

THE GROUMANIA AGOUTI PROJECT

Location : Groumania, Prikro Sous-Prefecture, N'Zi Comoe Region

Total Request :

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Abstract

The Groumania Agouti Project will create a self-sustaining, income-generating agouti husbandry facility at the E.P.P. Groumania Primary School. The project's primary goal is to provide a reliable source of funds for the school. In addition to providing funds, the project will educate the community's children in agouti husbandry, an expanding and lucrative practice in the Cote d'Ivoire.

Background

The sister villages of Groumania and Koffesso form a community of about 2,000 people, roughly half of whom are Ando, an Akan group dominant in the region, and half of whom are Djula who came to the area as refugees from the wars of Samory Touré about a hundred years ago. There is also a Mosi population who arrived from Burkina Faso within the last generation, and a scattering of other ethnic groups. Ethnic relations are good, and groups cooperate frequently on projects of benefit to the community at large.

In the early nineteen-eighties, a foreign sugar concern opened a factory near Groumania. This concern employed many local workers, and the community prospered from the resources the company dispensed locally as operating expenses and as occasional gifts. However, the company pulled out of the Cote d'Ivoire in 1986, leaving the workers it had attracted to the area unemployed. There is now scant enterprise in the region—Groumania and Koffesso are remote from major cities and the area lacks infrastructure to encourage economic development. Little outside cash enters the region.

The villages are agriculturally rich, and produce an excellent variety of food crops year round. Although a lengthy drought has weakened the region's production, the community does not have a serious lack of food and the villages are blessed with abundant drinking water. The climate is ideal for growing cashews, which are the primary cash crop. However, in February-March, 2001 a brush fire destroyed much of the villagers' cashew orchards. As cashew trees requires two to three years of growth before producing marketable fruit, the village will rest in an economic shadow for the next few years.

Past development projects include the construction of a maternity center (with financial assistance from Projet FRAR), the refurbishment of a school building (partially funded by Peace Corps), and village-wide hygiene improvements. The members of the community have demonstrated a particular commitment to projects promoting the education of their children, and the school is filled to capacity with students. The villagers have worked with Peace Corps Volunteers to improve the education of the community's girls, and over the past three years the number of girls studying in the school has gone up from 5% of students to 35% of students. This trend is expected to continue as parents enroll more girls in the first grade. However, due to the recent economic problems, both local and national, parents have started to reduce again the number of children they send to school. This project aims to combat this trend by making enrollment and school fees less costly for parents.

Demonstration of Need

A general lack of funds has long crippled E.P.P. Groumania, the local primary school. The school has only four teachers for its six classes, with two teaching slots filled by educated volunteer. Traditionally the community has rewarded these volunteers with a small stipend (10,000 F cfa/month), but the recent destruction of the community's cash crops (see above) has rendered this difficult. Retaining volunteers has become a problem for the school. Furthermore, many students have inadequate materials, such as books, notebooks, and writing materials. In past years the School Cooperative helped to buy materials for students, but the Cooperative payed using unreliable outside donations. Finally, while the community recently renovated one school building, the second remains decrepit. The community started raising money to construct a new building a year ago, but has collected only a fraction of the needed financing.

The agouti project would enable the students, teachers, and parents of E.P.P. Groumania to alleviate all of the problems described above. A reliable source of income for the school would allow the Parents Group to pay the volunteer teachers reliably and well, and would supplement the materials available to the students. It would also help pay for the

construction currently necessary, and fund future maintenance of the school buildings (for example, necessities such as the black paint need every year for the chalkboards could come from these funds). The project will relieve the most pressing problems the school community faces.

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In addition, the project will train the students in agouti husbandry. As mentioned above, the community is badly in need of new ways to bring money to the region. Agouti husbandry is one of the most remunerative agricultural projects in Cote d'Ivoire, and a rapidly expanding practice. Therefore, exposure to the techniques of raising agouti will benefit the children of the community in their adult lives. The project will also give the students a sense of empowerment by giving them primary responsibility for the care of the agouti.

Project Description

Nature of the Project:

The Groumania Agouti Project began in the Spring of 2001 with the instruction of the teachers and members of the Parents Group of E.P.P. Groumania in the techniques of agouti husbandry. This instruction, conducted over eight sessions by an agent of the ANADER agricultural extension agency, included the basic biology of the agouti (properly known as "aulacode"), their nutrition and ideal foods, the techniques of cultivation and breeding, and how to construct an appropriate shelter for the animals.

Now that the initial instructional phase is over, the Parents Group has started constructing a large hutch according to the specifications of ANADER (please refer to Annex for construction details). This building will consist primarily of traditional materials such as mud bricks and thatch, with concrete reinforcement in the pens where the agouti will be kept. The hutch will also be fitted with a strong wooden door with lock to prevent theft.

Following the completion of the building, the Parents Group will provide ten cages to transport two male and eight female agouti from the ANADER regional offices in M'Bahiakro to Groumania via chartered minivan. The teachers and Parents Group will

take joint responsibility for instructing the students in the care and maintenance of the agouti as the project progresses.

After the initial expense of establishing the cooperative, further expenditure should not be necessary. Veterinary expenses are expected to be minimal, as agouti are extremely hardy relative to other commonly domesticated animals (such as chickens). Although some animals in every birthing will be lost to sickness or birth defects, it is rare for all animals to in a breeding hutch to die from a contagion. To further guard against disease, ANADER agouti husbandry training includes identification of sick animals so they may be isolated or destroyed. Food for the agouti can be easily gathered from the forests near Groumania, and can be supplemented with small amounts of manioc and corn, both of which are commonly cultivated in the region. Finally, marketing expenses should be unnecessary. Given the degree by which the demand for agouti outstrips supply throughout the Cote d'Ivoire, the animals can be said to practically sell themselves. Other agouti husbandry projects report large advance orders for agouti which these projects come nowhere near filling. Groumania lies on a crossroads within striking distance of several small sous-prefectures, and women from these towns routinely travel to outlying villages in search of meat. Live agouti, which this husbandry project is ideally situated to provide, are particularly sought. Several hotels in Bouake, which lies seven hours away from Groumania, have also expressed interest in any and all live agouti the village can provide. Transporting the agouti with a teacher making a routine trip to Bouake will not be difficult. Depending on the size of the agouti and the season they are sold, the price can fluctuate between 2,500 F cfa and 9,000 F cfa per animal. For purposes of income projection (see Timeline below) the price is conservatively estimated at 3,500 F cfa per animal. Fourteen months after the first breeding, the cooperative should be making an annual profit of at least 120,000 F cfa/year (see Timeline for income projections).

Timeline:

The initial phase of instructing the Parents Group and teachers in agouti husbandry techniques has been completed over the past year. Therefore, this timeline starts with the construction of the agouti hutch by the parents group.

January 7, 2002-February 25, 2002: Parents Group starts construction of the agouti hutch. Construction will take place on Mondays of every week. Construction will begin with collection of wood for the walls of the structure, followed by the making of mud bricks. After the initial structure is finished, the Parents Group will use saved thatch to make the roof. Following the completion of the roof, the Group will prepare the mud brick framework for the internal pens (Please see annex for construction details).

FOCI funds are requested to continue the work from this point.

March 4, 2002-March 11, 2002: Parents Group cements the holding pens and assembles necessary cages for transport.

March 11, 2002-March 18, 2002: ANADER delivers the ten agouti with the cages provided by the Parents Group and transport organized by the PCV. The ANADER agent will accompany the animals and provide any necessary counsel. The ANADER agent will provide a basic training for the students concerning the biology of agouti, their care, and their feeding.

March 18, 2002: First breeding of agouti. Agouti give birth on a six to seven month schedule following the initial breeding.

April 11, 2002: ANADER agent visits to monitor progress and techniques.

May 11, 2002: ANADER agent visits to monitor progress

July 5, 2002: End of school year. A group of the most responsible local students is assigned to work under a supervising teacher to care for the agouti during the summer vacation.

July 11, 2002: ANADER agent visits to monitor progress.

September 27, 2002: Start of school year.

October 18, 2002: First birthing. Cooperative owns approximately 18 female agouti and 12 male agouti. The first sale may take place at this time, but may only consist of a maximum of three mature agouti in order to ensure . At an conservatively estimated price of 3,500 F cfa, this sale will bring 10, 500 F cfa. An ANADER agent will make a final visit to determine which animals, if any, should be sold.

May 18, 2003: Second birthing. Cooperative owns approximately 28 female and 24 male agouti. Real sales can commence at this point, of approximately one third of all animals, i.e. 17 animals. At 3500 F cfa, this should bring a minimum of 59,500 F cfa.

December 18, 2003: Third birthing. Cooperative owns approximately 40 female and 25 male agouti. 22 animals may be sold, for a profit of 77,000 F cfa.

July 18, 2004: Fourth birthing. Cooperative owns approximately 62 female and 30 male agouti. 31 animals can be sold for a profit of 108, 500 F cfa.. Breeding and birthing continue from this point with a similar pattern.

Partners/Participants:

Parents Group: The Parents Group will construct the agouti hutch and the cages necessary to transport the animals. Members of the Group who have attended the training given in 2001 by ANADER will oversee, with the teachers, the management of the agouti project. The President of the Parents Group will share responsibility, with the

teacher responsible for the management of the student cooperative, oversight of all funds earned by the sale of agouti.

Teachers: The teachers will oversee day-to-day running of the agouti project and give direction to the Student Cooperative. The teacher responsible for the cooperative will share responsibility, with the President of the Parents Group, for the collection and disbursement of all funds earned by the sale of agouti.

Student Cooperative: With the guidance of the teachers, the Student Cooperative will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the cooperative. This will include daily collection of food for the agouti, daily replenishing of food and water, cleaning of the agouti pens, and all other necessary maintenance.

ANADER: ANADER has instructed the Parents Group, teachers, and other community members in techniques of agouti husbandry. The agency has agreed to sell two male agouti and eight female, assist in their transport, oversee the installation of the agouti in their hutch, and return for occasional monitoring sessions if transport and per diem are provided.

Plans/Diagrams:

Please see attached Annex.

Budget

Please see attached Annex.

Community Involvement

The community is highly motivated to complete this project, as they see a direct benefit to themselves in a viable income generating project at the school. The Parents Group in particular looks to this project to relieve the burden of paying for volunteer teachers, and hope that the program can help offset the cost of school supplies for the students. The Group has agreed to undertake all construction associated with the project (please see

annexed letter of commitment) and has been very involved in the ANADER education program already completed. ANADER has promised to supply all necessary agouti and technical counsel to the Student Cooperative's project (as well as other, private agouti husbandry cooperatives) and to assist in monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and Evaluation will take place in three broad categories.

Category I: Initial Activities--Construction and Commencement:

During the initial phase of the project, the ANADER agent and Peace Corps Volunteer will monitor the construction of the agouti hutch, ensuring that the hutch meets ANADER standards. The ANADER agent will make the final evaluation before installing the agouti. The PCV will then monitor the early days of the cooperative, making sure that the teachers educate the students about the agouti and that the students begin taking proper care of the animals. In regular follow-up visits, the ANADER agent will evaluate the project's progress; with the final evaluation occurring with a successful first birthing seven months after the agent installs the agouti in their hutch.

Category II: Management of the Cooperative—Parents and Teachers

Once the first birthing has occurred, the responsibility for the monitoring and evaluation passes to the Parents Group and teachers. The period after the first birthing is a critical time, as the temptation will be to sell a majority of the animals, thus sharply reducing future profits. The President of the Parents Group and teacher responsible for the Student Cooperative will monitor the breeding and care of the agouti, ensuring that proper care is taken by the students to nourish and raise the animals. Weekly checks for disease and malnutrition will ensure the continued success of the project. At the end of every birthing period, the parents and teachers will evaluate if the animals are producing living, healthy offspring in suitable quantities. If not, appropriate changes will be made to the daily care of the animals.

After the first sale of agoutis (following the second birthing) the President and teacher responsible will collect all money together (thus preventing misappropriation of funds). All disbursements must be justified with the Parents Group, who will monitor and vote on the use of funds. The Parents Group has final oversight over the use of funds, and will evaluate the use of these funds by observing the quality and number of volunteer teachers at the school, the number of students with school materials, and the state of the school's facilities.

III. Knowledge Transmission—The Students' Progress

The teacher responsible for the Student Cooperative and his colleagues have primary responsibility for directing the students in the day-to-day maintenance of the agouti and their hutch. To ensure that the teachers successfully pass the techniques of agouti husbandry to the students, the teachers will carefully monitor the health and well being of the animals and the care the students take in raising them. If the animals remain healthy and have successful birthings, this will indicate success.

Furthermore, students who take special pains with the animals (i.e., volunteering for weekend duty, successfully identifying sick agouti, etc.) will be noted (and praised publicly). At the end of every school year, all students will be evaluated with a quiz concerning their knowledge of agouti. Students who score well and/or have demonstrated a commitment to the animals will be given a small prize and invited to help care for the animals over the vacation. The teachers will monitor the results of the quiz and quality of the work the students do and evaluate the students accordingly.

Environmental Impact

The project should have a minimal negative environmental impact, and a considerable positive one. Traditional methods of hunting agouti often rely on lighting bush fires, which inevitably destroy significant swaths of forest. Furthermore, these fires often rage out of control, destroying even more forest and even cultivated fields. (The fire which destroyed so much of Groumania's cashew harvest in February 2001 stemmed from a hunting accident). Agouti husbandry is recommended by both ANADER and the

Ministry of Waters and Forests to reduce bush fires and the killing of wild agouti, which in some areas are nearly eradicated.

BUDGET

Item	#	Cost	Total	FOCI	Community
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FORMATION AND MONITORING

Transport of Trainer	12	10000	120000	40000	80000
Per Diem	12	1000	12000	4000	8000

AGOUTI

Males	2	10000	20000	20000	0
Females	8	15000	120000	120000	0
Transport M'Bahiakro-Groumania	1	45000	45000	45000	0
Transport Cages	10	1500	15000	0	15000

CONSTRUCTION

Mud Biricks	2000	10	20000	0	20000
Thatch & Wood	6m x 8m	20000	20000	0	20000
Door w/ Lock	1	12000	12000	12000	0
Cement	4	3200	12800	12800	0
Transport of cement	4	400	1600	1600	0
Labor (4 men)	6	4000	24000	0	24000

Construction Subtotal			90400	26400	64000
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SUBTOTALS			422400	255400	167000
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Plus 10%			42240	42240	0
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TOTAL			464640	297640	167000
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PERCENTAGES			100%	64.00%	36.00%
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TOTAL FOCI REQUEST: 297,640 F cfa (Aprox. 420.00 US dollars)