

FISHING POND AGRICULTURE TRAINING GRADUATION

SPEECH BY DR. Allan Bachan, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome

It is a great pleasure to be here with you here today at this Graduation Ceremony. The focus on creating a sustainable future for our country's young women and men in rural communities is a cause that I personally am adamantly committed to. Firstly let us put this programme in context

A study in 2009 showed that the county of St. Andrew/St. David has the highest incidence of poverty in T&T with the North East Coast's unemployment rate as high as 40 percent.

Research also shows that our country has a low rate of rural entrepreneurial activity compared with other developing countries, with small business entrepreneurs contributing less than 5% of GDP, compared with 60% in countries like India and Brazil.

In addition, only 8% of all new rural ventures survive past the first year - a low rate when compared with other developing countries.

This region (North East Coast) was at one time one of the major food baskets of Trinidad. Traditionally, agriculture and fishing have been the major economic activities. In the past, agriculture has been identified as the major employer. Plantation crop dominated the agriculture production in the area. These include crops such as cocoa, coffee, coconuts and banana. Over the last ten years there has been a rapid decline of Agriculture in this region. This decline has been attributed to:

- 1. Distance of available markets:** Some farmers have indicated that they had to go into Port of Spain market to sell their product.
- 2. Cost of transportation:** A lot of farmers do not have vehicles hence had to hire vehicles to get their products to market.
- 3. Cost of startup**
- 4. Lack of attraction to young persons.** Owing to the minimal benefits for high inputs young people have sought employment in other areas.
- 5. The introduction of government assisted projects in the area.** The competition with Government Programs such as CEPEP and URP which is seen as minimal work for better wages has manifested itself in the creation of lazy and less productive younger workforce. And the programmes have also created a stray dependency in communities.
- 6. Migration out of villages into the town centers in order to seek other forms of employment.**

Another key factor influencing entrepreneurial activity is the lack of effective technical education supported by training in entrepreneurial skills and basic financial literacy (Which a lot of you have indicated a need for) and coupled with the lack of marketing opportunities.

The large majority of new small businesses are operated out of necessity - people seeking out a living through informal trading and service provision because there is no alternative.

At TVT, we recognize that people living in rural areas particularly the young are among the most vulnerable members of society. The accelerated creation of sustainable small and micro enterprises is essential both to economic growth and to future socio-economic stability.

Township and rural-based enterprises, in particular, have the potential to create jobs and alleviate poverty by channeling resources into disadvantaged communities.

To this end Turtle Village Trust, as part of our community entrepreneurship and livelihood skills development initiative has conducted two technical training programmes in short crop farming and duck rearing. The training was conducted in your community of Fishing Pond from March to August 2010.

The programme provided Forty three (43) farmers with technical training and skills to increase earning capacity thereby shifting the Livelihood dependency of 35 families from the natural resources to agritourism.

Manuals were also developed and would be used as a resource for further training. These were:

- Leafy Vegetable Production,
- Hot Pepper Production and
- Duck Production

You the Participants will also receive materials necessary to begin start up. Fertilizers, seeds, potting mix, seedlings trays, ducks and feed will be handed out to successful participants by the Honorable Minister

The training sponsored by BHP Billiton and JB Fernandez Memorial Trust was undertaken in collaboration with the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs. The programme bears testimony to the value and benefits of partnership among NGO, Community, the Private Sector and Government.

By promoting economic self-reliance and the need to play a constructive role in the community, the training also aims at human capacity building, a key element of sustainable development.

With these benefits in mind, Turtle Village Trust has identified the development of agrotourism as one of the methods Trinidad and Tobago might use to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For the first MDG—alleviating poverty—the merits of this programme are evident. It can provide jobs and generate income for communities that, in some cases, lack viable alternative means of employment.

For some non-formal learners it may provide the keys to a livelihood and for others it may lend legitimacy and system to work they are already doing. A similar training was done in the Toco/ San Souci/ Grand Rivere area. Owing to the development of Turtle watching in that area over the last 5 years transitional farming has increased and continues to grow. Over the last two years growth has been over 35%. This has been due to the synergy between the farming community and the hotels and guesthouses. There now exist ready markets for crops as these establishments currently purchase all crops so as to service the needs of the visitors as well as the development of niche markets such as organic farming. The sector currently employs around 70 farmers in that area.

The Government has identified this Region as a Growth Pole. From a development perspective we need to understand linkages that exists and the synergies to be had. But People must always be central to our work.

We also know that, as the farmers and producers of tomorrow, you have the potential to help feed us all and thus solve one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. We should remember that these women and men, with their hopes and dreams, hold our country's future in their hands.

Enabling you to gain access to training and a start up means enabling you to start and expand businesses. It means giving you the confidence to take an active part in community life. And most of all, it means empowering you to contribute your energy and creativity to your community and the country on a whole.

There is a need to further invest in the extension of services that advise and support start-up businesses to previously marginalized areas, and to support initiatives to create community investment trusts and co-operatives that undertake productive activity.

There are also exciting opportunities to help dynamic entrepreneurs in rural communities like the ones here today to purchase new equipment, animals for farming or set up business premises, creating employment in their communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we must not fail our communities.

Today, they need our support. Tomorrow, we will need their contribution, their creativity, their commitment and their leadership.

Thank you