



## Brasso Seco Paria Tourism Action Committee: A local green-blue enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago 2019

CASE STUDY #6: Local Green-Blue Enterprises in the Caribbean

This case study reflects findings of a process using CANARI's **Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar**<sup>1</sup>. This is a tool to help local community small and micro-enterprise 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.



The view from the Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility of part of Trinidad's Northern Range and homes in Brasso Seco Village. PHOTO BY CANARI.

### Introduction to the enterprise

The Brasso Seco Paria Tourism Action Committee (TAC) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that provides eco-tourism and agro-tourism services in and around the remote villages of Brasso Seco and Paria, in Trinidad's Northern Range. It was established in 1997 by the Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) – a state agency – as one of several tourism action committees along Trinidad's north coast.

Brasso Seco TAC provides employment for residents of Brasso Seco, Paria, Morne Lacroix and Blanchisseuse – 28 people year-round, which goes up to 35 during peak periods. Any surplus from the committee's projects/activities goes back to the community – from buying text books and providing transport for school children, to providing financial aid and manual labour to senior citizens in need.

Established in 1997 as a community-based organisation, Brasso Seco TAC officially became an NGO on January 19, 2018. The benefits to the

<sup>1</sup> 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>

community remain the same but as an NGO, only members can vote when a new board of directors is being elected.

The Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility is located at the entrance to Brasso Seco and is where the committee hosts visitors before and after tours, prepares and serves catered lunches – most often for bird-watching groups from the relatively nearby Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge. Locally-produced cocoa and coffee products, pastelles and condiments are also sold at the visitor facility.

## Economic benefits of the enterprise

Tours, hikes, catered lunches and special events, such as the Village Council Food Festival the Brasso Seco Day of Fun, all provide income for community members via the committee. However, these are often seasonal, leaving those involved financially vulnerable. Thus, in 2010 Brasso Seco TAC began



Tourists from the United States on a bird-watching tour on the outskirts of Brasso Seco Village, in Trinidad's Northern Range. After their tour, the tourists had lunch at the Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility before returning to their accommodations at the nearby Asa Wright Nature Centre and Lodge. PHOTO BY CANARI.

offering agro-tourism tours of Manchuria Estate. Visitors get to see mixed cultivation at work – committee members grow cocoa, coffee, citrus, bananas, cassava and other ground provisions on the estate – while enjoying being surrounded by nature.

The Brasso Seco TAC employs about 40% of the residents of Brasso Seco, Paria, Morne Lacroix and Blanchisseuse. Many of the other villagers earn a living through a combination of

farming and employment with either the Tunapuna-Piarco Regional Corporation or the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Not only does having a job in the remote village save residents from having to spend hours commuting to work in the nearest town/city, it reduces their carbon footprint and provides a reliable source of produce for their catered lunches and special events. What they don't grow, the committee buys from other local farmers and in supermarkets.

Recognising the interest from visitors in traditional farming and cooking techniques, and wanting to pass on those traditions, the committee trains staff in these methods. This, in turn, has provided villagers with new skills which some of them have used to start their own food-related businesses. While some of these entrepreneurs are no longer part of the Brasso Seco TAC, they have benefitted from its efforts to create jobs, improve financial stability and create stronger economic linkages.





A clay oven, meat smoking pit and wood-burning clay stoves, all used in traditional cooking methods, at the Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility in Brasso Seco Village, Trinidad’s Northern Range. PHOTO BY CANARI.

The committee regularly explores new opportunities to provide jobs within the community, such as making bread using a traditional clay oven upon request. One committee member noted that whenever they make bread for an event, it sells out quickly, so this is expected to be a successful venture. The bread-making business should be launched in the first half of 2019 and will be promoted on the committee’s website and Facebook page. Another venture

being undertaken is the Brasso Seco Day of Fun on March 2, 2019 offers a relaxing time in nature with good food, fresh fruit juices and homemade bread.

## Environmental benefits of the enterprise



View of Trinidad’s Northern Range and the Caribbean Sea from Morne Bleu lookout en route to the Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility. PHOTO BY CANARI

The Brasso Seco TAC rated itself very highly on water conservation and avoiding water, soil and air pollution, and good at minimal waste production and biodiversity conservation. Members cited daily water conservation practises, educating the community and visitors about doing the same, protecting watersheds, promoting chemical-free farming and their annual tree-planting exercise under the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

In 2018, they planted more than 1,500 trees, including fruit trees, cedar and mahogany, as part of this programme. Members also clean beaches and water courses in the area and limit the size and frequency of tour groups to reduce the risk of environmental degradation from over-use.

Significant room for improvement was found, however, in energy efficiency and energy use. Committee members identified the use of solar power to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels and their monthly electricity bills. Six solar panels had been purchased – five were installed at Manchuria Estate – prior to the committee’s self-assessment. However the sixth panel, batteries and the

converter were all stolen a few months later, putting their plans for energy efficiency on hold until money becomes available to replace the items. In the meantime, security measures have been put in place at the estate and Visitor Facility.



Morne Bleu Cacao is grown, produced, packaged and sold by the BSPTAC. PHOTO BY CANARI.

## Social benefits of the enterprise

Working with and for the community, the Brasso Seco TAC is very good at providing opportunities to the marginalised through its various activities. It is committed to promoting and buying local goods/services and ensuring decent work for members as well as enhancing the capacity of and empowering its members through skills training and workshops. Non-members benefit too, as the committee buys coffee and cocoa beans from others in the community to supplement any shortfalls in its own production. In addition, products made by other villagers are sold at the Visitor Facility.

Members felt that the committee could improve in fostering partnerships and networks even though it already has good working relationships with external stakeholders. This was because members identified opportunities to form strategic partnerships within the community and with similar rural communities. To this end, the BRASSO SECO TAC website

includes free promotions of local guest houses and bed and breakfasts, most of which are operated by non-members.

The committee's ability to enhance voice was rated poorly for several reasons. Namely, the reluctance of some villagers to join the committee and absenteeism by some members. Another reason was the need for increased effectiveness of advocacy work done by members on behalf of the wider Brasso Seco Paria community, such as appeals for road repairs. One member lamented how many years it took before their requests were acted on by the relevant authorities.

## Governance of the enterprise

Shared decision-making and building a common vision are the committee's strengths. Credit was given to how things work – input is sought from all members before the board embarks on any major project/event – and to the fact that meetings are held regularly, at which the committee discusses ideas on how to strengthen and improve its operations. Once a consensus is reached, the board proceeds, thus ensuring there is awareness of and support for whatever is being done.

The BRASSO SECO TAC also does well at engaging stakeholders but identified room for improvement in both capturing and sharing knowledge and sharing ownership of knowledge. Senior members have institutional memory of how things are done but not all of it has been documented in writing – there are a few videos. The committee intends to rectify the gap in its ability to capture and share knowledge in the coming months, particularly as it seeks to attract and retain more young people to carry on its work.





Members of the BSPTAC during a workshop held at the Brasso Seco Paria Visitor Facility. PHOTO BY CANARI.

Sharing ownership of knowledge is done freely but most often amongst active members. One hurdle to wider dissemination is the limited number of members and other villagers who attend meetings. Another reason for the low rating was the fact that some villagers join the committee, learn some skills then move on to other ventures. Members however expressed their commitment to continuing to share their knowledge freely with anyone who wants to learn.

## A bright future ahead

The Brasso Seco TAC is a successful local green-blue enterprise operating in Trinidad’s Northern Range, where it provides sustainable employment to residents of several remote villagers through eco-tourism, agro-tourism and its annual tree-planting exercise under the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme.

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*“Doing the Radar really made us examine how we were operating and where it would take us in the next 5 to 10 years. The Radar helped us realise how much water some activities require, like when visitors come and ‘make a cook’, and the opportunities we have to teach others to be more mindful of the environment – no slash and burn, no disposal of chemicals in the water, no dumping of waste. Encourage people to replant if they do have to cut the land.” – Francis Francois, President of BSPTAC.*

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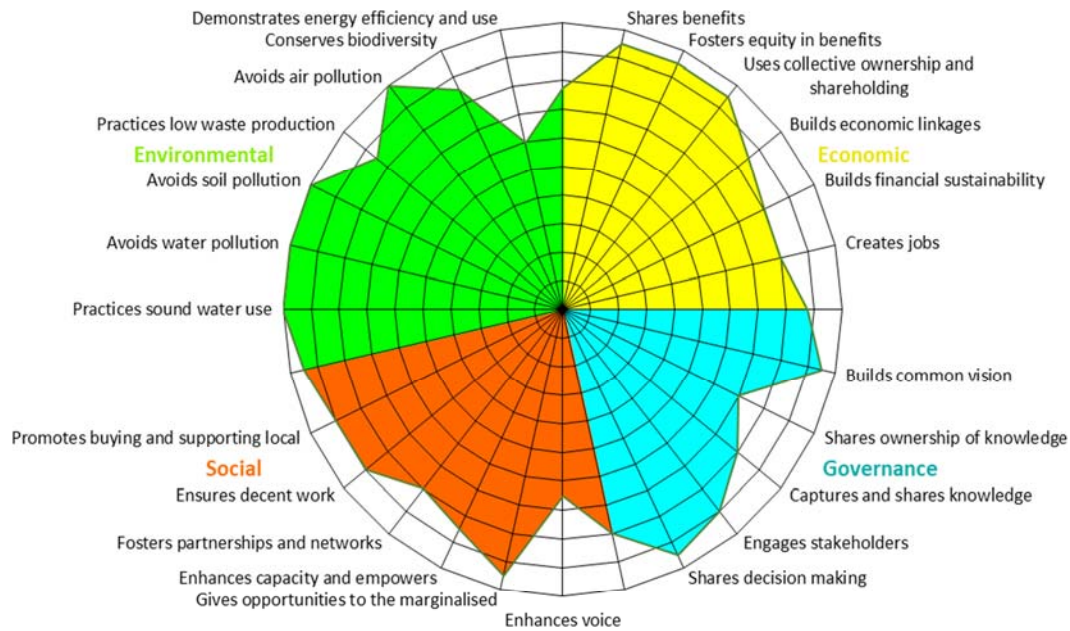
The members have identified, and in some cases already implemented, actions to help strengthen the delivery of economic, environmental and social co-benefits and good governance, including:

- Provide year-round employment through events, bread orders and agro-tourism tours;
- Improve its energy efficiency through solar power;
- Form stronger partnerships within the community and with similar rural communities;
- Formally document institutional knowledge currently retained in the memories of senior members.

Brasso Seco TAC is part of an inclusive, green and resilient economy. It intends to expand its positive impact on the community by offering a wider variety of products and services year-round. By doing so while maintaining its commitment to sustainable use of the environment, the committee is a good example of a local green-blue enterprise that is always seeking new opportunities to provide economic opportunities for its

community while protecting the rich natural resources of the area.

## Brasso Seco Pari Tourism Action Committee Radar



The Radar for Brasso Seco Pari Tourism Action Committee, developed by members based on their self-assessment in November 2017. This shows that members ranked the enterprise as being very strong in delivering many economic, environmental, social and governance benefits. They identified opportunities for improvement in building financial stability, creating jobs, energy efficiency, enhancing voice and sharing ownership of knowledge.



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