

Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by developing small business ideas based on the sustainable use of natural resources

Brasso Seco Village Council, 27th October 2010

1. Introduction

The Brasso Seco workshop is part of a project called “***Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by developing small business ideas based on the sustainable use of natural resources***” funded by the **JB Fernandes Memorial Trust**. The purpose of the project is to improve people’s quality of life in six rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago through facilitating and supporting the development of small and micro-enterprises based on the sustainable use of natural resources. For this project, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) will identify and work with six communities in Trinidad and Tobago who are interested in developing small businesses based on the sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. forests, fisheries, etc.). CANARI will assist communities in identifying their income generating project ideas, and help them work through the next steps, linking them up with agencies that can them.

2. Workshop goal/ objectives

The goal of the workshop was to conduct a preliminary assessment with the community on the potential for developing small businesses to improve community livelihoods based on the sustainable use of natural resources. The workshop objectives were to:

- a) identify natural resources with potential to be sustainably used for small businesses;
- b) identify existing and potential community small businesses based on sustainable use of natural resources;
- c) identify key issues for management of natural resources; and
- d) identify other relevant initiatives.

3. Methods

The workshop was highly interactive and participants easily engaged in the different sessions. They were asked to draw a map of their community, and to locate the existing natural resources. As a complement to this exercise, they were also asked to prepare a table listing the different natural resources, their existing and potential uses. Participants also used role playing to conduct a strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of their community, and held group discussions to brainstorm ideas on the potential for natural resource based small businesses in the community (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

4. Participants

Fourteen participants were in attendance, and mainly associated with two groups, the Brasso Seco Village Council and the Brasso Seco Tourism Action Committee. The group comprised of mostly females, and only three males, all of them of mature age. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.

5. Selection of Brasso Seco community

Brasso Seco is a small agricultural community of approximately 350 people, where villagers mainly do subsistence agriculture and vegetable crops. The community was recommended as a potential participant in the Fernandes Rural Livelihoods project as a result of an exchange visit facilitated by CANARI on “Sustainable financing for sustainable forest-based livelihoods” in June 2010 and was one of the last communities to be selected. Due to time constraints, the community was not further scoped via telephone and/or face to face interviews of key contact persons and members of the community. However, Brasso Seco was seen as suited for the purpose of the project based on the list of criteria that was used to select the other communities.

When participants were asked to assess the list of criteria developed to select their community, they all agreed with all the criteria listed, except one. It was indeed perceived that the “high degree of collective commitment to community development” was not a criterion that was applicable to Brasso Seco. Several participants were of the view that the level of commitment was not very high. They also added that people from outside the community sometimes seemed more interested in the development of Brasso Seco.

Participants also wished to add another reason why Brasso Seco is a suitable community for this project, and referred to the fact that it was once labelled as the “model community”, one reason for this being the fact that the first Community Tourism Committee was created in Brasso Seco in 1998. The community was then seen as the one setting the example for other rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Participants further added that in view of that, some of the “good ideas” that once existed should be revisited.

6. Findings

6.1 Key natural resources in the community

Table 1 below compiles the matrices prepared by the groups in which they had to identify the existing natural resources, their current uses, as well as potential uses of these resources.

Table 1: Key natural resources in Brasso Seco

Natural resources	Existing uses	Potential uses
Lumber		Furniture
Wildlife	Hunting/conservation	

Cocoa and coffee	Ice cream for sale, grinding	Cocoa and coffee ice cream labelled as 'Product of Brasso Seco-Paria'
Citrus and other fruits	Juices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selling of preserved fruits for supermarkets; • Bottled local juices for sale
Medicinal herbs	Remedies	
Clay		Ceramics
Water resources (sulphur spring, waterfalls, turtle beach)	Domestic and recreational use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid tours for visitors and tourists • Opening of a water plant
Bananas (various types), christophene	Domestic use	
Flowers (anthuriums, gingerlilies)	Selling in market (San Juan)	Selling at a wider scale, to provide interior decorators

6.2 Existing and potential community small businesses based on the use of natural resources

Hiking, tour guiding, cook outs and the harvest and selling of crops were identified as the existing successful community activities, and parlours and bars as the successful small businesses. The bed and breakfast business was also seen as an option.

6.3 Key issues for management of natural resources

The participants had a keen interest in the development of an ecotourism product as they believed that it would facilitate increased and better management of their natural resources by members of the community. This would be a positive response to the ongoing uncontrolled and indiscriminate use of the natural resources of the community by external tour guides and visitors.

6.4 Other relevant initiatives

Members of the community at present utilise the coffee and cocoa in their community to make a special brand of ice cream. Some participants are currently involved in a business training programme.

6.5 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis (SWOT) of Brasso Seco

Several participants volunteered to be playing the roles of television reporters to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the community. The results of the SWOT analysis are summarised in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis of Brasso Seco

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing natural resources: fruits, wildlife water resources, the Pawi bird, hiking trails, currently used to bring in revenue. • Community activities • Facilitation of training of community leaders by the Village Council • Brasso Seco is an attractive place, therefore people in and outside of the community are likely to come together to help with this project 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient knowledge of how to effectively set up and run a small business • Additional skills needed on specific rural subject matters such as wildlife preservation, disaster risk prevention and mitigation • Support from the government or other groups or organisations would be welcomed since members of the Brasso Seco community could not “do it alone”
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waterfalls could facilitate the development of a bottled water industry • Ecotourism • Development of a Brasso Seco brand of ice cream utilising coffee and cocoa in their community 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nothing happening either in Trinidad nor within the community would stop the development of small businesses based on the sustainable use of natural resources • Excessive cutting of trees is harming the natural resources.

“Wild card”

The interviewees stated that “positive action” is what brings members of the community to come together, as well as Village Council meetings or those of other organisations. Together, they also celebrate Christmas, the Annual Harvest and the Annual Cook-out. In terms of the change or new activities they would like to see in their community, they mentioned more sports related activities and infrastructures. Finally, they said that, as members of the community, they should make their voices be heard if they want to address some of their needs, and unemployment was identified as the most important one of them.

6.6 Recommendations for next steps in the project

It proved to be quite challenging to mobilise some of the people from Brasso Seco and convince them to come to this workshop. Therefore, the second workshop will have to be planned long enough in advance to allow sufficient mobilisation and follow up phone calls. Prior to the second strategic planning workshop, the start time will have to be adjusted, in order to take into account

the fact that people, more than likely, *will be* late, based on comments from several of the participants

It would also be important at the next step of the project to introduce the community to agencies which can assist in the development of businesses and perhaps invite representatives of communities which have had successful micro enterprises to share experiences. It is important that at the end of this interface with the community they feel empowered to actually put the wheels of a community micro enterprise into motion.

7. Evaluation and overall results

Most participants were quite happy at the end of the day, and enjoyed the proceedings and group activities. A large majority went to sign their names next to the faces that were either smiling or looking happy. However, a few expressed that they were not sure about what will be next for the project, which made them somewhat puzzled or confused.

Based on the responses of the groups during the various activities of the session the following can be concluded as regards the objectives of the workshop:

- a. The group has a clear understanding of the key terms used, including natural resources, sustainable use, livelihoods, though some may however have some challenges in finding the language to clearly articulate the meaning verbally.
- b. The group understands the key intention of the project as being to assist in the establishment of community/ individual enterprise towards the improvement of their income and by extension how that impacts on their livelihood which they understand in the broadest sense. They are aware and appreciate the livelihood assets provided by their community.
- c. The group understood and agreed with all except one of the criteria presented for their selection and they were also able to suggest additional appropriate criteria.
- d. The group was well able to identify the natural resources within their community, the few efforts at micro-enterprises based on the use of natural resources which exist and potential enterprises, they were also aware of other initiatives related to natural resource management.
- e. The group demonstrated a general appreciation of the project and its intent and what is required from them in order for it to be successful.

It was interesting to note that on an individual level very few persons had an interest in business development but they were all enthusiastic about the development of a community micro-enterprise and could appreciate the benefits of it to the community. The expectations of the community have been raised and they look forward to the next activity of the project and to the empowerment of members of the community so that tangible results can be achieved at the end of the project.



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Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by developing small business ideas based on the sustainable use of natural resources

Lopinot

20th October 2010

Workshop agenda

9:30-10:00	Registration and snack
10:00-10:45	Welcome and introductions
10:45-12:15	Identification of natural resources in the community and businesses that make use of them
12:15-1:00	Lunch
1:00-1:30	Identification of natural resources in the community and businesses that make use of them (cont.)
1:30-2:00	Identification of existing and potential enterprises within the community based on the sustainable use of natural resources
2:00-3:15	Analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and deciding which are the most important
3:15-3:45	Validation of community selection criteria and next steps in the project (with working break)
3:45-4:00	Evaluation and workshop closure

Appendix 2: List of participants

NAME	ORGANISATION
Yolanda Sylvester	Village Council
Angela Janette	Village Council
Ikyrra S. Francois	Brasso Seco Tourism Action Committee
Urban Salina	Village Council
Raymond Pereira	Farmers Association/ Village Council/ T.A.C.
Erica Charles	
Crystal Bastaldo	Village Council/ T.A.C./ P.T.A.
Helen Janette-Fuller	Village Council/ Farmers Association
Mathew Lopez	Farmers Association

**Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by
developing small business ideas based on the sustainable use of
natural resources**



Brasso Seco Community centre

Brasso Seco,

28th April 2011

1. Introduction

The Brasso Seco workshop is part of a project called “*Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by developing small business ideas based on the sustainable use of natural resources*” funded by the **JB Fernandes Memorial Trust**. The purpose of the project is to improve people’s quality of life in six rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago through facilitating and supporting the development of small and micro-enterprises based on the sustainable use of natural resources. For this project, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) identified and worked with six communities in Trinidad and Tobago who are interested in developing small businesses based on the sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. forests, fisheries, etc.). CANARI assisted these communities in identifying their income generating project ideas, and helped them work through the next steps, linking them up with agencies that can assist in making their ideas a reality.

A first workshop was held a few months ago, to conduct a preliminary assessment with the community on the potential for developing small businesses to improve community livelihoods based on the sustainable use of natural resources. A number of potential businesses were also identified.

2. Workshop goal and objectives

The workshop objectives were to:

1. To develop a vision for enhanced quality of life in the community
2. To identify a comprehensive list of potential sustainable natural resource-based businesses
3. To apply feasibility criteria to choosing most feasible micro-enterprises that can be done by an individual, existing CBO, or collective group
4. To validate what is existing capacity of the community in being able to develop micro-enterprises

3. Participants

Despite efforts to mobilise participants, only 9 participants attended this second workshop, 3 of whom were male participants. All participants took an active part in all the sessions and group exercises. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 1.

4. Methods

The workshop was highly interactive and participants were involved in several group exercises to develop a vision for their community with respect to how natural resources can contribute to improving their livelihoods. Group exercises gave them the opportunity to apply feasibility criteria to the list of potential small businesses they had identified and agreed on, in order to prioritise these businesses ideas, from the most to the least feasible.

The workshop agenda is attached as Appendix 2.

5. Findings

5.1 Visioning

Participants were divided into groups, and had to draw the vision they have for their community.

Below is a list of key words participants thought of before going into their groups, as words they would associate with what a vision is supposed to reflect. "An image of what we want to accomplish in the future" was their common definition of a vision.

- Attitude
- Image/picture
- Sustainability
- Want to accomplish
- Communication
- See
- Ahead
- Future



Figure 1 : Participants start working on their vision

The list below summarises the elements that were common to the two visions:

- Recreational park (on the site of old quarry)
- Host homes
- Tour guides
- Eco-tourism
- Brasso Seco becoming a protected area



Figures 2 and 3: Presenting the vision

5.2 Communicating the vision

In discussing how best they could communicate their vision for Brasso Seco to the whole community, participants suggested to hold “Vision meetings”, through the Village Council for instance. The information centre could also be used for that purpose. Participants also believed that it would be useful to have the children work on it, as the vision could be displayed and explained to students in the schools.

5.3 Identifying potential small businesses

Participants worked together to compile a list of potential small businesses, based on the existing natural resources they had identified before, as well as on the analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of their community. The following potential businesses were identified:

- Ecotourism: tour guiding, host homes
- Selling of preserved fruits for supermarkets
- Bottled local juices for sale
- Ceramics
- Selling of flowers to provide interior decorators
- Processing of cocoa and coffee
- Bamboo and seeds craft
- Aqua farming
- Seasoning (spices)
- Organic farming

5.4 Feasibility of the businesses

Using a table and scoring each business based on several important criteria provided by CANARI, participants conducted a feasibility assessment to determine which of the potential businesses identified were the most feasible. The matrix used to score each potential business is attached as Appendix 3, and the list of criteria as Appendix 4.

The table below summarises the feasibility study of the potential businesses, their scores and the three most important elements to be noted for each business.

Table 1: Ranked List of Potential business ideas

Potential Business	Score	Key points
Seasoning and spices	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have spices and seasonings planted.• Resource is abundant.• Community has everything they need
Aqua-farming	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of fishes to get started for free• Water and land readily available.• Support of Agriculture Society

Eco-tourism	54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of resources • The resources are healthy
Local juices	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruits available. • Sell markets exist. • Sell to groceries and food outlets. • Benefits to community – provide fruits for sale and employment
Flowers	52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tools available. • Markets available. • Receive support.
Bamboo and seed craft	51	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not expensive to do. • Cheap raw materials. • Skills and Expertise available
Preserved fruits	50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity – no one else involved. • Many fruits available. • Possess tools.
Organic farming	47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are not interested because it is hard work • Price for organic gives good value. • Its time consuming and labour intensive

It is worth noting that participants took an active part in the feasibility assessment for the small businesses. They noted that they would have rated the eco-tourism enterprise as the most feasible small business, because of the availability of the resources (access to trails, waterfalls etc.) and also based on the fact that members of the community are already involved in such activities. They believed that the organic farming enterprise had the potential to have good value for money, even though too few people would be interested in moving forward with it. Participants were quite surprised by the low score of this particular business. They admitted that whenever they were uncertain or not sure about one of the questions of the feasibility assessment, they would give it a score of 1.

5.5 Capacity needs

Participants seemed to be most interested by the aqua-farming and organic farming businesses. The latter was of great importance to them, as they stated that it would be useful to raise awareness in the community, since some farmers spray chemicals on large pieces of land, which can be potentially harmful in the long term, as they only see the benefits of such practices in the short-term. The following is a list of specific capacity needs to be addressed in order to move forward with the businesses:

- Organic farming and aqua-farming skills

- Project proposal writing
- Basic business management skills

Participants also wished to have a better knowledge on how to access funds. They further stated that accountability and transparency of the boards of their community groups were also an area of concern.

6. Evaluation

The evaluation exercise allowed participants to show where their knowledge had improved at the end of the one day workshop. Their ability to prioritize and choose small businesses went from little to fair. The participants identified that there was a great level of improvement in their knowledge of the necessary skills to build successful businesses. Finally the level of excitement of the participants in getting involved in small businesses also went up from very little to fair.

7. Next steps

Participants were informed about the Community Expo where five participants would be selected to represent Brasso Seco. The Community Expo is designed to provide an opportunity to present the most feasible business ideas that came out of the workshop and network with funding and technical support agencies that can further facilitate and support business development in the community.

Appendix 1: **List of participants**

NAME	ORGANISATION
Yolanda Sylvester	Village Council
Angela Janette	Village Council
Urban Salina	Village Council
Raymond Pereira	Farmers Association/ Village Council/ T.A.C.
Erica Charles	
Crystal Bastaldo	Village Council/ T.A.C./ P.T.A.
Helen Janette-Fuller	Village Council/ Farmers Association

Appendix 2: **Workshop agenda**



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**Brasso Seco
April 28th, 2011**

Agenda

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 10:00 – 10:30 | Welcome, introductions, overview of first workshop |
| 10:30 – 11:30 | Visioning – introduction, small group |
| 11:30 – 11:45 | Break |
| 11:45 – 12:45 | Small group report, development of common vision |
| 12:45 – 1:15 | Develop comprehensive list of potential sustainable natural resource-based businesses |
| 1:15 – 2:00 | Lunch (group businesses and participants) |
| 2:00 – 2:45 | Introduce feasibility criteria to choose most feasible micro-enterprises
Apply to one business |
| 2:45 – 3:45 | Small group work to apply feasibility criteria |
| 3:45 – 4:30 | Small groups present
Select most feasible for development in the short-term |
| 4:30 – 5:00 | Summary of capacity needs of community
Wrap-up and next steps for Community Expo |

Appendix 3: Feasibility criteria for potential businesses

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(Highlighted are most important that can exclude a business)

1. Natural resources:

- a. Is there legal (formal or informal) access to these resources?
- b. Are the resources “healthy” enough to be sustainably used?
- c. Is there a sustainable method of extraction that can be applied?

2. Access to other resources (physical, financial, material):

- a. Do individuals, groups, or CBOs have access to finance?
- b. Do individuals, groups, or CBOs have the physical (e.g. space, a building) and material (e.g. tools) resources needed?
- c. Is there appropriate infrastructure (e.g. roads for transportation, internet services, telephone, access to banking, electricity, water)?

3. Market:

- a. Is there evidence of an existing market for the products or services?
- b. Is there access to this market?
- c. What is the competition?
- d. Can a market be created?

4. Capacity of community:

- a. Do individuals, groups, or CBOs have existing business skills (e.g. financial management, marketing, people management and communication)?
- b. Are there existing successful small businesses in the community that can contribute to / link with this business?
- c. Do individuals, groups, or CBOs have existing skills, knowledge, and/or experience in this particular business?
- d. Are those individuals, groups, or CBOs willing / “ready” / confident to get involved in this business?

5. Contribution to the community:

- a. What would be the contribution to the wider community?
- b. Is there likely to be wider support from within the community?
- c. Is there likely to be conflict and opposition from within the community?

6. External support:

- a. Are there existing and/or potential avenues of support (from external agencies, other CBOs, other)?
- b. Is there likely to be conflict and opposition from outside the community?

7. Models:

- a. Are there existing relevant models from other communities with respect to this particular business



**Improving livelihoods in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago by
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resources**

Final visit – Brasso Seco

Thursday 16th June, 2011

Objectives

1. To get feedback from the community on the whole project – workshops and Community Expo
 - a. Results – benefits
 - b. Lessons
2. To identify specific and concrete actions for next steps by the community
3. To identify any specific future support needed from CANARI

Agenda

1. Review the project – objectives, what was done
2. Ask evaluation probing questions:
 - a. What do you think was the most important thing that the project achieved?
 - b. How did the project impact on you personally?
 - c. What do you think could have been done differently / better?
3. Help the community to develop a workplan for their next steps: what is the task, who will be responsible / lead, who will help, when will this be done
4. Ask them what support they need from CANARI, if any, in taking their ideas forward (will be different for different communities).
5. Closure – note that we will submit reports to them on their workshops, the Community Expo, and the whole project

Attending

Participants

Urban Salina

Raymond Pereira

Erica Charles

Francis Francois

Cynthia Janette

Facilitator

Loiza Rauzduel, CANARI

Rapporteur

Danielle Mayers, CANARI

Results

- a. Most important thing that the project achieved:
 - Participants stated that the meeting with support agencies at the Expo was the greatest achievement.
 - The Expo was also praised for bringing together support agencies for the purpose of helping and listening to the communities, which the participants never before experienced.
 - The project helped the community by giving individuals in the community the knowledge they need to develop themselves.
 - The Village Council has been talking with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) for assistance in their organic farming business.
 - The community has also made contacts in the Community Development Fund which provides a wide variety of funding opportunities.

- b. Impacts on individuals:
 - The project empowered the participants personally, assisting them in developing their ideas and giving them the confidence necessary to develop their businesses.
 - The simple way CANARI did the feasibility assessment prepared the community members to fill out more complicated forms and answer more complicated questions, asked by other organizations.
 - The second workshop, particularly the feasibility analysis, prepared representatives of the Village Council for a Social Investment Fair organised by the St. George East Branch of Village Councils.

- c. Recommendations for improvement:
 - Everything was good, the workshops were simple and easy to follow.
 - Mobilization was good, everyone in the community was aware of the workshop and the times the workshops were held were not a problem.
 - More people from the community might have come out to the workshops if a stipend was being provided.

2. Further support needed from CANARI in taking their ideas forward:
 - Community development: the participants would like help from CANARI in conflict management to help strengthen the community groups to help build stronger relationships.
 - The Village Council would like the contact information for the Japanese Embassy who they were not able to talk to at the Expo.
3. Community work plan for their next steps:
 - The participants indicated that they want to deal with their internal conflicts on their own after which time they will contact CANARI. No timeline was established for this activity.

Conclusion

The participants said that they want to deal with their internal conflicts on their own and then they feel they will be ready to approach CANARI for more specific assistance. However they had neither a plan of how to achieve this nor did they have a timeline. During the closeout discussion the participants said that the lack of vision in the community keeps the community groups and as such, the community divided. They went on to say that the community members are scared of responsibility, they would prefer to accept 'easy money' rather than set up their own business where money is not guaranteed especially in the start up. The participants said that the initial efforts and burden to develop a business in the community would have to be carried by an individual or a small group.

Since the Community Expo the Village Council of Brasso Seco has been liaising with IICA trying to develop their organic farming business. They have also been working on a proposal for the Community Development Fund. However the participants understand that getting more of the community involved is necessary. The closeout visit ended with participants feeling that right now they have the necessary support to move forward with their ideas, and if only one individual or a small group is motivated and interested then they should not be held back by unmotivated community members.