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Is Beekeeping a Viable Additional Income for the Rural Poor? Economic Analysis of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting as Income Alternative in the Philippine Cordillera

MANUEL NARJES, CHRISTIAN LIPPERT

University of Hohenheim, Institute for Farm Management, Germany

Abstract

Modern beekeeping with the European honeybee (*Apis mellifera*) was introduced to the Philippine Cordillera as part of rural livelihoods supporting programs that aimed to substitute traditional honey hunting, a practice that is alleged to have a negative impact on the environment. Based on this premise, a capacity building framework that is exclusively dedicated to the apiculture of *A. mellifera* has been established in this region, and therefore the potentials that the native bee endowment offers for the reduction of rural poverty has been neglected. Moreover, the exoticness of the European honeybee has added prohibitive costs to the already expensive adoption of its apiculture, which has excluded the rural poor from adopting it.

This study aims to assess the viability of beekeeping and honey hunting practices, involving introduced and native bee species, as additional income alternatives for the rural poor in the Philippine Cordillera.

Five setups for the economic exploitation of bees were identified to potentially be adopted by rural smallholders in the study area, namely the apicultures of *A. mellifera* and *A. cerana*, honey hunting of *A. dorsata*, the meliponiculture of *Trigona* spp. and hive baiting for *A. cerana*. The former four were assessed and compared based on a cost-benefit analysis and a subsequent risk analysis, while the latter was subject to a qualitative analysis, due to the lack of sufficient data.

The results confirm that investing in the apiculture of *A. mellifera* involves relatively high costs, of which approximately 61 % are attributed by this study to the exoticness of this species to the Philippine Cordillera. An additional socio-economic appraisal that this study carried out on the honey hunters of this region suggests that these individuals would not be able to afford a substitution of this activity for modern beekeeping. On the other hand, the results show that the setups that involve the economic exploitation of native bee species have great potentials to be adopted as low-cost additional income sources, especially if they could participate in the infrastructure and other benefits that are offered by the organisations and institutions that currently support beekeeping of *A. mellifera*.

Keywords: Beekeeping, cost benefit analysis, honey hunting, Philippine Cordillera, rural poverty alleviation