

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 11<sup>th</sup> 2018

Punta Gorda

Toledo, Belize



## **Improving access to Belize's first agroforestry concession**

On Friday, June 8<sup>th</sup> 2018, Ya'axché and the Trio Farmers Cacao Growers Association (TFCGA) inaugurated a bridge to improve access for 31 farmers growing cacao in a 936-acre agroforestry concession within the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve.

In anticipation of the harvest that will commence in 2018-2019 and addressing river flooding challenges faced by the farmers, Ya'axché with financial support from the GEF-Small Grants Programme in Belize constructed a 90-foot bridge at the entrance of the agroforestry concession. This bridge will facilitate timely transportation of the cacao beans and other farm products especially when the area becomes inaccessible due to flooding.

Ya'axché has been promoting agroforestry to diversify income for farming families, reduce erosion on farm slopes, generate layers of mulch that help prevent soil desiccation and support habitat conservation since 2005. In 2012, the TFCGA with support from Ya'axché began the dialogue with the Government of Belize for access rights to the forest reserve. In 2014, after extensive consultations and lobbying, Ya'axché managed to secure a 15-year permit to implement cacao-based agroforestry within the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve.

At the ending of 2014 each farmer began planting 2 acres of cacao and after 5 years, each farmer will be managing a total of 10 acres of cacao. With over 58,000 cacao trees planted within 165 acres, it is estimated that the farmers will harvest over 1,000 pounds of wet cacao beans at the end of 2018 as its initial harvest. It is estimated that 90,000 pounds of wet cacao beans will be harvested in 2019 as the cacao trees continue to mature. In addition, 28000 fingers of plantains, 1050 pounds of corn and 1000 pounds of peppers have been harvested.

This community agroforestry concession not only supports farming families but to also rehabilitates degraded land which was heavily used in the past for logging and cattle ranching. Ya'axché has been instrumental in creating a management plan, seeking investments, providing technical and material support to the members and leadership of the TFCGA. Many partners and donors have supported the work in the agroforestry concession which has engaged communities in the management of natural resources and improving their livelihoods in southern Belize.

**END.**

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