

**BEEKEEPING AS AN ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE TO BUSHMEAT HUNTING IN CAMEROON**

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Hunting for bushmeat generates vital income for rural communities but the trade in bushmeat is unsustainable. Species extinctions, food shortages and additional financial difficulties for forest-adjacent communities are predicted outcomes of this trade. Human use of and financial reliance on bushmeat must be reduced if biodiversity across western and central Africa is to be maintained. Community-based conservation approaches are considered to be necessary elements of a successful bushmeat mitigation strategy. Many economic alternatives to bushmeat have been proposed and piloted. Beekeeping is one such alternative which has been implemented in seven villages across Lebialem Division, Southwest Region, Cameroon. This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of beekeeping as an economic alternative to bushmeat hunting by using data from the Lebialem project and reviewing internal reports from established beekeeping projects elsewhere in Africa. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the 138 hunters involved with the beekeeping project in Lebialem. Interviews were conducted during the period of initial training in March – April 2009 and again after 12 months. Hunter perceptions of beekeeping as an alternative income source will be presented. During initial training, the majority of hunters held positive attitudes towards beekeeping, considering it to be a less strenuous and more reliable source of income. Economic data comparing the earning potentials of hunting and beekeeping will also be discussed. Recommendations will be made as to how a beekeeping project can be designed to maximize impact on the bushmeat harvest and trade through effective marketing and long-term technical support.

Keywords: Africa, livelihoods, community-based conservation