



## NEW FIRE Festival: Catalysing green economic transformation in Trinidad and Tobago

2020

CASE STUDY #8: Local Green Economy Growth 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-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 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. This case study represents the first application of the radar to an event, rather than an enterprise.

### Introduction to the festival

The NEW FIRE Festival (NFF) is a flagship initiative of the non-profit organisation (NPO), Trinidad and Tobago Bridge Initiative (TTBI). TTBI is a registered NPO founded in 2011. NFF is committed to facilitating the development of a confident and resilient people with the tools and capacity to transform their society and be a positive example to the rest of the world.

TTBI's work is grounded in the principles of ecological sustainability. NEW FIRE Festival, and the NEW FIRE brand itself, strives to demonstrate how people can progress and enjoy community in line with being environmentally responsible. NFF hopes to expand the economic and intrinsic benefits of festival tourism for the Caribbean, including job creation and niche market growth, creating opportunities for other businesses and communities and bridging geographic and underlying social divides.



NEW FIRE Festival is a T&T festival that aims to foster societal evolution through inclusiveness, self-expression and inspiring patrons towards the creation of a progressive lifestyle. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI

NEW FIRE Festival was first held in 2016 as an initiative to help develop, articulate and demonstrate a narrative of sustainable development that is appropriately adapted to the local context. Utilising the creative eco music and arts festival format, NFF connects people and communities within an immersive, fun and culturally enriching environment where they can organically engage with

<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>

examples of the practical application of the principles of ecological sustainability at the festival. Participants are inspired to incorporate these practices and tools into their lifestyles.

Management of the festival is executed by the Board of Directors of the TTBI, along with a volunteer staff which numbered 48 persons in 2018. In addition to this core executing team, the festival is heavily volunteer-centered, with TTBI having worked with the Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago (VCTT) since 2015. Volunteers are crucial for the festival's execution – with volunteers contributing their talents and efforts towards logistics and execution related to sustainable initiatives, marketing, hospitality, waste management and financial accounting among other skills. NFF facilitates knowledge transfer and skills development for volunteers who are provided the opportunity to develop new skills, build their network and connect with entities that may facilitate further personal and professional development.



NEW FIRE Festival encourages support of local green enterprises through a Green Business Expo, in keeping with the event's goal of sustainability. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI

NFF hosts an artisan market which allows vendors within various sectors to profit both economically and through exposure to clientele. In addition, the event has education and awareness initiatives, well-being activities such as yoga and cultural activities centered around art and musical expression.

In 2019, NFF introduced a Green Business Expo where businesses that provide ecologically progressive products and services have an opportunity to engage the festival audience who are potential end customers. The Green Business Expo

also fosters an environment where exhibitors can engage in prospective business to business initiatives. The event also promotes education and awareness on cultural activism and builds relationships with stakeholders who bring different perspectives into discussion via talks on aspects such as indigenous peoples and livelihoods. This networking provides an opportunity for the festival to exchange practices that can be implemented and supports the festival's vision of promoting a progressive lifestyle and culture focused on sustainable production and consumption, environmental conservation and inclusivity. The festival also hosted a delegation from the Welsh festival, Fire in the Mountain, in 2018. This festival has similar policies and goals focused on sustainability and zero waste concepts. The delegation was invited to share their experience at NFF, which encourages cultural exchange between parties.

## Economic benefits of the festival

Economic benefits of NFF are currently strongly grounded within benefit sharing and fostering economic linkages. The event has built a strong network with its partners and collaborators, growing each year from 35 entities in 2016, to 55 in 2017 and just over 75 in 2018, including financial sponsors, in-kind sponsors and workshop facilitators. Vendor numbers have also increased as the event grows, from 25 during its first year to 52 in its third year. Volunteers have also grown in number each year, as well as the number of offered performances and entertainment.

The NFF provides employment seasonally, specific to the festival, through execution of logistics such as setting up and preparations for the event. The employment generated is therefore mostly for service providers. The opportunity for revenue generation offered to vendors from artisans or community groups and members is also seasonal – as they benefit during the three-day festival period via sales and exposure. The TTBI has no employees, however its intention is to accrue financial sustainability to create paid positions. Currently the event creates jobs that are not exchanged for monetary compensation. The festival generates revenue through entrance and service fees.



Patrons with a vendor at the New Fire Festival Artisan Market 2019 at Ortinola Estate, St. Joseph, Trinidad. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI

The festival builds strong economic linkages between artisan market vendors, workshop facilitators, service providers, consumers and the community. NFF allows sharing of benefits amongst their vendors, performers and entertainers through enabling market access and exposure for local artisans for their products and services. The event also provides a space to build relationships between local entrepreneurs and the public around green business products. The market includes vendors who are small to medium enterprises, some of which have successful products that are sold in retail stores in T&T, such as Twigs Naturals and Coconut Growers Association (CGA); while others are small business ventures from artisans and crafters that utilise the festival as an opportunity to build their clientele and brand.

Despite its seasonality, the event has jumpstarted many great careers through inspiration received whilst volunteering services to the festival. The event continues to promote the creation of a space to develop skills and create connections for paid opportunities to team members involved in event execution. The parent organisation; TTBI, also feels there is room for improvement on collective ownership/shareholding through focusing on community development.

## Environmental benefits of the festival

NFF is committed to developing, implementing and showcasing good environmental management practices with initiatives and activities that minimise pollution and promote education and awareness of sustainable practices and biodiversity conservation. Methods applied in execution of the event centre on low impact to the environment, resource efficiency and promotion of upcycling and use of sustainable building materials.

Countries within the Caribbean are among those with the worst records, globally, pertaining to per capita municipal solid-waste generation and poor management. NFF has become a champion for waste reduction and uses a narrative of zero waste as its main platform for activism on ecological sustainability. The festival has adopted zero waste policies that it strongly implements during the festivities. These policies have strong foundation in “leave no trace” and guides partners, vendors and patrons on waste management practices for the event. Among these practises are the banning of single use plastics at the festival, walking with reuseable containers for food and water, and



guidance to participants on removing refuse by either taking it with them when they leave the festive or placing it in recycling bins or at a compostable collection area, if applicable.

The festival also engages in sound water use practise, with operations and activities that aim to prioritise water conservation. NFF has partnered with hydra-STATION to offer filtered water for free water bottle refills for festival attendees as well as JTBHomesteads to offer foot pump wash stations; installed throughout the festival grounds, that eliminates the use of free flow of water from pipes and allows guests to reuse their containers, thus eliminating the need for disposable cutlery, cups and plates.

Water pollution is mitigated, as greywater is channeled into soil rather than watercourses. In addition, preferred vendors for the market are those that seek to ensure products offered are made utilising the sustainability principles the festival strives to encourage – with low impact on the environment through responsible

manufacture, production and especially packaging. Many vendors offer package-free products such as organic soaps and environmentally concious products that were made via upcycling practices.

Electrical over generation for the festival is currently done via diesel powered generators but the organisers ensure that power saving practices are exercised as far as is practical. The festival managers are committed to accurately measuring – from 2020 - the actual carbon footprint due to direct electrical power generation for the festival and to exploring the use of bio-diesel or other renewable energy sources going forward. Unfortunately the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions on the part of attendees of the festival is still relatively high, due to the preference of patrons for using private vehicles. Nonetheless, the festival encourages patrons to carpool and will be looking into other ways to reduce the number of conventional vehicles used to attend the festival.

## Social benefits of the festival

NFF has aligned its principles with the United Nations (UN) sustainable development goals (SDGs); namely Goal 3 (Good health and well-being), Goal 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the goals) and is committed to providing social co-benefits through its various activities and operations.

NFF strongly encourages supporting and buying local through its various activities. New Fire's artisan market seeks to foster the culture of buying from and supporting local entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago. The NFF team works closely with vendors to ensure the principles of the event regarding zero waste are emulated within their services for the duration of the festival. Many vendors are small and medium enterprises, with a number offering natural and upcycled products. The festival supports sustainable local economic growth by offering these small and medium enterprises an avenue for economic and social benefit through patronage of their products by guests of the festival and indirectly through marketing. The capacity of the artisans are also built through training on financial management.

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NFF wash up station with foot pump to prioritize water conservation and instill zero waste policy culture. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI



Acono River clean up with NFF, WASA, SWMCOL and EMA's iCARE and volunteers. This joint clean up facilitated cooperation with civil society groups such as TTBI and government agencies in knowledge sharing related to environmentally responsible practices. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI

The TTBI also engages in fostering partnerships and networks with local communities, small and microentrepreneurs, civil society organisations, government agencies and the private sector to support the implementation of the NFF every year. In the build up to the annual festival, the NFF team engages with community members where the festival is located to discuss the festival, its objectives and the potential benefits to the area. Stakeholders are identified, who then advise the NFF team on effective engagement with the community in the lead up to and

during the event. As far as is possible, the NFF team uses services from vendors in the community.

Community outreach is also done by the NFF team, in efforts to integrate its goal of enabling sustainable development in communities. In 2018, the NFF team collaborated with the Water and Sewerage Authority's (WASA) Adopt a River Programme, and SWMCOL and EMA's iCARE programme, to conduct a cleanup of the Acono River which neighbours the festival venue – Ortinola Estate in Maracas Valley, St. Joseph, Trinidad. The team also collaborated with the Foundation for the Bioregional Autonomy of the Orinoco Watershed and the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project (FACRP) for the Port of Spain (POS) Watershed Regeneration Gayap, towards the goal of harvesting rainwater at the top of the POS watershed to aid in reforestation and reduce flooding. This fosters social benefit by giving back to the community while simultaneously promoting the principles of environmental stewardship and responsibility.

## Governance of the festival



Members of the NEW FIRE Festival 2019 team at a team meet and greet in late 2018. PHOTO COURTESY: TTBI

NFF has consistently fostered and continues to build a common vision amongst its core executing team and volunteers on the key principles of social, environmental and culturally inclusive responsibility. Through the implementation of zero waste policies and responsible waste management practices for example, the festival has shared its vision of promoting ecological mindfulness and sustainability.

In terms of resource management, directors of the event's parent organisation; TTBI, make decisions but they ask team members to support these decisions through participatory decision making via mechanisms such as face-to-face meetings, feedback forms and virtual communications. The team for the event's management is also strong on engagement of stakeholders, from vendors to partners, as well as patrons. Social media engagement is the strongest media-based avenue for engagement and is growing as the event grows every year. Whilst the event is still considered a niche market festival, there continue to be efforts by the management team to have the event publicised on mainstream media to continue growth and to develop beyond the niche market sector. As NFF grows, management has evolved to be layered, with sub-leads delegated for different areas of festival management in its 2019 logistics and execution.

## A bright future ahead

The NFF is achieving success as an innovative festival concept, the first of its kind in Trinidad and Tobago which centres on promoting sustainable practices and inclusivity with strong environmental and social benefits.

The NFF events team has identified a few key areas for improvement to help strengthen its impact in delivering economic, environmental and socio co-benefits and good governance, including:

- persons to begin valuation of their time/services rendered to the NFF currently so that the team will be able to quantify these benefits - e.g. capacity building, marketing, PR. Creation of opportunities for value for persons engaged vs. employment at this point.
- accruing financial sustainability to create employment opportunities, such as hire staff, as this enables greater buy in and sustained support whilst promoting knowledge sharing on the principles the festival adheres to within the national community.
- becoming more energy efficient through alternative energy options such as solar power or biodiesel.
- developing valuation measurement practices to value the time/skills of people and benefits to partners and vendors.

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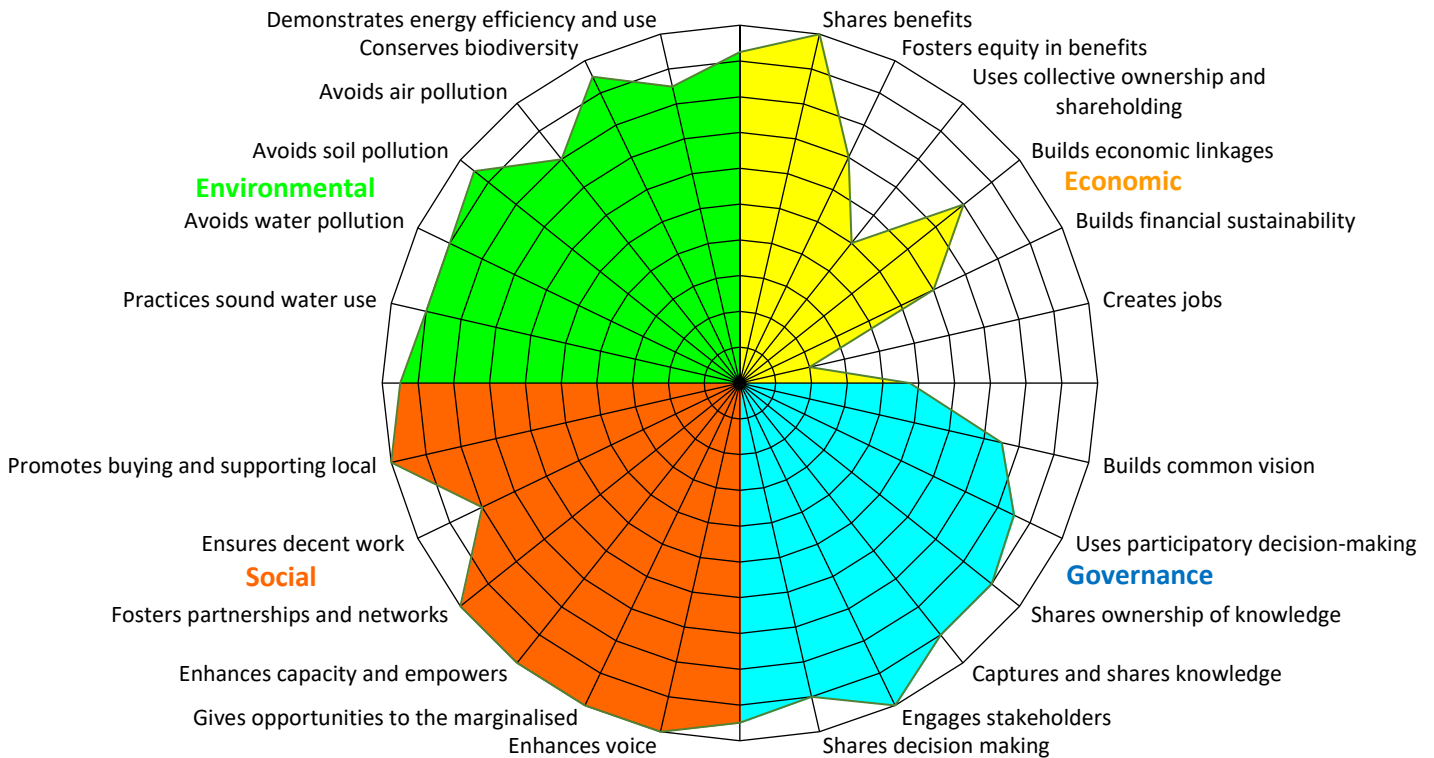
*“NEW FIRE Festival is a fire of renewed and regenerated, aspiration, intention and determination for a cultural renaissance in the Caribbean. This fire draws us to push forward with renewed passion for achieving our fullest potential. The experience at the festival is an exhilarating and inspiring complete immersion into a moment where we get a glimpse into a world of the most beautiful possibilities,”* Gerry Williams, Founding Director of TTBI and Founder and Creative Director of NFF

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The Local Green-Blue Enterprise (LGE) Radar has enabled TTBI to assess how they are achieving their goals of sustainability and social well-being through the NFF as well as how they help to support and drive the transformation to a green economy in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean.



# NEW FIRE Festival Radar



The Radar for the NFF event developed by Directors of parent organization TTBI along with NFF management team based on their self-assessment in June 2019. This shows that the event management team ranked the enterprise as being very strong in delivering environmental and social co-benefits. They also identified opportunities for improvement in terms of employment opportunity, financial sustainability, promoting collective ownership and shareholding, improved energy efficiency and building economic linkages.



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European Union

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