

Jamie Beck

## **Learning Agenda Mini Case #8**

### **Jamaica**

#### **Cascade Farmers: Portland Parish**

Gazing out from the porch of her coffee estate in Jamaica's Blue Mountains, proprietor and chief coffee roaster Dorothy Twyman recalls the story of the greenhouses nestled in the valley below.

"It has had a positive impact," she says of the USAID-funded project that brought these greenhouses to this remote part of the island. "But its success is due to our farmers, not necessarily to USAID." Built in 2007, these greenhouses were the result of a partnership between a group of local farmers who formed an NGO, Cascade Farmers, and USAID, under USAID's Rural Enterprise, Agriculture and Community Tourism Project (REACT). The purpose of this project was to develop Jamaica's use of greenhouses for its production of fruits and vegetables, after much of the island was devastated by Hurricane Ivan in 2004<sup>1</sup>.

This part of the Blue Mountain Range is particularly prone to hurricane damage, so local farmers, led by Dorothy's late husband Alex Twyman and son David Twyman, were interested when they became aware of this funding opportunity that so clearly spoke to their community's needs. The Twymans pulled together a group of local farmers to develop a proposal for USAID funding under the REACT project. This group became a registered NGO. Farmers were invited to be a part of this project only if they had what David calls "genuine enough interest" in the project and in working together.

Cascade Farmers experienced many frustrations during the nearly one year it took for USAID to evaluate, negotiate and finalize their award. "There were a number of different stages and changes... both in the nature and amount of funding and availability of staff time," David says. "We would work with one staff member for a few weeks or months, and then someone else would replace them." Adapting to the different work ethics, styles and requirements of USAID personnel was difficult for the organization, which had no formal experience with donors.

The project was finalized and funded by USAID in late 2007. The objective of the three-year agreement between Cascade Farmers and USAID was to strengthen the community's food security. USAID's involvement in the grant was to:

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<sup>1</sup> Jamaican Ministry of Agriculture, Citizens Development Corps for USAID/Jamaica. "*Protected Agriculture in Jamaica: A Reference Manual*." July 2008.

- Provide specifications and technical assistance in the building of improved steel greenhouses for growing food, especially endemic species;
- Provide guidance on crop development;
- Hold training for local farmers in water use efficiency and increasing the yields, quality and consistency of crops;
- Organize demonstration programs in all of the above areas.

Construction of the greenhouses began soon after the award was signed. After less than eight months, when the greenhouses were less than 75% complete, the organization received a call indicating that the project would be ended prematurely. With one-fourth of the three-year project barely completed, and with little communication on the matter, USAID funding, training and assistance came to an abrupt end. Only one or two of the many promised trainings and demonstrations had been held by USAID. To this day, David Twyman has no idea why.

Since the greenhouses were nearly complete and Cascade had all the necessary supplies, the farmers put forth their own resources to finish the construction. The farmers took full ownership of the structures and began planting their own crops. “These farmers were ready and ripe to take this project on their own” Twyman says.

“We learned that you can’t depend on USAID to be doing the work. We expected USAID to provide the structure and the training, but we knew the rest was up to us. We didn’t need hand-holding. We didn’t *want* hand-holding. But we did expect that the terms of the agreement would be met. It turned out that we had to learn more than we expected, but in the end I think it was good for us.”

One positive outcome of the project ending early is that now the organization can adapt the purpose of the greenhouse to its own context, with increased chance of sustainability. “Nothing about this project, in the way that USAID had designed it, was sustainable, and a project isn’t worth doing if it can’t be repeated.”

Why wasn’t the project sustainable, as originally conceived? First, the supplies used to construct the greenhouses were unavailable in the Jamaican market. USAID mandated the use of 3 inch galvanized steel tubing in the construction of the greenhouses and, while the security and stability that these materials afford the structure in strong hurricane winds, this quality and amount of steel is not available in Jamaica. When Cascade Farmers decided to make two of their own greenhouses several years after the USAID project ended, they used ½ inch galvanized piping; slightly less durable but much more available and reasonable in the country.

Second, USAID required that the greenhouses funded under the REACT project grow ‘species endemic to the location of the greenhouse.’ According to Cascade, there “isn’t one species endemic to this region that is appropriate for a greenhouse. Our endemic species don’t grow alongside the sweet peppers and tomatoes that USAID wants to see.” The farmers attempted to educate USAID in this regard, and

were even able to have a conversation with one of the Agriculture Officers from the Mission to convey this information. “[The Ag Officer] listened, but the deadline was coming up, so there was no time to change the requirement.” Instead, Cascade complied with the requirement by using the endemic species as shrubs that were planted along the outside of the greenhouse to break the strong winds of hurricanes.

Dorothy Twyman finds the whole venture a success, even if unintended on USAID’s part. “USAID lost interest in our project, or forgot about us, I’m not sure which. But because we’ve been able to make this [greenhouse] our own, I suppose it doesn’t really matter which. We have all learned a great deal.”

Cascade Farmers currently operates the USAID-funded greenhouses and two of its own. While they would have benefited from the training and awareness-raising that they expected from USAID, they are pleased with what they have been able to do with the limited funding. They are now funded by the UNDP Global Environment Facility and are open to partnering with USAID again in the future.