



Twigs Naturals:

A local green-blue enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago 2019

CASE STUDY #4: Local Green-Blue Enterprises in the Caribbean

This case study reflects findings of a process using CANARI's **Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar**¹. This is a tool to help local community small and micro-enterprises assess how they are delivering 'triple-bottom line' benefits (economic, environmental and social) and good governance, and what are possible areas for improvement. A focus group session is facilitated with members of the enterprise and they are asked to assess how they think that the business is doing based on a set of indicators. Each indicator is discussed, and members agree on a ranking for each. The ranking for each indicator is placed on a spider diagram, which visually represents a snapshot of how the enterprise is delivering benefits. The rich discussion helps members of the enterprise work together to assess how they are doing and areas where they want to grow.

Introduction to the enterprise

Twigs Naturals is a local green-blue enterprise founded by Nigel Jordan and Cheryl-Ann Baptiste in 2016 that makes 100% natural herbal teas in Arima, Trinidad using all-natural ingredients. Types of tea include mint, lemongrass, garlic, ginger, orange peel, citrine (a blend of lemongrass and orange peel), bamboo, green, moringa and Caribbean Christmas Tea (made with sorrel [wild hibiscus]).

The teas are produced at the company's new facility in after operations were relocated in 2018 after the business got too big for its original site. The new premises are in a quiet residential area at the foothills of Trinidad's Northern Range, with lots of trees, flowering plants, birds and even a river. Even as it strives to be a leader in all-natural teas, Twigs Naturals seeks to give back to its community by hiring people, mainly single mothers, who would otherwise find it difficult to get a job that pays a decent wage. The company also participates in events promoting environmental sustainability to build its network of suppliers and consumers, thus helping to grow the business over time.



Some of the Twigs Naturals teas. PHOTO BY CANARI.

¹ See here for more information on the Local Green-Blue Enterprises Radar and CANARI's work:
<http://www.canari.org/progrAMMES/issue-programmes/green-economy>



(Left to right) Twigs Naturals' co-founder, Nigel Jordan, accepts the award for Start Up Entrepreneur of the Year 2017 from the Wade George of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, as Twigs Natural co-founder, Cheryl-Ann Baptiste looks on happily. PHOTO COURTESY TWIGS NATURALS.

Within a year of it becoming operational, the company gained recognition both at home and abroad for the quality of its teas and their environmentally-friendly packaging. Their bags are resealable and made from recycled paper while their labels are made using post-consumable paper. Twigs Naturals was named Start Up Entrepreneur of the Year 2017 by the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce at its annual Champions of Business Awards. Internationally, its Caribbean Christmas Tea and Mint Tea earned top spots at the 2017 Global Tea Championship – an annual event where tea professionals give out awards for the highest quality and best tasting teas commercially available globally. Twigs Naturals products are sold at several gourmet stores in Trinidad and Tobago, including in the international airport as well as in fine dining restaurants. International shipping is available via the company's website.

Economic benefits of the enterprise



(Left to right) Twigs Naturals' co-founder Cheryl-Ann Baptiste shares a joke with a customer at UpMarket in December 2018. PHOTO BY CANARI.

Twigs Naturals provides a reliable source of income for farmers who would otherwise face up-and-down demand for their herb and seasoning crops. The number of farmers who supply the company has also grown over the last year, from three to five, all based in Trinidad. There are plans to add a sixth farmer from Tobago later this year since the company needs to hire more farmers to meet growing demand for its lemon grass as well as for rosemary, turmeric, thyme and ginger teas.

Given it is still a fairly new enterprise with limited resources and with most decisions being made by the co-founders and managers, Twigs Naturals ranked lower on collective ownership and building financial sustainability. Doing the Radar helped staff realise that the public needs to be educated about why Twigs Naturals teas cost more than big brands do as using all-natural ingredients and packaging costs more. Environmentally sustainable businesses, staff

noted, add more value to the community and the environment, which would earn more support once consumers are made aware of these facts. The company is also expanding its retail presence to increase sales because without increased profits, management cannot hire more staff nor increase salaries.

Environmental benefits of the enterprise



Ginger being hand-washed in a tub of water by an employee of Twigs Naturals. This method uses much less water than rinsing ginger under an open tap. PHOTO COURTESY TWIGS NATURALS.

Twigs Naturals staff agreed that the company tries to minimise water, soil and air pollution across its production chain. It also does well at conserving biodiversity. However, staff ranked the enterprise lower on water conservation and energy efficiency. Doing the Radar helped staff realise there are more energy efficient ways to clean ingredients before using them to make tea. For example, the company replaced its incandescent lightbulbs with fluorescent ones in January 2018 and now use LED bulbs at the new facility. The company also wants to add solar panels but has put that on hold for now because cash flow is not yet sufficient to make such a large purchase and pay for regular deliveries of raw materials.

Twigs Naturals has also switched from using running water to a tub of water to wash ginger collected from the farmers' fields. However, staff noted that they need to improve on their water conservation practices throughout the production chain. Twigs Naturals also chose to buy a hybrid vehicle that uses both compressed natural gas (CNG) and diesel for its transport needs. Its first vehicle, a pick-up truck, uses diesel only but recognising that CNG is better for the environment and cheaper than other fuels sold in Trinidad and Tobago, management chose to go hybrid vehicle rather than by another diesel-only vehicle.

Farmers who supply Twigs Naturals are also encouraged to increase their use of the most environmentally-friendly fertilisers and pest-control products. In addition, farmers are asked to stop using any synthetic chemicals leading up to and during harvest time, to ensure there are no chemical traces on the herbs used in tea production. With the relocation to its new facility, staff indicated that there is now a waste management system as part of the production processes. Recyclables are washed, bagged and delivered to the nearest recycling depot while organic matter is composted to be used in a garden on site. This garden is used for small batches of herbs as part of research and development activities.

Social benefits of the enterprise

Twigs Naturals is committed to ensuring social inclusiveness and community development throughout its operations and activities. The company gives back to the community in two main ways – employing single mothers and donating items to groups who work with the vulnerable in society. The company strongly supports the buying of local goods and services since it tries to source as much of its inputs as locally as possible.



Twigs Naturals employee, Giselle Hunte, using the dehydrator machine to dry sorrel – the main ingredient in the company's Caribbean Christmas Tea. PHOTO COURTESY TWIGS NATURALS.

Twigs Natural also strives to ensure decent work since it employs single mothers and residents from the community who might otherwise struggle to find steady work and decent wages due to their limited job skills. Staff agreed that the company is very good at networking and building partnerships, especially with other small businesses and environmentally conscious consumers. Staff noted that an area for improvement is giving more opportunities to the marginalised because Twigs Naturals would like to do more public advocacy on issues affect the community and local green-blue enterprises.

Governance of the enterprise



(Left to right) Twigs Naturals co-founders Nigel Jordan and Cheryl-Ann Baptiste display their all-natural herbal teas at a function promoting small businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. PHOTO COURTESY TWIGS NATURALS.

Twigs Naturals staff agreed that the company seeks to ensure good governance throughout its operations. This was credited to the company being so small that there is continuous, daily interaction between the owners, management and staff. Staff also noted that management is very good at building a common vision with them. This is achieved by having regular and as-needed discussions with staff to identify areas of the operation which may be 'falling short' as well as the impact these short falls have on the business, customers and income for payment of salaries.

In addition, Twigs Naturals staff ranked the company highly on sharing ownership of knowledge. Staff credited this to them having been employed with the company from the start and their clear understanding of the vision behind Twigs Naturals – to provide a reliable source of all-natural herbal teas and other all-natural products. The company also rated highly in capturing and sharing knowledge, something which is done by keeping logs of each stage in the production process and making those logs available to staff. This allows the company to record and discuss deviations or improvements that are

observed. Reviews are done when the need for a change is raised or when an issue arises in general conversation.

Management also credited the overall excellent governance ratings to the owners' background in leadership, change management and other soft skills training as well as their experience and training in processes and process management. Staff noted that although it actively engages stakeholders, there is not much more management can do to engage stakeholders – mainly farmers – beyond what is already being done to promote chemical-free farming techniques. Similarly, given that most decisions are made by the co-founders and managers, there is limited scope for shared decision-making with the rest of the staff. However, because the staff size is small, suggestions and issues raised by non-management staff are considered in decision-making.

A bright future ahead

Twigs Naturals is a successful local green-blue enterprise that is seeking to become more environmentally-friendly by reducing its carbon footprint, even as it expands operations to meet growing demand for its all-natural herbal teas made from ingredients grown in Trinidad and Tobago.

“Assessing our business under the economic, environmental, social and governance categories of the Radar made us realise that it wasn’t enough to want to expand our business in the future. We needed to have a clear idea of what we need to do, when, to achieve our goals.

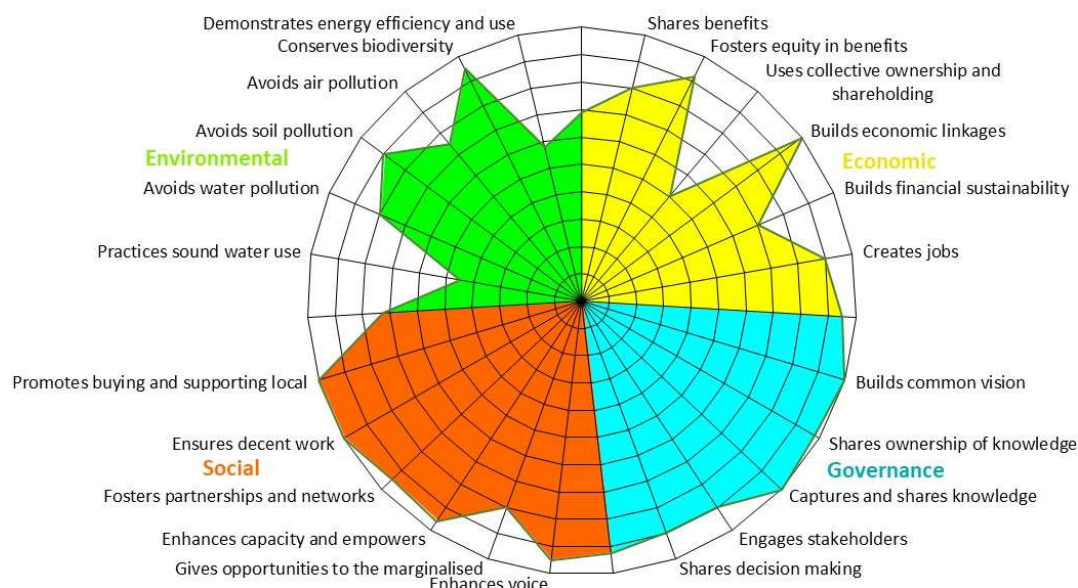
Doing the Radar also showed us where we could become more efficient in our water and electricity use, thus saving money while reducing our carbon footprint.” – Cheryl-Ann Baptiste, Co-founder of Twigs Naturals.

The company has identified, and in some cases already implemented, action to help strengthen its delivery of economic, environmental and social co-benefits and good governance, including:

- Replace all fluorescent light bulbs with LED ones;
- Use a CNG-fuelled vehicle to reduce carbon footprint;
- Waste management plan that includes recycling and composting
- Work with farmers to use environmentally-friendly fertilisers and pesticides;
- Use tubs of water instead of running water to clean herbs;
- Install solar panels to reduce use of fossil fuel-based electricity.

Twigs Naturals is part of an inclusive, green and resilient economy and sees itself as a good example of what is possible when a business chooses to ‘go green’. By expanding production while maintaining true to its objective of providing all-natural herbal teas, the company is an example of a local green-blue enterprise that is always seeking new opportunities to provide economic opportunities for its staff and community while protecting the rich natural resources on which it relies.

Twigs Naturals Radar



The Radar for Twigs Naturals developed by members of the enterprise based on their self-assessment in November 2017. This shows how members ranked the enterprise as being very strong in delivering social and governance benefits. They also identified opportunities for improvement in water use and energy efficiency, collective ownership and building financial stability.



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European Union

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