2020 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title of the Story: Saba Reach Foundation - Organoponics Garden

Destination Name: (include any state, province or region)
The Level, Windwardside

Country: Saba, Dutch Caribbean

Submitter name: Pieter van Amsterdam

Email address: sabareach.director@gmail.com

Position: Director Saba Reach Foundation

Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☒ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Islands & Seaside
☐ Immediate responses in dealing with the COVID-19
☐ Post COVID-19 recovery
☐ One of the 17 SDGs* (if yes, which one) GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The 17 SDGs are integrated—that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. What are the Sustainable Development Goals? [https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/]

For further information on Tourism for SDGs: [http://tourism4sdgs.org/]

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Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

**Issues faced**

One of the programs of Saba Reach Foundation (SRF) is the Social Workplace which is a sheltered working environment located at the Organoponics Garden The Level. The program started in 2007 to solve two issues the island was facing:

1. It provides employment and participation opportunities to otherwise (temporarily) unemployable individuals. The program gives the apprentices the opportunity to actively contribute to the Saban community by producing and selling their locally grown, healthy, fresh, and organic garden produce at the shop at the Organoponics Garden and at weekly markets in the village of Windwardside.

2. Saba is a small, quiet and isolated island and we are very dependent on the import of a lot of (basic) products. The Organoponics Garden started to grow our own local vegetables and fruits, so we are less dependent on the import of vegetables and fruits. And also, to serve as an example for the community, residents of Saba can buy vegetables and fruits, but also seeds and slips to start their own vegetable and/or fruit garden.

**Methods, steps and tools applied**

Organopónicos or organoponics is a system of urban agriculture using organic gardens. It originated in Cuba and is still mostly focused there. In the past we collaborated a lot with professionals from Cuba on-site to accomplish the setup of an organoponics garden on Saba. The Organoponics Garden consists of low-level concrete walls filled with organic matter and soil, with lines of drip irrigation laid on the surface of the growing media. In general organopónicos is a labour-intensive form of local agriculture.

The mission of our Organoponics Garden is:

To offer an adapted and sheltered working environment for impaired or unemployed individuals, who are not, at least not yet, place-able in a regular employment environment, aimed at the engagement in purposeful labor with a view to the preservation, restoration and promotion of the existing working capacity of said individuals, where possible also within the scope of future placement in the regular employment process. SRF aiming to reach these social goals, will set up economic activities as much as possible as in the regular business and will realize a company in which these economic activities support the social goals of the foundation; in that way helping to save the enormous costs involved in social employment for the community and at the same time improving the independence of the above-mentioned individuals in the society.

The vision of our Organoponics Garden is:

The development, maintaining and in the future possible extending of the Organoponics Garden into an agricultural hub for the exchange of knowledge and expertise; increased effective cooperation with local farmers and retailers; the development of the organoponics garden into an attractive
agri-tourism destination where locals and tourists alike can visit on a leisurely and recreational basis; to produce specialty products for which the organoponics garden will be known; to provide the community with regular and consistent village markets that will increase and secure the organoponics garden’s and their apprentices visibility; the acquisition of additional land to cultivate.

Accessing the Produce:

Locals and tourists are able to access the produce by visiting our weekly market, which is located in the center of Windwardside. This is also the village where most tourist accommodations and restaurants are located, which means that it is easily accessible for visitors to the island. Another way that people can purchase produce is by visiting the shop located in the Level. Here visitors can tour the garden, getting a feel for the produce and how it is grown, and for visitors also learning what will be available during their time on island.

Some restaurants on island, which depend on tourism for a large portion of their business, purchase their produce from the Organoponics Garden, but many still use mainly imported produce. If this could shift, that more is purchased on island, this could increase the demand for the garden's produce, which could help to expand the project. In addition to this, produce which is purchased locally is more affordable than imported items. This would lower the cost of not just direct purchases, but could also influence the cost of menu items which would benefit both locals and tourists alike.

Key success factors

In our Organoponics Garden we plant mainly fast-growing vegetables and herbs, so we can grow year around. There is another garden on the island where they focus more on long term vegetables. We have close cooperation with this garden by buying their products and selling them through our shop at the organoponics garden and the weekly market.

In the Organoponics Garden we only use organic fertilizers, soil and manure. We work together with local goat, chicken, and bull farmers and buy from them manure. This is a great way for both parties to support the local community and farming.

In 2019 we started installing a new solar irrigation system at the organoponics garden which should be completed before the end of this year. By making only use of these solar irrigation system we are not depended on electronic devices anymore. As we live in the Caribbean we will collect enough sun to let this new solar irrigation system work.

For the watering of the beds, nursery and trees at the Organoponics Garden we only use grey water (rainwater runoff). Besides growing vegetables, fruits and herbs we also make our own hot sauce and pesto to sell. We are planning to start making healthy smoothies from our own produce as well. By doing this we aim to motivate our apprentices- but also the community- to making them aware what you can do to be more sustainable through the use of local products and living a more healthy lifestyle.

In the afternoon, when the sun is out and too hot to work outside at the Organoponics Garden, our apprentices are making art work from recycling materials or rocks. Saba is a volcanic island with lots of lava rock formations. The garden would not have been such a success without the support of the Saban community, the hard work off our apprentices, the SRF team and board and the continued (financial) support off our local government and of course the close cooperation with all other stakeholders and local farmers of Saba.
Lessons learned
In 2017 Saba and the surrounding islands were severely impacted by two major hurricanes, Irma and Maria. Our nursery and crops at our Organoponics Garden were completely destroyed. We have rebuilt the nursery in a way that in the future less damage can be done. The sides can be taken off, and only the main structure stays up in the storms. Up until now Saba is still very dependent on surrounding islands in regards to providing sufficient food supplies. Due to these hurricanes and the current COVID-19 pandemic, we are even more aware of the fact that Saba can end up very isolated and will increasingly have to make an effort to be more independent from the other islands and to be able to provide for itself the basic necessities of life, including fruits and vegetables.

Future plans:
Besides the Organoponics Garden we are working in close relation with the Saban Government on two new pilot projects which should start by the end of this year. Both projects should be an addition to our current organizational mission and vision, as well increase of the number apprentices who we can offer opportunities as there is no space for new apprentices at the Organoponics Garden.

First of all we will start a pilot with installing a biogas system at the Organoponics Garden that recycles organic waste, creating a sustainable energy source. Once this system is installed we will be able to prepare small dishes at the garden site by making use of our own produce. If this pilot is successful hopefully we can inspire the Saban community and other businesses on Saba to start producing renewable energy through this system also.

Secondly we will start a pilot called “Precious Plastic”, with the aim to come closer to a solution to the plastic waste problem. Precious Plastic is a project trying to boost plastic recycling worldwide. It was started in 2013. By now, the project counts on the contributions of dozens of people joining the project with their skills and knowledge.

There are 4 machines in order to recycle plastic into new usable products. These machines are purchased by the local Government, and should arrive later this year on Saba. Each of these four machines have their own purpose:
1. The shredder: Plastic waste is shredded into flakes which will be used in the other machines to create new things.
2. The injection machine: Plastic flakes are heated and injected into a mold.
3. The Compression oven: Plastic is heated inside the oven and slowly pressed into a mold with a carjack. Well suited for making large and more solid objects, the oven itself is also a great machine for prototyping and making plastic tests with.
4. The extrusion machine uses a continuous process where plastic flakes are inserted into the hopper and extruded into a line of plastic. These lines can be used to make new raw materials such as 3d printing filament, make granulated plastic, spun around a mold, or used in your own new and creative ways.

Products of recycled plastic produced by these four machines can be sold in a new to established shop (which will be part of a bigger project, a second alternative social workplace) to the Saban community and tourists who are visiting the island.
Future Possibilities
In the future, it could be possible that longer staying visitors to the island can also volunteer at the farm, learning about the produce that is grown on island and also learning more about the SRF and the Organoponics Garden project. With this type of program, tourists would have more interaction with locals, learning from them why different types of plants are more valued, what are the different purposes they can be used for and also what are the traditional fruit and vegetables found in a Saban’s daily diet. This would create more of a connection with the island they are visiting and give them an appreciation of the produce that they will be taking back to their accommodation to use.

Results, achievements and recognitions
The Organoponics Garden has been recognized through the Appeltjes van Oranje in 2013, this an organization that recognizes three social projects that successfully connect different groups of people and ensure that people participate in society again. The awards are presented by Her Royal Highness of The Netherlands, Queen Maxima. Shortly after winning the prize, both Queen Maxima and her husband King Willem Alexander were able to visit the Organoponics Garden during their visit to the island. During the visit, apprentices at the garden were able to discuss with the Royal Couple their work at the farm and how it has impacted their lives.

The mission of SRF is achieved through several approaches:

1. By increasing the activities of the organoponics garden as was outlined in the vision statement, the different needs and competencies of those employed at the organoponics garden are achieved. Currently, all employed at the Organoponics Garden are involved in similar manual agricultural tasks while this kind of labor is not suited for everyone. To remedy this a garden manager is hired to categorize the activities at the Organoponics Garden and properly place the individuals in these categories with corresponding tasks. On request workshops about farming at the organoponics garden are taking place, for example as part of the summer program for the children of Saba. In this way, each apprentice can occupy an area that best suits their interests and competencies.

2. By increasing the level of cooperation with local retailers and farmers, the activities and production at the Organoponics Garden can reflect the local demand for fresh produce, and as such, provide purposeful labor to those employed there. To accomplish this, realistic agreements are being made with local retailers in cooperation with other local farmers. This may require limiting the Organoponics Garden’s produced crops to a few that can be provided to the market in a consistent and reliable manner. In this way, those employed at the Organoponics Garden and the community at large will see the valuable results of their labor.

3. By increasing the level of cooperation with local retailers and farmers, the Organoponics Garden can function more accurately as a regular business attaining somewhat of an economic value helping to save the enormous costs involved in social employment for the community. Currently, the Organoponics Garden is fully dependent upon government subsidies for its operations and salaries. The sales from production are not enough to cover the overall overhead costs. With increased
cooperation with retailers, the dependence on subsidies can be mitigated.

4. By coaching, guiding, and educating those employed at the garden, the apprentices gain enhanced employment skills and, with the acquisition of additional land for cultivation, they may be able to cultivate these plots on a more independent basis without constant supervision as is presently the case.

Over the past years we had different garden managers who all brought each different input and new farming techniques. Most of the apprentices have been working many years at the organoponics garden, so all different techniques and skills are combined. Due the limitations of our crew we need to adapt fast and look in a creative way for new solutions so we can keep the production high. During the current COVID-19 pandemic a lot initiatives were taken by our organoponics garden by providing the community with fruits and vegetables at their houses during the lockdown. We also see an increase of local farmers and we are cooperating with them as much as possible.

**Additional references**

Pictures: attached in the email
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