

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)
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Presentation for Poverty Reduction Day
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Can conservation initiatives support poverty reduction in the Caribbean islands?

Abstract:

This presentation examines two case studies from the island of Trinidad in the Caribbean where community-driven initiatives have successfully supported biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction. The first is run by the community-based organisation (CBO) Nature Seekers and originated when the Forestry Division approached the community to assist with protecting nesting leatherback turtles. Research and education activities are conducted as well as tourguiding, scientific tourism and sales of products. Activities have resulted in complete protection of the leatherback turtles as well as direct economic benefits to the community. Fondes Amandes is a squatter community in the Northern Range of Trinidad which became concerned about the threat to their crops from wildfires. They developed a reforestation initiative and supporting research, education and economic activities through an organic nursery, tourguiding, and making jewellery from forest products. Conservation benefits from the reforestation included complete protection of the hillside from fires and reduced soil erosion which previously was a problem at the water extraction point downstream. Economic benefits to the community were also gained. Common lessons from each case study are suggested and include the importance of the role of the CBO in driving the process with the support of intermediaries from government agencies, civil society organisations and powerful individuals.

Case studies:

Fondes Amandes, Trinidad: Illegal community of squatters drew in conservationists to gain support for protection of agricultural crops from wild fires via reforestation efforts.

Nature Seekers, Matura, Trinidad: Government conservation initiative drew in local community to prevent poaching of sea turtles on remote nesting beach

Lessons and recommendations

About the community (target/beneficiary):

1. A CBO without capacity cannot have a voice in the agenda / decision-making and take advantage of opportunities for poverty reduction – importance of leadership, participation & shared management, conflict management, tenacity and commitment, access to knowledge and people in powerful positions, entrepreneurship, active learning and evolution, shared commitment / spirit
2. There is no single template for an effective community organisation
3. People need to see early and stable financial rewards to keep involved; but vision and hope and volunteering is also important
4. Illegal settlers can be responsible land stewards

About the partners:

5. Partners need to have the capacity to facilitate participatory management
6. Intermediaries can play an important role in mediating, mentoring, and building capacity

About the institutional arrangements:

7. Formal sanction (laws, policies, agreements) is not always necessary – relationship built on trust is the foundation
8. Formalising relationships can actually limit potential opportunities
9. But...formal contracts are valuable not only as legally binding instruments for co-management but also because they clarify roles and responsibilities

About the benefits:

10. Importance of equitable distribution of benefits – danger that benefits may accrue to more powerful “external” stakeholders – capacity is key
11. “Community-based organisations” may exclude the poor and/or benefits may not spread to the poor – the rights and capacity of the poor to take advantage of opportunities needs to be protected or built
12. Alternatively, CBOs can act as “intermediaries” to spread benefits to the poor in the community
13. Being involved in conservation-driven processes builds the capacity of poor people to address their poverty concerns by building social and human assets

Key questions moving forward

1. What types of institutional arrangements optimise benefits to the poor?
2. How can livelihood benefits be measured? (participatory methods)
3. How are trade-offs between conservation and livelihood benefits negotiated?