

Information for beekeepers from the UK or another developed country who wish to volunteer to help beekeepers in developing countries.

What help is needed?

Generally delivering help to beekeepers in poor countries is rarely as simple as teaching beekeeping. Very often people already know how to keep bees but need help, instead, in running a small business or finding a new buyer for their products. If they do need help learning about keeping bees then any trainer must have a good grasp of beekeeping in that local area – have an understanding of the characteristics of the local bees, the most appropriate approaches to management and the typical problems. These are different everywhere. In many countries there are local experts but lack of money means they are not able to run training courses where they are most needed.

Time and commitment

If a volunteer has adequate time to spare they can overcome some of the challenges mentioned above by learning about the local situation, finding out about local problems and working out how they can help in an effective way. Certainly we recognise that a volunteer who is willing to spend adequate time, and on an on-going basis can be very effective. Short-term or one-off placements are more difficult.

Bees for Development Projects

Sometimes volunteers ask if they can help with our Projects in developing countries. This is a sensible approach as we have already done some of the work concerned with finding out about the local situation and we understand what is needed to help the local people. However, in this case it would be necessary to match the skills of the volunteers with the needs of the Project. For example, in a recent Project in Uganda we needed skills to do with helping to run a national beekeeping association, training farmers in enterprise analysis and we needed help to design a record keeping system for a honey collection centre.

Money

Ah! We do not have resources to pay even the minimum allowances for volunteers, nor travel and insurance. Volunteering can be an expensive business. If you make an independent arrangement (see later) with a beekeeping group, the same situation will likely apply.

Induction training

Bees for Development can help beekeepers, or other volunteers, prepare themselves for work in developing countries. We offer a one day course called “Strengthening livelihoods through beekeeping”. This is designed to give a background to beekeeping in developing countries, an overview of the types of problems and constraints which need addressing and an introduction on how to deliver support. There is a fee for this course. See the Events section on our website for dates.

Another way we can deliver Induction Training would be to make an arrangement for a potential volunteer to come and work for us (in the UK) on a short placement. They could help us with some of our work here and learn on-the-job. Here in the office we communicate daily with many beekeepers from all over the world – giving advice and information.

Other ways to help

A large part of our work is not field work. The reason for this is because we can reach more people by working through information networks and by communicating and encouraging national associations who can then help their members. For example, the *Bees for Development Journal* effectively reaches thousands of beekeepers every four months – without expensive travel. We are always looking for volunteers to help us in the UK – in our office in Monmouth or from home. Do contact us if you would like to help.

Independent arrangements

We sometimes receive requests from beekeepers who ask us to send them a volunteer. We can pass on these details to potential volunteers. However, in this case arrangements would have to be made independently of ourselves – between the parties concerned. We would be unable to take any responsibility for the placement. We would provide as much information as we can about the hosts but we may not know them personally. If you do make an independent arrangement, please consider what we have said about Induction Training above.

Pitfalls

Those of you with experience of developing countries will know that local situations are different from developed countries in more ways than we may first imagine – and they are different from one another too! What follows is a list of pointers to get you thinking

- Take time to find out and understand about local beekeeping, what may seem undeveloped has in fact been tried and tested for many years and is often effective and sustainable
- Don't rush to introduce new technology that is expensive and not proven to work in the local situation (even if it works elsewhere)
- The supermarket shelf is not the only market for honey – it is important, but local, informal outlets can absorb tonnes of honey too
- Quality – honey may be raw, badly handled or poorly processed – but the inherent quality is almost certainly excellent – consider improving handling, not production methods, when thinking about quality
- Avoid subsidising a business by providing transport or honey jars for free – unless you have a well thought out phase-out plan
- Look around for a good local beekeeper trainer who can provide follow-up when you are not there, or train a trainer (this might take years)
- Remember tropical bees have a different biology and behaviour compared to temperate bees – even if the species, *Apis mellifera*, is the same. For example, tropical bees will abscond quickly if disturbed and this includes simple, basic inspection.
- Nine times out of ten the challenge facing beekeepers in poor countries is not a technical beekeeping problem – it will be concerned with access to markets, knowledge of markets, approaches to business, lack of buckets, lack of roads, deforestation, lack of advice, misinformation and difficulties to do with managing finance, credit and savings.
- Always use local bees
- Our approaches to beekeeping in the developed world are not as great as we might think – diseases, colony losses and decline are the order of the day. In developing countries local bees tend to be healthy and vigorous. Think about it!