

Caribbean

fisherfolk in

EAF

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries

Leslie Alexander

From fisher to coast guard: A fisher's venture into the Coast Guard service

Leslie Alexander is a man of many hats - a former boat owner and fisher, he is now a fish vendor and a police officer attached to the Marine Police Unit of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force. He is also President of the Goodwill Fishermen Cooperative in Saint Lucia. Having been raised in a fishing family, Leslie naturally became involved in the fishing business at the tender age of 15. He joined the Goodwill Fishermen Cooperative in 2012, where he volunteered his services on the Board of Directors and fulfilled roles such as Treasurer and Vice President before becoming the President.



Whatever you want to do, you have to go for it - do not second guess yourself thinking of the challenges before you. Never focus on the problems, focus on the prize.



Leslie Alexander (right) along with a colleague at a market stall selling mahi mahi caught by fishers. Fishers sell their catch wholesale to vendors, who, in turn, market it retail to consumers (Credit: Leslie Alexander)

Adapting to a changing fishery

Leslie's early start in fishing allowed him the opportunity to "learn the trade" from knowledgeable veterans in the industry. Initially a fisher, he eventually became a boat owner in order to scale up his operations. While this decision was beneficial, Leslie soon encountered challenges within the fishing industry, which impacted his ability to earn an adequate income. For example, the high cost of fuel for a day's trip out to sea, averaging EC\$600 - \$700 per trip, and an observed decline in the quantity and size of target fish species caught, such as mahi mahi, meant that Leslie, as the boat owner responsible for operational costs, was operating at a loss.



Leslie holds lobster caught in Saint Lucia. Credit: Leslie Alexander

Mindful of this, Leslie opted to **shift focus within the fishing industry** and pivoted towards vending fish which he purchased from fishers in bulk and retailed in order to improve his earnings. He says with vending, the relative **risk is less than that of actual fishing** - both economically and in terms of safety - as fishers often face hazards such as inclement weather conditions and sargassum. However, if he wishes to fish during specific seasons, such as the lobster season, he boards a fishing vessel as crew to do so.

Leslie's knowledge and experience of the marine environment has given him an advantage in his chosen alternative livelihood working in the Coast Guard. As a local involved in fisheries, he is able to bridge the gap between fisherfolk and authorities managing marine resources as a trusted point of contact for communities.



Leslie (right), alongside an official of the Coast Guard, being recognised for his service (Credit: Leslie Alexander)

Same 'office', alternative livelihood

As his focus within the fisheries sector shifted, Leslie chose to venture into an **alternative livelihood** by joining the Marine Police Unit of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force, which functions as the Coast Guard for the country. The Marine Police Unit plays a key role in the enforcement of fisheries laws and regulations. Leslie's traditional and cultural knowledge of the marine environment and fisheries, and experience with fisherfolk, were considered by his superiors as strengths that could be leveraged within the Unit. To date, Leslie has been successfully employed as an officer in the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force for over eight years. The role has allowed him to improve his knowledge and skills in areas of interest to fisherfolk, such as safety at sea, navigation, use of the Global Positioning System (GPS), and fisheries laws and regulations. He is able to share this knowledge directly with fisherfolk attached to the Goodwill Fishermen Cooperative in order to build their capacity. Additionally, as fisherfolk often feel more comfortable speaking with Leslie about fisheries laws and regulations, he is able to help bridge the gap between law enforcement and fisherfolk.

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Leslie, on board a fishing vessel, displays that day's lobster catch. During lobster season, Leslie opts to board a vessel as crew and go out to fish. He has shifted his main source of income from fishing/vending to working in the Coast Guard, yet is still involved when he desires to be, such as during lobster season (Credit: Leslie Alexander)

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