

Honey gathering has long been one of the most important activities for the forest communities of Cambodia's Koh Kong Province. For decades it has been a vital source of nutrition, medicine and supplementary income for the economically disadvantaged communities that live in proximity to the forest. Critically, it also provides the villagers a source of livelihood that does not require cutting down trees – a fundamental element in the fight to arrest deforestation.

However, the manner in which the practice has historically been undertaken contains numerous in-built inefficiencies. These inefficiencies in the harvesting, producing and marketing of the product have caused the activity to considerably underperform its potential.

The significant opportunities for enhanced local nutrition and income generation in the community were being unintentionally lost. Pact's Community Forestry Partnership (CFP) Program has worked towards identifying and improving the most important components of the honey enterprises value chain. CFP has also worked at empowering the community to capture more of the value of their non-timber forest products, forming associations to undertake value-added activities that have traditionally been undertaken by outside middlemen.

The project has found three areas where it can help improve on the traditional honey enterprise techniques, making a material difference to the activity's profitability and sustainability.

Sustainable harvesting for environmental and business

benefit. The Pact team has trained villagers to remove only a portion of the "honey head" of the hive and to leave the brood intact in its rafter location, a technique that results in the bees returning and rebuilding their hive within two weeks of harvesting. The villagers also were taught to limit collection activities to daytime hours, when the Queen bee is able to protect herself, another critical step for hive rejuvenation.



Recently harvested hive – new technique

The intervention thus lessens both the activity's impact on the natural environment and its cost-intensity, the latter because the hives are continuously rebuilt, meaning hive migration is reduced and less time is needed to search the forest for new sources of honey.



Honey collector is bottling filtered honey for sale

Instituting simple quality control procedures in the production process. Before the project, “wild” honey was a difficult product to effectively market to sophisticated buyers. Although connoisseurs consider it to have a superior taste, the crude production process gave rise to problems with impurities, taste adulteration and water dilution. By introducing simple, easy-to-implement quality control systems and technologies, the village is able to verify the quality of the honey before it is sent to market, making sales considerably more lucrative and easier to achieve.

Introducing attractive packaging to enhance market appeal. Prior to the advent of the project, the villages’ sole means of getting their honey to the market was to sell it to middlemen, who sold it on to final consumers at a hefty mark-up. By providing expert business advice and training in attractive bottling and labeling techniques, CFP helped the villages to take a more active role in the final sale of their product and capture more of its added value.

Since the marketing campaign, the villagers collect \$6.10 per half liter for their honey, a 45% increase on the \$7 per kilogram they would generate from the sale of raw honeycomb to middlemen. Furthermore, the project is in the process of helping the community to design packaging aimed at the tourist market, featuring labels that highlight the honey’s origin and the role its sale plays in protecting the forest and supporting rural Cambodians. This offering will generate an even greater revenue premium for the community.



A mature honey bee hive set on rafters by members of the honey group



Koh Kong villagers applying new labels to honey bottles