




1. Report Submitted by :


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2. Program Description and Staffing Plan:



The Community Resource Development programmatic area in Puerto Rico experienced a complete overhaul during 2007, both in areas of extension interest and in the composition of our staff. Regarding the areas of extension interest, the fast disappearance of agricultural, conservation and recreational land in Puerto Rico has become an area of mayor concern to most rural and vulnerable communities due to the lack of a governmental law for land-use-planning. This has led to the fast reduction of available prime agricultural land and the allowance by the state to use these for urban development.¹ Further, the ecological footprint in Puerto Rico is one even deeper and greater than that in the United States.² In addition to these environmental issues, Puerto Rico is currently undergoing an economic crisis which is having its effect in the consolidation of high unemployment rates and pervasiveness of poverty and government aid dependence. With a sustained unemployment rate of 12%, welfare dependency of over 45% of the population, and a low labor participation rate of 46% for close to a decade,³ Puerto Rico is experiencing a process known by sociologists as peripheral post-industrialism.



In order to deal with the areas of major concern, we have put emphasis on the component of programmatic evaluation to constantly assess program performance in order to make the necessary adjustments. In addition we have developed three educational initiatives that will involve island wide community leaders' participation in the conception, implementation and evaluation of the initiatives. The first of these initiatives is *Comunidades al Rescate de sus Tierras* (CRT) (i.e., Communities Rescuing their Lands), which seeks to help organize community leaders in order to create a network of communities that will give direction to land use planning locally and nationally. The second initiative is *Alianza Tierra Mar* (ATM) (i.e., Land Sea Alliance), is an ecosystem management initiative of high land and coastal communities to establish synergic bonds between government institution, non government institution and the stakeholders in order to reduce our ecological footprint. The third initiative is known as *La Caja de Herramientas Empresarial Comunitaria* (CHEC) (i.e., Community Entrepreneurship Toolbox), which seek to promote economic self-reliance and empowerment through the design and establishment of community based tourism, service and manufacturing enterprises.



During 2007 our staff was invigorated with the addition of three new staff members that have strengthened our new vision and new areas of extension interest. We have included Dr. José M. Huerta, professor of Agricultural Education and Specialist in program evaluation (with a 60% of his work load in CRD), to our staff to help design and implement a program evaluation of the different programmatic initiatives. We have recruited Giovanni Soto-Torres, ecologist and Specialist in CRD of the Agricultural Education Department who is in charge of the ATM initiative and co-collaborator in the CRT initiative.

¹ Between 1942 and 2002 Puerto Rico has lost over 60% of its agricultural lands to other uses. Current projections state that by 2018 there will be left only 250,000 acres of agricultural land of the current 640,000 acres (source: USDA-NASS, *Censo de la Agrícola para Puerto Rico*, selected years). In order to achieve agricultural sustainability, Puerto Rico needs over 900,000 acres dedicated to agricultural production.

² See Soto-Torres, G. <http://aceer.uprm.edu/pdfs/huellaecologica.pdf>

³ Source: Banco Gubernamental del Fomento, (2006) [Puerto Rico en Cifras](#).

We have also recruited Dr. Robinson Rodríguez-Pérez, Assistant Professor of Rural Sociology and Specialist in CRD who is in charge of the CHEC initiative and co-collaborator in the CRT initiative.

Angélica Martínez-Díaz, Specialist in CRD, who is in charge of the empowerment initiative, together with Ruth Lebrón-Rivera, CRD State Leader for Puerto Rico, complete our regular staff.

3. Program Highlights for 2007

As part of the CRT initiative, a workshop series was designed to introduce and familiarize both Agricultural Extension and Department of Agriculture personnel, as well as community leaders to the benefits of participating in the development and approval of a plan for land use and management that has been mandated by the Government of Puerto Rico Legislature. As a result of this initiative, a coalition of farmers, environmentalists and community leaders was established nationwide creating a support network that strives in identifying, documenting and promoting the protection of ecological sensitive, conservation, recreational and agricultural lands. During 2007, participants of the CRT initiative helped save *Finca la Hermosura in Las Piedras*, a farm of over 900 acres of prime agricultural land, from urban development. CRT leaders proposed and supported the creation of two new coastal natural reserves in *Maunabo* and *Patillas*. These two represents a protection of over 1,200 acres of mangrove forest and other endangered coastal habitats.

Regarding the ATM initiative, selected members of the Agricultural Extension Service (AES) have participated in several capacity-building training workshops on sustainability of high land and coastal communities which were coordinated by AES specialist and Sea Grant extension agents.

The environmental 4H Club Semillas de Vida (i.e., Seeds of Life) realized activities to restore a mangrove ecosystem that used to be used as illegal garbage dump in Ceiba, Puerto Rico. The ATM initiative became a Land Sea Alliance Strategic Plan (2007-2017).

In the community economic development program the CHEC initiative is based on four new workshops that have been developed to promote community based entrepreneurship. These highly interactive and hands-on-training workshops are currently under validation.

During 2007 the empowerment program offered *Workshops in Leadership Development* to leaders participating in community organization and empowerment development. Seminars in emergency and disaster management were offered to develop community emergency and safety plan.

4. Plans/New Directions for 2008:

Our plans for 2008 contemplates the consolidation of the new initiatives of 2007 (i.e., ATM, CRT, CHEC). Concerning ATM a legal agreement between AES and Sea Grant is scheduled to be sworn and it is foreseen the future integration of the Space Grant in the initiative to develop a more holistic alliance, Land Sea Space Alliance. AES Extension Agents will be trained in CHEC, to be able to provide the workshop series island wide. CRT has led to the creation of a network of community and environmental organizations that are identifying lands to be protected. During 2008 this alliance will continue working in the making and approval of a government's plan for land use and management.

5. Collaborative Activities and Funding Sources:

ATM initiative has established a collaborative agreement between Agricultural Extension Service (Land Grant) and Sea Grant Colleges Program (Sea Grant), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DRNA).

CHEC initiative has established a collaborative agreement between AES and the *Fideicomiso de Comunidades Especiales* (Government of Puerto Rico Vulnerable Communities Office).