



SMEs utilise CANARI grants to boost eco-tourism in the Nariva Swamp

Port of Spain, April 16, 2024 – Since the beginning of 2023, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) has been conducting capacity-building and business-strengthening activities with 12 nature-based small and micro enterprises (SMEs) from communities around the Nariva Swamp in Trinidad and Tobago. This work was a key component of the four-year project, “Experience Nariva - Creating a community-driven, sustainable cluster and brand to transform eco-tourism in Nariva Swamp”, which is funded by the Inter-American Development Bank Innovation Laboratory (IDB Lab).



Mentors and SMEs participate in a hike to Sandy Hill in the Nariva Swamp, guided by local tour guide and participating SME, Buck's Eco Tours. Credit: CANARI

These 12 eco-tourism-based SMEs have been supported throughout the process by mentors trained by CANARI, who served as business advisors to the SMEs. Mentors first utilised CANARI's capacity building tools such as the Local Green Blue Enterprise (LGE) Radar and Capacity Needs Assessment Tool to help the SMEs identify and prioritise business strengthening actions for their enterprises. Each enterprise was then awarded a microgrant of US\$2,000 to address one or more of the needs or gaps identified during the assessments.

Small Steps to Big Change



One of the SMEs CANARI is working with is the Kernaham/Cascadoux Women's Group, which is currently constructing a plant shop and nursery with its microgrant funds. The women already run a plastic upcycling centre and intend to use plastic pots and planters that they make at the centre in their plant shop and nursery. Their project seeks to provide a sustainable source of income for members of the Kernaham/Cascadoux Women's Group while uplifting the community.

This plant and nursery shop is being constructed entirely of plastic lumber, for the Kernaham/Cascadoux Women's Group. Credit: Godfrey Boodoo

In the community of Mafeking, Mayaro – local roast fish vendor Dr Roast Fish has invested his microgrant funds in equipment purchases to expand his customer base. Neighbouring Ortoire roast fish vendors Kervon’s Exotic Seafood and Shaka’s Roast Fish have both upgraded their establishments, for example, with improved lighting and seating to provide a more enjoyable customer experience.

Nandoo’s Mango Estate in Kernaham Village and at Limeland House, home of LimeLand Tours in Manzanilla have also undertaken infrastructural upgrades. Both sets of upgrades help ensure that customer safety and quality assurance standards are maintained. Nariva Swamp-based tour operators Dynamic Nature Ventures and Nariva Swamp Eco Tours are utilising grants funds to purchase equipment and other materials to enhance tour offerings while also investing in increased marketing of their services. Similarly, key equipment purchases are underway for Susan’s Soup Shop in Manzanilla as well as Buck’s Eco Tours in Plum Mitan.



A new PVC ceiling in the agro-processing room at Nandoo’s Mango Estate ensures that all public health requirements are being met. Credit: Lonella Nandoo

SMEs have also used funds for towards marketing campaigns and associated materials, building their volunteer base and showcasing their work, as is the case with aerial tour operator Flying Tree Environmental Management which also undertakes forest and wetland reforestation and rehabilitation activities around the Nariva Swamp.

A key success story is Pam’s Hydroponic Green Food’s adoption of a greener business model. This SME has switched from melon farming to hydroponic lettuce production, which is more environmentally friendly given lower water usage, reduced pesticide use and requires much less land space. A full list of participating SMEs and grant recipients as well as their contact information is available [here](#).



Heads of lettuce grown from a hydroponic system belonging to PAM Hydroponic Green Food. Credit: Indira Bridgell

Reflecting on Progress

The business strengthening component of the Experience Nariva initiative concluded in March 2024. As a close-off activity, SMEs and mentors gathered for one last time at the Plum Mitan Community Centre to share their mentoring and business-strengthening experiences and the lessons learnt along the way. SMEs expressed their appreciation for the chance to enhance their skills and confidence in both business operations and environmental practices. PAM Hydroponic Green Food commented, “It gave my business a head start (by) generating an income to provide for myself and my family. Without the grant it would have taken me a couple years to save money to implement my business.”

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For more information on the Experience Nariva project, visit: <https://canari.org/experience-nariva-creating-a-community-driven-sustainable-cluster-and-brand-to-transform-ecotourism/>

About CANARI: The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit institute which has been working across the Caribbean islands for 30 years. Our mission is to promote and facilitate stakeholder participation in the stewardship of natural resources in the Caribbean. Our work focuses on Biodiversity and Ecosystems, Equity and Justice, Participatory Governance, and Resilience. See here for more information: <http://www.canari.org/>

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