OP-197 [Beekeeping for Rural Development]
Taking an industry approach to beekeeping development

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Bees for Development

Development organisations often claim beekeeping projects have a high impact, with significant financial benefits, within a short period of time. However, beekeeping development is plagued by challenges-failed projects, abandoned hives, and limited financial returns for participants. Projects often focus on short-term, localised beekeeping training with selected participants. Development work and livelihood research fail to consider the industry as a whole, especially the differences between beekeeping operational levels – for example small-holder beekeepers versus commercial beekeeping businesses and the interactions between levels.

In 2021, the author used focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and household surveys to examine beekeeping operational levels across Malawi from a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA). SLA characterises livelihoods using five capitals: human, social, financial, natural, and physical. The research found clear differences in SLA capitals and beekeeping constraints between beekeeping operational levels of small-holder, NGO recruited, commercial, and association/cooperative beekeepers. There were also important connections between small-holder and commercial beekeepers, supporting long-term sustainability in the beekeeping industry.

With respect to enabling beekeeping livelihoods in Malawi, non-governmental organizations need to use an industry driven and participatory approach rather than be oriented only to poverty relief. Applying this in practical development work has demonstrated the importance of considering beekeeping operational levels and focusing on the industry, not one-off beekeeping projects. Working with the industry includes partnering with and building the capacity of national associations, supporting university and colleges to build extension capacity, and working with the private sector to expand bee product markets.

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Background:

- Malawi beekeeping industry
- MSc Capacity Development and Extension
- Application with Bees for Development

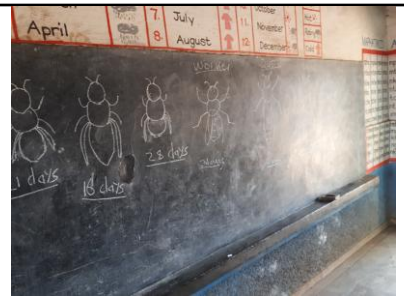
Objectives:

The goal: To identify the capacity and extension gaps constraining sustainable beekeeping livelihood strategies in Malawi

Rationale:

- Few industry papers and no peer reviewed research
- Few papers define “beekeepers”
- Many beekeeping projects across Malawi – limited visible impact

Methods: Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

Natural	Human	Social	Physical	Financial
				
Bee forage Apiary sites Water	Beekeeping knowledge Training Labour – paid or family	Beekeeping networks and/or mentors Support groups	Equipment Transportation and other infrastructure	Financial capital including cash, loans, grants, and assets

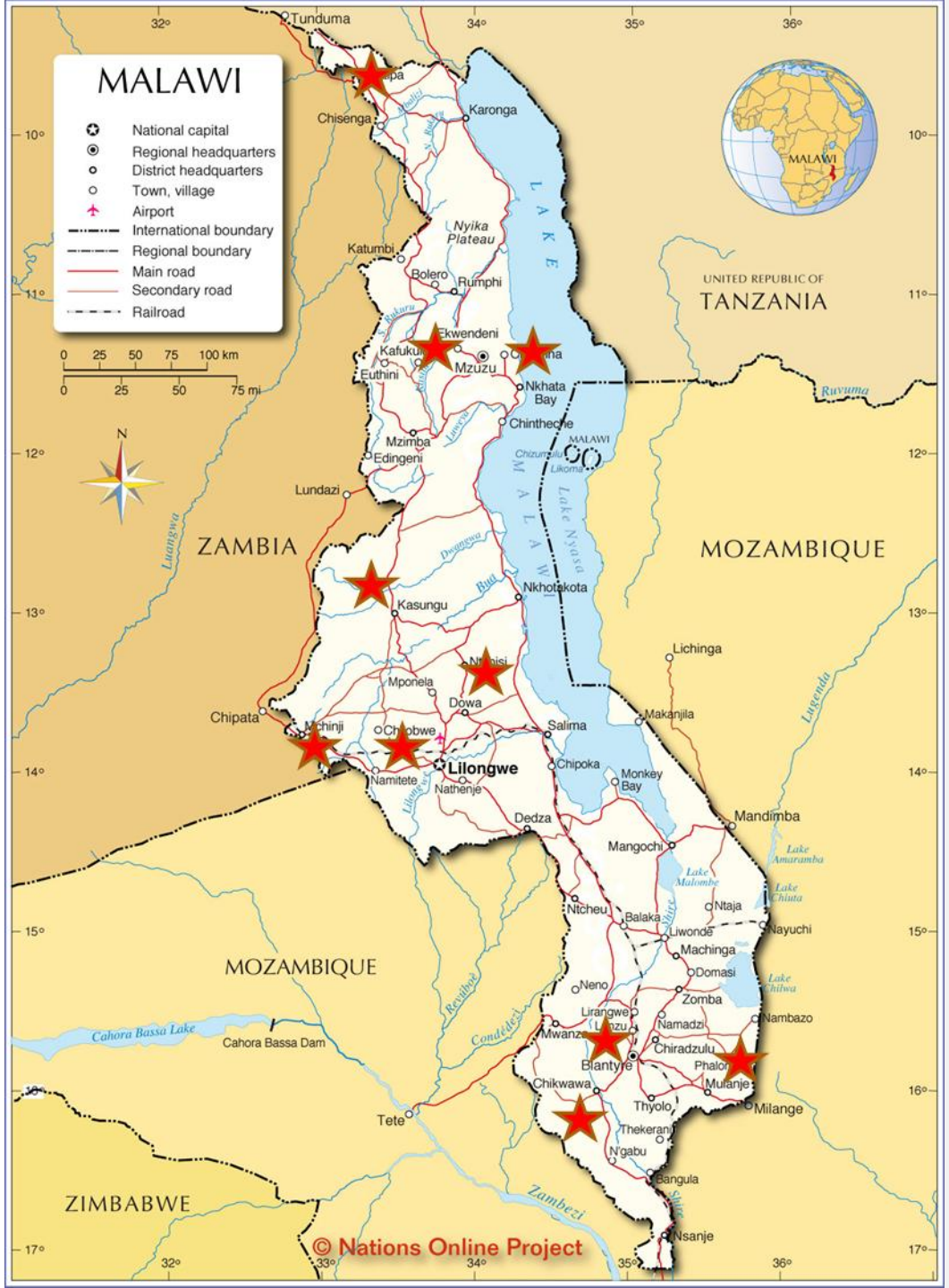
Methods: Qualitative

18 Key Informant Interviews
- Small holders
- Commercial beekeepers
- Processors
- Suppliers
- NGOs
- Association/cooperative chairs

19 Household Surveys
- Small holder beekeepers
- Association/cooperative beekeepers

5 Focus Group Discussions
- NGO beekeepers
- Association/cooperative beekeepers

Observation/reflective writing



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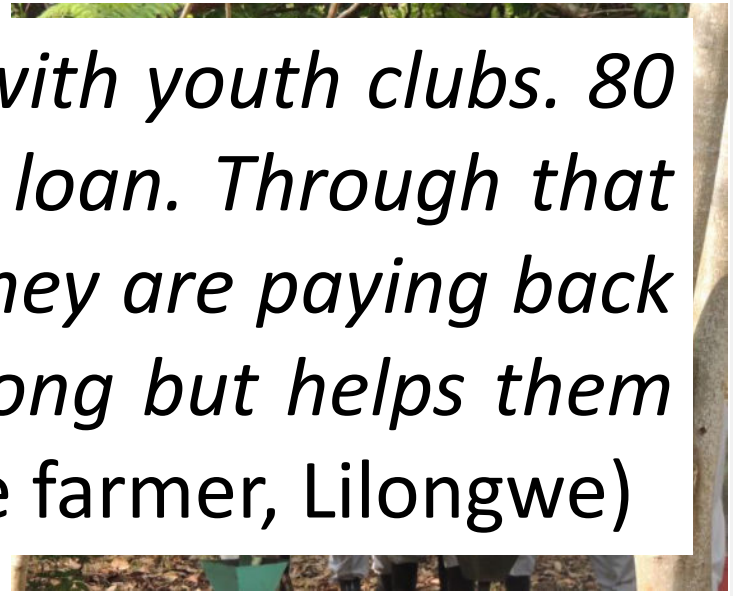
Results Obj 1: Levels

- Smallholders
- Commercial
- NGO beekeepers
- Association or cooperative



Now I have a new project. I am working with youth clubs. 80 something clubs. I give them beehives as loan. Through that process I also harvesting a lot of honey. They are paying back 2%. I buy the honey in cash. Payback is long but helps them as they do not have to pay back a lot. (Bee farmer, Lilongwe)

Results Obj 2: Constraints

Level	Specific Constraints
Smallholders	Knowledge – access to information
Commercial	Access to skilled labour
NGO beekeepers	**Group conflict**
Association or cooperative	Capital to scale
Suppliers and processors	Capital for upfront costs
NGOs	**Projects are not financially viable**

Results Obj 2: Examples

They need a 6-month certificate maybe later a diploma or degree. At this level (commercial) we need technicians.

…with NGOs you would be hard pressed to find more than one hive per member in the groups. It means that it is not economically viable.

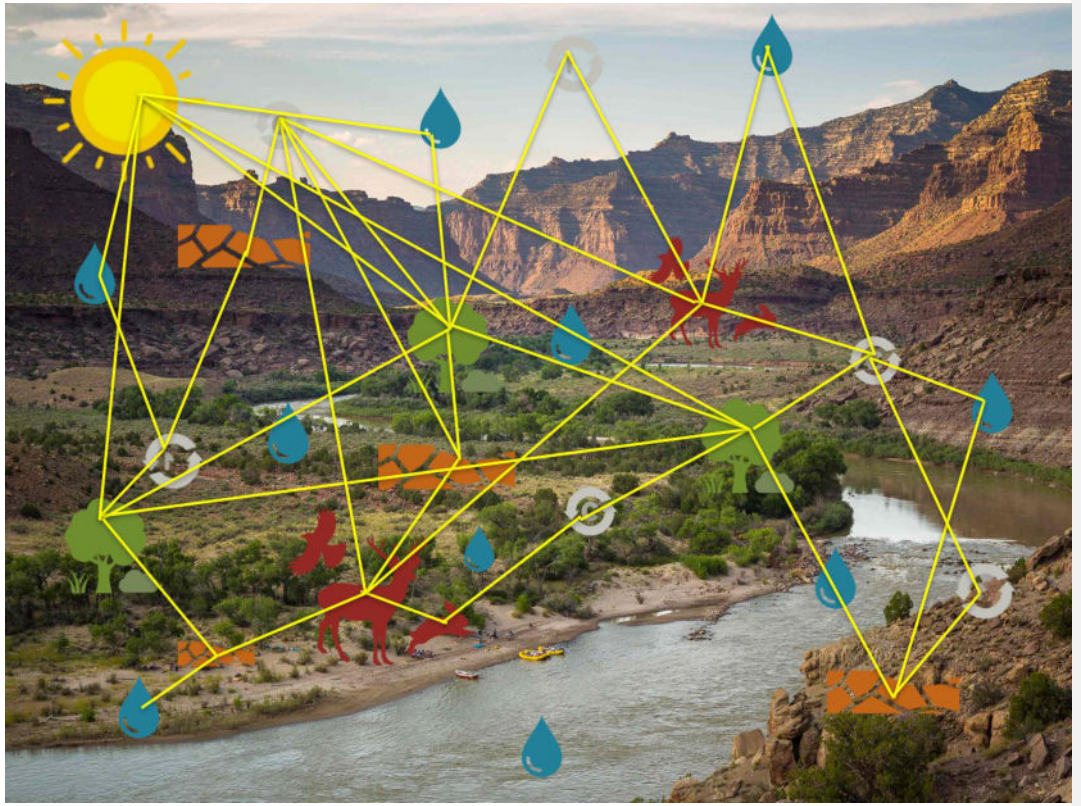
Only a few (members) check the hives, clean them, grease wires. But when time comes to harvest honey, everyone shows up saying they are part of the club and need some of the money.

Results Obj 2: Examples

The initiative is there. ***But the problem is the approach****. The outreach does not actually reach the beekeepers. There are so many processors, people who created cooperatives* ***in the name of being beekeepers that get grants and recognition as beekeepers****. There is little to no research of them actually doing beekeeping. So, in the end, they have this pre-established beekeepers who they call upon whenever something for beekeeping is on the plate.* ***But they don't do the beekeeping. So, the money is just blown****.*

Applications: From a development perspective

- Move from project thinking to systems thinking
- Consider
  - Environment
  - Access to resources
  - Local knowledge
  - Market access
  - Other organisations – synergies



Systems thinking is often used in ecology (Oregon State University, 2023).

Applications: Bees for Development

- Tertiary level training
- Practical
- Based on the Malawi context

National network – sharing resources and beekeeping development best practices

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