

WORKU

SUMMER 2008



SWEET DEAL

Farouk Jiwa turns
rural Africans into
honey-making
entrepreneurs

PLUS

New Chancellor Roy McMurtry
Bilingualism and the Brain
The Oscars, John Lennon and 'Sir Jerry'

Farouk Jiwa helps African subsistence farmers improve their lives through small, eco-friendly businesses like beekeeping. **BY MICHAEL TODD**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GEORGINA GOODWIN

SWEET SUCCESS

I MAGINE A HONEY OF AN IDEA as rewarding monetarily as it is socially. Farouk Jiwa did. The York grad (MES '03), who is a native Kenyan, has spent the years since his York graduation making a remarkable contribution to his former country through Honey Care Africa. HCA helps subsistence farmers improve their livelihoods by introducing them to sustainable beekeeping. The company ensures that the rural farmers – half of whom are women – access the capital they need for start-ups as well as training and a guaranteed market for the honey at Fair Trade prices.

Although Jiwa now calls Canada home, he travels frequently to Kenya and other parts of the world, setting up and attending to the honey and other sustainable, micro-financed businesses he's helped establish. His work involves principles that relate directly to his time at York, which included gaining a graduate diploma in business & the environment offered jointly by the Faculty of Environmental Studies and the Schulich School of Business. As early as 2005, Jiwa was recognized as One to Watch by York's annual Bryden Alumni Awards. Now he is one of 50 prominent alumni who are part of the new "50 to the Power of 50" group supporting York's \$200-million fundraising campaign (see following story). The bees have generated a lot of buzz.

"The decision to promote honey production as a micro-enterprise at the local community level was driven by a number of factors," says Jiwa. "From the market perspective, there was clearly a demand for honey both locally and within the wider region. At the time, my partners and I couldn't understand why a tropical country like Kenya was importing honey all the way from Australia and the US and yet we had a much more lush and vibrant flora. I was particularly keen on finding an income-generating activity that could be undertaken by



STEPPING UP: Jiwa in Nairobi



small-holder subsistence farmers, who represent a majority of the population, and didn't require heavy inputs or buying more land."

The decision to pursue honey production was also strongly influenced by the positive environmental impact that bees create, Jiwa adds. They pollinate native vegetation and food crops, and beekeeping could be done on the periphery of forests and national parks as an alternative to charcoal production. "Finally, we were looking for a commodity that was non-perishable because of the problems with road transportation in rural areas, so we needed a product that would keep well. Honey seemed to be the natural answer."

JIWA COMES BY HIS ENTREPRENEURSHIP skills naturally, it seems. "My father was a serial entrepreneur and my mother a school teacher. Between them, they ensured that my brother and I not only got a sound education but that we were well-grounded and had a clear sense of the important values in life." As a fourth-generation Asian-Kenyan and part of the first post-independence generation, he says, "I was fortunate to grow up in a strong, stable and cohesive community environment. From a very early age, this gave me a very good understanding of the power of communities and a sense of just what can be achieved when people come together and work towards a common goal."

HCA was launched in 2000 and, as part of his master's degree at York, Jiwa continued to work on elaborating his innovative business model. The initiative got a tremendous boost from its first significant project, worth \$50,000, with the Danish government's international development agency, Danida. HCA manufactured the widely used Langstroth hives and distributed them to small farmers who typically worked less than 0.8 of a hectare. In the early days Jiwa distributed 100 of the hives he'd made to 25 families in eastern Kenya. The result was highly successful. "Our first harvest was a mere 300 kgs of honey and collectively made only \$500," he notes. "However, that proved our model worked and gave us, the farmers and other partners the confidence to continue. We haven't looked back since." According to HCA, the company captured 27 per cent of the domestic honey market in Kenya within its first four years of business and established a network of 2,500 beekeepers who earned between US\$200 and \$250 a year, often double their previous earnings. That market share is now close to 40 per cent and there are nearly 9,000 households across East Africa involved in beekeeping with HCA.

Honey Care's business strategy has been to put the small-holder farmers at the centre of the business and to build a "Kenya first" marketing approach, says Jiwa. This involves focusing on the needs of the rural farmers to encourage them to start honey production, and to first serve the considerable

demand for honey in major Kenya hotels, retail outlets and local industries before pursuing the export market. Now, with a strong foothold in Kenya's domestic market, Honey Care has expanded honey sales to neighbouring Tanzania, the US and Europe. Although the recent political turbulence in Kenya caused some temporary problems for HCA, says Jiwa, the decline of honey bees noted in some parts of the world has not affected East Africa.

HCA's success has received international recognition. In 2003 it won the prestigious Equator Prize from the United Nations Development Program along with several other awards for social entrepreneurship. The Equator Prize recognizes innovative community partnerships that reduce poverty through conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Jiwa was also recognized as one of the "Most Outstanding Social Entrepreneurs" by the Schwab Foundation at the World Economic Forum in 2005 and received a World Business Award from the Prince of Wales International Business Leaders Forum.

IN 2006, JIWA JOINED CARE Canada as director of CARE Enterprise Partners, a social venture capital unit that seeks lasting solutions to poverty through market-based approaches designed to unleash entrepreneurship in emerging economies. His most recent initiative with CARE Canada was a partnership with Trade Facilitation Office Canada to support Gone Rural, an innovative social venture based in Swaziland, to successfully

find a market for its products in Canada. Gone Rural seeks to improve the lives of rural women who use traditional skills to create attractive bowls, placemats and other highly marketable household items in home-based businesses. This joint initiative won the 2007 Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters

International Cooperation Award for Excellence.

"Growing up in a country where more than half the population lives in abject poverty earning less than \$1 a day, where so much human potential goes unrealized because people are struggling to meet basic needs, and a country where getting an education is a privilege rather than a right, I was determined to use the opportunity I had been given to get a university education to try and make some contribution towards addressing these enormous challenges," says Jiwa.

"A sense of empathy is a very strong driver for what I do. I always try to remember that had circumstances been a little different, I could very well be one of the millions of people living below the poverty line. I therefore try my level best to provide the encouragement, advice and support to others that I would have wanted them to provide to me if I was in their shoes, and in a way that doesn't take away their pride." ■

With a strong foothold in Kenya's market, Honey Care has expanded sales to Tanzania, the US and Europe.