public extension agents who provides support in the area. The partnership’s practical training aimed at extension agents gave him updates on the sector and motivation to do his work.

“I used to advise the women cooperatives to collect the honey only once a year. After the training, I now understand that honey can be harvested three times a year. This will significantly increase the quantity produced and their income. In addition, trainings on how to make shades, transfer bees and prepare quality wax will help us to increase production and productivity.”

4. Lessons learned and Conclusions

Modern and transitional backyard hives brought an entry point for women to access the male-dominated sector of honey production. The partnership needs to provide access to finance to ensure the introduction of new technologies, as their cost is often prohibitive and discouraging for many, especially women and other marginalized groups. Effective use of new technologies via continuous training to develop knowledge, skills and confidence is also required.

As the sector is new to women, they need full support from the community and their male partners. Awareness creation forums should be held to change the perception of the community. The partnership could take a lead in this. The Union/business champion should keep facilitating access to beekeeping inputs as a package comprising hives, bee colony, protective clothing, and other equipment necessary for improved beekeeping management practice.



Bench Maji zone, South West Ethiopia - Beehive farmer



Bench Maji zone, South West Ethiopia - Beehive farmer



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inclusive agribusiness in Africa*

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