

## History of Sumoro H

Sumoro, gets off from the car, shifts the sticks and opens the trembling metal sheet gate that closes the Catholic Mission of Shelallà, small village in the Southern Ethiopian, repeating again the movements done thousands of times in 16 years, during which he worked as watchman, earning about 5 euro per month. During that period he has even never hoped to be, on day, in one of those cars living the place. Sumoro, today, should be 45 but he smiles saying that he does not remember well. He also does not remember when he married a girl coming from a 20 km far village but it was, anyway, 10 children ago. He cannot instead forget the emotion and confusion when he left his born village, for the first time, to follow a beekeeping course in the capital, Addis Ababa, 250 km far: “I was not able to go back home alone, I had to be driven every time”.

And he lives again, as a dream, his first trip to Italy, he says that if he thinks about it “he is not sure it has really happened”.

Another unforgettable moment was when his father passed away: he was 12 years old, attending fifth grade at school and being the first of two kids. He was forced to leave the school and to work helping the mother and paying school fees for his brother.

At the beginning, small daily jobs then, finally, the work which has been his main activity for most of his life. A decent occupation but not sufficient to maintain a family. Hence Sumoro “rediscovers” the father’s teaching who was not only a farmer but also a beekeeper, that means, in Africa, hard, difficult, dangerous and not well paid profession.

In Ethiopia, honey is very much appreciated either as food either for the preparation of *tej*, local ancient alcoholic drink, but the honey collected by Sumoro from the traditional beehives, *kafò*, was dirty, mixed with wax and dead bees, with a low market value, sold in plastic bags or in reused cans. Today, Sumoro has reached a respected position within the Shalalla’ community, he is involved in a civil court that judges the cases under 25 €, he is a forefront beekeeping and his trips to Italy have given to him unexpected notoriety and importance. His honey is sold in Addis Ababa for a 4 times higher price than before and he is often requested as a trainer.

Sumoro’s eyes shine when he goes back to the moment that changed his life: a casual, almost miraculous, meeting with a “determined” volunteer for Africa, Celso, who saw him working with traditional beehives and immediately understood to have a hidden, undiscovered resource to exploit for a beekeeping development project. Both have won the bet.

Sumoro now works with rational beehives, his honey is scented, tasty and clean, he produces and sells valuable wax and leads a group of beekeepers that want follow his example and together they have founded an association. He is proud to have demonstrated that it is possible to do something also without a school education.

Celso has seen his project growing within the community and becoming a small development engine, he has permitted to Sumoro to travel in order to upgrade his knowledge and to exchange experience with other beekeepers and the experiment is spreading through the neighbour communities.

Sumoro speaks with calm and deep voice, holding a beekeeping manual and he transmits serenity. He says not to be rich but he can finally sustain a family, all the children go to school and he could build a new house for himself and one for his mother. Maybe in future he will get also the electricity. His wife still distills a local maize brandy (*arakè*) but it is not a necessity anymore and three of their children, two sons and one daughter, follow his steps of “modern” beekeeper.