

“Getting Ready: Using Participatory Communication and Learning to Improve Food Security and Climate Change Adaptation in the Caribbean”

Theme: Community Development Sub-Theme: Community Based Learning and Outreach

Author: Dr. Maria Patricia Protz
Coordinator of the
Communication for Sustainable Development Initiative (CSDI)'s Caribbean Programme
Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC)
University of the West Indies
Kingston, Jamaica
mariaprotz@cwjamaica.com

1. RATIONALE

Rural communities in many parts of the world face increasing challenges to survive due to pressures caused by climate change and globalization. This is especially true in Small Island Developing states (SIDS) such as those in the Caribbean. Climate Change (CC) is forcing communities to adapt quickly not only for their own survival but also for national food security.

But “getting ready” demands new skills and the adoption of new practices, both of which can involve steep learning curves.

Participatory communication can play an important role in making this learning transition easier, and in fact, without it, adaptation is not likely to be sustainable.

This paper shares how Communication for Development, or ComDev, is working to improve food security and help rural communities adapt to climate change in the Caribbean. Through the “Communication for Sustainable Development Initiative” (CSDI)'s Caribbean programme, communities are using participatory video, ICTs, radio and other community media to establish backyard gardens and organic farms – practices that are not only helping to improve household health and nutrition, but also helping to improve national food security.

2. WHAT IS THE CSDI?

The CSDI is a global program of the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), and is sponsored by the Italian Ministry of the Environment and Territory. The program works in Bangladesh, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Bolivia, and also the English speaking Caribbean. The regional program is being implemented through the Caribbean Centre for Communication for Development (CCCD) of the Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication (CARIMAC) of the University of the West Indies (UWI).

2.1 Key Elements of the ComDev Approach

The word “communication” can mean many things to different people and in fact, there are several different types of communication processes. Communication can range from general public awareness, to public relations (PR), to marketing, advertising, to social media, to extension, diffusion, social marketing and social change communication.

But the ComDev approach is unique in that while it may, in different instances, borrow from all of the above processes as part of a ComDev strategy, its main priority is to facilitate learning through the use of communication tools and processes.

While ComDev has, at its heart, the learning needs of farmers and vulnerable communities, the approach also recognizes that sustainable learning must also involve all the researchers, extension staff and other rural knowledge services – including the media – that play a role in the CCA process. CC will require rapid learning – and science alone does not yet have all the answers or technological solutions – but neither do rural communities that will have to do the bulk of the adapting. ComDev is a process that facilitates joint learning among all the actors and stakeholders that are needed to enable sustainable change.

So, while the starting point of the learning process is the farmer – and especially farmer-to-farmer learning – ComDev is also a process that engages all the rural services that are needed to find viable solutions.

As a process, ComDev employs a wide range of communication tools – including video, radio, drama, drawings, ICTs, oral history documentation, digital audio recording, photography, social media, and so on – depending on what is available and what is most culturally appropriate for any particular given learning purpose.

2.2 ComDev in Action – How Does it Work?

The ComDev approach to farmer learning involves several moments that do not necessarily proceed in a linear fashion, but which allow back and forth sharing and mutual knowledge creation.

In the case of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), the ComDev process proceeds along the following path. First, general public awareness messages may be needed to help inform vulnerable communities of the types of impacts that CC will have on their livelihoods. In Jamaica, for example, through a parallel partnership project with the “Voices for Climate Change” project of Panos, this has been done through dynamic jingles and visits by well-loved musicians and artists to local communities in order to mobilize and activate people to understand the need for CCA.

At the same time, Agricultural Extension Officers (AEOs) and other rural services are sensitized and trained in ComDev methods and tools, and in Livelihood Assessment (LA) in order to begin working with rural communities to identify and promote best practices.

Communication tools and ComDev sessions are next used to identify problems and needs within rural communities and to establish a baseline picture of current knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAPs) on the ground. In many cases, farmers are not waiting for science to tell them what to do or how to adapt. They are already feeling the effects of CC and are adapting on their own. So ComDev can help to build on the positive strategies that farmers are already using to adapt and can modify or improve these technologies, as well as propose additional ones that might be beneficial.

This baseline process usually includes focus group discussions and employs tools such as force field analysis; problem tree creation, oral testimony documentation, seasonal calendars, venn diagram drawing, role play, among several other investigative tools that are used together with rural people.

Having a complete baseline picture not only helps to form a foundation for the learning process and to give a clear picture of how rural communities understand the problems to be addressed and what their priorities are. It also reveals what gaps exist, and therefore allows for a community demand driven learning process to begin – rather than starting with a learning agenda that has been set in advance from outside.

Completing a baseline investigation is also important for monitoring and evaluation and for establishing indicators to measure results in the field.

With the learning needs determined a pilot learning process can begin that usually involves on-farm demonstrations of practices that show the most promise to fill the identified gaps. In some cases, draft instructional videos, radio scripts, and/or print or power point materials can be prepared as “tech packs” and serve as additional reference material to support on-farm training.

Tech pack materials can also be posted as on-line resources or distributed on DVDs directly to farmer groups or Farmer Field Schools (FFS). That way, if farmers need to review specific training steps, or if they were not available to attend the actual training session, they can still learn at their leisure.

ComDev then continues to support learning as farmers test out what they have learned through the pilot demonstrations. In this instance, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones and website links can be most useful. For example, extension officers can send text messages to farmers to remind them to transplant, spray or weed. Likewise, farmers can use their mobile phones to text-in queries and/or take digital photographs of problems associated with their crops in order to get verbal or on-line advice.

ComDev tools and processes are also important for documenting successes and best practices while farmers test on their own farms. As crops mature, and as various new learning episodes occur, these steps can be further documented through digital photography, digital audio recording, and video investigations in order to capture rich learning and to provide credible evidence of what actual works and does not work in the field or under various agro-ecological conditions.

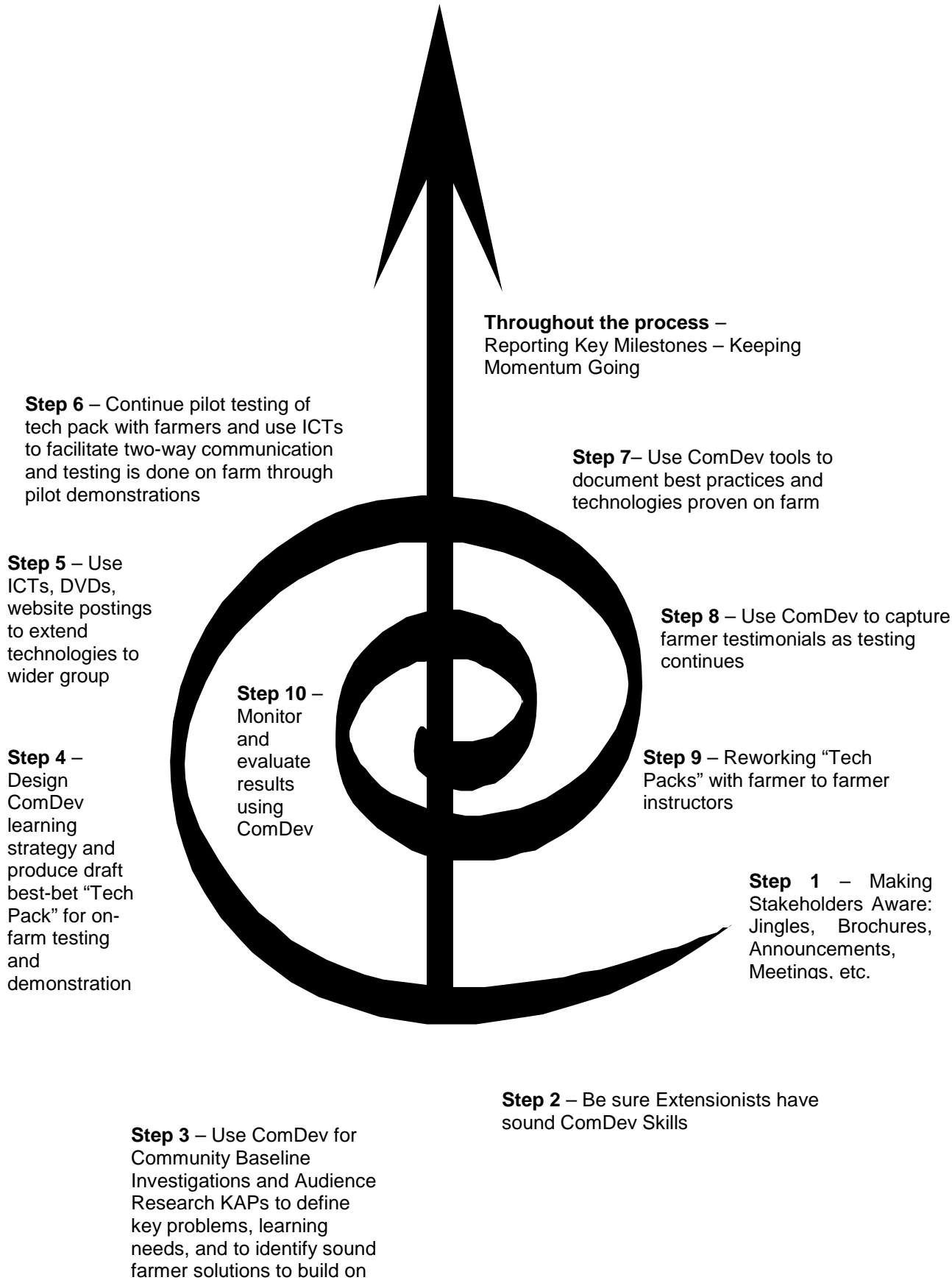
By further using ComDev tools to capture farmer testimonies of what works and what does not as the learning unfolds, at the end of the demonstration cycle, the ‘tech pack’ can be further refined and/or reworked using actual farmers as ‘instructors’ thereby further facilitating a farmer-to-farmer communication approach without necessarily having to go back and reshoot.

As key milestones are achieved, ComDev can be used to keep the learning momentum going and to scale-up lessons learnt in order to facilitate replication of proven techniques. In these instances, PR and public awareness strategies may prove useful.

Figure 1 illustrates how ComDev builds up learning and knowledge creation as it proceeds.

With this understanding of what ComDev is and how it works, some of its actual CSDI Caribbean activities are now shared.

Figure 1 Moments in the ComDev Learning process



3. MANDATE OF THE CSDI-CARIBBEAN PROGRAMME

The main mandate of the CSDI-Caribbean programme is to provide ComDev technical assistance and support especially to regional FAO projects that are focused on community-based climate change adaptation (CCA), food security and natural resource management.

4. SUPPORTING FARMER LEARNING IN JAMAICA

In Jamaica, this means that the CSDI-Caribbean programme is providing technical assistance and support in four main ways.

4.1 Improving ComDev Skills in Extension

First, it is designing a unique professional development programme in ComDev for the Rural Agricultural Development Authority's (RADA) agricultural extension officers (AEOs). The programme is introducing AEOs to a series of modules that cover a wide range of ComDev skills including participatory rural communication appraisal (PRCA) to complete baseline KAP research with rural audiences and clients. This is critical in order to ensure that the extension training programs they deliver are farmer driven.

Other modules are focused on instructional video production so that the various tech packs that are being developed will be properly done.

Further modules will focus on improving presentation skills and print material production, as well as ICT applications for extension.

4.2 ComDev for Agricultural Disaster Risk Mitigation

The "TCP/JAM/3202 (D) – National Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response Plan for the Agriculture Sector" – has been working to help Jamaica develop an Agricultural Disaster Risk Management (ADRM) plan and to identify a number of 'best practices' and mitigation measures that farmers can put in place in order to minimize the impact of hurricanes and adverse climate change effects on their farming systems.

The CSDI-Caribbean component is providing technical assistance for the development of a multi-media tech pack on ADRM best practices. RADA has already developed a series of brochures to promote mitigation practices in coffee production, and other cultivation practices for example. However, because these are print-based, such materials have limited use among less literate farming populations. They also need to be put into more popular language or used with other forms of communication to be effect.

This activity includes completion of a full-inventory of existing photographs, footage, print materials and media resources that could be retooled and packaged to form the basis of a tech pack for promotion of CCA and DRM practices in Jamaica.

4.3 ComDev Support to the Master/Gardener Programme of the EU-FAO Food Facility

Under the GCP/JAM/018/EC Food Facility, a backyard garden programme is being initiated to enhance household food security especially in targeted urban and peri-urban areas that are often the most vulnerable and resource poor. The programme is training a cadre of "Master Gardeners" who in turn will foster a peer learning process. The goal is to encourage each participating household to produce two crop cycles per year generating a minimum value of \$JA 12,000 annually.

Training is central to this initiative and the project's main form of communication and learning is originally is primarily through backyard demonstrations. CSDI assistance is needed to help

generate multi-media tech packs that support the work that the approximately 14 “soon to-be-certified” Master Gardeners will be doing to promote backyard gardening in urban areas. A multi-media tech pack that includes audio-visual “how to do it” packages, hot-lines, and other learning tools that will assist the Master Gardeners to extend back-yard gardening technology to an 2500 beneficiaries.

At the end of this process, a final video tech pack will be produced that will involve “Master Gardeners” instructing others on all the various steps required to have successful and profitable kitchen gardens.

4.4 ComDev Support to the Jamaica Organic Agriculture Movement (JOAM) of the EU-FAO Food Facility

Organic farming is often touted as a very important means to reduce carbon emissions associated with CC and to improve soil fertility and rural health. But while there are several certified organic farmers currently operating in Jamaica, organic production has not spread as widely as JOAM has hoped. People who might be interested in becoming organic producers are either (1) not sure that organic production can really be profitable and productive; and/or (2) are not aware of the steps involved in becoming certified.

As a result, under the GCP/JAM/018/EC food facility, JOAM is implementing 12 demonstration plots around the island of Jamaica in order to train farmers and to demonstrate proven results and the various technical steps involved in certified organic farming. However, JOAM recognizes that demonstrations are time consuming and costly, and that they cannot always be delivered at times that are convenient to all potential organic producers.

For this reason, with CSDI assistance, JOAM staff are receiving training in video production and will be given support for completing a comprehensive tech pack on organic techniques for small farmers. This same information will also be packaged as instructional web clips that can be downloaded from JOAM’s website by organic producers as they learn.

5. LEARNING FROM FARMERS AND LINKING WITH FFS IN ST LUCIA

In St Lucia, the CSDI expects to give support to the “Enhanced Capacities for Disaster Risk Mitigation in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry – St. Lucia (TCP/STL/3202 (D))” – an initiative that is introducing a series of best practices to mitigate various types of climate related disasters on that island.

ComDev techniques and approaches will seek to build on the innovations that farmers themselves are spearheading, such as the water harvesting and irrigation technologies that Farmer Constantine Lazurus has pioneered. This year, 2010, has wrought serious drought on the island of St Lucia, but this hasn’t held Mr. Lazurus Constantine back much at all. Through his own innovation, and with his own funds, he has forged ahead and rigged a water harvesting system using barrels, corrugated zinc, and drip irrigation hoses so that he can continue to supply a steady demand for lettuces and herbs.

Under the project, his innovation will be improved through the building of a concrete water storage tank at the top of his farm, allowing him to irrigate more cheaply and efficiently. Other farmers will be able to examine his results through participation in the local FFS. As results are demonstrated, their testimonials as well as those of Mr. Lazurus should shape a final tech pack for use by other farmers so that results can be replicated on a wider basis.

The project will be providing assistance to several other farmers and fishers through six different demonstration sites and will be promoting many of the following types of best bet practices:



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| 1. Use of Green House technology | 10. Land stabilization |
| 2. Integrated Pest Management | 11. Soil testing/Improvement of soil quality |
| 3. Drainage/Desilting of rivers and drains | 12. Use of drought resistant crops |
| 4. River Stabilization | 13. Crop scheduling/Mulching/Improved |
| 5. Water Harvesting and Storage (ponds, tanks, wells) | 14. Livestock |
| 6. Drip Irrigation | 15. Safe storage of feed for livestock |
| 7. Management of fires and implementation of fire breaks | 16. improved livestock housing |
| 8. Tree planting | 17. Safety at sea techniques for fishers and |
| 9. Wind breaks | 18. Boat removal via winches |

It is expected that ComDev will support the all of these pilot activities and that extension officers will play a lead role in using video and other ICT tools to support the learning process in St Lucia.

Similar assistance is also hoped to begin in Dominica before the end of 2010.

6. REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

All of the above national activities should go a long way to assisting the learning process of St Lucian and Jamaican rural families to become more CC resilient and food secure. But if the ComDev approach itself is going to continue providing value added to national agricultural planning processes, additional steps are also needed.

To this end, the CSDI-Caribbean programme is also implementing several regional activities to mainstream ComDev approaches at several levels.

6.1 Regional training programme in ComDev for extension

First, the professional development ComDev programme currently being pioneered by RADA in Jamaica, will be formalized and offered as a regional certificate or diploma programme by CARIMAC so that other extension officers throughout the region can also benefit and receive ComDev training.

6.2 Formation of a Regional Caribbean Professional Association of ComDev Practitioners

Sharing of ComDev experiences is also critical so that the region builds up a professional level of ComDev practice that is suitable for its own needs and culture. There actually is a vast array of ComDev experience within the region, but because of the challenges posed by travelling from island to island, it is very difficult to share experiences.

For this reason, the CSDI-Caribbean programme has already initiated a “Caribbean ComDev Practitioners’ Network”. The network not only allows members to share lessons learnt with one another, but is also actively looking at how to foster partnerships, develop joint ComDev projects, leverage resources and reduce the duplication that sometimes happens in the region.

6.3 Publishing Regional ComDev Case Studies

To support this same networking process and to stimulate a truly professional calibre of ComDev practice within the region, the CSDI-Caribbean program is also looking to publish case study examples of how ComDev has, and is working here. Although there is a plethora of experience within the region, it is rarely written down or published. A publication series should remedy this.

6.4 Caribbean ComDev Show Case – A Web Portal For On-Line Learning and Discussion

And lastly, but by no means, least, to facilitate even more immediate sharing, the CSDI-Caribbean program has launched an innovative portal – the Caribbean ComDev Platform – where a wide range of ComDev practitioners, students, farmer groups, multi-media centres and others who are using communication to enhance sustainable development, CCA and food security – can post their own news and experiences. The site already showcases a range of Caribbean ComDev experience that would otherwise only be found by trawling several sites. On-line e-discussions on topical issues will be encouraged on an as needed basis as well. The platform can be found by visiting: <http://csdinew.carimac.com/>

7. GETTING THERE

With all of these country level initiatives, and with the regional activities that are also on-going, the CSDI Caribbean programme certainly expects to advance progress towards “getting there” and to make ComDev and the use of communication tools and approaches the regular way of doing business for all farmer learning in future.

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