



Guardians of the South: The role of Saint Lucia's rural communities in shaping a nature-positive future

Saint Lucia, December 4, 2025 – When discussions about environmental stewardship in Saint Lucia arise, images of the iconic Pitons or seabird-filled offshore islands often come to mind. Yet some of the island's most powerful guardians live in villages such as Laborie and Choiseul, where livelihoods, culture, and ecosystems are inseparable. These communities are central to a new five-year (2025–2030) initiative, Valuing Nature and Nature-based Solutions for Sustainable Blue and Green Pathways for the Tourism, Food and Urban Sectors in Saint Lucia (Blue-Green Islands - Saint Lucia project), which seeks to embed nature-positive approaches into tourism, food systems and urban planning.



The villages of Laborie and Choiseul. Credit: CANARI.

Laborie and Choiseul are coastal villages shaped by generations of fishing, farming and artisanal traditions. Their mangroves, reefs, rivers and seagrass beds sustain livelihoods, protect communities and attract visitors. Rich in cultural heritage, both villages reflect African, Indigenous and European influences in crafts, cuisine and community life. Laborie is recognised for its strong village identity, while Choiseul, Saint Lucia's craft capital, maintains traditions such as coal-pot making, cassava baking and weaving. Together, they embody a living heritage where history, culture and the environment are closely intertwined, guiding community care for local ecosystems.

As emerging hubs for tourism and development, both villages face mounting environmental and social pressures driven by climate change. Coastal erosion, more intense hurricanes and loss of mangroves and coral reefs increase vulnerability to flooding and shoreline damage. Declining fish stocks and shifting marine conditions threaten livelihoods dependent on the sea, while on land, improper waste disposal, greywater runoff, land degradation and limited green infrastructure strain ecosystems. Socially, economic

constraints and limited sustainable job opportunities challenge community cohesion and long-term development.

Traditional crafts and ancestral practices are also at risk. Many young people no longer view the craft sector as appealing or financially rewarding, leading to declining engagement in skills like weaving and coal-pot making. Limited public-sector support, scarce product development training and perceptions of low-income potential further threaten these heritage practices, despite their cultural significance and livelihood potential.

The Blue-Green Islands - Saint Lucia project will seek to address these challenges through integrated and participatory interventions. These include reforesting approximately 300 hectares of degraded agricultural land through agroforestry and restoring 100 hectares of mangroves, coral reefs and seagrass beds. Complementary activities include capacity building for farmers and community members in climate-smart agriculture and nature-based solutions, as well as development of local waste management protocols for plastics, green waste, fish waste and greywater. Strategic investments in trails, signage, interpretation centres and tourism facilities will aim to improve visitor experience while protecting natural assets, alongside organisational strengthening and business-plan development for community and private-sector tourism enterprises to support job creation and local economic development.

Collectively, these efforts reduce coastal vulnerability, enhance fisheries and biodiversity, diversify incomes, safeguard cultural heritage, improve waste management and strengthen community governance, fostering long-term stewardship of natural resources while supporting sustainable livelihoods.

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About CANARI: The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit institute which has been working across the Caribbean islands for more than 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. For more information, visit: <http://www.canari.org/>.

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