Chipo Gono – Bees intrigue me

Bees for development's
Janet Lowore interviews Chipo Gono from the Livelihoods & Innovation Development Programme of Ruzivo Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe

JL Hello Chipo, please introduce yourself

CG I am Programme Assistant in the Livelihoods & Innovation Development Programme of Ruzivo Trust, Harare, Zimbabwe. We work in agriculture, land, livelihoods and sustainable development. Our work is with poor farmers, youths and the middle-aged: some are linked to markets while others are working at subsistence level. Apiculture is an important topic.

JL How does beekeeping help support rural livelihoods?

CG In many ways! Through the income gained by those who would otherwise struggle, especially in a dollarised country. Beekeeping has many advantages as it is low-cost and does not compete with land-demanding activities. Bees produce honey even in the poorest regions with little rainfall, making it viable in dry regions where crop production and community gardens are difficult to implement. Livelihoods in rural communities are improved as households become food secure, often using honey as a substitute for sugar. Honey is used also as a remedy for bronchial infections, burns, colds, ulcers and wounds. An unexpected outcome is that beekeeping increases the participation of communities in conservation. In Goromonzi District, as people gained awareness of the importance of flowers and trees, there is less indiscriminate cutting of trees for timber in the veld. This has helped to conserve almost near extinction trees. Moringa oleifera helps prevent anaemia and many forms of malnutrition, also it is a good nectar and pollen source.

JL Who are your target groups?

CG 500 bee farmers in four Districts. The first group of 15 farmers in Mazowe District started on their own and sought our training. In Goromonzi District, we are training 30 farmers in the Pfuma Group. We have identified groups in Hwedza and Marondera, (200 farmers), but unfortunately because of funding cuts the projects could not be sustained. Our Champion Beekeeper has over 350 colonies and she has ceased all other farming. We collaborate to train and convince sceptical communities of the value and desirability of beekeeping as part of their livelihood.

JL Tell us about your work

CG If farmers do not know how to utilise income gained from farm activities, they remain in poverty because there is always need for continuing investment in a farm for business survival. We give business skills advice especially the roles of budget and record keeping. When we began the beekeeping programme we found that maximum potential was not being reached due to the low investments by the beekeepers, who lacked organised market systems and had no extension support – some gave up after failing to capture a colony! After our training farmers realise the potential of working in small groups with leadership and

"Bees now intrigue me! When we see honey on the shelves, do we ever think of the efforts the bees make? How self organised they are to produce the sweetest of products? Besides their protective nature coming through stings, do we reflect that we harvest where they put their labour? As they do selection of materials for production of honey, do we think through the intelligence of how they select the best combination of nectars to produce honey? What is it that we are doing for them to play this role the way they do? What conservation efforts and complementary efforts do we put in place to make their job easier? These are questions that continue to seize me in my research efforts, having worked for a year in this unchartered area in development – Chipo Gono."
a constitution and only a few bee colonies are individually owned.

JL Why did you bring a can of insect spray with you?

CG I am afraid of the problems in Europe causing decline also in our pollinators. I am saying that in Africa our bees forage on indigenous tree species and there is very little use of pesticides in crops. However beekeepers are sometimes careless and do not provide water for their bees. This causes worker bees to invade people’s bathtubs and kitchen sinks looking for water. Not everyone in Africa is a beekeeper and not all are aware of the role that bees play in nature. For some people the only thing they know about bees is that they sting!

So when these innocent little pollinators enter people’s homes, the first human instinct is to get them out. Thoughtlessly humans spray harmful insecticides on the bees and they die. Sometimes bees are destroyed by veld fires as people hunt in the bush: beekeepers are encouraged to construct bee houses, or fireguards around their apiaries, for protection.

Beekeepers need to provide a safe environment (forage, protection, water) for bees to prosper so that future generations are able to enjoy the benefits that they bring to us. Africa should watch out for its own problems before it is too late: we do not want to count bee corpses!

JL How will you develop market opportunities?

CG We cannot be with farmers forever; we intend to develop smart relationships between farmers and honey buyers to eliminate intermediary buyers, and if we manage to raise resources, the sky is the limit. Acquisition of development funding is a challenge although we have submitted many proposals: we are seeking international markets for our bee produce.

JL Thank you Chipo

*S$ollarisation/Currency substitution Adopting a foreign currency as sole legal tender, easing to issue domestic currency and giving up power to vary exchange rate.

LOOK AHEAD

CAMEROON
Honey Show Cameroon
4-7 November 2015, Yaounde
Further details soukybert@yahoo.fr

ETHIOPIA
ApiEthiopia Expo
December 2015, Addis Ababa
Further details nbth1963@yahoo.com

IRAQ
8th International Arab Beekeepers Union Congress
10-13 October 2015
Contact beekeepersnajaf@yahoo.com

PHILIPPINES
APIMONDIA Symposium on Indigenous Bee Species
1-4 February 2016, Tagaytay City
Further details www.apimondiaphilippines2016.com

RWANDA
5th ApiTrade Africa Event
2016, Kigali
Further details will appear here

SAUDI ARABIA
13th Asian Apicultural Association Conference
2016
Further details will appear here

SLOVENIA
11th COLOSS Conference
Current threats & future beekeeping
21-23 October 2015, Lukovica
Further details www.coloss.org

1st Pan-European Honey Breakfast
21 November 2015
Further details www.czs.si

SOUTH AFRICA
FAO XIV World Forestry Congress
7-11 September 2015, Durban
Further details www.fao.org/about/meetings/world-forestry-congress

SOUTH KOREA
APIMONDIA: 44th International Apicultural Congress
15-20 September 2015, Deajeon
Visit: www.apimondia2015.com

UK
Strengthening livelihoods in developing countries through beekeeping
8 April 2016, Monmouth
Sustainable beekeeping
9–10 April 2016, Ragman’s Lane Permaculture Farm
 See www.beesfordevelopment.org/what-we-do/training

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