



## Caribbean Green Economy Action Learning Group

Community-based development through arts and culture:  
Case study from Laborie, Saint Lucia  
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Discussion paper  
#7

### Green Economy

#### Background to the case

Laborie, on the southwest coast of Saint Lucia, was selected as the site of a field exercise for the first meeting of the Caribbean Green Economy Action Learning Group (GE ALG). The exercise coincided with one of the activities of Jazz in the South, an annual cultural event coordinated by a local organisation in Laborie. The location and activity were selected for the field exercise because they offered the opportunity to identify and test the types of issues and processes that should be examined when exploring the relevance and meaning of the green economy concept to the Caribbean. This case study is derived from a background note prepared for the field exercise and from the GE ALG's collective analysis that followed it.

#### *a. The place*

The community of Laborie has 6,500 inhabitants, with a little less than half living in the main coastal village. The general features of, and development challenges faced by, this community are similar to those of many small coastal communities in the insular Caribbean:

The Caribbean Green Economy Action Learning Group (GE ALG) is made up of development professionals and academics from the region, with a range of expertise including development economics, planning, tourism, agriculture, social development, public administration, rural development, environmental management, disaster management, gender and climate change.

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) serves as convenor for the Group. The purpose of the GE ALG is to identify and promote ways in which "green economy" can advance sustainable development in the Caribbean through shaping visions, perspectives, positions and actions. The GE ALG collectively plans research actions and draws lessons and recommendations for policy and practice.

The GE ALG produces Discussion Papers to inform reflection and analysis on key topics relevant to transforming economic development in the Caribbean. Please see <http://www.canari.org/greeneconomy.asp> for more information.

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1. Mixed economy (agriculture, fishing, commercial sector), with farming and fishing continuing to be the primary economic activities of the inhabitants.
2. A natural resource base that supports traditional economic sectors (agriculture, fishing), offers potential for diversification (creative goods based on biodiversity, tourism), and is under threat (coastal pollution).
3. Vulnerability to disasters, increased by climate change and degradation of the coastal environment (loss of coastal protection).
4. Negative impacts of trade liberalisation on farming with economic and social consequences (poverty, migration, security issues). The main cash crop (bananas) has declined greatly in recent years as a result of the loss of preferential access to European markets, causing drastic reductions in production and export.
5. Unfulfilled tourism promises such as hotel developments that have not materialised.
6. Geographic marginalisation: although Saint Lucia is small, much of the economic activity centres on the north of the island, and current development initiatives and trends tend to exacerbate geographic disparities.

Perhaps one of the distinctive features of this community is that it has significant social capital, with strong community institutions, including a vibrant Co-operative Credit Union that has been in existence since 1976. With 1200 members and assets of around US\$30 million, it is currently the leading community financial institution in Saint Lucia. It provides employment and all main banking services, including education, housing and business loans.

#### ***b. Community-based development planning***

In 1999 a small group of local residents and organisations with an interest in sustainable development and dissatisfied with conventional

development approaches, took the initiative to facilitate the participatory formulation of a Strategic Development Plan for Laborie. The decision was made in response to a government programme, known as Comfort 2000, which aimed at supporting community-based projects in all towns and villages in the country. Financial and technical assistance was sought and received from the Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme for a process that involved two years of consultations and studies aimed at identifying issues and opportunities for the integrated development of the Laborie village and surrounding communities. An *ad hoc* Laborie Development Planning Committee (approximately 25 people, representative of all main sectors and social groups) coordinated this participatory planning process. The plan was finalised and published in December 2001.

The plan offered the vision of “a culturally vibrant community where there is continuous improvement in the quality of life and where people are able to enjoy all the basic necessities and to participate fully in the process of development”. The plan is structured along several strategic directions, including: participation; uniqueness and competitiveness; economic linkages and integration; encouragement of self-help, autonomy and initiative; strengthening of community organisations; and cultural development, and it includes five sectoral plans (education and human resources; health care and social services; agriculture and fishing; tourism; and youth and sports).

At the end of this process and in accordance with the provisions of the strategic plan, a new institution, the Laborie Development Foundation, was established, building on the experience of the Laborie Development Planning Committee, as the primary institutional arrangement for the coordination of the implementation of the strategic plan. The Foundation was formally registered in December 2002 as a not-for-profit company. Its members are community organisations that have a primary focus on Laborie. At present,

there are 10 organisational members. The Foundation aims to serve three roles in the community:

- as an organisation that promotes and supports the social and economic development of the community, while facilitating the participation of all groups in the development process;
- as a research-based planning agency that works with but independently from government to achieve sustainable development of the community and improve quality of life for the people of Laborie;
- as a federation of community organisations.

The Foundation defines its vision as *Yon konmin, Yon katjil, Yon mouvman pou divèlòpman* (one community, collective thought and action, for [sustainable] development). Since it was established, it has achieved a strong track record for its ability to mobilise and bring together the community and to provide a neutral arena for political dialogue on development challenges. It has also influenced national policy, secured funding for social, environmental and economic projects, and networked effectively with other organisations both locally and regionally (for example, LDF was the main driver behind the twinning of Laborie and Anses d'Arlets, Martinique).

### **c. Labowi Promotions**

One of the members of the Foundation is Labowi Promotions, a not-for-profit community-based cultural organisation created in 1991. Its mission is "to enhance social togetherness and harmony and to promote economic development in Laborie, in surrounding communities and in Saint Lucia as a whole, through cultural and artistic events and expression". It is a volunteer organisation, run by a small group of cultural activists, with minimal administrative and coordination costs, and with funding coming from private and

public sector grants to sponsor events and activities, and from the rental of equipment.

Labowi Promotions' work is based on the assumption that arts and culture can and should be: (a) vehicles of economic development and social cohesion as well as cultural integrity and identity at community level, (b) instruments of economic growth, livelihood enhancement and job creation at local and national levels, and (c) avenues for mutual understanding, collaboration and shared identity at the regional level. The organisation also believes that there are forms of cultural and artistic expression, such as Creole Jazz, that have a particularly important role to play in realising this vision, because they are accessible to all social groups, they link tradition and modernity, and they are at the heart of Caribbean identity.

Since its creation, Labowi Promotions has organised more than 300 events and activities, in music, education, dance, drama and visual arts. Its main production is a festival known as Jazz in the South, an autonomous component of the Saint Lucia Jazz and Arts Festival. Other regular events include the celebration of Emancipation and participation in Nobel Laureate Week. Among the group's ongoing activities is the facilitation of the Laborie Pan Project, started in 2006 with support from two national organisations, the Cultural Development Foundation and the Poverty Reduction Fund. It is a community steel band directed primarily at children and young adults, with a vision to provide a range of social, economic and cultural benefits to its participants.

### **d. Jazz in the South**

Jazz in the South started in 1997, and it has established itself as a Festival in its own right, with the objectives of promoting Caribbean music and musicians and supporting economic activity, business opportunities and social cohesion in host communities. Since its creation, it has featured over 150 bands from all over the Caribbean, with performers from many countries in the region, including Antigua and

Barbuda, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago, and with guests from Africa.

While the Festival is indeed above all a cultural event, it is also an instrument of community development, as community festivals are also good for the local economy. In the past few years, for example, two surveys of local vendors have been carried out in the South of the island, and they have both indicated that vendors from Laborie place Jazz in the South as their most important activity in terms of revenue. And it is not only the vendors who benefit, especially since Labowi Promotions ensures that all the services needed are provided locally when available. An event like Jazz in the South therefore means business opportunities for vendors, but it also means additional income for taxi drivers, restaurants, caterers and hotels in the area, and many others.

At a broader level, Jazz in the South contributes to the community's efforts to promote itself as a heritage tourism destination by creating opportunities for relaxed interaction between local people and visitors; promoting local cuisine, food products and crafts; and showcasing traditional Saint Lucian village life and culture.

Other features of Jazz in the South that may be relevant to a green economy agenda include:

- efforts to minimise environmental impacts;
- the facilitation of original collaborations and projects between musicians from different parts of the Caribbean region and the diasporas;
- the provision of public relations and marketing support to musicians;
- support in 2013 to an original Jazz and Enacted Word project on the topic of environment and climate change;
- dissemination of environmental messages at mass events.

### **Development issues in Laborie**

Despite this picture of a culturally and socially vibrant community supported by strong local institutions, Laborie has been affected badly by larger economic forces over the last few years, particularly the end of a preferential market for bananas and the enduring global recession. Employment opportunities are limited to a few small businesses and industries in the area. Many residents work in other towns, some commuting long distances to the north of the island. There is a general recognition amongst all residents that the local economy needs to be transformed, to create the conditions to attract and sustain more initiatives like Jazz in the South. The Foundation believes that tourism based on the uniqueness and quality of the community's cultural and natural assets can drive such a transformation. The key characteristics of the community's current development vision include:

- local ownership and use of local economic, environmental and cultural assets;
- local products that are authentic and vibrant, and that present a unique experience;
- benefits to the whole community;
- locally available (and largely locally owned) accommodation;
- competitiveness;
- attention to quality and standards.

In pursuit of this vision, the Foundation has worked to develop a calendar of local events and a community folk band. Work has also been ongoing on the development of a local bed and breakfast accommodation sector, a necessary component for increased benefits of the tourism product.

### **Challenges and questions for further action research**

The Foundation's diagnostic of challenges identifies the following issues:

- developing an effective and credible

framework for participatory governance in which the roles of local and national government agencies and community institutions are complementary and mutually supportive;

- acceptance, both by the local population and national stakeholders, of the possibility of alternative models of community governance and local economic development;
- financing for implementation;
- managing and responding to social and economic changes in the community;
- sustainability of community institutions, especially given these changing contexts.

Some of the deeper challenges identified by the GE ALG during its Jazz in the South field exercise revolved around balancing the local social and cultural benefits of the community's approach to development with the imperative of economic viability, which requires attracting increased "spending power" into the community. Questions raised by the Group included:

- How can Laborie achieve its objective of local ownership while tapping into the larger, and largely vertically integrated, national tourism sector?
- How can an initiative like Jazz in the South successfully attract the sponsorship it needs to be viable while protecting the "intellectual property" of the activities from capture by sponsors? Does a non-profit cultural organisation like Labowi Promotions have the skills to negotiate with

sponsors on royalties for the use of that property?

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of government sponsorship of such initiatives? How far can such relationships go before local control is lost?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of non-profit versus for-profit enterprises in delivering cultural, social and environmental co-benefits? What kinds of models can draw on the advantages, and minimise the disadvantages, of both types?

Other questions had to do with the role of locally led development in protecting and enhancing community assets, values and institutions, including:

- Physical planning: what is possible and sustainable in the context of a particular location and space such as Laborie?
- Building social capital: What role can cultural activities like Jazz in the South play in maintaining community cohesion and social values? How central is social capital to effective local development processes? How can a community like Laborie meet its economic development objectives while preserving its values?

Since the field exercise, the GE ALG and the Laborie Development Foundation have been exploring the possibility of developing and implementing a joint action research agenda based on questions such as these, using Laborie as a case study.

### Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for over 20 years.

Our mission is to promote and facilitate equitable participation and effective collaboration in the management of natural resources critical to development in the Caribbean islands, so that people will have a better quality of life and natural resources will be conserved, through action learning and research, capacity building and fostering partnerships.

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