

# EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

## Lending a helping hand to local civil society groups

By Natalya Lawrence, GEF SGP - UNDP National Coordinator

Community groups, NGOs, faith-based organisations and associations, and cooperatives, collectively known as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), in Antigua and Barbuda are on the ground making a difference. These CSOs see a need in society, whether social, economic or environmental, and task themselves with addressing it. Many times, these stalwarts of change work in the background, quietly, collaborating to improve the lives of our residents, and maintain the health of the natural environment, on which our very existence depends.

A few years ago, before assuming the role of National Coordinator of GEF SGP, I met Ms Rosita Edwards, a highly respected retired educator, in the idyllic village of Freetown. What started out as a project of love, restoring the historic village cemetery which guarded the remains of several community centenarians, turned out to be a full-scale community project. It began simply enough and grew to the discovery and uncovering of a century-old reservoir, the restoration of the reservoir, and the establishment of a community



*Agave seedbank opening*



*Site visit to West Indies Sail Heritage Foundations Sail Days before plastic upcycling*

garden. She connected culture, heritage and biodiversity conservation. Traditional plants at the site were nurtured to be used in culturally connected games, such as warri, and she worked with youth in the village, teaching them the skills to weave bas-

kets.

In that same month, I visited the late Mr Timothy Payne, acclaimed photographer, author, historian and the coordinator of the Barnes Hill Reservoir Restoration Project, another community endeavour that would see

the successful restoration of an ancient reservoir and the rehabilitation of a community fruit and flower garden, known in its glory days as the breadbasket of Antigua.

Another stop that I made was with the Swetes Village Uncovered group. Their project site, set around the historic Blouse and Skirt House, one of the oldest dwelling places still in use on island, perfectly mixed history, culture, and agriculture as they worked on a medicinal and food-crop garden.

These three projects, born out of a desire to connect the past to the present, brought much value to the communities and to the country. They all tackled issues relevant to persons living in Small Island Developing States – Climate Change, Food Security, Climate Change Adaptation, Biodiversity Conservation. They also supported the involvement of everyone in the community, fostering an atmosphere of togetherness.

The Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) is honoured to work along with these groups, funding their projects and building organisational capacity. GEF SGP empowers everyday people to make a positive difference in our countries. Since 1992, GEF SGP has been support-



Beekeeping Week November 2021 (Photos courtesy Natalya Lawrence)



ing Civil Society Organisations across the world, and now operates in 133 countries. Following a regional programme, Antigua and Barbuda gained its independent programme status in 2013 and has since funded 49 projects to the sum of US \$1.9 million, and has worked with funded organisations to leverage an additional US\$2.5 million co-financing (cash and in-kind).

Under the motto, "thinking globally, acting locally", GEF SGP works from the grassroots level, strengthening communities to work with and support technical experts to improve the environmental health of our country, both for our benefit, and for future generations. SGP promotes collaboration between CSOs, private sector and government stakeholders. In building the capacity of new and maturing organisations, SGP



equips them with the knowledge and skills to have a voice at the decision-making table.

SGP projects are varied, replicable, scalable and innovative, from specialised raised beds for gardening with the Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities, to sailing and upcycling plastic waste with youth through The West Indies Sail Heritage Foundation. Antigua and

Barbuda's projects proudly join the impactful work across the region, from church-group bird conservationists in St Kitts, to fishers in St Lucia using GPS technology to keep track of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). In Belize, indigenous women take solar technology to remote villages which never before had electricity. In drought-stricken Union Island, solar technology has been used in water harvest-

ing and distribution, using wells and restored reservoirs.

Now in its 7<sup>th</sup> Operational Cycle, GEF SGP Antigua and Barbuda has recently issued a call for concept notes and proposals. A virtual information-session will take place today February 24 at 9.30am. Currently, we provide funding up to US\$50,000 for CSOs. Strategic Initiatives for funding include Community-based Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Security, Low-Carbon Energy Access Co-Benefits, Chemicals and Waste Management, CSO Capacity-building, and CSO-Government-Private Sector Policy and Planning Dialogue Platforms.

For more information on the GEF SGP – Antigua and Barbuda, please refer to our Country Programme Strategy, as well as our social media pages.