

# Introduction and Objectives

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## Background:

Apiculture is an important resource base of mountain farming systems and offers specific advantages for developing sustainable agriculture. It is an exclusive non-land based activity which does not compete with other farming systems for resources. It also helps in the conservation of forest and grassland ecosystems because honeybees are the most efficient pollinators in nature.

The most important aspect of apiculture is that it is an important income generating activity in the hills for small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, and other weaker sections of the society living at, or under, subsistence level. Hive products such as honey, beeswax, royal jelly, and pollen provide both nutritious food and cash income. These are in demand both locally and for export market. It is a flexible occupation which creates off-farm employment and diversifies the economy. Inputs for apiculture are mostly simple and locally available. Yet another significant, but not widely recognized, role is that honeybees enhance the productivity levels of agricultural, horticultural, and fodder crops through cross pollination. It has been estimated that the value of honeybees as pollinators is about 10-12 times more than their value as producers of honey and beeswax.

## Status and Scope of Apiculture in the Himalayas:

Apiculture with the native hive bee, *Apis cerana*, in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas is a traditional household activity. It has not yet developed on the modern scientific lines followed in the cold climatic zones of advanced countries. In temperate parts of China and India, efforts have been made to improve traditional methods of beekeeping with *Apis cerana*, and in certain such areas this native bee species matches the European honeybee, *Apis mellifera*, in honey production and pollination activities. However, in other countries of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas, the situation is far from satisfactory, despite the fact that climatic conditions, and the multiplicity of flora available throughout the year, in the temperate and sub-tropical parts of this Region, offer great potentials for apicultural development. The major constraints are lack of basic infrastructure, skilled manpower, training, extension facilities, or basic and applied research programmes. All attempts to introduce the European honeybee, *Apis mellifera*, into this temperate region have met with little success. The largest and the most valuable species of honeybee, *Apis laboriosa*, is on the verge of extinction in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region because of traditional honey hunting methods.

The Expert Meeting was organized in order to attempt to overcome some of the above constraints. It is hoped that the recommendations of this Meeting will help to

raise the status of this rural industry from traditional honey hunting into a viable income generating activity and a stable occupation for rural communities living in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region.

### Objectives:

To bring together apicultural experts from the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (and other parts of the world), for an exchange of knowledge, and to focus on relatively successful developments in mountain apiculture, in China and India, as well as on the extent to which they are relevant to other mountain areas in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas.

To bring awareness to the Governments of the Hindu Kush-Himalayan countries, and International organisations, concerning the importance of mountain apiculture in providing extra food, pollination of crops, employment, nutritional benefits, and cash income to the weaker sections of rural society.

To explore the possibilities of establishing a regional Apicultural Research and Training Centre, with substantial international funding, in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region. This would help create a centre of trained experts and generate and deliver improved apicultural management technology, through basic and applied research, primarily on Asian species of honeybees.