

Training Workshop to develop business skills of SMEs

The GIZ EPA Implementation Support Project and Caribbean Export Development Agency (Caribbean Export) recently held a first ProNET training Workshop in Barbados for twenty professionals connected with national and regional Business Support Organizations (BSOs). The participants were selected from across the CARIFORUM region to be trained as trainers of this interactive business development training programme.

The decision to begin the ProNET training programme came out of the findings of onsite visits to companies during an earlier INWEnt (now GIZ) and Caribbean Export training initiative. In 2010 InWEnt implemented a programme to assist in institutional strengthening and export marketing training for SMEs and BSOs targeted at specific sectors such as specialty food and beverages, furniture, handicraft and gifts, fashion/design. Three training sequences were implemented with a total of 74 participants from across the CARIFORUM region including 35 BSO staff members. Through contact with the SMEs it was apparent that many companies needed support to improve their basic productivity and competitiveness as a prerequisite for export readiness.

ProNET is a modular training programme for owners of Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) who want to develop their business and become more competitive and was designed for manufacturing enterprises, but could also be beneficial to SMEs from the retail and service sector. The training Programme was originally developed by a GIZ project in Southern Africa where the model of "Training Trainers" who then train SMEs has proved to be successful.

The Workshop was the first in a series of 3 sessions of the ProNET programme. The material comprises 8 modules and is now being adapted to the region. The participants at the recent Workshop are coached by two GIZ ProNET Consultants and actively work on the revision through an online portal. The group will gather again in late February to review the modules and to train the pool of trainers. Following the second workshop the newly trained BSO trainers will visit individual SMEs supervised by the GIZ Consultants where they will implement the ProNET tools and at the same time benefit from on-site coaching by the Consultants. At the end of this process the participants will be certified as ProNET Trainers and will be able to offer their services to SME's on their own.

As a GIZ contribution to the enabling business environment in the region, the ProNET trainer pool for BSOs and SMEs seeks to improve market access opportunities under the EPA. Together with Caribbean Export's mandate for private sector development under the 10th EDF Regional Trade and Private Sector Development Programme, the initiative is a strategic alignment of

objectives which allows for joint funding, effective programming and regional ownership of the training programme.