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Title: Forest beekeeping in Zambia supports livelihoods and leads to forest management actions

Millions of very poor people live in Africa’s miombo zone, including nearly 200,000 who live in Mwinilunga and Ikelenge in Zambia. This research studies the local practice of forest beekeeping in this area and explores how selling honey meets the livelihood aspirations of beekeepers and how they negotiate and safeguard access to forest resources. A well-established honey buying company has been operating in this area for nearly 20 years. We aim to understand how the resulting increasing trade in honey is altering, if at all, the wellbeing of the primary honey producers and the way in which they value the forest. Field work in 2015 and 2016 comprised informal discussions with 19 groups of beekeepers, and a questionnaire survey involving 138 beekeepers, and 68 non-beekeepers in four sites. The study found that the practice of forest beekeeping is increasing, with income invested in education, in farming and as capital for other enterprises. Honey is often considered ‘the mother’ of other activities because no financial capital is required to generate this income. Self-reported measures of economic wellbeing showed beekeepers to be slightly better off than non-beekeepers. Although the forest is a common-property resource, beekeepers negotiate de facto rights to hive sites, and protect these sites from fire. Almost all beekeepers gave at least one explanation of how they take an individual action to manage forest resources. Our study suggests that unlike some NTFP harvesting, forest beekeeping is more than a safety-net activity. People are increasing their efforts, attracted by the rewards. Indications are that beekeepers have an economic incentive to take some forest management actions, and it is possible that these actions impact on a greater area of forest as the demand for honey continues to increase. The low productivity of miombo woodlands and soils do not offer a clear pathway out of poverty for the millions who live in and near the miombo zone. Yet the local practice of forest beekeeping, appears to offer some promise for forest-based poverty alleviation, whilst also avoiding forest loss. The approaches beekeepers adopt to protect their hives sites are locally driven responses.