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Strong interest in innovative climate-smart approaches for farmers – Introducing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Renewable Energy Opportunities for farmers.

The Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) in partnership with Pro NGO! conducted three workshops in Barbados, Grenada and St. Vincent to foster climate-smart agriculture. The idea of taking into account the Corporate Social Responsibility CSR) approach and the application of decentralised and autonomous energy generation has raised great interest among local farmers in the target countries. The high turnout number of 20-25 participants is a proof that there is great demand for innovative and sustainable topics around the overarching idea of Climate-Smart Agriculture. The inclusion of these concepts might lead to more market opportunities, more reliable power supply and eventually to lower energy costs. Additional more in-depth-workshops are planned for 2018 in all three countries.

Kingston, St. Vincent & Grenadines

Bridgetown, Barbados

The overall project strives to achieve positive impact through increased income which will be a result of the improvement in agriculture and other best practices, such as introducing CSR along different stages of the value chain, as well as the increased use of new technologies in farming, particularly the use of renewable energy. This has been the second series of workshops that were implemented under the aegis of the pilot regional project, ***Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods among Eastern Caribbean Farmers.*** In **Barbados** the workshop took place on Wednesday, October 25th at the Island Inn Hotel, St. Michael. In **Grenada** the workshop took place on Thursday, October 26th at Sam's Inn, Dunfermline, St. Andrew's. In **St. Vincent** the workshop took place on Monday, October 30th in the Church Center in Kingstown. Attendees at all workshops have been mostly individual farmers, representatives of farmer's groups/organisations as well as representatives from ministries.

Implementing organisations

ProNGO!

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"The European Union is made up of 28 Member States which have decided to gradually link together their know-how, resources and destinies.
Together during a period of enlargement of 60 years, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining Cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and Peoples beyond its borders".

New market opportunities and material benefits through CSR

The presentations by the first Pro NGO! workshop facilitator has shown that CSR measures can be a valuable investment into the future, and can lead to reduced social costs and enhancement of health by using non-polluting measures. Both consumers and producers could demonstrate social responsibility. In some markets, such as the European Union, consumers are becoming more health conscious and the price is no longer the only determinant in consumers' choice of produce. Consumers in Europe are also concerned about the quality of produce being sold and from where it was being sourced. CSR could therefore be the bridge to build a more solid relationship between consumers and producers, demonstrating social responsibility on both sides. Thus, it was shown that the practice of CSR could have – in the mid- to long-term have a positive impact on earnings generated by farmers, ensuring more equitable returns for them. It was therefore important to document that CSR practices are being applied and ensure that the community and consumers are aware of those practices and show that they act more socially and ecologically responsible. It was also suggested that small farmers in the Caribbean have various options to act more sustainable. Among some of the mentioned concrete CSR challenges were the following farmer's related issues, such as a) Whether they use the right chemical fertilizer or whether they should rely on organic ones, or b) how they could control for soil degradation.

It was noted that younger generations might be more interested in innovative and sustainable approaches than the older generation. For example, the younger generation chooses to support or not support a market vendor based on certain practices, often in favour of organics. This specialised orientation is becoming more prevalent. They will become the more influential buyers; following this perspective applying CSR practices will eventually pay off. Moreover, some supermarkets in the region are already using standards which are passed on to farmers. Corporations are forced to meet certain standards which they will pass on to suppliers, in order to avoid law suits. It is therefore in the best interest of the farmers to provide the trusted quality being demanded of them; if not, market vendors will go elsewhere to people who will do what is necessary to provide what they want. There are challenges and responsibilities that could provide obstacles to practicing good CSR. For example, a female farmer who is also a single parent, choosing to take the risk of selling organic produce at a higher price, but lower yields. Instead traditional farmers with chemicals might have increased their yields and lower prices, which are more satisfactory to most buyers.

Monetary benefits and more reliable power supply

The workshop on energy generation explored the application of renewable energy technology in agriculture. Reducing emission of greenhouse gases has always been one of the pillars of environmental sustainability. The dependence on fossil fuel and the high prices of energy which characterized the project's target countries - Barbados, Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines - also meant low financial and environmental sustainability. However, in those countries, there were opportunities for the application of renewable energy - solar and biogas - in the agricultural sector. Participants were introduced to demand analysis and the parameters to be considered in decisions investing in photovoltaic and biogas systems and in determining their energy mix of renewable energy and fossil fuel dependent energy. Local farmers had the chance to share their experiences in the application of renewable energy technologies in the various segments of his agri-business – farming, catering and agro-processing. It was shown that by using a mix of renewable energy – biogas and an independent photovoltaic system and propane gas (as a back-up) in agro-processing, food business and household one could achieve efficiency gains and save significant amounts of money. Biogas production, used principally in the agro-processing and catering segment, can be powered by animal waste, crop and food residues.

It was observed that the application of renewable energy technologies by farmers in the project countries would not only contribute to reducing the carbon foot print but would also contribute to savings in foreign exchange since application of renewable energy technologies would reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels. This was a point on which farmers in the Eastern Caribbean could negotiate tax and other incentives with their governments.
The workshop also explored the concept of climate-smart and sustainable agriculture. Given that the increasing population was testing the limits of planetary boundaries, sustainable agriculture implied an ability to maintain, over the long term, economic viability and competitiveness, social equity and environmentally friendly agricultural production. Sustainable agriculture supported biodiversity; soil quality; water quality; adaptation to climate change; controlled greenhouse effects and had the potential to produce renewable energy. Climate-smart Agriculture was considered as truly sustainable agriculture. Its three pillars were sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes; adapting and building resilience to climate change and reducing or removing greenhouse gas emissions where possible. Among the climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies were the following: water management; soil management; agro-forestry; landscape management; introduction of climate resilient varieties; alternative farming methods; diversification; renewable energy and capacity development.

It was the view of participants that the workshop was a very informative one. Greater awareness of Corporate Social Responsibility was required in the Caribbean region. It was also desirable that CPDC work towards supporting the setting up/creation of a model (farm) that could demonstrate the concepts of sustainable agriculture that were being promoted under the regional project.

The workshops concluded with an announcement by the representative of the CPDC that in December a call will be launched offering small grants. The grants as part of this regional project would be awarded on a competitive basis, 3-4 grants per target country of amounts varying between Euros 3,000 – 5,000. The grants were intended to increased agricultural productivity.

Conclusion

In a final discussion round all participants agreed that it was a very informative workshop session. They were satisfied with the outcomes. Participants expressed that they gained a greater understanding of CSR, sustainability in agriculture, and the use of renewable technologies.

The facilitators also expressed their gratitude to have the opportunity to share their expertise and the participants were thanked for their participation and eagerness to learn more about sustainability, and smart agriculture. The facilitators promised to make use of the feedback from participants. They analyse the results of the workshop and will adapt the agenda and come back for similar workshops on an advanced level in 2018.

About the project

Project objectives

The overall objective of the action is to enhance opportunities for sustainable livelihoods amongst rural agricultural farmers in Barbados, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Grenada.

In particular, it aims to improve the financial and operational sustainability of small scale farming operations; to ensure the implementation of sustainable/cost effective farming practices among rural farmers; to improve the opportunities for access to finance; to support the implementation of sustainable agricultural practices in agricultural production; and to enhance the enabling policy environment for sustainable agriculture.

Target groups & beneficiaries

Main target groups of the action include small scale rural farmers, with a special focus on women and youth farmers; representatives of farmers' organization; and private sector agencies working in the renewable energy sector.

Short-term impacts

- Improved operational and financial sustainability of farmer operations;
- Strengthened capacity of small scale farmers in the application of climate smart agricultural practices
- Enhanced opportunities via Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the establishment and financing of sustainable farming practices by designing CSR roadmaps
- Enhanced policy environment to support sustainable agricultural production.

Medium & long-term impacts

- More sustainable small scale farmer' operations and sustainable farming practices
- Improved management of small scale farms; increased farm income, improved livelihood security
- Adoption of climate smart approaches and technologies on farms
- Increased participation of women and youth in the agricultural sector
- Improved policy environment for sustainable agricultural approaches
- Improved private investment in the agriculture sector

The project, started in February 2017, will last for 24 months.