

BEEKEEPING PROJECT FOR RURAL AND ECONOMICAL DEVELOPMENT. A PROJECT FOR 20.000 KILOGRAMS OF HONEY

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Abstract

The Beekeeping Project addressed 100 families from three communes in Vaslui County who have received beekeeping equipment in total value of 1000\$ each and have participated in practical lessons as well as in small-business training. The budget invested during the three years has been of 500.000 lei. The beekeepers have established the Beekeeping Association in Negrești, the Agricultural Cooperative “Flowers of Vaslui” and an apiary store that facilitates them good relations with all the partners of the honey value-chain. The donation of 500 beehives has been multiplied to 1330 beehives. A total amount of 20.000 kilograms of honey has been produced: half of it was sold at a price of 15 lei per kilogram and the rest was used for consumption or for feeding the bees. Seven beekeepers have contracted European Funds of 52.500 Euros. Finally, 70 beneficiaries have donated to other 12 families and to the pupils of the Inclusive School and will help them become beekeepers.

Keywords: *children, poverty, family, beekeeping, economical development, association, community development.*

1. Context for initiating the project

The north-east region was known as the poorest region in our country: 47% poorer than the national average, with more than 35% of the population living in poverty. Vaslui County is the poorest of the European Union and has the highest mortality rate and the most

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numerous roma population⁴. Since 1989, the factories from the county have been taken by the private sector and afterwards they went into bankruptcy. Honey is a profitable business for the small entrepreneurs of the rural area. The climacteric conditions are extremely favourable in Vaslui County, one of the best areas for beekeeping, especially due to the acacia forests. Moreover, we could see that there has been an increase in terms of demand of honey, nationally and internationally, and the government started to allow more financial stimulants to beekeepers, especially the ones who reunited in associations.

2. Purpose and activities of the project

The Beekeeping Project aimed at increasing the living conditions of households and communities. The project has worked with households to practice beekeeping efficiently and competitive, so that it would become an activity that would generate income and a viable alternative to subsistence agriculture. The beekeepers have learned how to produce honey and to generate income to improve the lives of their children and families, to reduce poverty and to increase the employment rate, thus contributing to the economical and social transformation of communities.

The activities and the methodology of the project aimed at including the beneficiaries into the honey value chain. The beneficiaries have been selected according to a series of criteria: to be parents, to own land for placing the beehives, to have a minimum income, to be safe from allergies and to prove that they are interested in learning beekeeping.

The chosen beneficiaries have been instructed theoretically and practically in beekeeping through classes and lessons kept in the apiary with specialists and university teachers. Each household has received a technological package in total value of 1000\$: completely equipped beehives with family bees and the necessary instruments. Afterwards, beneficiaries have been guided to increase their donation and to produce honey. Besides, they have learned how to become good administrators of the resources that they own. They have been supported to establish Negrești Apiary Association and Agricultural Cooperative “Vaslui Flowers” with an apiary shop, to contract funds

⁴ Eurostat regional yearbook 2013, p. 21 published at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/5783709/KS-HA-13-001-01-EN.PDF/3337dbd9-762f-40fb-aa15-e07326c741bc?version=1.0>

from the European Union, to participate in experience exchanges and traditional fairs, round tables and other events where they could make contact with partners of the value chain. Thus, the beneficiaries have not just evolved into more professional beekeepers but they also organized themselves into a juridical and economical unit – the Apiary Cooperative, producer of honey that constantly collaborates with other partners of the value chain: providers, processors, sales people, exporters and buyers.

3. Involvement of beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries have been 100 households from the rural area. The indirect beneficiaries have been 145 children out of all the 100 households, who now have a healthy meal.

Each beneficiary has paid 10% of the value of the technological package, meaning 100\$. We could see that the beekeepers have demonstrated a change of attitude and behaviour: they gave up the minimum income allowed by the city hall and started to generate income on their own, they addressed the body-state institutions, they interacted with specialists in the area and negotiated selling prices, they collaborated constantly with each-other. Under the Apiary Cooperative “Vaslui Flowers” they became a famous brand on the market for the quality of their products and have participated in different events, holding better representation with institutions and companies (potential buyers), they attracted European Funds and subventions and one of the beneficiaries have set the basis of a small business, such as the Beekeeping Store in Negrești.

4. Results

The beekeepers have established the Beekeeping Association of Negrești with 60 members and one president; they established the Apiary Cooperative “Vaslui Flowers” and a beekeeping store which allows them to buy equipments, medicine and food for the bees. The donation of 500 beehives from the beginning of the project has been multiplied to 1330 beehives. The beekeepers have produced 20.000 kilograms of honey, out of which they sold 10.000 kilogram at a total price of 15 lei per kilogram, bringing in their community a total profit of 150.000 lei. Other 10.000 kilograms have been used to provide healthy and nutritious food for their children or for feeding the beehives. Seven beekeepers have attracted 52.500 Euros from the European Union,

accessing the 141 measure “Supporting semi-subsistence agricultural farms”. In order to increase the number of the beekeepers from the communities, 60 beneficiaries have each donated one beehive for other 12 families who will further on be supported to generate income from beekeeping. Other 10 beekeepers have each donated a beehive for the Inclusive School Center in Negrești. The Apiary Association will help pupils to become professional beekeepers. More than that, the 100 beekeepers have demonstrated care and protection for all the children from the community. When the child of one family from the project needed urgent medical care, each one of them donated 10 lei to pay for the treatment. Thus, all of the 100 beekeepers from the nearby communities demonstrated they are a common force in protecting children.

The final evaluation has proven that the families obtained higher incomes and have healthier food for children. The donation for technological package from the first year has been multiplied from 500 beehives to 1330 beehives, meaning a total increase of 160%. The evaluation of the project reveals an increase of the income from 32% to 41% to the level of the beekeeping production from 21% to 36%. Before the implementation of the project, beneficiaries with extra products from their household used to sell them for low prices. The farmers did not have the knowledge to negotiate and to present the quality of the products. Now, after attending the trainings in economy, management and marketing, 32% of the beneficiaries have increased their selling percentage. The evaluation has also proved that investment in establishing strong relations between beekeepers and partners from the value chain is an essential factor to ensure sustainability of the project. Even though the project implemented by World Vision Romania has ended, through the Apiary Association and the Apiary Cooperative, the beekeepers are now in good relations with providers, processors, buyers and exporters from the value chain. Besides, they make sure that the multiplied beehives are registered at the qualified body-state institution from the county level.

All of the 100 beekeepers have become more than small individual entrepreneurs. They also reunited in the Beekeeping Association of Negrești, they meet periodically, they exchange information and they support each other to increase the production of honey. The sustainability of the project is not only demonstrated by the fact that they have multiplied the beehives to more than 100% but also

through the fact that 60 beekeepers have donated beehives to other families and have committed to help and support them to use the beehives and multiply them. Equally, the beekeepers have strengthened their community spirit: by donating money to the Inclusive School Center in Negrești and helping a child receive urgent medical treatment. Besides, the beekeepers have been encouraged to attract funds from the National Plan of Rural Development. Seven beekeepers have attracted funds of 52.500 Euros from European Union, accessing the 141 measure “Supporting semi-subsistence agricultural farms”.

5. Human resources, material and financially involved

An important volunteer from the community is Mister Sorin Popovici, an experienced beekeeper who holds more than 300 beehives, has allowed for the practical lessons to take place in his apiary. He has also visited all of the households from within the project to supervise and advise the medical treatment they offer to the beehives, the extraction of the honey and pollen. The doctor George Silvestrovici has presented the utility of the beekeeping products (honey, pollen, propolis) to treat several affections of children and parents.

Partners have had a very well defined purpose and a practical contribution in all the stages of the project. Offering information on the importance of getting the beekeepers to work in an association has been done by the Agricultural Direction for Rural Development. The Agricultural Chamber has offered consultancy in writing projects, technical assistance by implementing and facilitating the access to the market and to certified classes in the agricultural area. The Sanitary – Veterinary Direction of Food Security has supported sanitary approvals and authorization for opening the Beekeeping Store. The Local Councils have supported the good development of the activities within the community. We have also organized several debates and round tables in partnership with Vaslui County Council that helped the beekeepers get in contact with partners from the value chain. The University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iași has worked along with beekeepers at a business plan for the Apiary Cooperative and has offered expertise on economic, management and marketing issues. The Researching Unit of Poieni has held all theoretical and practical classes and has offered the possibility of an experience exchange at the research unit. The Public Health Institution from Vaslui has ensured all nutrition classes for the beekeepers and the doctors from the area. All

of the beekeepers have registered their beehives at the qualified institution and two of them have been certified as professional providers for bee families and queens. The total budget of the project has been of 500.000 lei, money used to purchase beehives, cover the remuneration of designated staff and administrative costs.

The contributions in nature have included the beehives donations: full beehive with stationary frames and all the necessary tools for a beekeeper. At the end of the project, the beekeepers have received two boxes. World Vision Romania has equipped the Apiary Cooperative with a weighing machine for 300 kilograms and 30 kilograms, a refrigerator, a honey collector and a mirror fridge.

“I have received 5 beehives. Now I own 25 beehives, I have accessed funds from the European Union, I have withdrawn my social aid file from the city hall because now I am contributing citizen. I wish to take into my care two children from the foster house”, said one of the participants, Zmău Dorinel.

6. Obstacles and lessons learned

The beekeepers did not understand the importance of making the Apiary Cooperative because of the old mentality and the previous experiences connected to the obligation to establish associative forms, before 1989. By participating to informing sessions, the beekeepers have learned about the advantages of an apiary cooperative: the possibility to collect and to sell the honey, the establishment of the Apiary Store, the possibility to acquire equipment and medicine at low prices and without transportation costs. At the beginning, the beekeepers did not receive their money because of the complex documentation needed, but by the end of the project, the beekeepers have learned all of the rules to refund their acquisitions.

The project aimed to economically develop the communities, addressing those families who have minimum conditions to be looking after the beehives. Just one family out of all 100 beneficiary families did not have the economical possibility to maintain them: purchase of food for the winter and compulsory treatment for the bees. The family is extremely vulnerable, has 7 children and only survives with social aid and child state allowance. The beekeepers have supported the family with money for medical treatment, clothes and school supplies and they even gave them a goat to have milk for the children. The family was left with only two beehives which they have given to a different family

during the winter; during the summer they populate them to have honey for their own consumption. With this example, we proved that this project is not suitable for very poor families.

7. Conclusions

The Beekeeping Association is a success that offers good example of beekeeping activities that households can easily replicate. The purpose of the project has been to change the mentality of families who only aim to survive from social aid. For instance, one member of the association has given up the social aid and has filed to take a child from foster-care. The extra-arguments are about the personal ambition of them overcoming their condition and the beekeepers have proven that they too can help others as they have been helped.

Bibliography

1. Eurostat regional yearbook 2013.