

PHOTO CASE STUDY ON RURAL ENTERPRISE CLUSTERS SUPPORTING CONSERVATION

NATURE SEEKERS



Nature Seekers is a non-governmental organisation focused on turtle conservation based in Matura, Trinidad and Tobago.

It has created a cluster of community enterprises which generate jobs and multiple income streams to support turtle and ecosystem conservation.

THIS PHOTO CASE STUDY EXAMINES NATURE SEEKERS' JEWELLERY AND TOURISM CLUSTERS

Nature Seekers used the Local Green-Blue Enterprise (LGE) Radar developed and piloted by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) to examine their clusters in May 2019.





"ONE OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST PRE-HISTORIC ANIMALS"

Healthy leatherback turtle populations are key to the Eco-tourism services offered by Nature Seekers rural Enterprise cluster. The enterprise offers Turtle Watching tours, which gives visitors an up-close experience with "one of the world's oldest pre-historic animals", the Leatherback Sea Turtle. Tours are available nightly during turtle nesting season - March to August. Recognising the unique value of turtle preservation to the entire enterprise cluster, the group only grants access to tour groups who use Nature Seekers' official community guides, whose work also includes protecting nesting sites from poachers, and bottle collection



'TURTLE WARRIOR' JEWELLERY

Glass bottles dumped on Matura's beaches, particularly broken ones, posed a danger to nesting sea turtles and humans alike. Nature Seekers' innovative solution involved turning them into the now famous "Turtle Warrior" line of glass bead jewellery - the sale of which provides employment for residents of Matura and environs while helping to fund the group's turtle conservation work. Collected (and donated) bottles are kept in a storage room at their offices, ready to be melted and reshaped into jewellery.

CITIZEN SCIENCE + TOURISM

Nature Seekers' turtle tours cluster provides jobs for locals, helps preserve and protect nesting sites and contributes to Trinidad and Tobago's tourism sector

Community guides monitor where female Leatherback Sea Turtles nest, how many eggs are laid and how many hatchlings emerge after the 60-day incubation period, headed instinctively to the water to begin their own journey across the world's oceans.

Tracking the migratory movements of these turtles helps researchers identify, potential risks to their survival. Nature Seekers also offers immersive educational conservation experiences, such as Turtle Tagging tours, where participants get to measure and collect important data on the turtles with community guide support.



REFORESTATION FOR COASTAL PROTECTION

Matura Beach has loose sand, which makes it an ideal nesting site for sea turtles. However, it is also a high impact beach which experienced severe erosion in 2019 – available space for turtles to nest therefore decreased. Nature Seekers uses some of the Turtle Tours cluster revenue to address erosion.



Reforestation of the area around Matura Beach is an enterprise in the cluster which supports ecosystem conservation while providing employment for residents. For the past 4 years, members of the group have been planting coconut trees and other trees that help combat beach erosion and in turn, protect the nesting sites of Leatherback Turtles.

DIVERSIFIED REVENUE STREAMS

The scene Salybia River Kayak Ride is enterprise in the cluster, this one focused on recreational activities. Some hotels in the area have partnered with this enterprise offering kayak tours, nature walks, hikes to local waterfalls and pools.



On the river tour community guides point out interesting flora and fauna. Forest walks take visitors to the Rio Seco Waterfall in nearby Sangre Grande and the Mermaid Pool in Matura.



A BALANCED AND VIABLE RURAL ENTERPRISE CLUSTER

Nature Seekers' Reforestation team includes men and women of all ages from the community. They take pride in being part of the solution to problems facing Matura and environs and encouraged others to take similar action to conserve and sustainable use the natural resources in their communities.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Women participate in the decision-making, implementation and execution phases of most, if not all, of Nature Seekers' programmes.

This ranges from designing and marketing the Turtle Warrior TT glass beads jewellery, to Turtle Coordinator of the hugely popular Turtle Tours, to the creation of the Kayaking Tours programme and management of the Reforestation programme.



Suzan Lakhan Baptist, Managing Director of Nature Seekers, was once only 1 of 2 women on the board of directors. Several years ago, the NGO began actively recruiting female members from the community but the real 'turning point' in the now almost 50% female board came in 2014.

That's when Nature Seekers began adding independent members with relevant skill sets not necessarily found in the community; such as lawyers, accountants and forest management experts. Several of the independent board members were women, thus realising the NGO's (and Lakhan Baptist's vision) of having a more equitable gender balance at the highest level of Nature Seekers' operations.

Women are also encouraged to participate in decision-making processes and project activities at all levels, from suggesting new events for revenue-generation to designing new turtle-inspired souvenirs for the Nature Seekers gift shop.

Women (and men) are also provided with training to enhance or expand their skill sets, with the aim being to help them become self-employed, especially if they are not part of the tour-guiding or tourism programmes.

LOOKING AHEAD

Nature Seekers is dedicated to "Conservation through Experience" through 'magical' nature experiences with purpose, such as turtle nesting tours, turtle tagging, kayaking and through the purchase of 'Turtle Warrior' glass bead jewellery and other turtle-themed souvenirs, all of which are made by community members.

The NGO strives to connect visitors to the natural environment with a learning experience that binds them to its cause while inspiring the best of the rural communities in delivering this experience. This has led to the creation of sustainable employment for many locals, all of whom have gained or enhanced skills that can earn them revenue within the community while helping to protect turtle nesting sites along this section of Trinidad's north-east and east coast.



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