

The Cropper Foundation Community Technical Assistance Programme

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This Programme builds on the work by The Cropper Foundation in The Northern Range Assessment¹ and its first ‘on the ground’ community initiative, The Bon Air North Sustainable Living Project. It also seeks to incorporate the approach by the late co-founder John Cropper in trying to support communities in their effort to implement livelihood activities that can also contribute to the re-greening of the Northern Range.

The Foundation seeks to orient its Programmes and initiatives towards contributing, on several fronts, to the sustainable management of the Northern Range. This natural system includes several ecosystems ranging from forests and rivers to coastal areas and is of significant environmental, economic and socio-cultural importance to society. Society derives many benefits from the functions and resources of the Northern Range. Some benefits are tangible and direct, while others are intangible and less direct, but they all contribute to the well-being of society. There are several factors that impact negatively on the functioning of the Northern Range and its resources such as: economic, demographic, land use, culture, institutional arrangements and public policy.

This Programme attempts to engage and support communities in initiatives that can increase and/or maintain the ability of the Northern Range to continue to provide the range of services to individuals, communities and society as a whole.

One of the objectives of The Bon Air North Sustainable Living Project was to share the experience and lessons learned with other communities, especially in the Northern Range, so as to raise public awareness of the issues relevant to the management of the Northern Range and to motivate them in participating in similar initiatives. In trying to achieve this objective, the Foundation hosted a Community Exchange in March 2006 in which 33 communities participated.

The participation in the Community Exchange and the response from communities arising from this event, have encouraged the Foundation to design a Programme for Community Technical Assistance. This Programme would seek to incorporate and adapt an approach that was used in The Bon Air North Sustainable Living Project which sought to re-orient the national approach to community development. This approach was:

- Facilitative- supporting ideas and initiatives that originate from the residents with technical and financial assistance.
- Participatory- encouraging involvement of all stakeholders which grows with each activity of the project or milestone of the community. Involvement within the community is in the context of the wider community and not just a core group.

¹ Northern Range Assessment 2005. Report of an Assessment of the Northern Range, Trinidad and Tobago: People and the Northern Range. State of the Environment Report 2004. Environmental Management Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. 184pp.

- Integrative- integrating the discussion and implementation of economic, environmental and social aspects and prospects of the community. For instance, the concept of forest gardening for an open space that is not dedicated to housing will entail the re-greening of the area with a mix of hardwood trees, trees crops and short crops that can generate livelihood for residents. Activities complementary to forest gardening can include vermicomposting (composting with worms), bee keeping and nature trails.
- Sustainable- making decisions that considers how community activities can impact on the natural environment and how it can be used or conserved so that it can continue to provide the benefits (tangible and intangible; direct and indirect) to the community. Another aspect of sustainability that should be addressed is ensuring the succession of leadership and skills within the community for maintaining and further strengthening of community governance.
- Guided and Informed- providing guidance related to strategy, process and documentation and facilitating access to information resources.

2.0 OUTLINE OF PROGRAMME

2.1 Goal

To support communities in realising, formulating and making progress on their development vision that can potentially be transformative for their natural and social/economic context, while contributing to the national development process.

2.2 Objectives

- To build community capacity relating to motivation, design, programming, managing and implementing development activities
- To strengthen community governance (functioning, management processes, capacity)
- To help communities to formulate community development ideas, plans or initiatives
- To improve community's self reliance, sense of empowerment and self-confidence
- To contribute to improving the wellbeing of communities
- To contribute to improving gender equality (decision making, involvement, roles & responsibility and benefits)

2.3 Areas of Technical Assistance

2.3.1 Direct

- Information collection, assessment of community situation and prospects for realizing above objectives
- Documentation
- Functional organisation
- Management of projects and activities
- Community communications and participation

- Monitoring, evaluation and forward planning

2.3.2 Indirect

- Assisting communities to access resources available to communities
- Assisting communities as interlocutor with public entities

2.4 Outcomes

- Capacity building for community development
- Activities that contribute to human wellbeing and sustainability: economic, environmental, socio-cultural
- Contribution to re-orienting and supporting the national development process
- Transforming/influencing practices with respect to their natural space
- Improving process of participatory community development

2.5 Foundation Resources

- Personnel grounded in a sustainable development approach and field experience
- Network of collaborators
- Bon Air North (experience, ongoing development programme, residents)
- Information: Findings and experience from the Assessments of the Northern Range and Caribbean Sea; library of relevant materials (newsletters, books and DVDs)
- Equipped office and meeting room with access to a larger meeting space

2.6 Resources Needed for Specific Projects

- Human capacity
- Financial support for agreed activities
- Updated database of public, private and international sources of assistance available to communities
- Expertise and experience not available within the Foundation or from its network of collaborators

3.0 AREAS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

3.1 Direct Assistance

3.1.1 Information Gathering and assessment of community situation and prospects for realizing programme objectives

Provide support and training to:

- Identify information and community needs and priorities
- Access and collect existing information
- Collect primary data for community
- Analyse data and information
- Select and use relevant information

3.1.2 Documentation

Provide advice and training to improve:

- the process and methods of documentation
- filing and archiving
- referencing and use of documents
- development of proposals and plans

3.1.3 Functional organization

Provide advice and support for:

- improving the process and procedures for decision making
- improving structure of governance system
- improving efficiency and efficacy of meetings
- promoting and improving community self-organisation
- solving

3.1.5 Management of projects and activities

- Provide advice and training in all phases of project management
- Provide advice on managing grant budgets
- Provide advice and training on project report writing
- Provide advice and training in project monitoring and evaluation

3.1.6 Community communication and participation for development

Provide training, advice and support in the use of communication to facilitate participatory development. This would involve:

- Planning, development and evaluation of communication strategies
- Encourage two-way communication
- Promoting individual monitoring and feedback
- Build and maintain trust among all stakeholders
- Developing transferable skills such as team-working and problem
- Addressing confidentiality

3.1.7 Monitoring, evaluation and forward planning

Provide advice and support to:

- Promote, develop and implement monitoring and evaluation strategy specific to community and its development activities.
- Use information from monitoring and evaluation for adaptive management
- Promote, understand and undertake the approach of adaptive management of processes and activities

3.2 Indirect Assistance

3.2.1 Assisting communities to access resources available to communities

- Provide updated database of existing resources and their criteria for access
- Assist in identifying resources relevant to specific community initiatives

- Assistance and training in satisfy criteria of accessibility (i.e. preparing document
- packages, writing letters, completion of application forms, proposal writing)
- Act as intermediaries when needed between communities and resources (e.g.
- government agencies, international organizations, academia and external civic
- organizations)

4.0 OUTCOMES

Generally the outcomes of the programme will contribute towards a sustainable development approach, especially as it relates to and involves communities. The outcomes will be guided by the focus of the Programme, which is to encourage and facilitate communities to become sustainable as a unit and in their relationship with the Northern Range. Outcomes of specific projects will however need to be stated.

One of the outcomes of the Programme that can contribute to an approach to sustainable development in terms of communities and therefore the nation as a whole is capacity building. The Programme would seek to build community capacity through the development of the capacity and skills of the members of a community so that they can better able to identify, and meet their needs and to participate more fully in society. “Community capacity building is concerned with providing opportunities for people to learn through experience in opportunities that would not otherwise be available to them and involving people in collective effort so that they gain confidence in their own abilities and their ability to influence decisions that affect them” (<http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/publications/rr5.asp>). This can potentially result from all the aspects of technical assistance within the Programme which would seek to combine encouragement with practical assistance and facilitate community members to help themselves.

Other significant outcomes include: Activities that contribute to human wellbeing and sustainability (economic, environmental, socio-cultural); contribution to re-orienting and supporting the national development process; transforming and influencing practices with respect to their natural space and improving the process of participatory community development.

5.0 PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance will be provided by the capability of the Foundation’s resources and Programme mechanisms.

The experience for providing direct technical assistance will be drawn mainly from the Bon Air North Sustainable Living Project as well as from the myriad of initiatives the Foundation’s President, Board and network of collaborators have and are involved in.

The Programme will involve the use of generic mechanisms, such as funding, process and educational, which can be tailored to the design of specific projects within the Programme.

6.0 CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF PROJECTS

The Programme necessitates the use of selection criteria for projects and communities in order to make strategic and effective use of limited resources; to continue and promote linkages with other Foundation activities (e.g. Northern Range Assessment) and programme areas (e.g. Programme in Environment and Resource Education); to build critical mass in relation to an overarching and long term objective; and to maximize the potential for learning and replicating.

Criteria for selecting and prioritising:

- Project site located in or near the Northern Range
- Projects that together represent a range of issues and activities relating to the management and sustainability of the Northern Range
- Project site in a community with at least the rudiments of a governance arrangement
- Existing leadership in community and/or project team
- Project site in a community already interested and mobilized to some extent
- Project site within a community that has evidence to show it has already taken responsibility
- Small enough to make a difference