

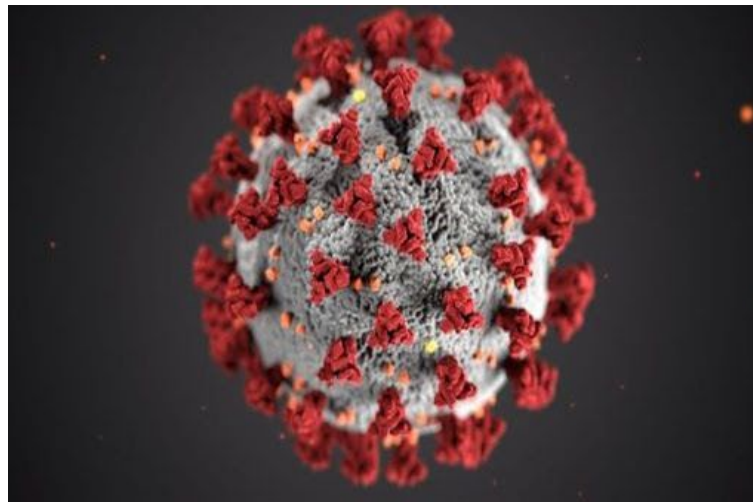
GEF SGP Trinidad and Tobago

Issue 2 (Apr-Jun 2020)

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Welcome to Trinbago Talk!

The latest news on GEF SGP projects in sweet T&T



(Picture taken from <http://www.health.gov.tt/sitepages/default.aspx?id=292>)

Trinidad and Tobago recorded its first case of COVID-19 on March 12, 2020 and by August 2020, there were 192 confirmed cases. Like most countries, this pandemic exacerbated the social and economic vulnerability of many communities and resulted in thousands in need. GEFSGP and its grantees quickly sprung into action with assessments of COVID-19 impacts and appropriate responses to the needs identified by the community. In this issue, we will explore GEF SGP COVID-19 response as well as the responses of many of its grantees. Happy Reading!

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THIS WEEK'S TOP STORIES

Impact of COVID-19 on GEF SGP projects

GEF SGP COVID-19 Response

GEF SGP Grantee awarded by the Queen for service during COVID-19 pandemic

R.I.D.E. COVID-19 Response

Impact of COVID-19 on GEF SGP projects

Trinidad and Tobago reported its first COVID-19 case on the 12th March 2020 and within two weeks, the entire country was on lockdown to curb its spread. GEF SGP encouraged the NGOs to honour the lockdown, encouraging the NGOs not to take any risks. COVID-19 and the lockdown had many impacts on the progress of projects, as well as, on the communities to benefit from the projects.

A survey was developed to assess the impacts of COVID-19 to the projects and to the communities, with a view towards identifying and actioning ways in which GEF SGP could assist their communities in COVID-19 response.

A google survey was developed and sent to 12 organisations currently pursuing GEF SGP projects. Overall, most of the groups identified that COVID-19 has affected their ability to meet project objectives or complete activities and that they had immediate needs to address COVID-19 (Figure 1).

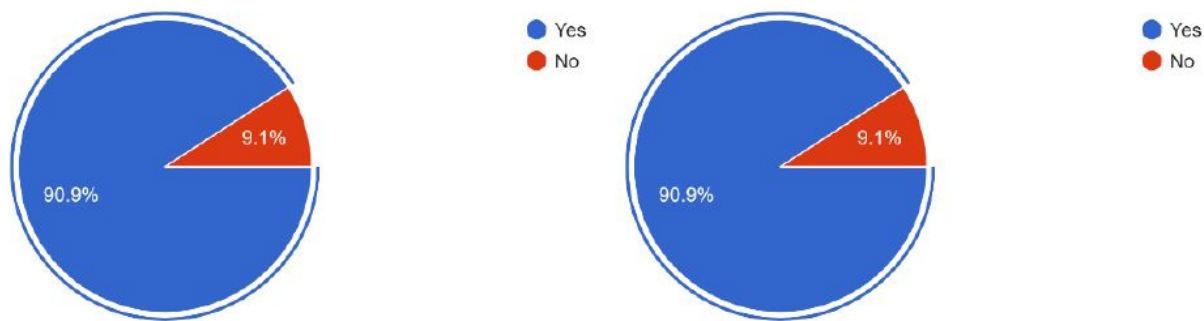


Figure 1: Responses to “How has COVID-19 affected your project’s ability to meet objectives or complete activities?” and, “Are there any immediate needs that your community requires to address COVID-19?”

GEF SGP grantees complained of impacts ranging from low, such as cancelling events, to high, which includes loss of livelihood and lack of access to grant funds due to limited banking hours. Most of the grantees indicated that their main requests were masks, soap and food, in particular seeds and seedlings in order to increase food security. Most also identified the importance of psychosocial support to assist those affected by job losses and the stresses of COVID-19.

As such, GEF SGP sprung into action to support their grantees. The National Steering Committee provided their full support and in the shortest possible time a plan was created for effective response to the community requests. The next article outlines what was done and the results of the developed initiative.

GEF SGP COVID-19 Response

Over 600 seed kits for establishing home gardens, were delivered to community groups across the country by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP) as part of its effort to support communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, with seeds also being provided by The University of the West Indies seed bank.

The initiative followed a survey of community organisations in which food and seedlings for growing food at home were identified as urgent needs. The kits contain a variety of seed types including celery, pimento, beets, pakchoi, cabbage, cauliflower, ochro, melongene and cucumber. They were delivered to 12 communities across the country including in Arima, Brasso Seco, Grande Riviere, Siparia, La Savanne, Felicity, Moruga, Castara, Charlotteville and Port of Spain. Bottles of soap as well as washable, reusable masks were also distributed.

The University of the West Indies also supported this initiative by providing seed kits to 4 organisations that focus on the needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs), thereby providing support to this important and sometimes forgotten community.

The response from the communities has been overwhelmingly positive. GEF SGP has received feedback from many of the communities which have diligently shared videos and pictures of their developing garden and their produce (Pictures 2, 3 and 4).

GEF SGP will also be working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners to expand this initial distribution into a nationwide, Grow-Garden initiative, with a special focus on vulnerable communities that have been disproportionately affected by the food security challenges raised by . Targeted groups, which will include at-risk youth, single mothers and low-income households, will be supported in developing new skills, employment opportunities, food security and improved family nutrition. This project will provide 2000 food hampers and seed kits across five islands: Trinidad, Tobago, Aruba, Curacao and Sint Maarten.

According to Dr. Sharda Mahabir, National Coordinator GEF SGP: “We remain committed to developing community resilience and supporting communities in holistic and sustainable projects that bring benefit to community and country. Our intention is that, on completion, this GEF SGP project and the upcoming national UNDP/FAO initiative will have supported some of the most vulnerable communities and increased appreciation for agriculture as a psycho-social tool, as well



as a means of food security and resilience. In the long-term, we hope to improve the perception of, and participation in, this important sector.”



(Pictures (from top to bottom): 1. Sowing of the seeds by children in Grande Riviere; 2. Preparing seedlings in Sea Lots; 3. Small garden in Matelot and 4. Harvests from Grande Riviere. All pictures provided by Constable Alfred, Matelot Police Youth Club and Giselle Mendez, Volunteer Centre of Trinidad and Tobago).



GEF SGP Grantee awarded by the Queen for service during COVID-19 pandemic

Volunteer Centre of Trinidad and Tobago (VCTT) Founder & Managing Director Giselle Mendez was recently awarded the Commonwealth Points of Light award from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 11 for her service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mendez is the 148th Commonwealth Point of Light from across the Commonwealth and the 4th for Trinidad and Tobago, since 2018.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the VCTT team launched their ‘virtual volunteering’ initiative to promote strategies for persons to continue to support the vulnerable while physical distancing. This included raising awareness of mindfulness and safe volunteering opportunities such as telephone befriending, tutoring children online, letter writing to isolated people and donating to NGOs.

Giselle and her team of volunteers lead over 130 mentors that will provide guidance and support to young people beyond the pandemic through their e-mentoring programmes, 'Me to We' and 'Grown in East Port of Spain'.

As Managing Director of the VCTT, Giselle is implementing a project with GEF SGP which will expand the "Grown in Gonzales" community garden as well as establish two new gardens in Morvant and Sealots. The GEF SGP wishes to congratulate Giselle and her team at VCTT for their exceptional work and commitment to providing support to communities, especially vulnerable youths, across the country.

Congrats Giselle and VCTT!

(Picture taken from:

<https://www.looptt.com/content/trinidadian-awarded-queen-service-during-covid-19-pandemic>)

R.I.D.E. COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 not only threatened the health of the people of this country but also widened the digital divide, especially in terms of education. Trinidad and Tobago is reported to have 77.3% of its population having accessibility to the internet. However, the education system of the country has limited digital support and as such, when COVID-19 hit and educational institutions were closed, the education of the children of the nation slowed almost to a halt.



One of the major reasons identified for this divide is the lack of access of students to digital devices. Even though teachers tried to move their classes online, many complained that the classes were poorly subscribed because the students lacked the technology to join.



In response to this, GEF SGP grantee, Restore a Sense of I Can (RSC), worked diligently to support digital education with the provision of refurbished computers to those in need. In 2017, Restore A Sense of I Can (RSC) received grant funding from GEF SGP to implement a project called "Reduction of Indiscriminate Dumping of E-Waste - R.I.D.E. " R.I.D.E. objectives included educating youths on the importance of recycling e-waste and how to create recycled technology from e-waste. This project provided training and opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship for

youths, by converting old computers into new ones, which in turn has developed the local recycled-technology market and reduced local dependent on international imports.

From 2017 to 2019, RSC started 20 IT clubs in Trinidad in secondary schools. They collected at least 200 units of e-waste and refurbished at least 30% of all units collected. They then redistribute at least 50 units to groups/NGO's that address the needs of vulnerable groups. For their distinguished work locally, they received the Community Heroes Award from the Ministry of Community Development.



During COVID-19, RSC worked with 9 corporate partners, including Republic Bank Limited and Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company (TTEC), to donate 210 units to schools, civil society organisations, community-based organisations and individual families. Through their partnership, RSC collected old computers from these corporate partners, assessed the units and then rebuilt and/or refurbished the units for further longevity. Impressively, eighty (80) families received units, to support the education of children within these households. They are currently preparing 175 units for further distribution.

In total to date, 445 units have been refurbished which means 445 less units in our landfills. Further, parts from old computers were used in the refurbishment and any parts that could not be used were taken by the Environmental Management Authority or Kaizen Environmental Services Ltd. for appropriate, environmentally safe processing.

The GEF SGP would like to acknowledge the work of the RSC in their COVID-19 response and congratulate them for sustainably furthering the work of their project.

(Picture from top to bottom: collection of units from corporate partners; delivery of the units to the workshops and donation of units to school. Pictures provided by Raj Ramdass.)



COVID-19 created fear and uncertainty for so many: the fear of illness, of loss of jobs and the inability to provide for oneself and family. However, forged out of this was the strength for survival for oneself and others in need. It was almost as if the country woke up to its humanity and its responsibility to community and society. In this way, COVID-19 did us a service. GEFSGP isn't just an entity that develops and supports community projects; it strives to instill in communities the togetherness needed to strengthen spirits, increase resilience and awaken the power of people working in tandem. I felt very proud writing this issue because it captured, so beautifully, the tangible and intangible successes of the work of the GEF SGP in Trinidad and Tobago. I humbly thank all of the grantees for their support

and their contributions towards developing community spirit across the islands and look forward to great things as we continue to develop and support our communities and adapt to the environmental vagaries of our countries and our world.