



# Commercialisation of Smallholder Beekeepers: Lessons from ASPIRE

## Background

Beekeeping is an integral part of the smallholder farming system in Ethiopia.

About 1.8 million people are engaged in beekeeping, cultivating approximately 6.19 million beehives, the vast majority of which (around 96.5%) are traditional hives. The total amount of honey produced in 2016 was around 47.7 million kg, of which about 42.9 million kg was harvested from traditional hives.

Traditional beekeeping is highly inefficient, yielding an average yield of 5kg to 7kg per colony each year. In general, most of the honey and beeswax come from traditional production methods, which are characterised by low productivity and low quality.

The commercialisation of beekeepers – from traditional beehive-based subsistent production to modern commercial beekeeping practice – represents an excellent opportunity for individual beekeepers, including women and young people, to improve their livelihoods, and at the same time bring economic benefits to the country as a whole, for example in terms of exports and job creation.

## The goal

The ASPIRE project is aimed at targeting 30,000 beekeepers and their followers who use subsistent and traditional beekeeping practices, and transforming them into semi-commercialised entrepreneurs.

Commercialisation in apiculture is about creating business-minded beekeepers, scaling-up production, developing cooperatives and groups of input suppliers, creating market links with processors, addressing quality issues, and so on.

## The solutions and results

The ASPIRE approach towards commercialisation started with the strategic expansion of honey production that could successfully generate marketable surplus. ASPIRE implemented a number of initiatives, including:

- developments in the private sector, input supply system, and extension system



- promoting the increased engagement of young people and women
- institutional development
- setting up value chain-based networks of actors and stakeholders at national, regional, zonal and district levels, so that beekeepers could access inputs and sell their products at higher prices
- preparing a legal framework for marketing apiculture products.

Commercialisation efforts began by identifying prospective or semi-commercial beekeepers individually, in groups, associations or cooperatives; linking them to honey processors or exporters; creating commercial business plans, supported by a 'starter package' and complemented by business links and continuous monitoring. Most of the activities were to be implemented by the actors themselves, with the ASPIRE team playing a facilitation role.

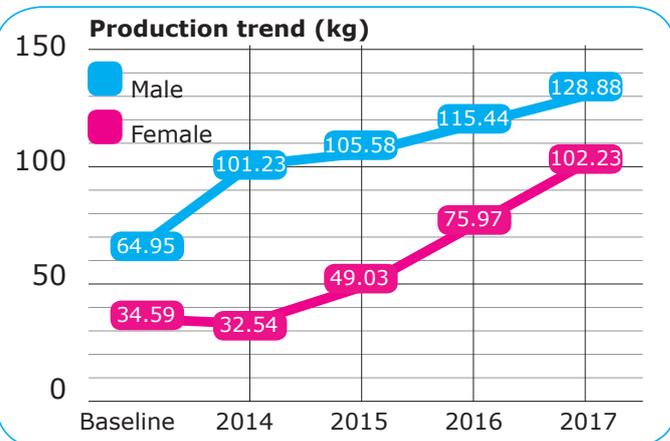
ASPIRE provided intensive training to beekeepers and other actors on business orientation and production techniques. During the training, sample apiculture equipment was provided to the 'lead beekeepers' and input suppliers. ASPIRE also provided hands-on training on how to manage an apiculture business, as well as techniques for activities such as preparing transitional beehives, multiplying and transferring colonies, and extracting and printing wax.

The ASPIRE capacity development initiatives also included strengthening financial services and increasing beekeepers' access to improved inputs. The project partnered with two banks and two micro-finance institutions (MFIs) to facilitate access to value chain financing through a partial guarantee. The total amount of guarantee fund allocated was €800,000. This guarantee fund was leveraged to over ETB 63 million.

ASPIRE also facilitated loan systems and training for staff of project partner financial institutions – about 23,641 beekeepers and companies/unions/cooperatives benefited from this arrangement. About 21% of the credit beneficiary beekeepers were females. Much of the financial support was used to increase the number of transitional hives.

Over the project period (2013–2017), ASPIRE trained about 31,376 beekeepers (21% of whom are women) using the minimum ASPIRE training package (supported by learning materials covering technical, business, financial and entrepreneurship areas), and about 33,290 'copy farmers' were supported by trained beekeepers. Of these, about 25,519 beekeepers constructed 67,066 transitional beehives. In addition, around 21% of the trained beekeepers, about 15% of whom are women, multiplied about 15,246 bee colonies. At the end of the project period, about 15,000 beekeepers own around 30,000 framed beehives, and about 84% of these beekeepers tend bee colonies.

The lead farmers and a number of target farmers observed positive impacts as a result of marketing their surplus honey. All the beekeepers targeted by the project developed a more commercial orientation to their operations. About 5,707,080kg of honey was produced



**Figure 1: Target beekeepers' honey production trend**

by 39,912 beekeepers in 2016. As indicated in Figure 1, the production showed significant growth over the project period for both men and women beekeepers.

## Lessons learned

- The strategy of providing beekeepers with support in terms of knowledge and skills, financial resources and access to equipment resulted in surplus honey production. This model of expanding production can be scaled up to increase marketable honey supply.
- The model of business relations and systemic links between smallholder beekeepers and a collaborative network of honey and beeswax exporters in a credit scheme are exemplary in terms of commercialisation.
- Engaging young people and women in beekeeping is an important lesson in how to address unemployment and, at the same time, expand production and enhance commercialisation.

## Case study: Lead beekeeper, Keshi Hailemariam Ze Yohannes

Keshi Hailemariam Ze Yohannes, a lead beekeeper aged 35, lives in Weree Leke, Tigray. He started beekeeping in 1999 with five traditional and two framed hives. He received training on ASPIRE's minimum training package for 10 days in 2014. Nominated as a model beekeeper in 2016, he received intensive training on technical, business and beekeeping management in Bahir Dar. He also received bee accessories from the ASPIRE project.

After he was trained in Bahir Dar, he increased the number of framed hives to 68 and added three transitional hives for both wax and honey production. Currently, he has 73 framed hives, four traditional hives, three transitional hives, and 80 colonies.

As a lead beekeeper, he is providing special support to 49 copy beekeepers (three female and 46 male, including 28 young people). He supports them in harvesting, splitting, making transitional beehives and site selection. Keshi Hailemariam's apiary also serves as a demonstration site for beekeepers.

Keshi Hailemariam's livelihood has improved dramatically since beekeeping became his main business. He is now financially secure and is able to cover all his children's education expenses, his family's medical expenses, and recently paid for the construction of a new house. He owns three 'Holstein' and two 'Begayet' cattle, and recently purchased 500m<sup>2</sup> of land in an urban area to build a family home.

