The Project
This project was initiated to develop a viable horticultural industry by taking advantage of the rich volcanic soils of Hope Vale. By providing expertise and practical support to local block holders, Balkanu has enabled the beginnings of a private enterprise farming culture by working with individuals and families to set up micro agricultural businesses.

It is now time to move this forward to Stage Two in order to broaden the production base and commercialise market opportunities.

Background
Over the past 18 months, Balkanu (with the support of an agricultural expert provided by Westpac on a two year Fellowship) has worked with local block holders to take the first steps in developing individual capacity and basic infrastructure as the first building blocks towards a viable horticultural industry in Hope Vale.

The ‘can do’ attitude of the block holders and their dedication in pouring their ‘sweat equity’ into preparing their land and planting their crops has impressed visitors to Hope Vale, and inspired other members of the community by showing what can be achieved through hard work and persistence.
Challenge

Stage One has demonstrated that the people of Hope Vale have the capacity to participate in the horticulture industry, and that commercial buyers have confidence in our ability to deliver quality produce into the future.

Where Stage One has demonstrated “proof of concept”, the next stage will ensure commercialisation of the projects.

At the centre of this commercialisation will be a producer driven co-operative entity.

Balkanu will temporarily undertake a central role in providing management, administrative and governance functions pending the transition to a future Hope Vale Producers Co-operative as the industry grows. This Co-operative will be developed initially in conjunction with the Hope Vale Congress of Clans and the Hope Vale Shire Council, but the long term intent would be to transition ownership to farmer shareholders. The Co-Op will support and enable local horticultural enterprise.

In this central role, Balkanu will provide a project oversight (negotiation and management of contracts with buyers) and expert horticultural and business advice. Balkanu will also expand the horticultural program to include the towns of Aurukun and Coen. At Hope Vale, Balkanu will provide on-ground practical assistance through an indigenous horticultural mentor (a local Hope Vale person)

The services Balkanu will deliver in Hope Vale will include:

- Packaging;
- Sorting;
- Cool room and storage;
- Farming equipment (tractor and accessories);
- Freshcare accreditation and crop spraying;
- Propagation of seedlings (market garden/nursery);
- Logistics and transport;
- Marketing;
- Insurance.

By bringing existing stakeholders such as local producers, Jobfind, Hope Vale Shire Council and the Congress of clans together, Balkanu will consolidate the hard work of Stage One, and take Hope Vale produce to market. This will be realised by building on existing infrastructure and human resources.

The services Balkanu will provide in Aurukun and Coen will include:

- Identification of suitable land and crops types
- Identification of potential markets from horticultural products
- Creating viable business entities to manage project
- Develop business plans
- Co-ordination of the training of workers
- Assisting indigenous people to develop enterprises round horticultural products
- Oversight of infrastructure development
- Project manage growing of crops.

Issues

Over the course of the first 18 months (Stage One), the project has overcome many setbacks. These varied from delays in funding release that lead to missed opportunities for cultivating seasonal crops, to the loss of the local indigenous horticultural mentor, the late Eddie Woibo.

An initial reliance on the CDEP program to provide their tractor and equipment unfortunately hindered progress. This was resolved by Balkanu taking the lead in leasing a dedicated tractor and equipment for agricultural development.

Balkanu has enabled a farming culture by working with individuals and families to set up micro agricultural businesses.
Outcomes

Stage Two will bring the ultimate proof of Hope Vale’s capacity to grow crops such as passionfruit, egg plant or fresh herbs that will be brought to market through buyers such as Coles and Island & Cape. Apart from the obvious economic outcomes, we should not neglect the direct nutritional impact on Hope Vale, and the wider Cape York communities. Many attempts have been made to grow fruit and vegetables locally through ‘community market gardens’. Most of these gardens have failed to provide the nutrition and food security needed in remote communities.

Balkanu’s financially viable, commercial approach in Hope Vale can be extended to other communities, that is, Coen has a potentially very productive market garden sitting idle. By providing healthy, locally grown produce, the remote communities of Cape York will reap additional nutritional benefits, with increased food security in the wet season.

Balkanu’s leading role, through an independent co-operative structure, will create jobs in a mix of self employed (micro) farmers, horticultural workers employed to work on the farms and market garden, and over time will see the development of horticultural support opportunities around packaging, transport, and contract spraying. This can be achieved in cooperation with existing JSA providers and CDEP.

Balkanu will build on the real outcomes of Stage One, and put together a detailed long term industry development plan which will be developed this calendar year. A longer term horticulture plan, broadened beyond Hope Vale, will seek to bring coordination to the growing of fruit and vegetables to include a ‘whole of government’ approach to nutrition and food security.
Proposed next stage

Buyers

Hope Vale Horticulture Project

Balkanu

Outback Spirit Foundation

Informal Farmers Co-op
determines crop and volume

Main Supply Area
3 days a week usingemployment programs

Serviced allotments- own labour

Serviced allotments- own labour

Serviced allotments- own labour

Option to save
through FIM

Opportunities to establish
farm with contract to
supply through co-op
or direct to customer

Future

As the longer term financial viability for
the Producers Co-operative has been
secured, Balkanu’s direct involvement
will evolve into an advisory supplier
of expertise on an as needed basis.
Further funding/finance could be
sourced through corporate investors,
loans, and the Hope Vale Congress
of Clans.

The Hope Vale Producers Co-operative,
over the long term, will be instrumental
in creating and managing a range of
employment opportunities, including
horticulture and ancillary service jobs
while supporting the development of a
self employed farmer culture.

The Co-operative will provide industry
expertise and economies of scale that
will develop this into a financially viable
and sustainable industry.

In the longer term, the better returns
from horticultural enterprise are expected
to lie in value adding manufacturing
of Hope Vale indigenous branded
products, using locally grown produce,
that is, jams, sauces, dips. This can be
achieved in partnership with experienced
manufacturers such as Robin’s Foods,
using Hope Vale produce, recipes and
branding.

The Hope Vale Producers Co-operative
will also play an important role in
assisting independent farmers to access
low interest (indigenous) loans from
profits from the Co-operatives activities
and low cost lenders such as the ADAI
Indigenous Independence Scheme, IBA,
NAB micro finance, or other suitable
providers to help set up or expand small
scale farms.

Experience worldwide shows that a
viable, self-sustaining regional farming
industry develops over the longer term.
Land development, people development,
and produce and market development
do not happen overnight. Stage One
has shown it is possible. Stage Two will
make this Hope Vale industry a reality
and expand this successful program into
other communities.

Footnote: A box off passionfruit was sent to
Melbourne in March 2011 to be assessed by
Coles’ buyers. The buyers loved the look, size
and taste. Look out for Hope Vale fruit and
vegetables on Coles’ shelves soon.

For more information contact:
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