

# TAA AWARD FUND

## Jonathan Stern - Case Study

My career in sustainable development really kicked off thanks to the Tropical Agriculture Association Award Fund (TAAF). A long term award granted in 2008 made it possible for me to volunteer at the Small Producers' Association of Talamanca (APPTA) in Costa Rica for 6 months, a life changing experience which exposed me to the inner workings of development agriculture, fair-trade and farming with nature. Following this I was able to find further work as a business consultant to co-operatives in Belize, Panama and Costa Rica.

**Figure 1: On a break from profitability analysis at the Bocatoreñan Cocoa Cooperative**



When I approached TAAF I had been interested in working in international development for about six years. I had earlier done conservation and teaching work in Peru, as well as completing my degree in Economics and Politics and working for a year as a government economist.

Once in the field in Costa Rica, I found the creative opportunity to define my own role and contribute to small farmer development greatly empowering. I was able to use the quantitative skills I already possessed, and found myself quickly able to contribute with supply chain analysis. This led to analysis of the profitability of individual products, and finally fully-blown strategic and business plans with financial projection models. Essential to my own progress through these stages was a lot of experimentation, independent study and contacts I made in the field. The advice and support of my TAAF mentor was also invaluable.

Speaking with APPTA's effective general manager two years after my departure from Costa Rica I learned that the financial projection tool which I co-developed was still in use. The organization had consolidated its administration and was entering a period of relative stability although not all the organizational changes I recommended had worked out as planned. I am left really believing that the technical assistance provided by TAAF volunteers (and later TAA consultants!) can make a useful contribution to rural development.

I gained enormously from the professional and personal skills that I developed while in Central America. I currently work as an Economic Advisor to the UK government, working toward making UK agriculture more productive and sustainable. Although I currently do not work directly with developing country organizations, the knowledge of agriculture and agribusiness, as well as creative problem solving abilities, analytical, self reliance, and leadership skills that I developed while in the field have stayed with me and helped me to influence the direction of UK agricultural strategy. I am also sure

that my experience will continue to shape my future direction, in which I hope to continue to contribute to sustainable development wherever that takes me.

**Figure 2: APPTA staff quality testing cocoa purchased from a small holder farmer**



**Figure 3: rural people at an APPTA training session in Costa Rica**

