

## Honey bees and the environment

One of the key missions of this Bees Abroad project is to improve the natural resources of this semi-arid region. Tree planting has been encouraged, and the Kisima Self-Help Beekeepers group has taken the message to heart.



Bee-suit made from a gunny bag

Each group member must own at least one hive. Young people can join from age 15. The tree nursery grows horticultural crops that are bee-friendly. They started planting ten years ago, and there is now substantial tree cover around the apiary area.

“ we have planted trees for some years, but now we value the trees that are good for the bees.”

## Looking into the future

As this phase of the project comes to an end, further opportunities to increase the impact of the project are becoming apparent.

## Children are the future

The children in this project area will get a chance to learn at school about beekeeping and its influence on their environment and their future world.

## KEBS certification



Tiny seedlings of bee-friendly trees

As small community groups form co-operatives, they are seeking Kenya Bureau of Standards quality certification. Bees Abroad will support them to achieve this.

## Marketing and processing honey

Groups have formed co-operatives to share equipment for processing, and strengthening numbers for bargaining. Other groups wish to emulate this approach

Bees Abroad is grateful to the UK Department for International Development for its financial support of this project

Contact us for more information or support us through our online donor page:

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# Bees Abroad

Relieving poverty through beekeeping



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## Changing the lives of low-income families through beekeeping; an impact case study in Laikipia, Kenya

### Background

Laikipia County is a ‘hardship area’ of Kenya, where around 49% of people live in poverty. The Bees Abroad project, entitled ‘The Bee Products Enterprise Development Project’ involves over one thousand beekeepers who have either been trained or have increased their skills.



Kisima Self-Help Group Beekeepers

Bees Abroad shares its skills by:

- training women and men how to look after bees, how to extract high quality honey, and make other hive products
- teaching marketing and selling skills to make products for profit
- advising on how to improve the quality and quantity of the crop yields through improved pollination by the bees

The project ensures that women and men take an equal share in the activities and profits from the project. Special care was taken to include very vulnerable households.

### Achievements

“the financial benefits of the project are very noticeable – one family sent their children to school through a loan from this co-operative.”

### Reducing financial poverty

This project was set up to help very poor families to earn more money. Now, around 15tonnes of honey is produced, and family incomes have increased by over one quarter to around £134 per month for most project households.

The Mutaro Community group explained; “we have increased our living standards, and have been supported in learning how to sell profitably. This has helped us to pay school fees”.

## Group action & community groups



Group action strengthens community spirit, and gives more bargaining power to its members. Project groups have formed co-operatives to buy processing equipment, market and sell quality products, and register products with the Kenya Bureau of Standards.

“the support given by the members to each other improves the life of the community; it is ‘nice’ and allows people to solve their problems”

Social benefits include loans, which can be arranged safely as the communities members work closely with each other.

### Value-added products

Traditionally, honey was sold as it came out of the hive. Wax would be included and it was sold by the bucket. The purchaser would filter the honey and scrap the wax. Now, this valuable commodity is used to make skin cream, balms, polishes and candles. Women enjoy making these products as a team.

“Before using body cream, my husband did not appreciate my face” said one, “now he finds me very attractive!” Everyone laughed with her telling her story!

### Bees and health

Honey is an important nutritional food, which contains easily digestible carbohydrates. It contains vitamins and minerals, including B vitamins and other important micronutrients.

A male beekeeper was asked about skin products for men. With lots of laughter he declared “no – not a good plan”. The women said the men already use the skin cream that the women have bought ...

A young man suffering severely from ringworm to his scalp used the skin cream made by the group. It led to rapid healing where other treatments had failed.

Honey is rich in antioxidants which can protect against health-damaging free radicals. Many women said that the health of their children was the most important use of honey as well as the medicinal properties of the skin cream.

(All images: Steve Bates)

## Bee husbandry can now be inclusive

In the past, only men kept bees. By introducing the ‘Top-bar Hives (TBH)’, beekeeping is opened up to the whole family and everyone can now be involved; the hives are hung on low frames so no tree-climbing is involved, and bee-suits allow women and young people to be take part.



Father & daughter are keen beekeepers

“We are keen to involve our children in beekeeping. With log hives, up in the trees, fathers would bring their sons...now, armed with bee-suits, our sons and daughters are included. We make them aware of the environment, and the reasons for conservation. “

### Women in beekeeping

For many women, particularly in the Maasai communities, the traditional roles are deeply ingrained. Women have become involved in ‘value-added products’, producing, in particular, the skin creams which are so highly valued.

The chairman of The Osutwa group explained “with the women involved, I feel that we are all now brothers and sisters; we will move together”



Maasai women making skin cream over a three-stone fire

### Making hives and bee-suits

During the Project, Bees Abroad have trained beekeepers to make their own hives using local materials; one hive costs around £4 to make (£32 to buy).



Top bar hive made from local materials

A good-quality bee-suit in Kenya can cost around £28. Bees Abroad have trained local beekeepers to make excellent bee-suits using recycled *gunny bags* (grain sacks) with the cost of making one suit being less than £1.50.