

BELIEVE (Beekeeping as a Livelihood in Extremely Vulnerable Environments), Kenya

This project aims to improve the quality of life for small-scale beekeepers in some of the poorest areas in Kenya.



What problem or need is the project addressing?

25% of the population in Kenya and 35% of those under the poverty line live in what are known as arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). These are fragile environments, with low and unreliable rainfall and vulnerable to frequent drought. Land degradation and depletion of water resources in ASALs are worsening as population grows, and their mainly pastoralist communities are becoming increasingly food insecure and impoverished.

Production of honey is one of the few means people in ASAL areas have to earn an income without damaging the environment they depend on to survive. Many people already practice beekeeping, but on an occasional basis and at a very small scale.

Although there is unmet demand for honey in both national and international markets, beekeepers face a number of problems that prevent them from taking advantage of these opportunities, such as inefficient beekeeping methods, a lack of market information, and difficulties getting their honey from remote rural areas to urban-based buyers.

If these problems can be resolved then the potential for income generation from honey production in ASAL areas, with associated social and environmental benefits, is significant.

What is the project doing?

Our BELIEVE project has two strands to it: 1) helping families in ASAL areas to increase their income from honey sales, and 2) supporting them to improve their environmental management practices.

So far the project has:

- Formed 12 community Natural Resource Management Committees (NRMCS), to oversee community efforts to conserve and protect their natural resources. The NRMCS have actively engaged community members, educating them on strategies for resource management and promoting behaviour change.
- Worked with communities to increase the number of water reservoirs and strengthen grazing and forest management capacity.
- Facilitated the construction of five water pans / surface dams to improve water conservation in the project area.
- Supported beekeepers to form groups and work together to achieve economies of scale and greater bargaining power with buyers.
- Provided training for nearly 3,000 people in improved beekeeping methods. This has included training on apiary management, honey harvesting, pest control and honey quality control, as well as natural resource management for beekeeping.
- Established six new honey centres where beekeepers can take their honey to be graded and bulked.
- Worked with 20 primary schools, involving students in conservation education and beekeeping through environmental clubs.

What impact has the project had?

The project is now in its final year. A recent review found it was having significant positive impact:

- There has been a 60% reduction in resource-related conflicts. The major causes of conflict and hardship are lack of water and competition for pasture. The project has worked with participating communities to address these problems and come up with common solutions. Communities have also managed to reach agreement on a range of other issues including charcoal burning, tree felling, livestock grazing, and vegetation regeneration areas.
- Communities are working together to conserve and protect their natural resources. In three areas, land has been set aside for grazing regeneration and water reservoirs have been established. Charcoal burning and felling of trees for firewood has been banned in nine of the divisions the project is working in (communities can only gather dead wood for firewood), and communities are planting tree seedlings in designated conservation areas. Families in three divisions have also started planting trees in their homesteads - something they have never done in the past.
- Bee reserves have been established, where forested areas are designated to provide long-term foliage for bee foraging. Beekeepers have changed the smokers they use to ensure they don't start forest fires.
- Communities are investing in new and rehabilitated hives. This, along with designated bee reserves and conservation areas, has resulted in increased bee colonies and higher production of honey.
- 3,240 families have seen increased income from beekeeping and are using this to meet basic needs, especially health, food and education.



Thomas Nkiputari, one of the beekeepers participating in the project, says:

"We had no idea to sell the honey until we came to work with SITE [Traidcraft's local partner]. The training will enhance our skills for harvesting honey, a very good quality honey so we can train the farmers how to harvest, to have nice honey, without a lot of smoke, without pollen. They are also being trained about the cleanliness of the containers and personal cleanliness of farmers. I think all those will help us."

Our local partner

We are implementing the project in collaboration with our local partner SITE Enterprise Promotion, a Kenyan NGO whose goal is the promotion of employment opportunities and economic growth among small-scale producers. SITE has been working in the project area for a number of years, and has a great deal of expertise in the African honey sector.

How is this project funded?

BELIEVE is funded by the Big Lottery Fund, grant-making trusts and individuals.

