A Sustainable Future for Sea Moss Farmers

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For generations, harvesting of wild edible sea moss as a viable income earner, have been practiced by economically challenged families in the Grenville Bay area, St. Andrew. In Grenada, Sea Moss is mainly used to make the Sea Moss Drink. However, Sea Moss can be used to make paint, gelatin and as an aphrodisiac.

Since the passage of Hurricanes Ivan and Emily in 2004 and 2005 respectively, the sea moss population have not fully recovered, due to the massive destruction of the bottom substrate upon which sea moss grows. In addition, overharvesting by local sea moss farmers have severely depleted the resources. Having witnessed the success of sea moss mari-culture (farming) in Union Island, Mr. Willan Andrew, a seamoss farmer from Grenville Bay had the idea to introduce this specialized branch of aquaculture involving the cultivation of marine organisms for food and other products on the island of Grenada. This created an avenue for a more reliable supply and a much better quality product.

Through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Integrated Climate Change Adaptation Strategies (ICCAS) project Community Climate Change Adaptation Fund (CCCAF), sea moss farmers of Grenville Bay received funding to undertake this unique initiative. Several consultations and meetings were held and soon thirteen groups came on board to farm sea moss in Telescope, Soubise, Grenville and Petite Bacaye. There were twenty-four sea moss farmers, comprising six males and eighteen females from single-parent households whose only means of livelihood was sea moss farming. When Willan approached them, although they were very excited, their only concern was that they may have to pay back the start-up funds. The community members were elated when he explained that the project will be supported through grants, as all the start-up materials would be purchased and they would also receive training. With such great news they were geared up and ready to go!

The training sessions and plot set up was successfully set up in one week. The materials included ropes, anchors (cement blocks), buoys as floats, poly chord as streamers and plants. To set up a plot, lay the ropes as a rectangle, set anchors to the four corners on the main line; attach the mother lines from one main line to the other; then attach the streamers to the mother line and attach the sea moss to the streamers.
Monitoring was also an integral component of this project. Visits were made at least once a week for eight weeks. During these visits, Willan stressed the importance of maintaining the plots to ensure that they were not detached from the anchors and that no ‘foreign objects’ were attached to the plants. Within 6 to 8 weeks it was now time to harvest seamoss. This process took about one to three hours based on the size of the plots; and farmers caught other marine resources such as fishes, shrimps and lobsters that were living between the plants. So you see, even the sea moss plots are a good habitat for marine life.

After harvesting, the sea moss was placed in special sheets of plastics on drying tables to be allowed to bleach by the sun for about three to four hours. Subsequently, the sea moss was removed from the plastics and then placed on solar driers and other tables to dry. Throughout the drying process, the farmers continuously turned the sea moss to ensure that they were properly dried.
In the Telescope community, 5 plots were established, yielding approximately 2,400 pounds of wet sea moss in 1 harvest; which is 120 pounds of dry sea moss; using a ratio of 20:1. The sea moss was then placed in special bags, stored and sold. At $40.00 per pound, these 5 plots can make approximately $4,800 XCD every two months. Isn’t sea moss mariculture lucrative?

This project has recorded tremendous success, however, it have not always been smooth sailing. There has been reluctance from some of the members to accurately record their sea moss yields. To them, this recording mechanism that has been set up will allow others to gauge the amount of income they earn from farming sea moss. Further, while there have been great yields to sea moss farmers, this now creates an issue of glut; there is not enough demand for the amount of sea moss on the market in the raw state. In the future, we hope that the sea moss farmers can work more co-operatively to pull their resources together to farm at a scale where they can produce more value added products and even export.