On the western coast of the island of Grenada, lies the smallest parish of St. Mark. This community predominantly depends on fishing and agriculture for a livelihood. After the passage of Hurricanes Ivan, and Emily in 2004 and 2005, respectively, the farm lands were devastated resulting in loss of jobs and an increase in the unemployment rate. This led to an increase in invasive species such as the bamboo which is very difficult to control as it can re-establish rapidly. Although bamboo offers some protection to the soil, it is not the best option for soil protection and water conservation. Ms. Emma, a retired microbiologist, felt compelled to assist the youths as she did not like seeing them walking the streets idle. A signal was made for proposals by the United Nations Development Programme under its community climate change adaptation fund, where ideas like Emma’s can be realised. Funding was secured and choosing persons who were unemployed was easy, but choosing persons who were interested was another process. Emma’s dream of seeing the community sell its own hand made craft had to be achieved. She walked the streets inviting persons to be part of a training for six weeks, hoping they would answer the call.

Excitement reverberated Emma’s heart, she awoke before dawn ensuring she got fully prepared, a new day has begun, change had finally arrived; the first day of the training and she couldn’t keep quiet. A group of young people climbed unto the back of a small van and journeyed to the mountains of St. Mark’s. Two strange men and a lady accompanied them, later to realise it was the two men who were going to teach the classes and the lady was representing the persons who had given Ms. Emma the funding.
We stopped at a site where there were lots of bamboos which was also easy to cut and carry back to the van. The men were introduced and the bamboo selection begun. One of the trainers, whose name is Mr. Andre, provided a synopsis of selecting the right type and size of bamboo for making craft. Participants were amazed to see the type of bamboo that was selected to make craft.

We continued to find Weiss which is normally tucked away in trees. We stopped on the hill side and the men went to look for Weiss. A guy came pulling this long snake like rope from the bushes, excitement filled the air as he loaded the truck. Our first day had paved the way for the rest of the future for young people.

Our classroom began the next day and 16 new persons were introduced to one another. The hard, dangerous, but exciting work had officially begun. The class was divided into two groups where Weiss, and screw pine and bamboo craft were taught. A bond was created and soon we became like a family working together. The Weiss teacher went beyond what was expected of him as he ensured that all his members finished and understood their tasks before moving on, however the bamboo teacher was not as patient with the students and so much of the bamboo craft was unfinished, or students were left behind due to the time constraint.

We worked from Monday to Thursday for six weeks in a workshop from 9 am to 1 pm. We surprised ourselves to see what was accomplished in a week. Visits were done by people from the ministry of Environment, interested persons and well-wishers. We were getting attention, yes, St. Marks was finally getting some well-deserved attention! This little parish which is considered the poorest on the island will rise to the pinnacle of Grenada’s economy.

During the third week of the class, it was suggested that we put the project on hold due to the disbursement of funds to pay the driver who was transporting the trainers daily, among other business places where materials were taken from. The participants decided that they were continuing without the trainers as they had an idea of what is required. However, by the end of the day it was resolved and classes resumed normally the next day. During the period of training we were regularly under hurricane watches and warnings which would have cancelled classes, however we braved the weather and went out to classes even if the teachers were absent.

Members cooperated with one another, laughing, sharing and helping to ensure that the task given was accomplished. The unexpected happened, on the final week of the class, a call of sorrow came from the community as one of the participants had died. We were frozen, he was one of the electrical sparks of the bamboo class. He had succumbed to his sickness while enduring pains to finish the class. This affected the entire class and we couldn’t function properly. On the last day, we were told that a stipend would be given and we were not sure how long it would take, but it was hoped that it would not take too long. We were shocked.

A wind of change stepped in, members became lackadaisical. During that period, it was the carnival season and Ms. Emma and the community liaison officer along with the president of the St. Mark’s
Development Committee agreed that it would be a great time to showcase what was done at the monthly Food festival which attracts hundreds of people around the island including visitors who entice in St. Mark’s food and culture. Planning was done and persons were assigned to stay at booths, however this was not done as only four persons stayed at the booth which included Emma herself. Frustration stepped in as the vision of forming a cooperative to sustain the project had to be wondered about. Visitors flooded the booth, fliers were given out, items were sold and promises were made. During the week, the Liaison officer greeted us with the news that the Grenada Tourism Authority wanted to support this initiative. We didn’t anticipate all this exposure in such a short space of time. We were then invited to an EXPO held at the Grenada Trade Centre. In that exposition over 50% of the products were sold and orders were received. Lack of cooperation was seen again as persons were not fully engaged in the making of the craft or staying in the booths again. The Weiss trainer however, extended his services in helping us prepare when we had activities.

Two days of extensive training in group dynamics, marketing and promotion and forming of cooperatives were held where participants were educated on the topics before venturing into forming a cooperative.

In conclusion, a lot of work was done, however six weeks of training was not sufficient to cover as much as we expected. Because of the limited time in the class, there wasn’t any time for the teacher to have one and one session with students, which resulted in some students not being able to finish their product. Nevertheless, the project highlighted the potential for changes in a community through commitment and dedication. This project has been given exposure in such a short space of time that was not expected. We were given invitations to attend to festivals as soon as we participated in an event and someone saw us.

For future projects such as this one, persons should be interviewed where serious ones are selected. In doing this, cooperative will be formed without disputes as persons will be motivated to work together seeing the long-term investment rather than just doing a training because you do not have anything to be done. Proper management is key to the success of any business and so responsibilities must be equally distributed to ensure that everyone is involved. Another key factor is that the production centre should be in an enclosed environment to avoid unnecessary distractions and outsiders walking in during sessions. Marketing and promotion is also very important as groups need to be able to have adequate market after training to avoid discouragement of members. Materials and trained resource persons should always be available if there is a demand for craft to ensure sustainability. Projects like these should be modelled throughout the Caribbean as a means of building livelihoods and resilience that can support coping with climate change.