

Gaviotas Discussion / Haitian Agriculture

Gaviotas is a sustainable development community in Columbia. Students were assigned to read the book:

Weisman, Alan. *Gaviotas: A Village to Reinvent the World*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 1998. ISBN: 0930031954.

[In addition to the book, there are some web resources on Gaviotas. See the Friends of Gaviotas Web site <http://www.friendsofgaviotas.org/default.htm>. Alan Weisman was interviewed about Gaviotas on NPR's *All Things Considered*. See a transcript of this interview at <http://www.dharma-haven.org/five-havens/weisman.htm>]

This class considers a set of questions posed in the D-Lab assignment "Gaviotas Discussion."

To begin the class, student Stephanie Dahlquist presented some slides on a "where are they now" review.

What made Gaviotas work? What were the successes and failures?

- They've planted huge stands of Caribbean pine trees as a fuel source. That clearly takes lots of will to manage policy issues – imagine trying to import and plant something of this order in the U.S.
- Alternative model to large cities. Combination of rural setting and small scale seems to help it work. They didn't want to be an isolationist community (as opposed to "untainted" utopian ideals), so it's OK to bring good things in from the outside.
- There seemed to be very good communication among all the stakeholders.
- What are the mechanisms for discipline? There are many interesting "informal methods" that communities use to respond to bad behavior.
- There wasn't much development "theory" underpinning Gaviotas. How did this affect results? How does it compare to results of "well-planned" and theoretically grounded projects?
- They burned through tremendous amounts of money.
- Note that much of the decisions – siting, specific projects – came from inspiration and gut feeling, rather than analysis. There is lots of discussion of "magic" in the book.
- Most people that supply funding want a tremendous degree of predictability, of planning and expectations. That would not have worked for Gaviotas.
- It's a bit distressing that these folks did a little of everything – but they refuse to publish results. Why don't they share the results more widely? They worked in micro-hydro, and the things they did and

- things they learned should be passed along. In development of all places, we shouldn't be re-inventing the wheel in a suboptimal way.
- There aren't many problems that are completely unsolved. In most cases, there have been many attempts to solve, and many solutions that partly work – what remains is coming up that brilliant simple efficient solution.
 - It's not clear how the Gaviotas Manual Pump works from the picture and description. Instructors suggest this could be a good UROP project.
 - Gaviotas would not have happened were it not for the passion of its founder. His passion was not for dissemination, it was for the community and the projects happening within that community.
 - The book didn't talk much about the effect of broader policies, i.e. U.S. support for Columbian agriculture. Some of these policies probably had real effects, should be included in a thorough study of Gaviotas.
 - What's the best means to disseminate major development innovations? It depends on who the target users are...clearly, traditional journals don't reach the right audience.

Consensus is that this book was a good one to read, interesting and inspiring.

Haiti Projects – ORE

Guest Lecturer: David Dougherty – returned Peace Corps volunteer, now works for Organization for the Rehabilitation of the Environment, Haiti.
<http://www.oreworld.org>.

Premise of ORE: if the annual fruit/essential oils harvest of trees can be made more valuable than the tree's one-time use for charcoal, they won't cut it down.

ORE was started in 1985 by photographer Sean Finnigan, who was struck by the poverty of Haiti and wanted to do something, anything, to help. Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Agriculture is the most important sector of the Haitian economy. Trees are being cut down for reasons of survival, even though everyone knows in the long run the deforestation will have terrible consequences in this mountainous country. Currently less than 1% of original tree cover remains, leading to severe flash floods.

Somebody helped Sean create a small grafted fruit trees project with some funding. Why grafting? It allows harvesting 3-4 years after the graft, vs. 7-10 years for seed-based growth. Graft plants can be started in controlled conditions, and the host plant is already working in the local soils.

Of their initial 400 trees, 397 of them died. Then they got an agronomist to help out, and the project took off.

Established development organizations like USAID (Agency for International Development) and PADF (Pan American Development Foundation) talk about how many trees they planted or distributed as seedlings, but most of them

die. A much better metric of success would track trees that survive and produce.

As Haiti is lacking a functional government, all projects and progress relies on the passions and energies of individual people. ORE operates on this level, with small grants on the order of a few hundred thousand dollars. Large NGOs won't touch projects this financially-small.

For the years 1985-98, total funding from USAID, Canada and Europe was \$6.8M. With a conservative estimated 33% survival rate, and using worst case revenue projects (actually larger in practice), ORE projects have generated \$6.6M – close to break even, and a pretty good record for development projects.

ORE programs support the things needed by people in the community when they can't find anywhere else to turn. After many years and many attempted projects, ORE has become a clearinghouse for any community based initiatives, expanding into schools, computers, etc...

Program list

- Fruit trees
- Essential oils
- Improved Seeds
- Quality Protein Maize
- Plantain and Banana
- Other Improved Crops
- Training Programs
- Dried Fruit Factory
- Computer School
- HIV Prevention Training

What's next? Disease susceptibility of the host plant stock is a big risk with grafted fruit programs. Currently there are efforts to stem disease effects in the plantain and sweet potato stocks.