

## **Beekeeper Training in Sheka**

Beekeeping has long been a means of generating income in the Sheka Zone. However, traditional beekeeping methods have not maximized available resources and have in some ways placed a strain on forest resources. Using traditional techniques, beehives are constructed using the trunk of a large tree which has been cut into sections, split, and hollowed out. These hollow sections are then bound together to form a cylinder which is hung in the upper branches of trees in the forest. Due to the danger associated with hanging and gathering honey from these hives, women have traditionally been restricted from participating in beekeeping and honey has only been harvested once a year. Now, thanks to assistance and training provided by MELCA's Beekeeper Workshop held in Masha, Ethiopia May 5-14, 2009, this is beginning to change.

Through this programme, MELCA provided information on the use and construction of a new, environmentally and user-friendly beehive, along with information on general beekeeping practices, such as the transferring of bee colonies, seasonal management of honeybees, and the proper handling of bee products.

The "Ethio-ribrab" beehive, introduced by MELCA, is particularly innovative because it utilizes clay and locally available, fast growing bamboo for construction rather than the trunk of a large tree. Also, these hives are positioned on posts set approximately 4 feet off the ground rather than being hung in tree tops and can be placed near the home instead of deep in the forest. These alterations in design have allowed both men and women to be involved in beekeeping; as Waltata Bahiru Wolde Giorgis, clan leader of the Wolo Kebele, notes, "Women are fully integrated into the beekeeping process". Placing the hives near the home also permits beekeepers to use their time more efficiently because there is no longer a need to travel far from home to tend the hives. Additionally, these improvements have allowed beekeepers to harvest honey two to three times a year rather than just once. This increased production represents a valuable opportunity for the Sheka Zone, as outside buyers such as Bezamar have begun to consider the prospect of buying honey from local producers according to Ateso Kebele Clan leader Atestata Dakito Atestata. The presence of potential outside buyers represents an opportunity for the Sheka Zone to establish itself in a niche market as producers of high quality, organic honey. In this manner, MELCA has helped to consolidate peoples' traditional livelihoods in the Sheka Forest while also working for the regeneration of Nature.

In total, this training reached 200 participants, 48 of which were women. Along with useful information for expanding their honey production capacity, participants also received a certificate of completion along with protective gloves, veils, and a smoker