

THE *DISRUPTORS*

Social entrepreneurs *reinventing*
business and society

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GUY STUBBS

WHERE THERE IS HONEY, THERE IS HOPE

*On the wings of the African Honey Bee and the rock of his faith,
Guy Stubbs is building a social enterprise that is helping to
change lives and grow the livelihoods of rural farmers*

One day, when he was in boarding school at Hilton College in the Midlands of KwaZulu-Natal, Guy Stubbs put his mother's wedding veil over his head, topped it off with his father's Mexican sombrero, and went outside to light a fire. The kindling of dry grass, twigs, and crumpled-up newspaper took flame in the stainless-steel container, and he shut the conical lid, cocked at a jaunty angle like the Tin Man's hat. Puffs of white smoke bellowed from the funnel, casting a pall that left the raging swarm in a stupor. Guy scraped the honey from the comb, and in the oozing of the sticky sweetness, he found a way to turn it into money. He sold it in jars at the side of the road, earning enough to be able to pay a chauffeur when he took his girlfriend out on a date. It hardly mattered that the chauffeur was his father, Jeremy, an astute businessman – owner of a landscaping company and boarding kennels for cats and dogs – who was only too happy that his son was making a modest living from his hobby. But it turned out to be more than a hobby.



Guy, a burly and easygoing man, at home in his tee shirt and shorts and hiking shoes, is the founder of African Honey Bee, a hive of micro-enterprises that provide training, mentorship, and subsistence for beekeepers in some of the most impoverished areas of the country. "In Africa, most of our rural communities live adjacent to areas that have natural vegetation," says Guy. That means bees, and that means honey, unfiltered, unprocessed, unadulterated. "I just thought, if I can find a way for poor people to produce honey, and coordinate the whole thing, there will be a waiting market."

The honey from African Honey Bee, sold mostly in pharmacies, is branded as Eat Naked (Slogan: "Super Nude Super Food"), with a quirky logo of a cartoon caveman wielding a strategically positioned club. But behind that fun façade is a serious business that is helping to alleviate poverty and revolutionise small-scale farming in South Africa. The bees themselves, industrious, cohesive, highly productive, are the business model. Nature's social entrepreneurs, ferrying pollen from flower to flower as they draw the nectar that sustains the hive. For Guy, this is more than just the perfect example of an ecosystem built on symbiosis. It is an everyday miracle, a validation of his faith, proof of concept of the Biblical principles that underpin his approach to doing business. Guy calls himself a Christian social entrepreneur, and he quotes chapter and verse from Proverbs as his statement of mission. "The honey from the comb is sweet to your taste," he recites. "Know that wisdom is thus for your soul. If you find it, then there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

At Hilton, Guy was a member of the beekeeping society and the photographic club, and in adult life, at the intersection of those interests, he found the cause that gave him reason to believe. He studied photography at the Tshwane University of Technology, and took his camera into the frontline at the turning point of democracy in the early 1990s. In the mythology of the New South Africa, these were the Rainbow Years, imbued with the light of goodwill and reconciliation. In truth, the transition swept in on a whirlwind of fire. In Snake Park, an informal settlement in Soweto, Guy stopped when he saw the smouldering body of a murdered man. The police on one side, armed and ready; the community, angry and restless, on the other. And in the midst of it all, a small boy, nonchalantly kicking around a football. It was the perfect shot, filtered by smoky light in a crucible of history. But Guy never pressed the shutter. He put his camera down and drove into the veld, where he sat, shaking and alone. In that moment he decided that he would only ever photograph the invisible, the glow of determination, resilience, and positive energy that makes us human. He would become a photographer of hope. A little girl on a dirt road, throwing her head back in joyous laughter. A man on his way to work, the handles of six shovels arrayed on his arm. A schoolgirl feeding a flock of chickens in the early morning before class. A mother lovingly swinging her child by the arms in front of a thatched hut.

"You look for a spark of hope in the situation," says Guy. And then, you press the shutter. He specialised as a social-development photographer, capturing the human face of projects for multinational corporations and aid and development organisations. In the field, he had a close-up view of the way things work, and the way they

sometimes don't. In Malelane, a farming town in Mpumalanga, on assignment for the Department of Land Affairs, he photographed life on two commercial sugarcane farms that had been handed over to the local community. One of the farms had been turned into a communal enterprise; the other had been subdivided into one-hectare plots, allotted to individual families. "After three years," says Guy, "the farm that the community had moved onto was bankrupt. They lost the farm because they had run up so much debt. The one where individual families were given individual farms was absolutely cooking. Those one-hectare farms were producing higher yields than the original commercial farms had been producing. I realised, wow."

Now, in Guy's portfolio, let's take a look at a photograph of a woman, smiling, her face softened by a veil, a wide-brimmed hat on her head, a chunk of brittle comb held aloft in her gloved hands. There is hope in honey too. Close to the Kruger National Park, in the lowveld of Mpumalanga, lies an area called Bushbuckridge. It is rural land, haunted by poverty. Over 84 per cent of the population earn less than R1,300 per household per month, according to a Spatial Development study commissioned by the Bushbuckridge Municipality in 2014. Just over a quarter of households have electricity, and less than half have access to piped water within 200 metres of their homesteads. But it was here, in 2007, that Guy found his Eden, his new beginning, because the one thing that Bushbuckridge does have, in abundance, is flora. In particular, the *Eucalyptus saligna*, also known as the Sydney Bluegum, a hardy species originally planted to provide timber for the mining industry. But the real gold here is honey, and the busy miner is *Apis*

mellifera scutellata, the African Honey Bee at the epicentre of this social enterprise.

"Social" is the impulse that binds the hive, with each worker bee foraging for the greater good; in turn, the flowers bloom. In the agricultural sector, the mirror of this model of doing business is the co-op. Farmers join forces to strengthen their buying power, share skills and know-how, and create a mutually beneficial channel for distribution. But in South Africa today, says Guy, the spirit of the co-operative is being eroded, with the best of intentions, by the system of government grants for rural farmers. "You have a whole lot of people coming together who don't really want to be together," he says. "They are being forced into social cohesion. The Department of Trade and Industry gives them a grant of R350,000, so all they are really coming for is to get a slice of the pie. Once they have this money, or whatever they bought with that money, nothing happens. The basic concept of a co-op and how it works is very good. But you must have the right incentives." For the beekeeper on a commercial farm, that can mean an income of up to R6,000 a month; for the farmer, it means easier access to hives for pollination, and better yields for fruit and vegetable crops.

But the greater incentive, the long-term purpose of African Honey Bee, says Guy, is the alleviation of poverty on a permanent basis. That may sound like a Utopian ideal, even for someone whose business is founded on faith. But he has already seen hints of it happening in Bushbuckridge, where the project took root with seed funding from the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) and ABSA's CSI fund. The original goal was to find and train a hundred beekeepers, who would

farm with a hundred hives each. "That would give us 10,000 hives, which would give us a very nice little business model." He held meetings with the community, hoping to attract applicants who showed a strong capacity for entrepreneurial thinking. "We got 5,000 applicants," he says. "Every opportunistic person came along. There are no jobs there. How do you select people? I tried all sorts of things, I got people to play farming business games. I tried to identify the entrepreneurial people in that bunch, but it was useless." He came to realise that people who live in abject poverty, for the most part, do not aspire to be entrepreneurs. They simply want to put food on the table. Now anyone who is interested is invited to beekeeper training workshops, where they learn to make veils from tablecloths and tee shirts, beekeeping gloves from old jeans, smokers from old tins, and hive tools from scrap metal. "The process is transformational," says Guy. "You have men sewing and women nailing hives together. People realise they have the God-given abilities to change their own lives. You should see what happens to a person who has never had a job, when the hive that they made with their own hand catches a swarm of bees. You should see what happens when they produce their first honey and earn their first income."

In the African Honey Bee network, which has since spread beyond Mpumalanga to Gauteng, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal, the beekeepers can become micro-franchisees, or BKBs (Beekeeping Businesses) working their way up from two hives as they master the fundamentals of apicultural management. At the next level of the hive is the micro-franchisor, providing the platform for the BKBs to access guaranteed markets. An African Beekeeper Trust provides grant-

— funded training, guidance, and support. With 2,000 hives in a beekeeping “hub”, the enterprise becomes commercially viable and self-sustaining. The smaller farmers are then given equity in the main franchisor, through a trust. “It is all based on how much honey they supply,” explains Guy. “The honey gets measured, and they get a percentage of the overall profit, based on their contribution. It incentivises loyalty. The more people that are involved and the more honey that is produced, the more everybody earns as a dividend. They start helping each other, and you start having voluntary social cohesion. People are helping each other because it is going to help them more.”

Guy is the entrepreneur in this equation, striving to raise funding, find markets for the produce, and organise the necessary training for the BKBs. It is a martyr’s role. Why would any sane and sensible person want to be an entrepreneur? “Entrepreneurs are people who go all over the place and they are a little...loose in the brain,” says Guy. “Seriously, I know. My dad was a business owner, and he had a very happy family. I am an entrepreneur, and I have got a totally stressed-out family. I mean, they can’t cope with me. I pray, please Lord, give me a sustainable constant income.” But you don’t just pray; you consult. Guy’s own network of experts on the leadership team of African Honey Bee includes Martin Johannsmeier, one of the world’s foremost authorities on beekeeping and bee-plants, Elias Mavuso, a pioneer of innovative beekeeping methods in South Africa, and Kobus Visser, a project manager with vast experience in helping NGOs solve their operational problems.

— Guy himself holds a Christian-based MBA from Regent University in the USA, and is working towards a PhD on “A Biblical Model of Micro-Franchising for the Reduction of Poverty”. In Bushbuckridge, he has been struck by the successive layers of dependency – colonialism, apartheid, socialism – that oppress and entrap the poor. In the secular field of development and poverty alleviation, he believes, hope is a form of idolatry, driven by greed and politics. But in the Bible’s approach to capitalism, as preached by John Calvin, the Protestant theologian who lent his name to the Calvinist work ethic, growth and wealth are forces for good, if you use them to help people and build a better society. Guy spreads the word, because he believes it brings hope, but he does not seek to convert. “Most of our beekeepers believe in traditional ancestral spirits,” he says. “If you try to proselytise, or you discriminate, you are not being a Christian. The Bible is very clear about that.” There are dozens of references to bees and honey in the Bible – “The land of milk and honey”, “Honey from the rock”, “Eat honey, for it is good” – but nowhere in its pages will you find instructions on how to build a hive. For that, you do as much as you can, with as little as you’ve got.

In Mozambique, after the war, Guy saw scuba-divers wearing outfits patched together from the inner tubes of tyres. They were wielding old AK-47s, with spears affixed to their barrels. In Bushbuckridge, Guy teaches the beekeepers to make smokers from empty tins of baby food, using bullets of donkey dung as fuel. The hives, a proprietary technology developed by African Honey Bee, are fashioned from wood with moulded plastic frames costing R4 each. They require no assembly or maintenance. For the harvesting, there is no expensive infrastructure or extraction equipment. The honey and comb are

knocked and scraped into a sterile bucket, and the frame goes straight back into the hive, where it is cleaned of excess honey by the bees themselves. What's good for the bee, is good for the keeper. Sustainability in symbiosis. In his MBA dissertation – "A Business Plan for an African Honey Bee Micro-Franchise Incubator" – Guy highlights the fusion of smart thinking and smart technology that puts this principle into practise. In the field, the beekeepers transport their honey on solar-powered electric bicycles and trailers. They use Android smartphones to collect data, which is tracked and managed by a system called Nektar (Nectar Knowledge Technology and Resources).

Even a schoolboy, wearing a borrowed wedding veil and sombrero, can be schooled in the apicultural arts, but at African Honey Bee, nothing is left to chance. In conjunction with AgriSETA, the Agricultural Sector Education and Training Authority, and Skills for Africa, a private agricultural and rural training company, African Honey Bee has developed a comprehensive methodology that begins with a one-week practical workshop and evaluation. The selected beekeepers are then employed and "incubated" in a hub of 2,000 hives, with 10 hives of their own to care for and harvest. The training lasts 18 months, qualifying as an NQF1 course, equivalent to first-year university. Those who make the grade become African Honey Bee franchisees, entitled to soft loans of R140,000 to start their Beekeeping Businesses. Not everyone is that ambitious, says Guy. "Some families only want one or two hives, and that extra R2,000 a year is fine. They will do other things to generate income. We are cool with that. We help them with chicken farming, we help them with vegetables, we help them with business skills."

But he also tells the story of one beekeeper, who heard a buzzing in the bluegums, and thought it sounded like an opportunity. She formed a co-op of her own, persuading other beekeepers to join her in catching swarms and transporting them to her village. "She made a plan with an old guy who has an old bakkie," says Guy. "She pays him a daily rate. She has 60 hives out in the bluegums this season. She has an arrangement with other beekeepers, who have equipment but are not interested in beekeeping. She takes 50 per cent of the honey, and gives them 50 per cent. I am so proud of her." Women-headed households are the norm in Bushbuckridge, says Guy, as a result of the migrant-labour system that lures men to the mines and the city in search of work. "My dream was that the women would be able to set up businesses that were economically viable, so that the dads could come back and the family could be reunited. But that hasn't happened. The dads are too entrenched. They are living in the city with second houses and second families." Instead, he has shifted the focus to women and young people, who make up more than two-thirds of the population in the area.

Most of the Beekeeping Businesses are family owned and run, with knowledge transferred through training. "The family head, usually the mother, will be the business manager," says Guy. "A son or daughter will be the main beekeeper. Another son or daughter will manage the banking, business communication, and data collection via smartphone." Guy, meanwhile, will be out there, writing proposals, running meetings, struggling to harvest the toughest crop of them all. Funding for a social enterprise. "South African funders understand grant funding," he says. "They will give some money and it will be for a specific purpose. It will

always be ring-fenced for this or for that. They are not thinking about the sustainability of the project. You will hardly ever be able to get funding for operating capital." He laments the state of the two old bakkies used by African Honey Bee. They keep breaking down, they use too much fuel, their everyday running costs are unreasonably high. "If we had to buy brand-new bakkies, we would be able to spend less on repayment and insurance. It would be much more efficient. But nobody wants to provide them."

He wonders sometimes about the road he has travelled. If he had a choice, there is nothing he would like more than to be on horseback on a 22,000-hectare farm in Namibia, looking after wild animals. But he doesn't have a choice. "God has a different plan for me," he says. God, and the honeybees. Bee populations in many parts of the world are dwindling, due to a combination of disease, climate change, exposure to pesticides, and the availability of food and resources: a syndrome known as Colony Collapse Disorder, with potentially devastating consequences for agriculture, natural ecosystems, and global food security. But as long as there are bees, there will be honey, and as long as there is honey, here where the African Honey Bee makes its hive, there will be the hope of a sweeter tomorrow.



A SYNERGY OF BUSINESS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

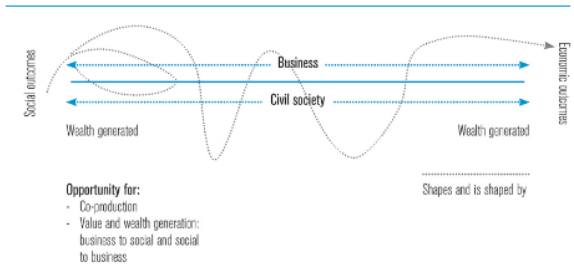
Guy is driven by an instinctive understanding of the complementary relationship between markets and social value. He appreciates that access to markets and profit is crucial to achieve social change, a philosophy that is mirrored in the Calvinistic philosophy that profit is earned for the betterment of society.

This philosophy is reflected in the work of Child (2015), who argues that civil society and the market have a complementary relationship. He anchors his thinking in the embeddedness theory of social economists such as Granovetter and Swedberg, who believe that social forces such as political

and state institutions, civil society, and social networks, are critical in achieving economic outcomes. For Child (2015) the converse also applies: *civil society shapes and is shaped by the market* (Child, 2015).

Through this sociological lens, social enterprises co-produce and add value to business. Child (2015) uses the Fair Trade Movement as an example of a civic concept that has enabled business to deliver more effectively.

Guy's approach is a good example of this complementary relationship, and demonstrates how business can promote social change. He understands, through his Calvinist beliefs, that wealth generation cannot happen without social progress, and vice versa. He has developed a model that allows farm workers to generate additional income by using natural resources. By ensuring that the product is sold on the market, Guy achieves both his economic outcomes and his social goals, in what could be regarded as a classic social enterprise.



Spectrum showing the parallel and connected relationships between business and civil society, adapted from Child (2015). Business and civil society are not on opposite ends of a spectrum, but rather are parallel processes of value and wealth creation.