East Grand Bahama Fly Fishermen – A local green-blue enterprise in the Bahamas

CASE STUDY #11: Local Green-Blue Enterprises in the Caribbean

This case study reflects findings of a process using CANARI’s Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar¹. 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.

Introduction

The island of Grand Bahama is the second largest island in the Bahamas and is known as a world class bonefishing destination by anglers from around the world. East Grand Bahama is a district and comprises of a few settlements including High Rock, Rocky Creek, Pelican Point and the easternmost, McLean’s Town. The fishery is phenomenal with its mangroves and vast white sand flats and impressively large bonefish.

The community of East Grand Bahama Fly Fishermen works together to support each other via training, referrals and building relationships with local businesses for the benefit of all. As this fishing community is impacted by a tourist season, they boost trade during the off-season through lobster fishing and conch farming.

Economic Benefits of the Enterprise

Tourism is the major industry in The Bahamas and fishing is one of the top activities enjoyed by visitors. Fly fishing is a generational business, with assets, information and relationships passed down from parents to children. Captain Philip Thomas of Captain Phil and Mel’s Bonefishing Guide Service was a leader in the fly fishing community of East Grand Bahama. He rated the fly fishing enterprises strongly in fostering equity and sharing of benefits.

Volunteers are offered training and startup businesses are encouraged, as increased economic activity benefits the wider community. This small fly fishing community acknowledges the positive impact of

working together. Other fly fishing guides, restaurants and tour companies work closely together, seeking opportunities and referrals to maintain a healthy business momentum.

While continuing investment happens to ensure that the best service is offered, Captain Phil emphasised the importance of building relationships with clients so that repeat customers provide a reliable income stream.

Financial sustainability is challenged by the stability of the United States’ economy (as many of their clients are from there), the development of fly fishing industries in other Caribbean islands, and especially by unpredictable hurricane seasons. Hurricane Dorian decimated the Bahamas and its tourism industry in 2019, and fly fishing enterprises also suffered as their equipment and infrastructure were destroyed and some lives were also lost.

**Environmental Benefits of the Enterprise**

In 2017, the Bahamas’ fly fishing industry implemented regulations to help sustain those working in the sector and the natural resources that the industry depends on. Guides do not partake in commercial fishing and anglers are only allowed to catch and release specified fish, including bonefish, snook, cobia and tarpon.

Captain Phil sought energy saving options wherever possible and practiced sound water use, particularly when it comes to washing down boats, paying close attention to water availability and conservation. While mindful of soil and air pollution, there are no formal policies in place.

**Social Benefits of the Enterprise**

The fly fishing community rated itself highly on enhancing local voices and opinions. Town meetings and discussions are facilitated regularly to discuss issues and opportunities. Young men, especially those
that are unemployed, are welcomed into the community for training, employment within businesses and fostering opportunities for them to start their own.

With an outlook that the community is like a large family, resources and ideas are not horded but presented for communal input and consequently, communal benefit. Community relationships are supported by working with the local government authorities and other stakeholders. Safety is a priority and licensing and labour requirements are adhered to.

**Governance of the Enterprise**

As with many family businesses, operations are governed by generational practices rather than documented policies and procedures. The business can grow from strategic planning, marketing and business development through analysis and documentation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the business.

**East Grand Bahama Fly Fishermen Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar**

The Radar for the East Grand Bahama Fly Fishermen was developed by members based on their self-assessment in June 2019². This identifies areas where they can strengthen their triple-bottom line and governance to continue to enhance their contribution to conservation of marine and coastal biodiversity and development of sustainable and resilient livelihoods.

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Contact information
Captain Philip Thomas of Captain Phil and Mel’s Bonefishing Guide Service passed away on March 31, 2021 after contracting COVID-19. Website: http://bahamasbonefishing.net/


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