On December 5 2018, CARDI Day was commemorated under the theme “Celebrating the potential of the region’s coconut industry”, where the focus was on highlighting the achievements under Phase I of the EU – ACP funded Regional Coconut Industry Development Project. Through a series of exhibitions, media engagements, public lectures and school tours participants, saw first-hand some of the practical ways that the project has breathed new life into one of the region’s oldest industries.

Coconuts are iconic in this part of the world, it defines the Caribbean’s landscape and culture. Since 2015, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) has been implementing the project with the International Trade Center (ITC) in 11 CARICOM territories with the primary objective of transitioning the region’s small-scale operations to enterprise-level profitability in the global coconut industry.

The implementing countries used CARDI Day to promote and highlight the project’s achievements and the many beneficiaries. The CARDI countries that did not implement the project used the CARDI Day platform to highlight the results of the work they have been engaged in over the last year.

In his remarks on CARDI Day 2018, Executive Director, Barton Clarke noted that “through this Regional Coconut Industry Development Project, CARDI and ITC have been working to improve income and employment opportunities, food security, and overall competitiveness of the Caribbean coconut sector.”
Bahamas launches school garden project

To celebrate CARDI Day, the Bahamas office partnered with St. John’s College and corporate sponsor Generali to launch a school garden project at St John’s College.

This project is part of the Institute’s programme in The Bahamas which seeks to positively influence children’s food choices, promote healthier habits and educate and engage students in Agricultural Science and environmental sustainability.

Speaking at the launch of the project, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources the Honourable, Michael Pintard noted that the Bahamas imports more than 80% of its food while only 1% of its arable lands are under cultivation. He encouraged students to see the tremendous opportunities that exist within the sector, telling them that a career in agriculture is a dignified one which can positively change their lives while transforming the Bahamian economy.

CARDI guided the establishment of several innovative practices for the school project including vertical and horizontal production systems. Crops such as broccoli, cabbage, lettuce and peppers have already been cultivated. CARDI Representative in the Bahamas, Michele Singh said that soon “we’ll be working with the school to introduce several climate smart agriculture practices and systems”. Like all countries in the Caribbean the Bahamas is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and within the last few years the country has faced an onslaught of hurricanes and storms.

Initiatives like these are critical to The Bahamas as the country is grappling with escalating chronic non communicable diseases, many of which are impacting youths. The Institute is hopeful that other corporate entities and schools can adopt and expand this farm/school movement in the Bahamas.

EU confirms Phase 2 of Coconut Project at Barbados’ CARDI Day celebrations

The Barbados Unit used the CARDI Day platform to showcase the achievements under the Coconut Industry Development for the Caribbean project. Representatives from the donor community, partners, and other agricultural stakeholders gathered at the CARDI Demonstration and Training Centre in Graeme Hall, saw first-hand how the project has assisted in revitalizing Barbados’ coconut industry.

Improving production was one of the major objectives of the project and to this end two nurseries with a combined capacity of producing over 3,700 seedlings were established. Visitors got the opportunity to tour the nurseries where they saw two contrasting systems for seedling production. Improper disposal of discarded shells from coconut vendors is a problem authorities in Barbados are seeking to bring under control. Through the project a shredder was procured and its use demonstrated. CARDI Representative, Ansari Hosein spoke on the sustainable use of the shredded material. A mini exhibition demonstrating a range of coconut value added and by products were also on display.

Chairman of the National Coconut Stakeholders Platform, Michael Gill called for a measure of regulation and organisation to the business of coconut vending, including registration of farmers, vending villages along the highways and better practices and monitoring to ensure proper food safety.

Bringing remarks on behalf of the EU Delegation in Barbados was Programme Manager, Katja Svensson, who revealed that a second phase of the coconut project will be financed to a tune of 6 million Euros. She noted that it will build on the first phase of the project and said activities will focus on the development of coconut nurseries, evaluation and multiplication of varieties to increase coconut production efficiency, coconut waste management and the promotion of climate-smart practices.

Implementing partners and stakeholders gathered at CARDI’s office in Central Farm to celebrate the achievements of the first phase of the Regional Coconut Industry Development Project. Following an overview of the project’s activities and achievements by CARDI Representative, Omaira Avila Rostant participants received a tour of the upgraded Central Farm coconut nursery. This together with two other nurseries in Yo Creek and Dangriga were expanded and upgraded with a collective capacity of producing over 55,000 seedlings annually. Participants also saw some of the practical ways they can care for and manage their nurseries and plantations to achieve good yields. One of the highlights of the project in Belize was the hybridization programme which has had a positive impact on the availability of hybrids for farmers. Participants were able to get a first hand view of this process.

Over the four years and through the national stakeholder platform, several small scale agri processors and entrepreneurs have received training and assistance to develop their coconut value added products and by products. At the CARDI Day celebrations these participants got the opportunity to showcase these products.

According to Avila Rostant this was particularly pleasing as persons with an interest in getting into coconut processing will be inspired to do so. Some of the processors on hand were Ellis’ Coconut Oil, Bella Dees, Tp’s Coconut Water and Flo Natural Coconut Water. Texbel Farms a
Participants at the CARDI Day celebrations in Linden, Guyana received a first-hand view of some of the lucrative value added products that can be derived from coconuts. CARDI Guyana partnered with one of the project’s Lead farmer/processor to demonstrate the production of virgin coconut oil and handmade soaps using natural plant based oils and local ingredients. De Souza who has been manufacturing soaps since 2016, has received technical advice for developing his factory and training in food safety, handling and packaging, under the project. He will soon begin to put to use the knowledge gained to upgrade his facility and improve his post production processes.

As a lead farmer, De Souza is involved in the production of the raw materials needed for his processing. Participants toured his coconut nursery and plantation and saw how he is working to strengthen and control his supply chain.

Every part of the coconut tree is useful. The Unit did a demonstration of the shredder procured under the project for breaking down coconut husks which continues to receive a bad rap from an environmental and social perspective. Dr. Cyril Roberts, CARDI Representative in Guyana spoke on the versatile uses of the shredded green shells and dried husks.

According to Dr. Roberts, students were especially invited to be part of the CARDI celebrations as they are the future of the sector and they must therefore get interested and involved if they are to see the sector as a viable avenue for earning a livelihood. The office seized the opportunity to present the CARDI Award for Outstanding Performance in Agriculture Science to Gabriell Williams from the Mackenzie High School in Linden. Based on the criteria established by CARDI and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Gabriell emerged as the best performing agriculture student in the region. Three other students from the school were also on the CXC Merit list for Agriculture Science. Because of the school’s outstanding performance CARDI will support the establishment of their aquaponics and hydroponics programme while the students will be treated to a field trip to the beautiful Pomeroon, the heartland of Guyana’s coconut industry.

**OECS countries put on a good show for CARDI Day**

The central theme for St Lucia’s CARDI Day celebrations was knowledge sharing. Students and extension officers participated in a seminar on Coconut production and coconut nursery establishment at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College. A second seminar targeting farmers focused on topics such as Establishing Coconut Nursery, Integrated Pest Management of Coconuts, Coconut germplasm and intercropping.

At the St Lucia Field Station in Dennery attendees including specially invited schools got the opportunity to see some aspects of the field work under the project. They received a guided tour of the coconut nursery and learnt about other aspects of the Unit’s work such as the establishment of a germplasm bank to conserve unique varieties of coconuts and the establishment of an IPM plot to study and develop management strategies for the troublesome Red Palm Mite. To test their understanding, a Q & A session was held and students rewarded with prizes donated by corporate entities and local partners.

A variety of exhibitors who are involved in value added product development also got an opportunity to showcase their products such as flour, soaps, oils, handicraft and confectionaries.

In Grenada, CARDI Day celebrations at National Stadium updated stakeholders on some key aspects of the Unit’s research and development activities. Soursop has been identified by the Government of Grenada as a crop of economic importance, CARDI is supporting the country’s drive to increase the acreage under soursop production by conducting hand pollination trials.

CARDI Representative, Reginald Andall also updated on the establishment of the sweet potato innovation platform and the strengthening of the cassava value chain.

Several hurricanes in the past have affected the country’s coconut plantations, once a principal source of livelihoods in the rural communities. The country like the rest of the Region is on the drive to rehabilitate the industry. Reginald Andall said at that the last COTED and Alliances Meeting held during the Caribbean Week of Agriculture, Executive Director, Barton Clarke requested that Grenada be added to the list of project countries for phase II of the Regional Coconut Development Project set to commence in 2019.

Over in St Kitts and Nevis, CARDI hosted a forum at the Department of Agriculture to apprise stakeholders on the work of the Institute in 2018 and to preview the Unit’s work programme for 2019.

CARDI Representative, Kistian Flemming presented on an innovative solution the Unit is developing to bypass some of the production challenges that farmers on the island face. The conversion of shipping containers to agricultural production systems offers farmers solutions to some nagging problems such as the unavailability of land, pests and climatic challenges. Based on projections the system which only occupies a space of 320ft can produce approximately 6,400lbs of leafy vegetables.

Together with Wageningen University (WUR) the Institute conducted an assessment of soil risk erosion in agricultural areas. Using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and modelling tools, results showed that the majority of farmers were located in high erosion risk zones. In 2019, the Unit will be working on a sustainable land management programme in
these areas as most of these farmers are not currently practicing any erosion risk reduction measures.

Participants were apprised of the Regional Coconut project and learnt that a coconut programme is being developed by the Unit for implementation in 2019-2020. It will focus on the introduction of disease resistant coconut breeds and entomological support, the promotion of food safety quality measures and enhanced germplasm management capacity.

A number of artisans, processors, entrepreneurs and farmers used the CARDI day platform to display their coconut based value added and by-products in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The exhibition jointly hosted by CARDI and the Ministry of Agriculture also exhibited a number of food based products including water, confectionaries and savoury dishes.

CARDI Representative, Greg Linton said that the project brought to the fore the many opportunities available for stakeholders along the coconut value chain in St Vincent and the Grenadines to improve their income and employment opportunities. However to support this, he called for a robust replanting/planting programme on the island.

On hand to assist persons interested in establishing a coconut based business was the Bureau of Standards. Their representatives showcased the services available for persons involved in the coconut industry and for prospective entrepreneurs. Jennifer Douglas-Bullock, the Bureau’s Representative, explained that they offer a range of services for persons who need information on standards within the coconut industry, food safety information applicable to the processing of coconut, its uses, and a range of products which can be had from it.

Support like this is critical to transition these small businesses into profitable, competitive enterprises if they are to tap into the growing regional and international markets for coconut products.

CARDI in collaboration with the Youth Development Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries hosted seven, 4-H clubs to celebrate CARDI day at the Goodwill Primary School, Dominica. Presentations on the importance of the coconut industry to the Region and Dominica and the uses of the tree among other topics were made by the CARDI team.

The targeting of youths for this exercise was deliberate as Dominica is in the process of rebuilding its agriculture sector following the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria. Every opportunity must be used to educate youths on the importance and value of the sector as their involvement is critical in crafting a resilient, sustainable and competitive sector.

Coconuts in particular is a viable option as it offers many opportunities to farmers, processors and agripreneurs. From an environmental perspective it is an important feature of agriculture systems because of its inherent resilient nature.

Across in Jamaica, CARDI did a feature story on the project and the specific activities that were implemented at the national level. Like much of the region, work in nurseries were conducted thus ensuring improved availability of quality planting material to farmers. IPM plots were also established to study the lifecycle and impacts of the coconut mite, ambrosia beetle and lethal yellowing so that effective control strategies can be developed.

Under the Alliance for Action initiative 10 Alliance groups each made up of 15-30 farmers were established where they received training on a range of topics. This approach has reaped benefits across the Region where the lead farmers have been catalyzing development in the sector through knowledge sharing. In Jamaica a coconut water quality survey was completed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Bureau of Standards. The information gleaned from this survey is being used to help revise the CARICOM Regional Standard for packaged natural coconut water which took place under the project.

**Trinidad and Jamaica host media engagements to celebrate CARDI day**

Head of Trinidad and Tobago Unit, Joan Petersen did an interview with the TTT Now Morning Programme where she highlighted the regional scope of the project and the activities at the national level. Some of the highlights of the work in Trinidad and Tobago were the establishment of IPM plots to develop management strategies for the Red Ring disease, the establishment of nurseries and the training and capacity building opportunities for stakeholders along the value chain. Ms. Petersen also spoke on the surge in global demand for coconuts and the many lucrative opportunities that are available along the value chain for entrepreneurs. Watch her interview @ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNQo1xpv6Fg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNQo1xpv6Fg)

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