

Beekeepers demonstrate resilience during Covid-19

A Sappi-sponsored programme that helps communities adjacent to forestry plantations to become beekeepers, has shown some unexpectedly encouraging results during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Non-profit consultant and founder of the African Honey Bee programme, Guy Stubbs, who has more than 30 years' experience in small and micro-enterprise development, was struck by the incredible resilience being demonstrated by the families that have been part of this beekeeping project. Collectively, since the beginning of the year, the participating families have harvested about five tonnes of honey, earning close to R360,000 despite the national lockdown.

Issued by [Sappi](#) 17 Jul 2020



During a recent survey undertaken in the Sokhulu community in KwaZulu-Natal (north of Richards Bay), where the project has been running for the last couple of years and a new community in Thembaletu, Mpumalanga where training had not yet begun, Guy noticed some marked differences in people's approach to the situation brought about by the international health crisis. "While the families in Thembaletu were watching TV and waiting for the government to hand out food parcels, the families that we interviewed in Sokhulu were producing and even selling vegetables, chickens, eggs and honey," he says. "100 families were producing honey, 85 were growing vegetables, 27 were producing eggs and 39 were producing chicken for meat," he says.

Sappi Southern Africa's general manager communications Mpho Lethoko comments: "The approach of this beekeeping project we support is based on our overall philosophy of supporting ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) in our communities. Most of these beekeeping families participate in our Sappi Khulisa supplier programme and are already part of the valuable forestry supply chain. By learning to harvest honey, grow vegetables and produce poultry and eggs they are not just producing food to feed their own families, but many of them are also supplementing the income they make from selling their timber, by also selling this produce," she says.

The survey into how they were coping with the challenge of Covid-19, was aimed at measuring the impact of this method of poverty alleviation - which African Honeybee had been developing since they launched the beekeeping project in 2016 with Sappi as their main stakeholder, along with funding from the government of Flanders and the IDC. The initial goal of establishing 125 beekeepers was soon surpassed and by the end of 2019 there were 1,600 families involved in the project at different levels; with some 900 keeping bees and a further 400 harvesting honey without starting uncontrolled fires; and with some 400 participating in self-help groups that save and invest in new income generating activities and a further 300 involved in other income-generating activities.

Because Guy and his team were involved in essential services, they were able to issue their staff with permits when the national lockdown was imposed, which enabled them to continue with the project. The house in the Sappi Village in KwaMbonambi, which is used in the project for the extraction and processing of the honey collected from the beekeepers,

was used to convene small Covid-19 compliant meetings. “We obviously couldn’t meet in large numbers so in consultation with the savings group members, just the chairperson, secretary and treasurer of each group would meet separately, while other members would submit their savings via letter. All wore masks, sanitised before each meeting and strictly observed social distancing,” says Guy.

Refilwe Ramohaladi, the savings group facilitator, reports that the self-help savings groups are helping a lot of people now during Covid-19 because they have money to start their own businesses that can earn them money, or savings that are helping them get by. “There is so much need because many of the people who had jobs in the city, and have lost them, come home and are hungry,” she says.

While conducting the survey, Guy also reports that he was greatly encouraged by the fact that he was welcomed by a literal hive of activity in Sokhulu, where participants in the project were busy harvesting honey, growing vegetables, producing eggs and poultry and people were proud to show him what they were growing or producing. “It was such a contrast to the visit to I had to Thembaletu where the greetings were from families who were all asking for financial assistance of some kind,” he says.

One such successful Sokhulu entrepreneur is Sandiso Maghabi who says: “My clients have grown during Covid-19 because they can buy good quality meat right here in Sokhulu. I’m now farming with 50 chickens every two months.” This is confirmed as one of his clients, Nkosinathi Khumalo arrives to buy a chicken. “I buy my chickens from Sandiso because then I don’t have to take the taxi to KwaMbonambi. His chickens also taste fresh,” says Nkosinathi.

Guy sees the success of this project - from living in a state of dependency to becoming self-sustaining and sustainable - as a solution that could be replicated elsewhere in the country. “We, as a country, could come out of this pandemic as a nation strengthened at its core if families can produce their own food, and even make some money from selling the excess. They will be far less reliant on social grants and food parcels,” he says.

About Sappi

A global leader in dissolving pulp and paper-based solutions, Sappi Limited is headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa. It has over 12,000 employees; manufacturing facilities on three continents, in seven countries (eight operations in Europe, five operations in North America and five operations in South Africa) and customers in over 150 countries worldwide.

Sappi works closely with customers to provide relevant and sustainable dissolving pulp, paper (speciality, packaging and graphic), paper pulp, and biomaterial products and related services and innovations. Our market-leading range of paper products includes: flexible packaging, label, release liner, containerboard, graphic papers, casting release papers and in the Southern African region newsprint, uncoated graphic and business papers. These products serve the fashion, FMCG and industrial sectors. Our dissolving pulp products are used worldwide by converters to produce viscose fibre, pharmaceutical products as well as a wide range of household and consumer products.

Sappi drives product innovation and the development of new uses for its renewable resource (woodfibre) as well as for the biomass and other residues from its production processes. One such area is in the field of biomaterials (cellulose composites, nanocellulose and lignins), biochemicals including hemi-cellulose sugars and bio-energy forest products materials which Sappi believes will play a key role in its future range of products, both as commercial products and for applications within Sappi.

We continue to grow into a profitable and cash-generative diversified business with an exciting future in woodfibre, a renewable resource. www.sappi.com

About African Honeybee programme

African Honey Bee (AHB) is a South African Christian not-for-profit organisation that enables families from severely disadvantaged rural communities to establish self-help savings groups through which they build sustainable, climate-smart

income-generating enterprises.

In addition to free-range eggs, chicken meat and organic vegetables and fruit, the families also produce raw traceable honey of unrivalled taste and quality, using environmentally friendly and ethical beekeeping practices. AHB was recently recognised for the work that they do, winning the Social Innovation award for Income Generation at the Community Chest Impumelelo Social Innovations Awards.

For more information visit <https://www.africanhoneybee.co.za/>

- **Honouring courage, embracing readiness: Sappi hosts regional firefighting competitions** 3 Jul 2025
- **Sappi boosts local enterprise with MSME investment** 1 Jul 2025
- **CoGTA-led dialogue bridges sectors to boost municipal performance** 26 Jun 2025
- **Empowering South Africa's youth through education and skills development** 17 Jun 2025
- **Growing futures: Sappi's Forestry Skills Centre opens in Richmond** 10 Jun 2025

Sappi



Sappi works closely with customer, both direct and indirect, in over 100 countries to provide them with the relevant and sustainable paper, paper-pulp and dissolving wood pulp products and related services and innovations.

[Profile](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [RSS Feed](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>