

Beekeepers get financial support from Kumba

The Rekgarathile Honey Bee Project in the Tsantsabane local municipality has turned bees into tiny winged allies in building a sustainable enterprise that will provide the impoverished rural community with employment opportunities.



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Therefore, women dressed in protective suits carrying water to quench the thirst of bees, is slowly becoming a familiar, yet odd sight in the fields of Skeifontein in the Northern Cape.

When Kumba Iron Ore, a division of Anglo American, was first approached at its Kolomela operation in 2010 for finance to train beekeepers, they helped fund entrepreneurial training as well. The challenge of thirsty bees was just one of many new experiences that the newly minted beekeepers had to deal with over the three years of the project. The business skills training funded by Kolomela helped train the women to look for solutions rather than throw in the towel at the first hurdle.

Opportunity for unemployed

The project has not only won over the community, but earned recognition from the Department of Water Affairs, who awarded them a third prize in the 2013 Women in Water Awards. As the first group of ten trained beekeepers enjoy the sweet taste of a regular income, they are also growing the business to offer opportunity to other unemployed members of the local community. Skeifontein is perfect for beekeeping with its mix of indigenous bush, trees and flowers. It is hoped that the beekeeping project will build a stronger appreciation for the environment and lead to a reduction in the indiscriminate cutting down of trees for firewood.

The Northern Cape MEC for Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, Norman Shushu, believes that co-operation between government, industry and communities is the best way to improve the fortunes of the people of the Northern Cape. "Effective and inclusive co-operation at all levels is essential to effective poverty alleviation and is thus key to achieving key development objectives and targets. As we have seen with Kolomela's project, we want businesses to go into their communities and help fund projects that communities need."

New product lines

It is hoped that this innovative beekeeping initiative will soon deliver on its promise of creating more jobs by helping to address a global shortfall in organic honey. While the market grows for the spicy honey from Rekgarathile, the apiarists are developing new product lines around the by-products of their buzzy little helpers. They have again reached out to Kolomela to fund training in using bees wax to produce polish and candles.

Kolomela's manager of public affairs, George Benjamin, affirms the company's commitment to sustainable economic and social development. "Dependency is not the way to build strong and stable communities. We believe that projects like Rekgarathile, where communities take initiative from the bottom up and display ownership and responsibility is the way to break the cycle of dependency. Together with government and our neighbours, we will continue to establish partnerships and collaborative efforts that will contribute towards sustainable development of the communities impacted by our operations."

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