

IMPROVING AGRICULTURAL AND LAND USE PRACTICES TO BUILD RESILIENCE in the Maya Golden Landscape, Belize

Project title: Community Outreach and Livelihoods Program **Lead Organisation:** Ya'axché Conservation Trust

Location: Maya Golden Landscape, Belize **Project Duration:** Ongoing (2004 - Present) **Focus:** Cross-cutting www.yaaxche.org



Maya farmers of Aguacate Conservation Group participating in a compost training © Ya'axché Conservation Trust

Project Overview

The Ya'axché Conservation Trust is a non-governmental organisation (NGO), which was founded in 1998 by a consortium of local leaders in southern Belize. Its overall objective is to engage in integrated landscape management in collaboration with local indigenous Mayan communities, private landowners, government bodies and local NGOs to generate positive conservation and development outcomes in the Maya Golden Landscape. The Maya Golden Landscape spans 3,100 km² of broadleaf forest, which links the Maya Mountains and the forested coastal plains of southern Belize. It is critically important

nationally and regionally as part of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor across Central America.

The Trust's Community Outreach and Livelihoods Program focuses on improving the current agricultural and land use practices, livelihoods and local economic conditions, and building the resilience of communities in the Maya Golden Landscape. The program provides farmers with materials, equipment, training and technical support to shift to climate-smart and environmentally friendly farming practices. Enhancing the climate resilience of crops and farmers to threats such as wildfires, deforestation and land degradation is a key outcome of these activities. This program complements the Trust's Protected Areas Management Program, where it co-manages three protected areas and seeks to increase community participation in managing natural resources and foster sustainable livelihoods.

The program's activities have been financed through: grants written and leveraged by the Ya'axché Conservation Trust, including from the Inter-American Development Bank, The Inter-American Foundation, European Union and the Overbrook Foundation; the Trust's own sustainable financing initiatives such as eco-tourism; and the Conservation Investment Strategy of Belize's Protected Areas Conservation Trust that committed BZD\$ 1,000,000 from 2019-2021.

KEY RESULTS

- Over 300 farmers assisted by the program, with over 0.5 km² (150 acres) of land converted to climate resilient cacao-based agroforestry farms. Over 100,000 pounds of wet cacao beans were harvested in 2021.
- Capacity building support to facilitate women's groups, including of indigenous women, and honey farmers to run small entrepreneurial ventures.
- Over 250 training sessions on bookkeeping, cooking, business management, cacao farming, beekeeping, gardening, alley cropping, community planning, leadership, climate change, fire management, and protected area management. These trainings have enhanced the resilience of farmers and local inhabitants, including indigenous groups, to climate change impacts such as forest fires and limited/unproductive agricultural land.
- Over 300 school visits targeting more than 700 students through summer camps and field trips to raise awareness of agricultural and land practices that build community resilience.



Innovations and Lessons

Through the Community Outreach and Livelihoods Program, the Ya'axché Conservation Trust is able to adopt a holistic approach where community participation and livelihood co-benefits are a distinct feature of its broader work to conserve and sustainably manage the Maya Golden Landscape. The direct local ownership of conservation activities achieved through the program is vital for ensuring the long-term sustainability, scalability and replicability of such projects.

The Trust has also sustained engagement with 200 indigenous and other local community members, 50 youths and 25 state actors, which enabled it to spearhead a dialogue on establishing a national agroforestry policy, a national capacity building symposium, and business models for sustainable entrepreneurial activities in the Maya Golden Landscape.

The Ya'axché Conservation Trust's activities has further enhanced its long-term sustainability through its various sustainable financing initiatives linked to sustainable livelihoods, including an ecotourism venture, agroforestry concession and tree nursery. Furthermore, the Trust engages in sustained knowledge transfer and sharing. This includes publication of sustainable climate resilient agriculture manuals, community-oriented and student-oriented trainings and eco-tours, and formal national exchanges with related institutions across the region.

This case study has been developed under the Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society's Access and Readiness to Climate Finance project. Its content is the sole responsibility of the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and does not reflect the position of the Green Climate Fund or other partners.