Indian Castle Fisher Folk Association – A local green-blue enterprise in Nevis

CASE STUDY #10: 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-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 Indian Castle Fisher Folk Association (ICFFA) is a civic society organisation in St. Kitts and Nevis, formed in 2013 to organise a fishing tournament. The tournament was a success and over the years the Association expanded to further its activities and goals to benefit its member base and community. The mission of the ICFFA is to encourage camaraderie and sportsmanship amongst its members, to educate its members in all areas of good fishing practice, to reduce adverse impacts of unsustainable fishing practice, to enhance the livelihood of fishers and to promote social and community development.

The Association’s fishing tournament has been established as an annual occurrence, with the sixth tournament held in 2019 and deemed a success. The ICFFA started a small seamoss farm on the beach at Indian Castle (Little Bay) in Nevis. The plot was in its very infant stage. Although production was done on a small scale, it was based on the availability of dried seamoss which was purchased from local fishers and from Grenada and Saint Lucia. The equipment used for production and labelling was the property of the Agro-processing Unit at the Ministry of Agriculture.

In order to meet the demand for seamoss drinks locally, the ICFFA needed to expand its level of operations, reduce its reliance on the Agro-processing Unit (this group didn’t use the resources of the unit. Labels were not available locally and were printed in Barbados) and improve the quality and consistency of the product, as several local businesses expressed an interest in becoming outlets for drinks. Many persons are becoming health conscious and seeking products that offer much healthier benefits. Therefore, the ICFFA also had to embark on a campaign that created an awareness of the nutritional properties and potential health benefits of seamoss and the work of the Association. There was also the possibility of marketing the product regionally.

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Economic benefits of the enterprise

Over the last ten years, fluctuations in fish production have, at times, resulted in considerably smaller catches of conch, lobster and fish being landed. Small catches often directly impact the incomes of fishing households, as well as employment and food and nutrition security in fishing communities.

Seamoss farming as an alternative livelihood relies on skills and equipment that fisherfolk already possess, making it an easy and practical transition. Under a small grant provided under the Catalyzing Implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the Sustainable Management of shared Living Marine Resources in the Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf Large Marine Ecosystems (CLME+ Project) in 2019, the ICFFA was able to increase the number of seamoss plots and improve its operations to demonstrate seamoss farming as a viable, alternative livelihood in fishing communities. This involved improving quality assurance methods for seamoss products, training the ICFFA members on value added processing and small and microenterprise development, and developing an upgraded storage facility.

The group found seamoss farming to be worthwhile as an income generating activity, where members have built their capacity to operate a small business and have an opportunity to give back and support the community through employment of local community members.

While financial records confirmed that operations are at break even, the benefits of the business are equally shared. Members agree that any profits should be used in the first instance to strengthen operations. Informal economic partnerships are created with local businesses whereby mutual product promotion and retail is facilitated.

Members are interested in diversifying the income streams. Diversity in the products manufactured creates multiple revenue streams to secure a better cash flow. However, members agree that better financial planning would improve the forecast for business sustainability and the ability to offer jobs to others within the community.
Environmental benefits of the enterprise

For small-scale fishing communities, exploring alternative livelihoods is becoming increasingly important, given pressures such as overfishing, habitat destruction, pollution and climate change that are affecting the productivity of the region’s coastal and marine resources.

The Association rates itself high on biodiversity conservation, taking great care not to damage the reef when harvesting seamoss and being selective when fishing. Additionally, they are conscious about the efficient use of energy in their operations, using LED bulbs and hoping to move towards solar energy. However, the enterprise’s position and practices to avoid pollution of water, soil and air have not been given much consideration in this early stage of business development.

Social benefits of the enterprise

The views of all members have a platform via a WhatsApp group chat where experiences, opinions and issues are open for sharing. Members rate themselves strongly on the support that the enterprise provides to its members via training and capacity building, and group insurance that all members are entitled to. Financial assistance is provided to members on occasion and the enterprise collectively supports disadvantaged sectors of the community: student scholarships, care packages for the needy and support for the elderly.

Members agree that networking and developing partnerships bring benefits to the business. They have also developed creative avenues by building partnerships with government organisations and agencies and NGOs that promote the benefits of healthy eating.
Governance of the enterprise
The ICFFA is currently governed by members who serve as the Executive of the group. The current membership is 26, with three female members. The mission of the ICFFA is to encourage camaraderie and sportsmanship amongst its members; to educate its members in all areas of good fishing practice to reduce adverse impacts of unsustainable fishing practice; to enhance the livelihood of fishers and to promote social and community development. While participatory decision making is encouraged within the group, attendance at meetings can be poor and therefore decisions tend to be made by those present.

More emphasis needs to be placed on engagement with older members of society for sharing of technical knowledge and knowledge of the landscape. It was also agreed that more seminars would be beneficial to interact with stakeholders and the public about the potential and the benefits of the enterprise.

ICFFA Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar
The Radar for the ICFFA was developed by members based on their self-assessment in June 2019\(^2\). 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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