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Beyond bees: flight paths from apiculture in Uganda

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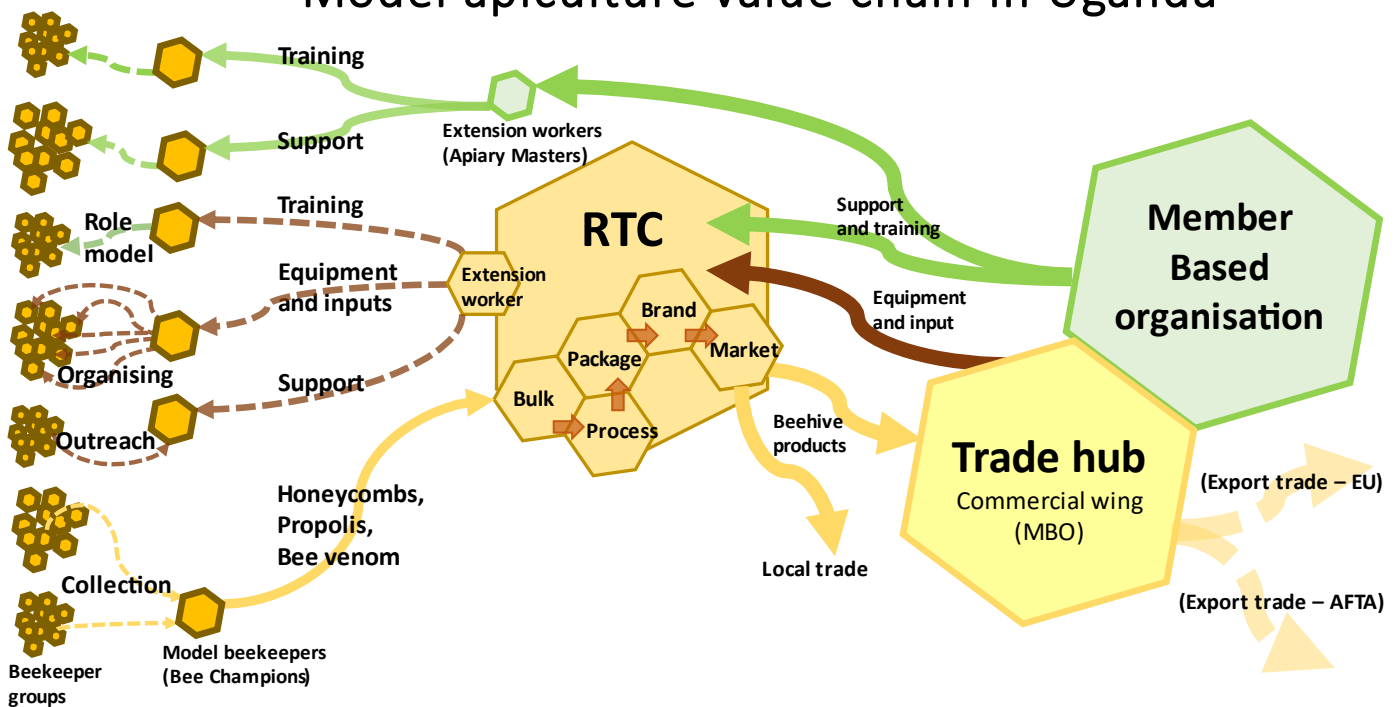
Beyond bees: flight paths from apiculture in Uganda

The apiculture sector in Uganda consists of several value chains from the beehive to the processors, and through market actors to consumers. At the first level, beekeepers maintain hives and produce raw beehive products. These products, mostly combed honey, beeswax, and propolis, are then supplied to processors who purify and process the products into pure honey, beeswax products, propolis tinctures, and in some cases bee venom or royal jelly. A blog giving an overview of the apiculture sector in Uganda is [found here](#).

Originally fragmented and scarcely organized, the apiculture sector has been growing towards a national value chain that produces high value hive products that meet national quality certification requirements. To date, this allowed Ugandan bee products to be sold in Ugandan supermarkets, having added value locally through processing, packaging, branding, wholesale, and retailing. As one of few African countries, Uganda carries out national residue monitoring plan that allows export of bee products to the European Union. This poses an opportunity for Ugandan beehive products.

TUNADO and its partners are promoting a value chain that uses more advanced honey processing businesses as concentrated nodes or one-stop-shop for their sectoral activities, called *Rural Transformation Centres* (RTCs). These RTCs provide services that include support and training for groups organised around an experienced beekeeper, known as Bee Champion. The Bee Champion is not only experienced in beekeeping, but is accessible and willing to learn and share, while being honest and having a good relationship with the community. The figure shows how beekeeper groups are targeted by the RTCs in their training of beekeepers, provision of equipment (on loan or sale), and collection and transport of beehive products to an organised market. The connection of supply and market with training, equipment and support is an innovation that allows for an infrastructure for current and future innovations in the sector.

Model apiculture value chain in Uganda



The apiculture sector as depicted above does not show access to finance and other essential elements of a value chain. Some of the barriers and flight paths of the sector are given below, as well as recommendations for other agro-industrial value chains.

Barriers for apiculture in Uganda

- **Land** for disadvantaged starting beekeepers: user rights or access to land plots (especially for youth, women, minorities, and persons with disabilities).
- **Value addition positions** in the value chain are not available for all. Equipment is expensive and the cost of borrowing is too high for most within the apiculture sector, due to low access to affordable credit.
- **Cultural perceptions** on beekeeping limit social acceptance and motivation, especially for women and persons with disabilities.
- **Technical knowledge** of beekeeping and its uptake is still low.
- **Climate change** impacts the seasonality and degrades the ecosystem.
- The **value chain is still not organised** well enough from beekeeper to beehive products markets, with many small-scale beekeepers still wanting to do everything from production to marketing, which is inefficient. TUNADO has not reached all beekeepers yet.
- Supply chain with **traceability, quality standards and bulk capacity** for export trade. First steps are made in organising the supply chain for export.

Flight paths for apiculture in Uganda

- **Access to affordable finance** through a revolving apiculture fund for apiculturists that are either beginning or willing to grow, as well as bee-products processors known as RTCs
- **Promote commercial beekeeping** as opposed to hobby-based beekeeping through entrepreneurial and apiary management support and showing the potential of beekeeping as a low-investment, high impact economic activity with model farmers and bee champions.
- **Integrate apiculture into important high value tree crops in agroforestry** for environmental management (pesticides, deforestation, high value forage growth, sustainable drought management) and cross-pollination.
- Working to **saturate the local market** for beehive products and grow export to neighbouring countries.
- Establish **traceability and quality assurance** mechanisms for product certification, trade and export.
- Adequate **branding, marketing and scale for export** to EU market, as well as neighbouring markets.

Recommendations beyond bees for other agricultural value chains

- **Coordination** of projects into sector-wide and long-term value chain development, e.g., TUNADO as apex body and a main vessel for coordinated efforts in the apiculture sector.
- **Avoid hit-n-run projects** that distort local markets and value chains. Some organisations and government projects distribute inputs, without the proper training and extension services or market linkage arrangements. Dropping a product (e.g., beehive) for free into the value chain periodically may cause this product to cease commercial value. This is the result of the fact that the product may be seen as something one will receive, rather than something one must invest in and is valuable for other actors to start producing locally. Improving the access to affordable credit for farmers to invest in inputs and equipment themselves would be preferable.
- **Seasonality** matters in rural development – seasons also vary from one locality to the next (e.g., northern Uganda has a different bee calendar than western Uganda).
- **Linking farmers to processors** for greater efficiency through bulking, using the same infrastructure to bring best practices and support through extension work.
- **Inspiring** entrants, as well as persons with disabilities, women, youth through role models and model farms – e.g., young expert workers, persons with visual impairment with an apiary and integrative farming practices.
- Recognise constraints of small-scale farmers & provide pathways to ensure **farmers are ready for commercial farming**. Processors (e.g., RTCs) also need to be ready for business and investments.
- **Integrative agriculture** – planting high value tree species – with beekeeping as a resilience strategy and income smoothing for small scale farmers – specially to counteract uncertainty due to climate change.