

**NATURAL RESOURCES SYSTEMS PROGRAMME**  
***PROJECT REPORT***<sup>1</sup>

**DFID Project Number**

R8325

**Report Title**

Sustainable tourism linkages. Case study – Sea moss production in Praslin, St. Lucia.  
Annex A, Appendix 5, of the Final Technical Report of project R8325.

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**Date**

2005

**NRSP Production System**

Land Water Interface

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<sup>1</sup> This document is an output from projects funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The views expressed are not necessarily those of DFID.

**SUSTAINING LIVELIHOODS FOR PEOPLE ON THE CARIBBEAN COAST**

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM LINKAGES:

## CASE STUDY - SEA MOSS PRODUCTION IN PRASLIN, ST. LUCIA

by Colette McDermott, Marketing Professional

### SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

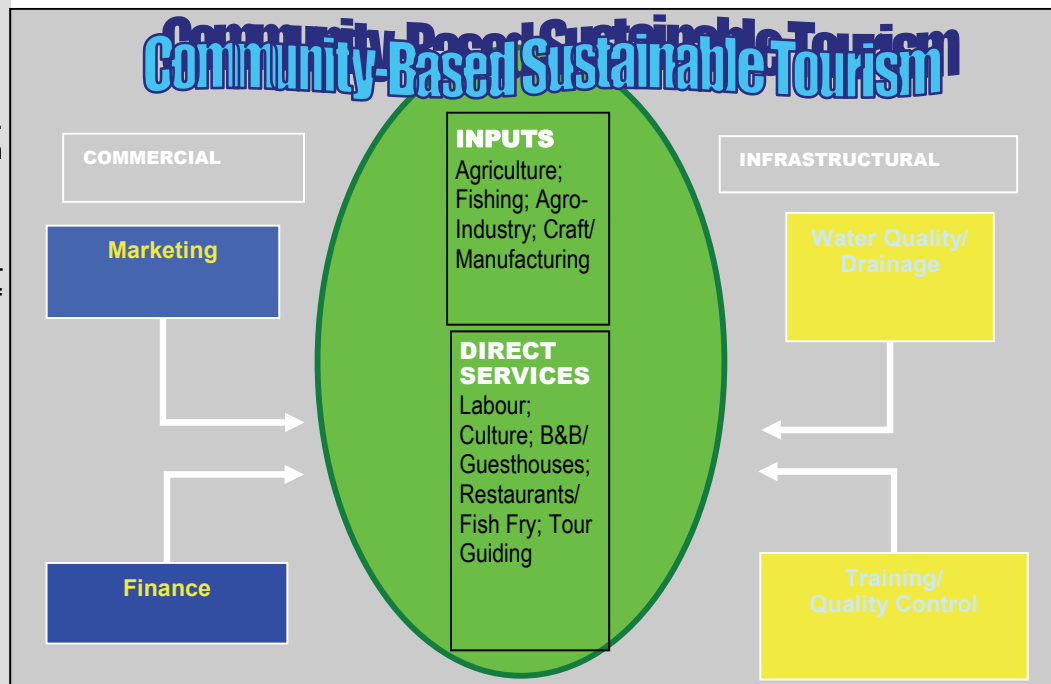
Enhancing linkages between policy intent and policy implementation, towards achieving sustainable livelihoods among marginalised communities along the Caribbean coast, was the major focus of a research project undertaken during 2004-2005 by the University of the West Indies Sustainable Economic Development Unit (UWI SEDU), with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The concentration on Community-based Sustainable Tourism recognised the multiple possibilities of this burgeoning industry, in providing both product inputs and direct services, to enhance linkages between producers in the communities and mainstream tourism interests.

**KEY POINTS:** Tourism is the world's largest industry and a significant contributor to regional income and jobs and, therefore, regional development. The case of seamoss production in St Lucia illustrates many possibilities for enhancing linkages between local employment generation and tourism, towards greater sustainability for both.

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism, by its very nature, has the potential to have a positive impact in all sectors of the host economy. By effectively increasing the domestic market, through introducing a new group of consumers, tourism offers opportunities to expand in all sectors; and, by increasing linkages, activates a key channel through which the development impact of economic growth and corporate activity can be spread further across the economy and society.

But tourism development tends, in many instances, to become geographically and socio-economically concentrated, to the detriment of the most marginalised (or poorest) groups. Specifically, communities dominated by people living in poverty are more vulnerable to poorly managed, uncontrolled tourism development. Government and other stakeholders must make measured interventions to ensure that the benefits of tourism development also accrue to those who most need it. This is the challenge of sustainable tourism development — defined as a service industry which seeks to have a low impact on the environment and local culture while helping to generate income, employment and conserve local ecosystems.



## PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Principles that must be observed in the planning and management of tourism for sustainable tourism, offering equitable benefits to communities, include:

- **The community must be involved at all stages of tourism development** - be it the engagement of tourism industry interests coming in from outside, community-based tourism initiatives, or a combination of these.
- **Capacity building is needed at the community level, in many cases, to facilitate effective participation.** It is important to acknowledge that different groups have different requirements in terms of capacity building and empowerment; in particular women and youth.
- **Partnership-building strategies are required**, since the promotion of community participation in the tourism industry forms an important part of the slowly evolving trend towards building partnerships.
- **Building linkages with goods and services** currently produced with production potential in communities.



## AGRO-TOURISM LINKAGES IN ST. LUCIA: THE CASE OF SEA MOSS

Efforts to diversify agricultural activity in St. Lucia, with the threatened collapse of the banana industry, have met with limited success. Sea moss cultivation was introduced as an alternative agricultural product to the community of Praslin – traditionally a banana-producing area. The community now cultivates sea moss and processes the product into sea moss gel which is primarily used in the production of drinks. The tourism industry in St. Lucia offers a number of current and potential market opportunities which are detailed below. These findings are based in qualitative market research carried out by the UWI-SEDU project team during 2005.

Top—Community meeting, Praslin, St Lucia  
Middle—Praslin, St Lucia;  
Bottom—Praslin Seamoss Farmers' fruit flavoured drink

### Sea Moss Drinks

The Praslin Seamoss Farmers Association (PSFA) produces a variety of fruit and nut flavoured sea moss drinks for sale locally. Currently, they are able to (and do) produce more than they can sell, and would therefore like to be able to expand their current markets and develop new ones. A number of problems have been identified with regard to expanding the market for this specific product, both for sale to locals and potentially to tourists. Many of the problems identified are linked to limited capacity in product development.



### Local Tastes and Product Placement

Seamoss drink is a product which is associated with home/family/community: that is, people tend to make it at home and, if they don't, will normally only buy it or accept it from specific people who make it to their taste. The traditional drink is milk-based and, aside from the attractive taste, demand for the drink is driven by its perceived and actual medicinal value. The fruit flavoured drinks face marketing constraints since they are neither a fruit juice (as the information on the bottle labels it as a sea moss drink) nor a seamoss drink (as the fruit flavour is the dominant one). Locals

tend not to buy seamoss drinks in the supermarket and, if they do, they lean towards the milk-based drinks rather than the fruit flavoured ones.



Top— Praslin Bay;  
Bottom—Seamoss growing on a line. Picture from:  
<http://www.buccooreeftrust.org/seamoss.htm>



### **Competition/Product Quality**

The seamoss drinks compete against a very wide range of fruit juices available on the local market which are packaged in single serving bottles offered at a similar price.

### **Product Development/Labelling**

The decision by a consumer to buy a product is based significantly on how it looks – the response to a visual stimulus cannot be underestimated. Attention therefore needs to be paid to this aspect of marketing in the case of Praslin Seamoss drinks, especially because they are being sold into a very competitive market.

### **Sea Moss Gel**

Seamoss gel also is produced by the Praslin Seamoss Farmers Association and sold to St. Lucia Distillers which utilises it as an ingredient in an alcoholic beverage (*Z-Mass Booster*) which is manufactured and exported. The product has been highly successful in the Barbadian market; almost all of the Z-Moss Booster that is produced is exported to that island.

## **TOURISM LINKAGES – FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SEAMOSS PRODUCTION**

### **Spa Products**

The Well-Being or Spa tourism sub-sector in St. Lucia is large and growing. Many of the large properties have spas, and the local tourism authority recognises that this type of tourism offers a viable option for St. Lucia.

In meetings with the managers of two of the spas attached to large resorts on the island (Sandals Grande and Windjammer Landing), it became obvious that local spa products would be a welcome addition to the suite of local products on offer.

There is already a wide range of seamoss-based products in use at various local spas, including massage oils, body and face masks and hair treatments. These products are currently sourced overseas as there are no local providers.

For a number of reasons, outlined below, community production of spa products may be a viable area for development. These include:

- Seamoss products are already successfully produced by a number of companies around the world. This suggests that there is an existing market for these products.
- The products are generally very simple, and in the case of the masks, quite 'coarse'. The ingredients as listed on the products are few, and the processing minimal.



An important point to note, however, is that these products MUST be able to compete in terms of price and quality, including the quality of the packaging, with the products currently available.

### Souvenir Items

St. Lucia attracts healthy and increasing numbers of cruise ship and stay-over visitors. As a result, there is a huge market for local souvenirs. However, it would appear that the local handicraft industry appears not to have responded, and many of the souvenir products which are currently available have been imported from



*Fruity Seamoss Dessert Mousse. Picture from <http://www.slucia.com/seamoss>*

elsewhere in the region and in some cases as far away as India and other parts of Asia. In the right packaging, Seamoss offers an excellent opportunity for a viable souvenir product. The actual product need not be processed further than the standard drying stage and, with very inexpensive but effective packaging made from a combination of hemp and madras, seamoss could prove an attractive, indigenous product to visitors.

### Food Items for use by Local Chefs

Various seaweed and seamoss species are used worldwide as food products, mainly in Asian cuisine. Brief meetings with the chefs of two of the larger, up-market resorts illustrate that chefs on the island are interested in using local seamoss in their menus. However, past experience has proven that there is a problem with consistent supply and quality. The local coordinator for the St. Lucian Team for Taste of the Caribbean, an annual competition sponsored by the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA), who also is an expert on the use of seaweed and seamoss suggested that these products could be introduced as the secret ingredient for one of the local cook-offs to select the chefs to participate in the larger CHA competition. This could result in increased knowledge and potentially increased use of seamoss as an ingredient by local chefs, thus developing a local market linked to the tourism industry.

### Sea Moss Gel

Discussions with St. Lucia Distillers (SLD) indicate that they would be willing to buy seamoss gel less often but in larger orders to allow the producers to take advantage of potential economies of scale in the production process. This, however, will require SLD to find suitable warehouse space, and Praslin Seamoss Farmers Association (PSFA) to arrange a number of shelf life (and other product quality) tests on the product to prove that the gel will not decrease in quality over time, and under what conditions it would need to be stored to ensure same.

### SUMMARY

If poverty eradication efforts are to achieve any measure of success, policy implementation MUST include the communities targeted from the earliest stages. It must also be recognised that policy implementation will be limited by ability of community organisations (and individuals in the community) to effectively participate in the process, and to absorb the development interventions of government and NGOs. The successful development of tourism linkages throughout the economy is imperative for the equitable distribution of tourism benefits, and such development depends on the application of the principles of collaborative and inclusive planning, capacity-building in communities and building real and effective partnerships.

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