

PROMOTING MODERN BEE - KEEPING AND DOUM PALM (HYPHAENE THEBAICA) PRODUCTS AS ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOODS FOR COMBATING DESERTIFICATION IN NIGERIA'S DRY BELT

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The paper reports the role of two separate communities in Nigeria's dry belt, in the practical utilization and management of natural resources in their localities to enhance alternative livelihoods, while at the same time combating desertification. The paper uses field evidence to demonstrate that combating desertification implies combating or alleviating poverty among relevant stakeholders. The implicated natural resources are honey bees and forests (for bee - keeping) on the one hand, and hyphaene thebaica (doum palm) on the other, which supports the collection, production and sale of a wide range of products that guarantee sustainable economic self-reliance among rural inhabitants who control these resources. The paper further demonstrates the transition from traditional bee-keeping by the communities studied, with its attendant negative environmental consequences including the acceleration of the process of desertification through tree felling for honey harvesting to modernized bee - keeping techniques which have the following salutary effects.

- i. Enhancement of the culture of tree planting and forest conservation;
- ii. Higher or enhanced honey yield per bee - hive;
- iii. Strengthening of the group or community spirit for the pursuit of activities for economic self-reliance.
- iv. Enhanced income - generation viz-a-viz possible incomes from the peasant farm sector; and
- v. Sense of complementarity of roles between the farmer and the bee - keeper, leading to collective interest in natural resource conservation.

The study also demonstrates that the doum palm (hyphaene thebaica) is cherished and conserved as a wild resource by community members, in Northern Yobe State of Nigeria. This arises from its economic potential as the source of raw material for a variety of non-farm activities, which include the making and sale of mats, fans, brooms and ropes. These products are traded by community members both internally and across the borders in neighbouring Chad and Niger Republics. The study interestingly highlights the roles played by natural, social, human, physical and financial *capitals* in the production process of these activities. These critical *capitals* enhance sustainability of livelihoods in the study area.

The study utilizes abundant field evidence to argue that there is significant economic, environmental and social incentives in the practice of bee - keeping and the exploitation of the products of the doum palm. They all involve the conservation of renewable natural resources which represents a strategy for combating desertification as well as substantially alleviating poverty through the pursuit of these alternative non-farm livelihood activities.

INTERESTING - 8

INFORMATIVE - 8

USEFUL ]  
PRACTICAL ]  
REALISTIC ] - 8

24