



# Honey Production in Urban Cameroon

Fonyuy Thomas Tata and Ojong Baa Enokenwa

Inspired by his uncle, Fonyuy took up beekeeping at age 15 and gradually increased the number of hives and now, 25 years later, he produces up to 1000 L every year. Fonyuy was from Kumbo regon in Bui division in the northwest region of Cameroon but he currently resides in Molyko, Buea, in the southwest of the country. He has been able to build a successful honey production business through sheer hard work and dedication and is inspiring many people to start honey production in his community.

I used to visit my uncle who kept traditional bee hives and was so courageous that he will take me along to harvest when I was a child. He will say ‘eh tata lets go and harvest bee’, while other children will run away, I will be so glad to follow him. Bee sting for me was nothing so I was always willing to follow him. From there when I grew up and came to Buea, I started keeping mine around the 90’s, and from then I have been adding the number of the hives I have yearly.

Fonyuy gradually improved his beekeeping skills by attending several training courses and he learnt the basics of beekeeping, hive construction and so on.

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In constructing a bee hive, you must know the type of wood to use. We do not use any acidic wood like eucalyptus tree. You can easily know it when you get the pepper smell from the wood. When you construct a hive with such a toxic wood they will not survive it. I have my boy who I have brought into beekeeping, he is a carpenter by profession and is very good in knowing wood for bees. You see bees have very little ventilation except the entrance that is left for them to enter inside. So, if the hive is constructed with a poisonous or acidic wood they can enter and die or may not enter at all. They are ‘confined and so with very small ventilation, when they keep getting that smell they may die.

Fonyuy lives in an urban area which has many trees and his beehives are in his backyard (Figs. 1 and 2). He uses the “Kenya top bar hive” which is a modern beehive. Although costlier than traditional beehive which most people use in the northwest region, Fonyuy prefers this.

I have learned to live with bees that whenever I have a new tenant I teach them how to live with bees. The bee hives I have around the house are used to people unlike the ones in the bush. I tell the people around me when you see a bee do not act like you are in danger. When we harvest honey, most of them follow us to the house and will be there until all is packaged in containers. When they come to the house, they do not sting because they have nothing to defend. But they do sting around their house because they have a queen inside the hive to defend.

Fonyuy uses protective clothing while working and he feels that he has become an expert having worked in beekeeping for so many years.



**Fig. 1** Fonyuy Thomas Tata in the backyard of his house, with two beehives in the background



**Fig. 2** Beehives used by Fonyuy in the urban setting with several trees around

Most often, what I do is when I construct a bee hive, I burn fire inside to kill any other insects that could be inside. One thing you must know is that bees do not cohabit, a hive is either for them or another insect. They do not share at all. But the lizards continue to worry them a lot. I have had to reconstruct the shape of my bee hives just to avoid lizards entering inside. Now what I do is, I try to surround the bee hive with nets so that the moment the lizards climb on the hive they get hooked to these nets and cannot go inside.

Besides being particular about generating the best quality honey, Fonyuy is also helping others begin beekeeping in his community.

You know the quantity of honey you harvest will depend on the number of bee hives you have. I have so many bee hives now that I try to concentrate now on encouraging young people and anyone interested in bee keeping building their hives. I try to put my hives where there are enough trees for shade, there is nectar, and water. But what I do is I try to measure the level of water inside the honey as most people tend to dilute their honey with too much water. I belong to an initiative group which am one of the leaders there. We produce hundreds of litres of honey. For my own personal business, I go up to 600 to 1000 litres per year for my honey production. I do package them in smaller containers like 1 litre, 0.5 litre as

well as 0.3 litres bottles. So, you see, this is a good venture. I make a profit of about 1.8 million to 3 million Francs (US\$3,200–5300) a year and this has really enabled me to build my houses.

The business was such a success that Fonyuy has been able to sell honey in a number of agricultural shows in Buea and other regions.

Every month end when I sell, I use the money to do something meaningful. I have been able to construct my house just from my honey business (Fig. 3). You know I have this other house I now rent to university students thanks to the honey business. I have marble tiles in my house. They are not cheap but I can afford buying them because I get the money through the sales of honey. I have one big room in this house which is a storage place for honey that I harvest. All my equipment and containers are kept there so that anything related to bee keeping is found there (Fig. 4). I now have many protective suits to protect myself from bee stings unlike when I started with one. I need a lot of containers especially as my production goes up to 1000 litres sometimes.

Fonyuy is looking at exporting his honey to external markets especially to neighbouring countries like Garbon and Chad. He believes that

he is the main producer of honey in Cameroon and he supplies to all parts of the country.

I try to really encourage many people to move into this business so that we can meet the demand of honey. I have a project with a Canadian NGO that has been approved and will start in November, 2017 in Akwaya (Manyu division) to train people on bee keeping and teaching them on how to set up bee hives. One thing I noticed is that the cost of setting up a bee hive in the southwest region is quite expensive than in the northwest region. Just paying for the cages is not cheap since you must use the best type of woods which are usually very expensive. I however, have seen the profits to be far higher than the cost especially as you do not change the bee hives every year. That helps us to reduce expenditure.

Formerly a guard at the Prison Service Department, Fonyuy is now retired and is happily working on honey production full time. After retiring, he began teaching of about honey production part-time to students of the agricultural department in the university. As a guard he earned 150,000–200,000 Francs (US\$ 270–360) a month, which was not adequate for his family



**Fig. 3** Fonyuy's house exterior on the left and interior showing wood paneling on ceiling on the right



**Fig. 4** Some of the containers used by Fonyuy to store honey

and hence since the 1990's he began honey production. Beekeeping helped him supplement his income to approximately \$300–500 per month.

When I was working, I will mostly be seen on my bee hives only after 3:30 pm when I close from work and during weekends that I do not work. Now I can say all the time is mine. I have been

recently accepted to train students in the department of Environmental Science at the University of Buea on bee keeping. This too am happy as it will enable the young students to pick interest in bee keeping. My children have gone to school, and continue to school thanks to this venture, and I have 12 children plus a wife under my care. If I didn't do this, I would not have been able to cope.