

Beekeeping as business: Samoa

ABSTRACT

The Women in Business Foundation (WIBF) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that aims to encourage and support the involvement of women in small business initiatives. Follow-up is provided for WIBF programmes by the Ofaga o Tomai Training Team, funded by the New Zealand Overseas Development Administration (NZODA) and managed by WIBF.

WIBF and Ofaga o Tomai have collaborated to address the needs of village-level enterprises. The programmes developed by WIBF focus on utilizing village resources. The Ofaga o Tomai **team** develops the programmes and provides follow-up training and support. Ofaga trainers are skilled in many areas of traditional craft, small business management and microcredit.

In 1996, New Zealand Agriculture Consultants Ltd. (NZAC) requested WIBF to write an appendix to the Apiculture Development Strategy for Western Samoa (TCP/SAM/4551), being prepared in conjunction with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The outcome was a number of initial training initiatives where staff of **WIBF** answered questions about small business. The relationship flourished in 1997, when WIBF, NZAC and the Pacific Islands Investment Development Scheme implemented an advisory mission entitled Beekeeping as a Small Business Initiative.

Training took place in the villages of Saleimoa on Upolu and Faletagaloa-Safune on Savaii, covering basic beekeeping, potential products related to beekeeping, empowerment, microcredit and small businesses. Some **20** people, mostly village women, were encouraged to learn through lectures and extensive hands-on experience.

Samoans, who are afraid of bees and consider them pests, were fearful at the beginning **of** the process. Through contact with the bees and the beekeeping process, this programme has dispelled the myth, at least for those who took **part**, that bees are dangerous.

The unique combination of training **subjects** has resulted in the setting **up** of businesses related to beekeeping and inspired women to try other business ideas. Partnerships have been formed between the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture, WIBF, the Samoa Beekeepers Association and FAO to promote beekeeping as a viable rural industry.

By June 1998, the project had grown to include an additional 160 hives, which are being placed in villages. A repeat of the 1997 training will be delivered to preserve the quality of training and follow-up that WIBF is trying to maintain. This new injection of assistance has come from FAO's TeleFood project and the Canada Fund.

INTRODUCTION

In 1990, seven women determined to involve other women in commercial activities, founded the WIBF as an NGO to:

- promote women's interest in business;
- stimulate and support small/microbusiness initiatives;
- facilitate and nurture cooperative action among community groups;
- advise and train urban and village women.

Ofaga o Tomai is a small business training team funded by NZODA and managed by WIBF. In the Samoan language, Ofaga o Tomai means a nest of skills and talents. The team has tailored its presentations for rural women. Learning is encouraged through the theory and practice of business concepts.

To address the needs of youth, WIBF formed the Junior Achievement Trust of Samoa. Junior Achievement teaches business and life skills to children from kindergarten to secondary school. WIBF has implemented programmes in school, village and church groups.

WIBF and Ofaga o Tomai have collaborated to address the needs of village-level enterprises. The programmes developed by WIBF focus on utilizing village resources. The Ofaga o Tomai team develops the programmes and provides follow-up training and support. Ofaga trainers are skilled in many areas of traditional craft, small business management and microcredit. Together, WIBF and the Ofaga o Tomai team hope to help change the face of village enterprise in Samoa.

WIBF's initial contact with FAO and beekeeping came about in early 1996, when WIBF was approached to draft a report on the viability of involving women in apiculture development. This brought together WIBF and members of the local Ministry of Agriculture, the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture, FAO and NZAC, opening the way for WIBF's involvement in a beekeeping training series.

At the same time, WIBF was involved in a few small training initiatives being implemented by the Western Samoa Ministry of Agriculture and the NZAC consulting team. Two members of WIBF attended workshops given in Savaii

³⁸ Green, S. & Meredith, E.M. (1996). Appendix F: Role of women in apiculture development, prepared for FAO as part of TCP/SAM/4551: Apiculture Development Strategy for Western Samoa.

and Upolu to groups such as the Catholic Women's Group and men in Savaii who were interested in beekeeping.

This sparked further interest within WIBF, resulting in additional collaboration with NZAC. In 1997, WIBF and NZAC introduced beekeeping as an income-earning idea to women and young people in Saleimoa village on Upolu and Faletagaloa-Safune village on Savaii. Technical training was delivered to more than 20 women and young people and to the Ofaga o Tomai Training team. The rationale for training the Ofaga o Tomai team was to prepare it to provide follow-up assistance after the NZAC consultants returned to New Zealand. As a component of the training, the Ofaga o Tomai team delivered a session on small businesses to encourage trainees to apply their newly-acquired skills.

Of the women trained, only two were given the equipment to set up a beekeeping business. Each received five hives of three boxes high and the safety and harvesting equipment necessary to establish the beekeeping business. Since the 1997 training, more women have acquired equipment and become active in beekeeping and related businesses.

PRE-INNOVATION

Prior to implementation of WIBF's projects, villagers had little access to income-generating activities other than production of handicrafts, which was only carried out when funds were required for family commitments such as church or school fees and uniforms. Villagers relied for their cash needs mainly on relatives living overseas or living and working in urban areas. They were beginning to realize that they no longer lived at subsistence level and to feel the stress of a semi-cash economy. Family members mainly met cash needs, so there was no perceived need for villagers to begin income-generating activities. As a result, villagers showed little interest in WIBF's training programmes unless they were given something visible to observe.

Identifying business ideas utilizing resources found in the village is a constant challenge. A search was made for small business opportunities that were not labour-intensive, made use of village products and offered villagers the opportunity to earn cash for daily needs.

As women become more involved in the cash economy, they are faced with many new problems. They are aware that they need money to make money and are often frustrated by their lack of access to credit.

Urban drift from rural areas has increased at an alarming rate, as people no longer see viable options for work in villages. There was a need to encourage women to believe that they could become business people like their urban counterparts. Women's work had long been regarded as not being real work.

WIBF's experience had been that many consultants/agencies arrive from overseas to implement programmes. The premises of these programmes are sound but they are not adapted to the Samoan or Pacific way. It is essential for the success of any project for donor agencies to recognize that each Pacific country is as different from another as it is from the Western world. WIBF's experience showed that no single method can work in every situation and that programmes that have been successful in one country may not **work** in another; programmes must be tailored to each situation. The cost of a tailor-made project or training concept will be nowhere near the cost of unsustainable projects.

The general feeling of Samoans is that bees are pests and that they sting. People have been known to throw rocks at wild hives or smoke bees out of their hives.

INTRODUCING INNOVATION

Women, who comprise 48 percent of Western Samoa's population, have traditionally been responsible for food preparation, resource management, household duties and childcare. Men do the work of clearing, planting and harvesting crops, while women are responsible for tasks such as weeding and feeding. Approximately half of employed women work in the home and are involved in subsistence agriculture and household economic activities.

In many cases, Small/microbusiness can impose further pressures on a woman's already busy life. Village-based income-generating ventures need to be implemented that will supply additional funds to family budgets, while not adding to women's already heavy workload.

Many women have begun involving themselves in income-generating activities in and outside the home. Agricultural projects implemented at or near the home help to alleviate the pressure of balancing home and income-generating activities. Beekeeping satisfies these requirements.

In the three years that WIBF spent delivering small business training to villages, it was hampered by lack of business ideas through which women could put their new skills into practice. In 1996, WIBF conducted a subsector analysis of the village environment to identify the most viable options for small businesses.

Once the problem of finding a viable option for small business development in villages had been solved, WIBF faced the challenge of finding the right training

³⁹ Western Samoa Department of Statistics. (1991). Report of the Census of Population and Housing.

⁴⁰ Tafuna'i, A. & Green, S. (1997). Sub-sector analysis: coconut oil industry in Western Samoa. Unpublished.

method to suit rural Samoan women. The main problem encountered when delivering training is that village women do not grasp abstract concepts without actual experience. It is essential to find the balance between technical training, hands-on learning and practical application of new business skills.

There is a need to teach rural Samoans the importance of separating business funds from personal funds for a business to run properly.

Another challenge faced in training was that the two NZAC consultants involved were male and from New Zealand. This presented the problem of a language barrier and affected the comfort level of the trainees.

In addition to the above difficulties, bringing training to villages can be a cultural challenge. The FaaSamoa is resistant to change from long-standing tradition, so it can be difficult to introduce new crops and agricultural ideas. Village families or individuals must have the support of a strong leader, otherwise political barriers may be erected before the project has a chance to get started. There is a commonly held opinion that bees are dangerous pests. Fear and dislike of bees has caused the destruction of people's hives in the past. Support by the village elders is thus essential to protect hives.

The implementation process

While searching for innovative, non-labour-intensive business ideas suited to village environments, WIBF was asked to contribute to a consultants' report for FAO on designing an apiculture development strategy in Samoa. With help from FAO consultants, WIBF secured funding from the Pacific Island Investment and Development Scheme (PIIDS) and purchased enough materials to equip two women with five hives each to begin a small business. Using the installation of these hives as examples to be run alongside small business management training, WIBF conducted training for 20 people, most of whom were women.

Trainees were chosen by WIBF according to the following criteria:

- the women had to have some standing in their community, since they were expected to pass on their knowledge of beekeeping;
- the women had to be involved in some small business activity or to have expressed a desire to be involved in small business management training;
- the villages receiving beehives were not to be recipients of another small business aid project.

Sets of hives were given to two women and their families on the understanding that if they did not make a success of beekeeping and related business activities,

⁴¹ The traditional Samoan way.

⁴² New Zealand Agricultural Consultants Ltd. (1997). PIIDS Scheme Advisory Mission: Report on beekeeping development for village women and small business trainers, Western Samoa.

WIBF reserved the right to remove the hives and place them with other trained participants. The hives and related equipment remain the property of **WIBF**. An agreement signed by the recipient and a **WIBF** representative covered these details. The hives were not given to groups, villages or committees, because **WIBF**'s past experience had shown that when equipment is given in this manner, too many expectations and agendas exist to allow a project, especially a business-related project, to run successfully.

Each course lasted for one week, which gave time to assimilate knowledge while reducing the chances of participants being overloaded with work. Most training sessions were held in an open *fale*.⁴³ The **NZAC** consultants delivered their technical training in English with a Samoan translation where necessary. The technical training covered:

- the history of beekeeping;
- beekeeping equipment and its use;
- estimated costs and returns from beekeeping;
- a video, *The Mysterious Bee*;
- basic beekeeping skills;
- hive construction and care;
- bee-related products;
- bee biology;
- introduction of honey bees to the hive;
- honey extraction and care;
- bee diseases.

Participants were given a written course outline and lectures on beekeeping but the real success came through a high level of practical application and hands-on learning. Participants were shown how to build the hive and then given the opportunity to build one. The consultants were on hand for guidance but they made a point of standing back and letting the women work on their own as much as possible. Each participant donned the bee suit and went through the process of extracting honey from a hive that was ready for harvest in a neighbouring village. Direct contact with the bees and the beekeeping process was paramount in overcoming any initial fear of bees and their perceived dangerous nature.

Another successful component was flexibility on the part of the **NZAC** consultants. A time schedule was not strictly observed, although there was an awareness of the amount of material that needed to be covered. After a traditionally huge lunch, the consultants made sure that group work was done to avoid the

⁴³ A traditional Samoan house, which has a thatched roof, a cement or wooden floor and no walls.

usual postprandial lethargy. The training day was shorter than the usual time allotted, to allow extra time for the participants to travel home. The NZAC team was aware that training occupied time the women usually spent on daily tasks.

Traditionally, taking a project to a village means substantial expense for both implementers and beneficiaries. This expense comes in the form of elaborate meals, ceremonies and gifts given and received by both parties. It has been known for a village to refuse a project solely because it believed it would have to arrange an elaborate feast for the project team. WIBF made an extra effort to make it known that while it respected tradition it was not interested in having this done. Having encouraged the villages in the project to forego this tradition, a good deal of time was saved that could be devoted to the project.

The Ofaga o Tomai team was on hand to conduct small business training and translate where necessary. The small business component was given about an hour and a half each day to give the participants a practical way of applying what they were learning, without overloading them with new business concepts. Giving a little information on business management and opportunities encouraged the participants to persist with the training and allowed them to learn about small business management through practical experience.

The participants needed to know that they were fully capable of owning and operating their own businesses. When questioned, many of the women identified owning a shop as the only acceptable small business idea. Shops in Samoan villages are abundant and often within metres of each other. There is little variation in inventory but shop ownership is a status symbol and is seen as real business. Participants initially found it hard to believe that activities such as beekeeping, coconut oil production, farming or weaving could be the basis of a small business.

Since rural women often believe that they are only significant in the village environment, a component of the training focused on empowerment and the vital role that women play in the Samoan economy as a whole.

The Ofaga o Tomai team used what it called the business pyramid as a framework for lessons. The aim of this approach is to allow trainees to see the connection between themselves, the environment and the business as a whole. The pyramid is a map for the development of Samoan village-based business. The trainers divided the women into groups and established a rapport with them to facilitate discussion of what the participants were looking for in life. They went on to talk about earning their own money and how, even if they lived in a village, there were opportunities to start a business.

⁴⁴ Tafuna'i, A. (1997). Report on small business training delivery for beekeeping. Submitted in PIIDS Scheme Final Report.

Also attending the workshops were two men from the village and a representative from the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture. The success of the project resulted from support from many quarters, including village elders, the Samoan Ministry of Agriculture, FAO and the Samoa Beekeepers Association. This co-operative action meant that the participants had a strong support network and that villagers' work was recognized by their counterparts.

POST-INNOVATION

"I was very happy to have the beekeeping training in my village. This is the first time since I have participated in women's affairs programmes that we have actually benefited from the training. What I mean is we keep getting lots of promises, but nothing turns out the way we were promised... This kind of programme will help me and my village expand our knowledge of small business. We have had small business training in the past, but without a business to practise what we have learnt, we quickly forget what the trainers taught us."

The most noticeable change was the enjoyment that the trainees experienced in learning about bees, an insect of which they had been afraid. The trainees were quick to see the economic possibilities of beekeeping; in Savaii, at least two women intend to rewrite their business plans and applications for microcredit finance to go into beekeeping rather than production of doughnuts.⁴⁵

Once the beehives were set up and technical training completed, families were left to care for their hives until it was time to harvest the honey. Four months after set up, the honey was harvested from the first hives. Production was such that the family was able to sell about 36 bottles of honey and keep some for home use. A large harvest was not possible, because it was so close to the rainy season.

The Small Business Training Team continued to visit the families weekly to continue training and offer advice about packaging and marketing. The two families have shown confidence in their abilities to manage a business and no longer regard children overseas as their major source of cash. They are an example to their communities and as a result villagers are no longer afraid of bees. Samoan women are now much more sympathetic to the honeybee and no longer think of it merely as an insect that stings. There has been so much interest in the project that further funding is being sought to establish more women in this activity.

Knowledge of the project has spread through collaboration with other agencies. In October 1997, the Department of Trade, Commerce and Industry invited WIBF to display honey and other products created by its clients in its lobby display for three months. This publicity opened new overseas market opportunities for WIBF and the Samoa Beekeepers Association. Not long after the training,

⁴⁵ New Zealand Agricultural Consultants Ltd. (1997). PIIDS Scheme Advisory Mission: Report on beekeeping development for village women and small business trainers, Western Samoa.

the Ministry of Agriculture invited WIBF and its clients to participate in an agricultural show, which ran for two days near the government building, giving producers the opportunity to test the local market. The collaboration of the village beekeepers has made the village producer aware of what the Ministry of Agriculture and the Samoa Beekeepers Association have to offer and given them the confidence to approach such agencies.

In early 1998, the Government of New Zealand approved a microcredit scheme for WIBF to administer. The funds will be disbursed in loans of up to US\$500 to women wishing to start a small business. WIBF is convinced that it received this funding because of its involvement with the beekeeping project. The funds are only released to clients who have undergone some small-business training, who have a business plan and who agree to have the Ofaga o Tomai act as advisors to their businesses.

Although producers from the 1997 training are currently harvesting honey, their harvests are not large enough to meet growing local and overseas demand.

In conjunction with FAO's TeleFood project, WIBF acquired funding to set up 12 women with an additional 60 hives. This project is another outgrowth of the initial training. By introducing this new group to beekeeping, WIBF is hoping to produce enough honey for the local market and for export. The honey will be used in yoghurt production, which is being generated using milk from a dairy-farming project, also initiated by FAO.

In order to stimulate women to produce enough honey to satisfy foreign markets, WIBF secured a grant from the Canada Fund to purchase another 100 hives. Ten families will be set up with the hives and trained under the same programme.

The Samoa Beekeeping Association is creating a network of support for the WIBF beekeepers and the rest of the beekeeping population of Samoa. As neither population of beekeepers produces enough honey to meet the requirements of the overseas market, collaboration is being sought to form a services centre, through which the honey will be gathered centrally and packaged for export.

LESSONS LEARNED

Through the project, WIBF has seen how to utilize overseas consultants in such a way that a project benefits from local and foreign staff. It was essential to have consultants work directly with local personnel who would be providing support. **WIBF discovered that success depends on collaboration with local agencies,** using local resources when possible. Agencies often overlap when implementing projects and WIBF is convinced that the way to stop this **is** to work with agencies involved in similar activities, which can offer their help and expertise. This eliminates the need for additional foreign funding for consultants, since

there is frequently someone in the country qualified to do the required work.

As WIBF expands its work further, it has discovered that it is best to work in harmony with traditional ways, rather than try to fight them. It is always possible to make compromises and demonstrate respect for traditions without compromising the project.

If a similar programme is repeated, more effort should be made to acquire equipment from the beekeeping industry in the countries of the Pacific region. Although the industry is still in development, there are individuals who are keen to manufacture beehive equipment. For this first project, it was impractical to use these suppliers, since they were not in a position to provide equipment. Even the local beekeeper who supplied the nucleus hives had difficulty in rearing the necessary queens. This resulted in the NZAC team providing the queens and making up the nucleus hives. It is better to spend more time working with beehives, which should be possible given the increase in hive numbers and introduction of gentle bee stocks.⁴⁶

When a project is visibly working, the government pays attention. Since this project was implemented, WIBF has been granted duty-free status for beekeeping equipment. WIBF is now importing equipment that cannot currently be made in the country at an acceptable price. This equipment is available to WIBF clients involved in its programmes.

WIBF has discovered that in a small island country such as Samoa, it is hard to develop ideas on a mass scale. The markets for handicrafts or doughnuts, for example, are only as big as the village in which the business operated. On a larger scale, village handicraft producers have not proved able to satisfy large orders to a consistent level of quality. WIBF has introduced a new approach whereby many small producers work to make the same product for bulk export orders.

As a result of hands-on training, women gained valuable knowledge about bees and learned that bees were not harmful but actually useful in pollinating crops. They passed this information on to others, contributing to their acceptance of beekeeping as a viable income-generating activity. With follow-up by small business trainers and support for the new businesses, women will continue to learn small business concepts while their business grows.

It is still too early in the programme to implement changes in policy. When supplies of honey become plentiful, WIBF aims to approach the Government of Samoa with a view to banning imports of overseas honey. This would help local marketing and avoid the introduction to Samoa of bee diseases from overseas.

⁴⁶ New Zealand Agricultural Consultants Ltd. (1997). *PIIDS Scheme Advisory Mission: Report on beekeeping development for village women and small business trainers, Western Samoa.*