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Honey with Potential for Geographical Indication a Bee Conservation Tool?

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Introduction

Geographical Indication (GI) identifies a product as originating from a *territory/region/locality*, where given *quality*, *reputation* or other *characteristic are exclusively* or essentially *attributable* to the product´s *geographical origin* (Article 22, TRIPS definition). GI provides a relevant tool to protect, promote or enhance biodiversity (Larson Guerra, 2004, Rangnekar, 2004).

Honeybees *Apis mellifera* are essential in honey production and in pollination services for economic gain (Kasina et al., 2009b).

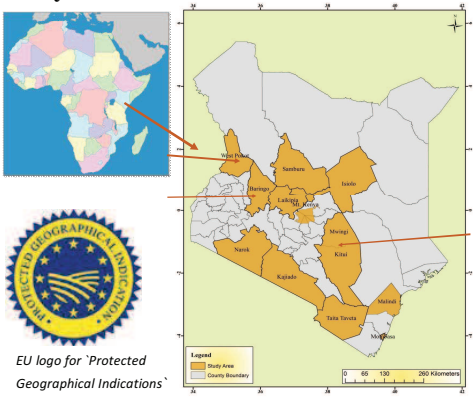
Studies conducted in Kenya found that honey bees and other bees are becoming less diverse and less numerous in different habitats (Gikungu, 2006, Kasina et al., 2009a).

Objective of the Study

To assess how bees conservation and pollination services can be enhanced through production of quality honey with potential for geographical indication labelling.

Two types of beehives often used in the study areas

Study Areas



EU logo for `Protected Geographical Indications`

Methods

- Household survey of 417 beekeepers
- Six Focus Group Discussions with beekeepers
- Key Informant and in-depth interviews with stakeholders from the honey sector

Preliminary Results

Preliminary findings of the study showed that honey produced in study areas has a potential for GI labelling due to their unique taste attributed to local flora and cultural/traditional practises by most producers in the region as shown in the figure below;

- Honey is organically produced (no chemicals use)
- Use of informal institutions (norms and taboos) in conservation of indigenous plants used by bees
- Use of indigenous knowledge, skills and equipment in beekeeping (traditional bee hives and methods of pest and disease control)

However, the development of GI honeys is hampered by the national GI bill not being enacted as well as low knowledge of the GI concept among beekeepers.

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A honey bee foraging for food in a natural habitat in Mwingi, Kitui

Potential GI honeys in Kenya

Eco honey from Mwingi, Kitui, The label reads: "Linking forest biodiversity to sustainable livelihoods"

Organic honey from West Pokot

Conclusion

Conservation of bees can be enhanced by activities conducted by honey producers aiming for quality honey attributable to geographical origin, though contingent on enactment of the national GI bill in Kenya.

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