

Tourism in Laborie, St. Lucia: baseline study and identification of potential for development

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This report is a product of a research project aimed at testing and developing tools, methods and approaches critical to the sustainable development of coastal communities in the Caribbean and other parts of the world. The project, called *People and the Sea: a Study of Coastal Livelihoods in Laborie, St. Lucia*, is implemented by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) in collaboration with the Laborie Development Planning Committee (LDPC), the Department of Fisheries in the Government of St. Lucia, and a number of governmental and community organisations. *People and the Sea* is funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) under its Natural Resources Systems Programme, and receives technical assistance from the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in the UK.

The primary focus of this initiative is on testing and developing specific tools and methods in participatory planning, institutional design and sustainable use. *People and the Sea* therefore tests, develops, refines and documents methods that aim at increasing effective participation of stakeholders in all stages of planning and management. It also explores and documents technologies and management tools which can enhance the social and economic benefits derived from the sustainable use of coastal resources, and particularly from the reef fishery, sea urchin harvesting, seaweed cultivation and heritage tourism. At the same time, the project will help to evaluate the impact of participation on the sustainability of resource use and on the livelihoods of people, by identifying and monitoring concrete linkages between institutional and technological change on the one hand, and the well-being of both the people and the reefs on the other. At the end of the project, results will be analysed, documented and disseminated for the benefit of resource managers and policy makers within and outside the Caribbean region.

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Introduction

“Small scale, cooperatively managed, sea-based tourism initiatives can lead to economic benefits for the women and men of Laborie, especially the poor”.

This statement is indicative of an aspiration of the “People and Sea” project to explore ways in which coastal resources can be used to generate economic benefits through tourism. In order to carry out this exploration, the project will, over the next 18 months, conduct a research case study in the village of Laborie, Saint Lucia, that will identify and document some of the policies, approaches and methods needed to generate sustainable and equitable social and economic benefits from tourism development, with a particular attention to the needs and aspirations of poor people.

In support of this case study, a base line survey and an analysis of field data were conducted, for the purpose of describing the natural and human capital available in the community, and of assessing the current impact of tourism on local livelihoods. This report presents the results of this survey, and it is hoped that it will also provide sufficient background information and suggestions to guide the experimental design and implementation of tourism-related activities over the next few months and years.

The process used in this survey was as follows:

- An examination of St. Lucia’s experience to date in tourism for rural development, and an extraction of the main lessons learned from that experience.
- A description of the features of tourism in the village of Laborie.
- An examination of the current tourism related skills and interests in Laborie.
- An examination of the economic impacts of tourism, in terms of income, employment, access to credit and capital.

The methods used to collect the information for this study were participatory and intended to allow the stakeholders in the process of development to contribute to design and results as much as possible. Consequently, the collection of information was directed by a person from the local community, with inside knowledge of the tourism-related activities and individuals in the area, and the purpose of the survey was clearly explained to all informants. The information was collected with a deliberate attempt by the lead researcher not to influence the outcomes or decide the sources of information. In addition, questionnaires were administered by independent enumerators. Interviews were conducted in a manner principally designed to extract information and not to direct the responses.

The description of the overall experience of tourism in St. Lucia is the result of an analysis of selected cases, and a review of the relevant literature. The past and current features of tourism in Laborie were constructed via interviews, questionnaires and a

review of relevant documents and files. The examination of tourism-related skills and of the human capital available for tourism development in Laborie was based on an analysis of the livelihood impacts of tourism-related activities both in and out of the geographic community. The economic impacts of tourism-related activities were assessed via a structured examination of five different sectors. These sectors include vending, accommodation, restaurants, arts and craft, and water-sports. These categories were deliberately chosen by the community people involved in the research.

Tourism for rural development

Much of the recent literature on tourism for rural development focuses on the concept of “pro-poor tourism”, referring to a type of tourism that generates net benefits for poor people. These benefits need not only be economic, but could also be social, environmental or cultural. However, whilst the terminology is now widely accepted in the developed countries of the world, most developing states take offence to the use of the term. It has been described as disparaging and even patronizing. To many, it conveys the impression of handing out benefits to poor people, rather than reflecting the concept of people in the developing world using their resources, however limited, and playing their part to increase the economic benefits that might be accrued through that economic activity. There is a growing sensitivity among developing countries, St. Lucia included, that the relationship between the market and the producer must be one of mutual respect and competitiveness, and that the tourism product must be shaped by local needs and realities. As the countries of the Caribbean are called upon to become more competitive in every aspect of their development, terms like “pro-poor” reiterate an image of dependence upon “preference”, rather than an aspiration to be “competitive” and to succeed on the basis of performance and quality.

Caribbean tourism has actually operated on the premise of competitiveness from its inception. Visitors are not coerced into visiting the Caribbean. The weather and beaches are the primary attractions for visitors to this part of the world, and even though market share has dropped, particularly over the past decade, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation continues to record relatively significant growth rates in the region, in the vicinity of 5 % per annum.

One of the main challenges faced by Caribbean governments at this time is to reduce the economic leakages from tourism. This loss of revenue comes primarily from profit repatriations as well as payments for imported goods and services (Brohman 1996). These leakages make it difficult for tourism to provide the engine for economic development that agriculture did, primarily through bananas in Saint Lucia and the other Windward Islands. In addition, the negative environmental impacts associated with mass tourism threatens to place the Caribbean islands on a downward slope towards unsustainable tourism development. The growth of the cruise sector by over 200 per cent in the last five years challenges the resources of St. Lucia to manage those large increases in a sustained way.

Alternative approaches to tourism development, including community-based tourism, have been explored as a possible way to encourage small-scale locally owned tourism

enterprises that can generate employment and revenue at the local level, contribute to reducing fiscal leakages, and attenuate the impact of large numbers of visitors on the environmental landscape. But problems of access to the market for these initiatives, as well as an inadequate policy framework, continue to make this sector largely insignificant.

In any case, an approach to rural development through tourism is extremely complex, and it does not mean that wealthy people should not benefit as well. The relative distribution of the benefits is of no consequence (Ashley *et al.* 2001). The collaboration of various stakeholders, given the multi-faceted nature of tourism itself, is a hindrance to effective participation and benefit sharing. However, the principles of community involvement in decision making, with emphasis on community resources and local technology, and the sustainable principles of consumptive practices through attaching an economic value to natural resources, are worthwhile strategies that have the potential to achieve developmental objectives through tourism (Western and Wright 1994). Given this premise, if a community benefits from the construction of a hotel by getting better road access, more regular water supply, electrification or improved waste management, these are benefits for rural development, even if local people have no direct connections to the tourism initiative itself. When one speaks about *developmental tourism* or *community-based tourism*, one does not necessarily refer to a form of tourism that requires direct involvement of the community at all levels, even though such participation is always preferable.

Tourism in Saint Lucia

St. Lucia currently attracts approximately 700,000 visitors per year contributing approximately US\$275 million in tourism earnings, and 13.4% of GDP. However, economic leakages in St. Lucia are estimated to stand at 45%, which is a higher percentage than in its comparable neighbours, namely Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, and Jamaica. All-inclusive hotels account for some 55% of the accommodation stock, though this is decreasing with the rapid expansion of the European Plan (EP) bed stock. This expansion will provide an excellent opportunity for small rural tourism products to gain access to this new visitor market. But the internal linkages and systems that allow small entrepreneurs to access this market are weak. The St. Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme, set up in 1998, developed several complementary quality products, but access to the market continues to plague the sector and to limit economic opportunities for poor people and local communities (Renard 2001).

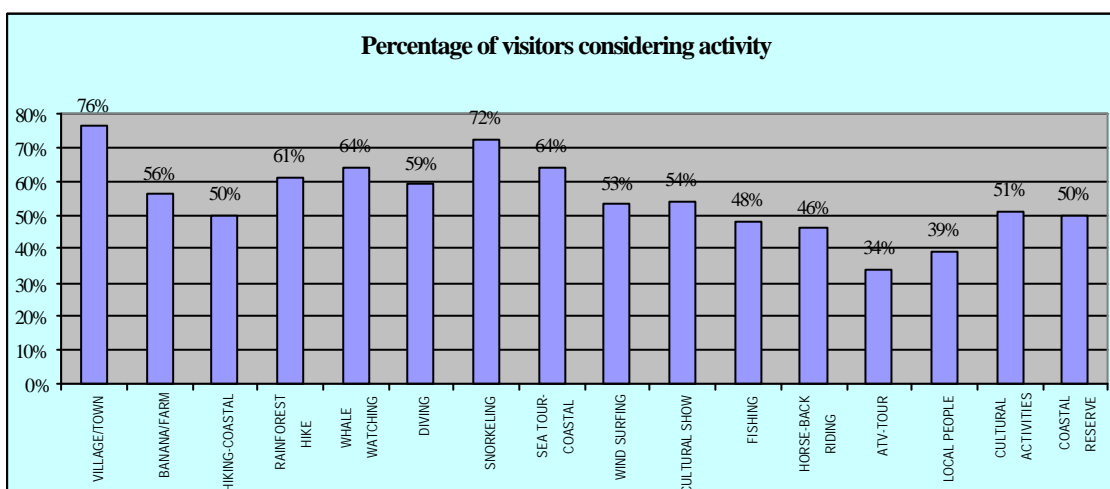
All debates around tourism development must be informed by an accurate understanding of the product sought by the visitor, and of the cultural and socio-economic profile of that visitor. Research conducted by the St. Lucia Tourist Board, and confirmed by independent studies, indicates that visitors to St. Lucia are attracted primarily by the warm and sunny weather and the beaches. Clauzel (2001) found that 95% of all visitors to St. Lucia visited the beach. That study, which attempted to assess the potential for product development and market access for the near-by town of Vieux-Fort, indicated that 38% of visitors to that area patronize wind water-sports. Although this figure may appear low when compared to visitation to major sites such as the Sulphur Springs or

some of the most popular waterfalls, both enjoying 58% patronage, other activities like visitation to Parks/Reserves and Excursions¹, which are the next most patronized activity, enjoy a mere 44 and 40 per cent respectively. From that perspective, water-sporting activities appear to have great potential.

Sites & Attractions	% of Patrons	Index of Satisfaction		Sites & Attractions	% of Patrons	Index of Satisfaction
Beach	95	4.5		Water-sports (Motor)	29	4.7
Sulphur Springs	57.5	3.9		Diving	25	4.3
Waterfalls	57.5	4.2		Rain Forest	23	4.6
Excursions	44	4.4		Horse-Back Riding	13	4.2
Parks/Reserves	40	4.3		Whale Watching	12.5	4.1
Water-sports (Wind)	38	4.4		Jungle-Tour By 4wd	6.0	4.9
Cultural Show	31	4.2		Turtle Watching	4.1	4.0

Table 1. Visitor Patronage of Activities and Satisfaction Indices in descending order of patronage (Table taken from Clauzel 2001)

In that same study, when visitors were asked about their willingness to patronize certain activities should these be made available, water-based activities dominated, with snorkeling and coastal sea tours attracting 72 and 64 percent respectively. A day-visit to a village or town scored the highest with 76% of the visitors indicating a willingness to patronize.



The comparatively low scores for willingness to stay with local people (39%) or participate in cultural activities (51%) is symptomatic of the type of visitor currently being attracted to the island, but do not suggest that these elements cannot be part of a viable and sustainable tourism product.

¹ Excursions refer primarily to coastal boat trips or day-trips by sea or air to neighbouring islands.

The history of tourism in Laborie

Tourism development and tourism-related activities in the village of Laborie can almost all be traced back to the operations of the Halcyon Days hotel in the nearby, southern town of Vieux-Fort during the 1970s. This hotel was built in 1971 by a UK company called Court Line, which also owned the airline LIAT as well as several other hotels in the region. The hotel had 256 rooms, but the original intention was to expand it progressively to a total of 750 rooms. In 1974, however, Court Line went bankrupt and the hotel was liquidated. It was purchased by the Government of St. Lucia and a private company in 1979. After several years of poor performance, it was eventually closed in 1984, and purchased by the French company Club Med in 1986.

The majority of the people from Laborie who are currently involved in a tourism-related activity can trace their involvement back to Halcyon Days, and particularly to the years between 1971 and 1974, when the hotel performed well. In particular, many of the successful entrepreneurs in the area attest to the fact that their entry into the tourism business began at Halcyon Days, when invited to participate in the water-sports department of that hotel. In addition, several farmers and fishers in the Laborie area used to sell produce and goods to that hotel, and as a result gained familiarity with and understanding of the tourism sector. Over the past three decades, Laborians have continued to seek employment in the tourism sector in other parts of the island, but there have been very few opportunities for tourism-related activities within the community.

Laborie's natural capital

The potential of tourism development in Laborie should first be assessed against its natural capital. The main elements of that capital are presented in the table below.

Type of resource	Current tourism use	Management issues
Overall landscape	Attractive to all visitors	Deforestation, architectural quality
Rainforest and trails	Very occasional	Trail development, and promotion
Waterfalls	Occasional, primarily by locals	Water quality, deforestation
Farms and rural landscapes	No use, but plans being formulated by Black Bay Farmers Association	Product development and promotion
Coral reefs	No use	Pollution and poor water quality near shore, risks of overfishing
Beaches	Extensive use by locals, especially at Rudy John Beach Park, and by residents of local hotel and guest houses	Pollution and poor water quality, user conflicts, sand mining, waste management
Bays	Occasional use for windsurfing, small but regular use by yachts	Need for moorings for yachts
Morne Leblanc site	Occasional, primarily by locals, pic-nics and family outings	Need for additional facilities, land ownership issue
Architecture and village life	Very little, primarily by passengers on yachts moored in the bay and residents of local hotel and guest houses	Preservation of architectural quality
Cultural events	Important but few	Need for calendar of activities and promotion of events

Human capital

Water-based skills

As noted above, many of these skills were initially developed at the Halcyon Days hotel in Vieux Fort. Although persons came from all over the island to get jobs in different areas of the hotel, thanks to personal and family connections, and thanks to their diving and boating skills, the water-sports department was dominated by young men from the village of Laborie. Six young men, all from this area, initially got jobs in the water-sports department and from hence, continued to play an active role in the water-sport departments in hotels all over the island for the next two decades. From this inception, twelve persons were identified from the village of Laborie, who currently work in water-based activities either at major hotels on the island or are self-employed. These persons hold positions as dive masters, captains, water-sports supervisors and navigation instructors.

Ancillary services

Another group of people in the sector is that of hotel workers, many of whom also had their first experiences at the Halcyon Days hotel. These persons include chamber maids, kitchen staff, bartenders, gardeners, waiters and waitresses, electricians, mechanics and other maintenance personnel. This research was not able to identify all these persons, but reports from other tourism workers suggest that these skills are abundant and form a significant grouping of the human capital skilled in tourism related work. However, many of these persons have moved out of the village and are difficult to trace. There are indications that many of these people would re-establish residence in their village of origin if they were able to find employment there.

Investment potential

There are a number of skilled persons working and residing out of Laborie, but with interest in investing in the community if that became attractive. This research was able to identify two persons in that category, both with interest in the accommodation sector. This interest was not matched by most of the other respondents, and is insightful. That sector however, is owned predominantly by middle to upper class persons with discretionary incomes. Their capacity to invest once the opportunity appeared viable is significant.

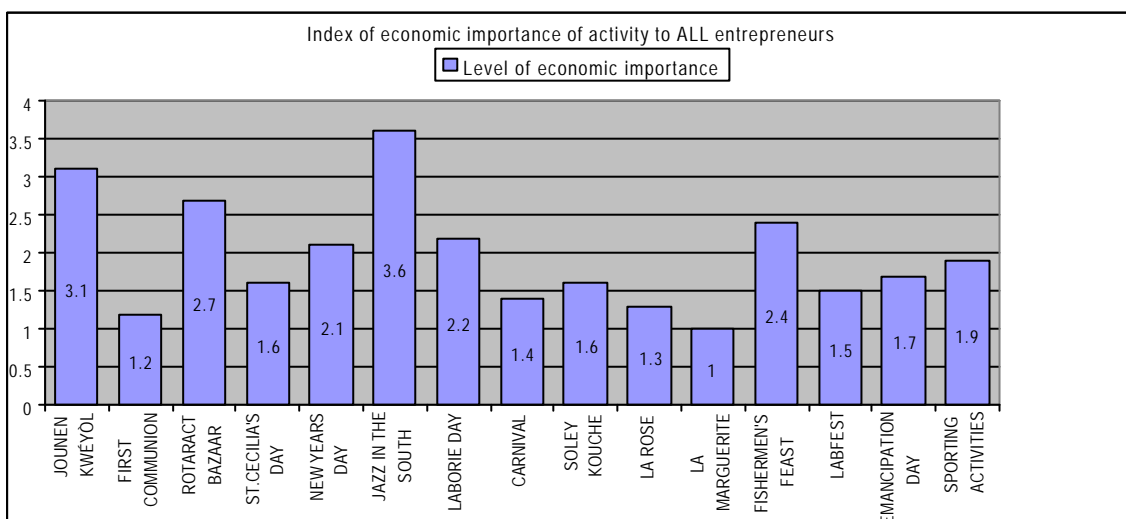
Economic impacts

The current economic impacts of local tourism activities on Laborie are marginal. However, because the human capital is so significant, its resources deployed in tourism-related activities around the island contribute to economic livelihoods for over 30 different families currently residing in the village. Also, the fact that over seventy per cent of respondents in this survey depend almost entirely on their tourism related work for an income is worthy of note. It points to the significance of the tourism industry to the livelihoods of the village of Laborie, which is not always apparent.

Entrepreneurial activities

Most entrepreneurial activity in the tourism sector is conducted among middle-aged persons. The primary problems expressed by these people include the lack of capital, absence of adequate visitor accommodation in the village, and lack of activities to lure visitors to the bay. Youth as well as mature persons appear to be involved in few entrepreneurial exploits. But young people simply do not have the capital for investment, while most mature people feel that they are too old to engage in entrepreneurial activities. The local Credit Union has a good reputation in supporting domestic investments, but the same cannot be said for entrepreneurial activities. There was a general reluctance, expressed by the persons interviewed, to seek financial support from the Credit Union for entrepreneurial objectives. The views of the Credit Union representatives were not sought on this matter.

In this survey, questionnaires were distributed to a fairly equal number of persons in terms of gender, and there appears to be a clear distribution of occupation in relation to sex. Six out of eight vendors identified and interviewed were women, whilst there were no women involved in water-based activities. All divers who are also fishers were men. These persons depend on the resources of the sea for their livelihood. They are largely pot or spear-fishers. In the past they also harvested wild seamoss, and the seasonal sea-urchin or lobster.

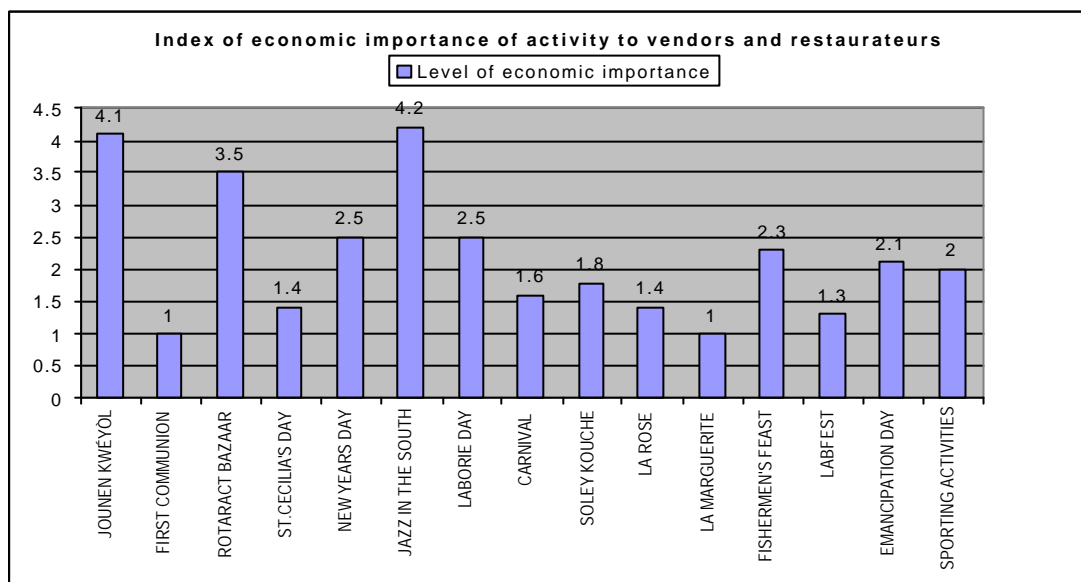


In this survey, local entrepreneurs were asked to indicate, on a scale of one to five, the economic relevance of various activities to their livelihood pursuits. The activity with the greatest economic significance for entrepreneurs was undoubtedly Jazz in the South (3.6). This was followed closely by Jounen Kwéyòl (3.1), the Rotaract Bazaar (2.7) and Fishermen's Feast (2.4). Jounen Kwéyòl and the Jazz Festival are national events that attract island-wide patronage. These activities generally entice a large number of visitors as opposed to the other more localised activities. But it should be noted that the Rotaract Bazaar and Fishermen's Feast are very localised activities, and yet are able to be of greater economic importance to entrepreneurs. It appears that unless the community is

host to a major activity, the returns from local patronage will be small. This may explain why the flower festivals (La Rose and La Marguerite), Carnival, New Year's Day and Emancipation Day appear not to have any major economic importance to local small-scale entrepreneurs.

Having made these preliminary points, the overall picture still looks relatively bleak with the highest rating being 3.6 and a mean score of 1.96 on a scale of 1 to 5. This can be explained by the inclusion of divers and water-sport operators in this survey, since they depend very little on these activities. Perhaps a better picture of the scenario can be appreciated if vendors and restaurant operators are taken separately.

Whereas the overall picture is consistent in terms of relative economic importance of activities, the significance of certain activities is even more apparent. Jazz in the South (4.2) tops the list with Jounen Kwéyòl (4.1) in a close second place.



It is clear that activities held in the community are of greater economic importance to vendors and restaurateurs than they are to water-sport operators. This is perhaps obvious in view of the nature of the activities described; but it does explain why all the water-sport operators work outside of the village. In other words, there is little connection between the human and physical resources of Laborie described above as comparatively higher than most other communities, in terms of water-based activities, and the type of activities actually held in the village.

Service

Employment in the service sector of the tourism industry outside of the village is dominated by youth. This includes airport services, tour representatives, and airline clerks. This income brings much needed additional earnings into families, and

respondents in this survey indicated being responsible for various domestic charges like helping out with utility bills. A significant component of this work experience is the fact that these young persons are learning skills in customer relations, which appear to be lacking in older entrepreneurs. They also develop an overall understanding of and familiarity with the tourism sector.

Vending

Vending is a popular activity and a source of income to many. It is largely opportunistic, whereby vendors target activities that attract crowds of spending people. There are three types of vendors. Firstly, there are those who sell largely locally produced foods like float, bakes, fried chicken, etc., as well as beverages, but who conduct this on a part-time basis. (The ingredients for the produce of these items are largely imported, for example flour for the bakes and float, as well as chicken.) They comprise the typical opportunistic vendor who monitors social activities in the village, and takes the opportunity to vend on the perimeter of those activities. The second type of vendor is also opportunistic but tends to be a specialist, operating on a national level and on a full-time basis. The third type is also full-time, sells similar products to the first type, but conducts business on a permanent, almost daily basis in the village. There are similarities and differences between the vendors. The first and third type have similar products. However, the second type who operates on a national level, specializes in in-season fruits, including nuts, *tjénèt* (known also as ackee), plums, and confectionery and drinks.

The persons interviewed in this survey indicated that they are able to make a decent livelihood from this activity. This includes sending children to school, as well as taking loans to purchase homes. One very enterprising vendor, belonging to the second category, paid-off a mortgage of approximately 60,000 dollars in six years.

Vendors as well as restaurateurs tend to purchase from suppliers within the community. They buy fish and other sea foods from the local fishermen, and vendors purchase drinks and other confectionery from local shops. On an average, a small-scale vendor would purchase approximately one hundred dollars worth of dry goods from a local supplier in one week.

A restaurateur catering regularly to the local market would purchase approximately one hundred and fifty dollars in fish from a local fisherman per week. This can triple or quadruple during festivals like Jazz in the South, or Jounen Kwéyòl, where highest economic returns are experienced. The economic significance of these activities has been discussed in a prior section.

Arts and craft

There is a loose grouping of craft producers in the village comprising approximately eight members. Their activities are largely part-time and earnings are used to complement existing occupations. The main items produced are souvenir products made from dried banana leaves and coconut shells; dolls and loofah products; crochet; and hand paintings. The main difficulties encountered by the craft producers are associated with the marketing of their products. They claim that most outlets in the island's northern tourism

belt will only take items on consignment and that there is a general reluctance to purchase craft items. The craft items have an average price of EC\$30.00.

A few years ago, the government's Poverty Reduction Fund financed the building of a craft-vending outlet along the village by-pass road, but inadequate design and security considerations have prevented the craft producers from using this outlet. The structure is currently being used as a shelter. A spokesperson for the craft producers has estimated that EC\$5,000.00 is required to make the outlet usable as a vending area, and negotiations are currently underway to upgrade this facility and make it suitable to vending and promoting local arts and craft items.

Accommodation

In the village of Laborie, twelve rooms available for visitors were identified, distributed among five different properties. One small beach-front hotel accounts for half the number of rooms available. The other rooms are additions to private homes and apartment rentals.

Marketing of the facilities identified is almost non-existent. Most depend on word-of-mouth, but two properties have web-sites and two have an international representative. The earnings from this sector are negligible. Average occupancy is below 30%. Only one property derives 100% income from this activity, and average occupancy of that particular property is less than 50%.

The properties all seem to have a sense of the need to have mechanisms for natural resource management in place. For example, they all have water tanks and three out of the five have solar water heating. Two properties have low-wattage lighting. This sensitivity to natural resource management instruments is insightful, however this does not appear to be matched by active systems to manage waste or utility consumption.

There is an awareness of the basic requirements for running an accommodation property for visitors. All the properties have hot and cold water, wardrobes, and adequate furniture. Four of the properties have private baths and three are located in areas that provide very scenic views for guests. Two properties have coffee makers in the rooms.

The absence of other ancillary services is not unusual and quite typical of this type of village accommodation. Most of the properties are within walking distance to a beach and are all self-catering, or may provide bed and breakfast if requested by the visitor. There is a lot of flexibility as expressed by the managers of the properties interviewed. The managers live on site, and this allows for a very personalised service to guests. Most stayover visitors use Laborie only as a base and move out of the village for most activities. This is the reason why many persons interviewed indicate the need for increased accommodation to support other ancillary services in the village. However, most respondents to this survey appeared less interested in accommodation and more in the activities sector. There appears to be a perception that this is a high-risk undertaking. Persons seem to prefer to wait for a sizeable accommodation investment in order to trigger their own investment in activities within the village.

Information from well-placed sources has indicated that a major 250-room property with US based investors was expected to begin construction this year. However, the September 11th 2001 terrorist attack on the USA has reportedly resulted in the stalling of this project, with no date set for re-commencement.

Restaurants

There are few established restaurants in the village, and these depend heavily on drive-by visitors, particularly on holidays and weekends. They are hardly patronized by the villagers, even those persons with adequate disposable income. It is however the highest single employer among tourism related activities in the village, with one property employing seven persons.

Marine-based activities

The skills of water-based activity operators, which abound in the village, have been described earlier. They are on demand not just in the hotel where they work. These expert divers free-lance as well, and bring in additional income to the village. For example, in a good month, private jobs can surpass the regular earnings of a water-sports expert. A certified diving instructor will be paid US\$30 per person to accompany visitors on a dive. The group is often as large as five persons. Because diving is so infectious, says one diver, the visitors may request more than one dive in that day. It costs approximately US\$400 over one week to certify a diver. The water-based experts from Laborie indicate that set-up cost for a dive shop is estimated at US\$60,000. Given the returns indicated, and in the absence of a feasibility study, it is fair to suggest that should the market become available, the capacity for increased livelihoods for local persons from water-based activities seems tremendous.

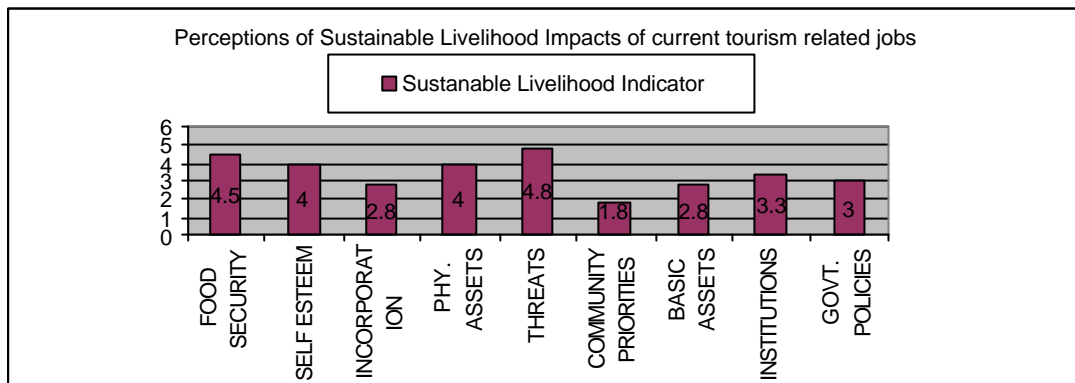
The Laborie bay is occasionally used by yachts, but the economic impact of this activity is limited, principally because crews and passengers seldom come to shore, using this area simply as an overnight anchorage on the way to or from St. Vincent. Customs laws and regulations do not encourage yachting in the area: since Laborie is not a Port of Entry nor a Port of Call, yachts have to clear customs at another port, except when they have been issued a Permit to Moor. This permit allows them to moor or anchor for one night outside of an official port, but without permission to disembark.

Whale-watching is a quickly growing tourism activity nationally, attracting 12.5 % of the visitor market. Laborie-based entrepreneurs are already engaged in this activity, averaging 60 clients per week, including locals. However, there is a growing conflict between whale-watching tour operations and *blackfish* or pilot whale fishers in the country. The escalation of this conflict will have to be contained if the potential for this industry is to be realised. Mutual respect for the pursuit of livelihood exploits through sustainable *blackfish* fishing and the enjoyment of whale-watching activities for visitors and locals is a challenge for both the fishing and tourism sectors.

The future of tourism in Laborie

The residents of Laborie who participated in this study all expressed a view and a vision of the type of tourism development they would like to see in their community. The importance of this vision, both philosophical as well as physical, has implications for the livelihoods of the people of Laborie.

People involved in the sector and interviewed in this survey were asked to indicate on a scale of one to five how they felt that their work contributed to certain livelihood indicators. Most respondents felt that their work contributed significantly to their own self-esteem, and their ability to provide for themselves and their families. However,



many persons did not feel that this led to a sense of incorporation. This perception was further confirmed when asked about influencing government policies or that of developmental institutions. Most persons felt that their influence was marginal in that regard, and that they did not have the opportunity to participate in policy-making and management. In addition, persons interviewed felt that the priorities of the community were hardly addressed by their current job. However, one respondent, who uses the bay extensively for his livelihood, held an opposing view. He felt that his persistent use of the resources of the bay, in as sustainable a manner as was possible, contributed significantly to focusing the attention on a community priority, which is the managed use of the marine resources in the bay.

The beach

Most persons interviewed considered that tourism development in Laborie stood its best chance if greater advantage was taken of the marine resources. The beach is described as the “nicest” and perhaps the best managed by any community on the island. It is cleaned regularly, and there are park benches and facilities for entertainment. The bay is calm, protected and ideal for snorkeling and swimming. However, persistent illegal sand-mining continues to threaten this relatively narrow, though attractive beach. The Laborie Village Council is reportedly not fully aware of the extent of the impact of this activity, but resource users of the bay lament that this activity is having serious and visible impacts. Village Council representatives have articulated a commitment to stamping out this activity.

Arts and craft sector

The comparatively high average price of craft items is indicative of the difficulties experienced in attracting sale for craft produce. This is not to suggest that the items are over-priced. But they do not reflect the pricing of souvenir products that is consistent with the type of tourist currently dominating the St. Lucia visitor market. Craft producers will need to allow the market to influence, not necessarily the type of product, but the size and price, if they are to break into the craft market in the short term.

Human capital for water-based tourism

The abundance of human capital in the area of water-based activities makes this a natural synergy. Most of the divers described the reefs as attractive. One experienced diving instructor, who has over 25 years experience in the more popular dive sites on the island, says that the average visitor to the island is an amateur, and will no doubt find the snorkeling in the Laborie Bay very satisfying. Laborie also presents an opportunity to release the stress off the more frequently dived sites in the Soufriere region, on the island's west coast. There is the added opportunity to cater to the local market to train both children and adults to swim, snorkel and dive. With a combination of adequate physical and human assets, all residing in the village, Laborie can emerge as a water-sports centre for local and regional tourism. The potential for viewing whales and other marine mammals also offers a tremendous opportunity for expansion into the tourism industry by Laborie based entrepreneurs.

Seamoss

The importance of seamoss cultivation was also highlighted by users of the bay. The opportunities for economic activity were described both in terms of the production of the seamoss drink as well as tours to the seamoss farms to explain the cultivation practices and the natural resource management issues related to this new and intriguing farming practice.

Accommodation

There is a consensus that the lack of sufficient and adequate accommodation within the village is a major hindrance to taking advantage of the opportunities to generate economic activity through water-based activities. In the absence of external investment in a relatively large hotel (150 – 200 rooms), which can catalyze this activity, there is need for further investment in the accommodation sector with a corresponding and adequate marketing thrust. If the character of existing accommodation is to be continued, the national and regional markets can provide an opportunity.

Mature retired persons with extra disposal income or savings could be encouraged to examine the possibility of investing in the accommodation sector, with a focus on bed and breakfast facilities. Returns would undoubtedly be slow initially; however, with a corresponding marketing thrust either to the local or regional markets, this can be alleviated.

Financial credit

The Laborie Co-operative Credit Union, which is described as a successful and stable financial institution within the community, could begin to examine ways to facilitate micro/medium enterprise development. The focus could be on training and capacity building initially, before investments are made in physical assets. The potential of the local banking sector, especially the indigenous banks, should also be explored to assess policies on financing for the small-medium enterprise development sector. There is also the possibility of attracting external funding from organisations such as the World Bank, through the Global Environment Fund (GEF), which is currently active in St. Lucia, and the Caribbean Development Bank, which is increasingly demonstrating confidence in tourism development in rural communities.

Physical assets

Most persons believe that the northern end of the beach, which already possesses basic facilities, should be the point of focus for water-based tourism development. Persons state their preference for non-motorised activities in the bay. Many also recommend a regular Kwéyòl food fair at the already established Rudy John Beach Park.

In this survey, the greatest level of support went towards the building of a jetty. Most people interviewed believe that this would generate economic activity through attracting yachts. However, persons involved in the water-based sector point out that the presence of a jetty will not automatically attract the yachting sector. This has to be complemented with the installation of mooring buoys, perhaps a dinghy-dock platform attached to the jetty, and a strategic marketing plan, preferably directed at the Martinique to the Grenadines yachting market. No preference was expressed for the location of the jetty. The potential for the jetty's contribution to increased economic activity was also unclear. However, it is a widely supported assumption that the jetty could provide the impetus to generate tourism-related opportunities in the Laborie Bay.

Conclusion

These indications of visitor willingness to participate in products and services for which Laborie has the human and natural capital suggest the high potential that this community has for tourism development. The accommodation sector is certainly the primary area of concern, which if harnessed to the required standards may produce the catalyzing effect envisioned.

The recent surge of local interest in swimming, recognised by the Sports Department of the Ministry of Education, resulting in discussions on inter-school swimming competitions, also presents an opportunity for Laborie to lead the way in the development of water-based activities for a local market.

The major problem perhaps lies in the sanitary quality of the water. This is discussed in another research paper, but this problem is nationwide and was highlighted by respondents to this survey as the number one negative impact on the quality of the coastal marine environment.

Overall, there appears to be a shared vision of a marine based tourism product, with significant investment in the accommodation sector, and some product enhancement coupled with environmental and industry standards development. It is hoped that this report will help, even if in a modest way, towards the realisation of that vision.

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