

Challenges Facing the Beekeeping Industry in Southern Rangelands

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Abstract

Agro pastoralists and pastoralists in the larger Makueni, Kibwezi and Kajiado district Kenya live in a fragile and hostile environment. The area is semi-arid with crop farming and livestock keeping as the main activities. The Kamba community is agro pastoralists while the Maasai are mostly pastoralists. Crop farming in this area is difficult as experiences frequent and prolonged drought exposing the local communities to food insecurity, starvation and high poverty indices. Water for domestic and livestock use is a major problem in this region. On the other hand, the pastoralists keep cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and indigenous chicken. They normally overstock resulting to overgrazing leading to environmental degradation and subsequently, desertification. The livestock keepers have many challenges of maintaining the animals during droughts resulting to nomadic and migration. Still, during prolonged droughts the pastoralists loose a lot of animals and in some cases, whole herds are wiped out leaving them with abject poverty. At such times the sharing of water and grazing grounds are sources of conflict between communities and also between the communities and wildlife. During transhumance it is women, children and the elderly who suffer most as they are left behind to take care of the homesteads. KARI with funding from the European Union is promoting and introducing alternative livelihoods options to the communities living in this region. Beekeeping is one of the alternative livelihood option selected for promotion and introduction in the region. This paper discusses the current status of the beekeeping industry in this region. The data was collected through interviews of 210 key informants and beekeepers through questionnaires on production, processing and marketing of hive products. The sampling was random with ecological and agricultural activities as variables. The marketing questionnaires were also administered in Nairobi as a major destination of Kenyan honey. The data was analyzed using excel spreadsheet using Sesotho results are discussed in this paper.

Key words: Challenges, Agro pastoralists, pastoralists, food security, alternative livelihood, beekeeping