

**Cooperative Enterprises and Community-Based Tourism as the Gateway to Social
and Economic Revitalisation in the Caribbean in the Aftermath of COVID-19**

CAF — Ideas for the Future Essay Contest — 3rd Edition

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Executive Summary

This essay seeks to explore difficulties and opportunities for the sustainable social and economic revitalisation of tourism-dependent Caribbean islands in the aftermath of COVID-19. Tourism is the economic mainstay of the Caribbean, but most of the revenue leaves the region, and the little that remains is distributed inequitably. All-inclusive resorts, the defining feature of Caribbean tourism, are very disconnected from the local economy and produce high levels of inequality and ecological damage. Cruise ships also benefit a handful of people and devastate the marine environment. In order to facilitate a sustainable recovery and address major socioeconomic problems, the region must transition to sustainable forms of tourism and empower marginalised groups to counterbalance the harsh economic, environmental, and social consequences of these forms of tourism.

Cooperative financial institutions are popular in the Caribbean and can potentially mitigate socio-economic problems if encouraged in other areas and institutionally supported, and community-based tourism represents a viable avenue for the diversification of Caribbean tourism. If adopted together, these potential solutions may reduce inequality, empower marginalised groups, and guide the Caribbean to sustainable development in the aftermath of COVID-19.

Introduction and Literature Review

While tourism is often conceptualised as an 'industry' or 'sector', some contemporaries believe this classification obscures the wide range of goods and services demanded by a tourist.¹ The International Monetary Fund has observed that by the end of 2019, spending by international tourists amounted to nearly US\$1.6 trillion, with the direct, indirect, and induced contribution to global GDP amounting to over 10%.² Notwithstanding its relatively small size, the year-round warmth, festive culture and pristine beaches of the Caribbean region attract over fifty million visitors per year.³ According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2019 tourism represented 11% of the Caribbean GDP, but the 'tourism economy', which comprises the economic activity imparted to agriculture, construction, transport, and the creative industry by the tourism sector, was 2.5 times as large.⁴ Tourism is responsible for 17% of all employment in the Caribbean, but the tourism economy accounts for 35%.⁵ Tourism also provides a significant source of employment for women who constitute the majority of tourism workers in the region.⁶

Cruise ships and all-inclusive resorts represent the most popular forms of tourism within the Caribbean. However, while they impart significant economic benefits as outlined above, there remain significant imbalances in the distribution of wealth generated by tourism, and these forms of tourism presents the region with a number of unique economic problems and raise concerns surrounding sustainability and linkages with the wider economy which make an equitable recovery from the economic fallout of COVID-19 a challenging endeavour. In Jamaica, tourism is vibrant and well-developed with over four million arrivals annually,⁷ 25,000 hotel rooms, a 66.9% hotel room occupancy rate,

¹ Steenge and Van De Steeg, "Tourism Multipliers For A Small Caribbean Island State; The Case Of Aruba," 361.

² IMF, "Tourism in the Post-Pandemic World: Economic Challenges and Opportunities for Asia-Pacific and the Western Hemisphere," 3-5.

³ Peterson "Over the Caribbean Top: Community Well-Being and Over-Tourism in Small Island Tourism Economies," Introduction.

⁴ Mulder, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery," 9.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, 12.

⁷ World Bank, "International Tourism, Number of Arrivals - Jamaica".

and almost two million cruise passengers annually as of 2018.⁸ The direct, induced, and indirect contribution of tourism to the GDP of Jamaica is 30.5%,⁹ making the sector a major contributor of foreign exchange. Although the Jamaica Tourism Master Plan outlines a framework for the development of community-based tourism and a shift toward a more sustainable tourism product,¹⁰ there are still major deficiencies in environmentally sustainable tourism, and the distribution patterns of the benefits of tourism in Jamaica are highly unequal,¹¹ and many of the economic benefits of tourism do not go into the local economy.

As of 2019, the 76 all-inclusive resorts in Jamaica accounted for 59% of the hotel rooms on the island.¹² Gmelch has observed however, that all-inclusive package holidays are often part of 'vertical integration' schemes, where tourists make a single payment to a foreign company, often in the home country of the tourist, which covers airfare, accommodation, services, and tips in foreign-owned resorts, airlines, and tour companies.¹³ All-inclusive resorts are thus incredibly isolated from the local economy, as tourists do not eat out locally, rent equipment from local entrepreneurs, or arrange tours with local taxis.¹⁴ As a result of these arrangements, much of the foreign exchange generated by tourism never reaches the Caribbean, with some contemporaries observing that for every US\$100 spent on an all-inclusive package holiday, only around US\$5 stays in the developing country destination.¹⁵

This phenomenon, whereby the revenues generated by tourism and associated economic activities are not available for reinvestment or the consumption of goods and services within the same destination, or where tourism-related goods, services, and labour are imported, is referred to as leakage.¹⁶ Because two-thirds of the hotel rooms in

⁸ Jamaica Tourist Board, "Annual Travel Statistics 2018," 8 - 24.

⁹ Inter-American Development Bank, "Caribbean Economies in the Time of the Coronavirus," 3.

¹⁰ Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Jamaica), "Master Plan for Tourism Sustainable Development," 11 - 12.

¹¹ Giampiccoli et al, "Characteristics and Policies of Community-Based Tourism in Jamaica," 52.

¹² Jamaica Tourist Board, "Annual Travel Statistics 2019," 35.

¹³ Gmelch, "Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism," 11.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Zopiatis et al, "The non-inclusive nature of 'all inclusive' economics: Paradoxes and possibilities of the resort complex," 2.

¹⁶ Jönsson, "Leakage, Economic Tourism," 1.

the region are foreign-owned, and the food, furnishings, and equipment to cater to tourists is often imported,¹⁷ the composition of Caribbean tourism can be said to lend itself to leakage. In Antigua, where tourism directly accounts for 60% of GDP, indirectly accounts for 75% and employs one quarter of the population, approximately 90% of accommodations in the island are controlled by foreign business interests in the form of large resorts with minimal linkages to the local economy and which produce high amounts of leakage within the sector.¹⁸

The high levels of leakage within the tourism sector in the region may also be attributed to the large foreign presence, which Sowerby has observed does little to encourage local linkages.¹⁹ While governments, such as those of Jamaica, attract tourism investment through duty-free imports and lengthy tax breaks,²⁰ the repatriation of profit, servicing of foreign debt taken on to fund tourism projects,²¹ the aforementioned situation with respect to imports, and the few linkages all-inclusive resorts have with the wider economy present the region with a crisis. So isolated are all-inclusive resorts from the rest of the economy, that in Speightstown, Barbados, most of the small restaurants were forced to shut down after a nearby resort became all-inclusive.²² Although some regional governments have recognised this problem, policymaking institutions appear to focus on increasing the participation of small businesses in tourism,²³ without addressing the isolated nature of all-inclusive resorts and encouraging such resorts to foster local linkages.

The social landscape of Caribbean tourism has been criticised for producing drastic levels of inequality. Notwithstanding the major employment benefits outlined prior, parallels have been drawn between resort-based tourism and colonial-era sugar plantations, as there is a small group of owners with a large labour component and very

¹⁷ Gmelch, "Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism," 10 - 11.

¹⁸ Weaver, "The Evolution of a 'Plantation' Tourism Landscape on the Caribbean Island of Antigua," 328.

¹⁹ Sowerby, "Economic Development of the Caribbean and the Contribution of Tourism from an EU Perspective," 110.

²⁰ Ministry of Tourism (Jamaica), "What incentives are available in the tourism sector," 1.

²¹ Gmelch, "Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism," 10.

²² *Ibid*, 11.

²³ Commonwealth Secretariat Special Advisory Service Division, "Jamaica Master Plan for Tourism Development", 12.

little in-between.²⁴ Tourism development has prompted an inflation in land and food prices, which has put home-ownership, especially on land located near the sea, out of reach for many people, while the profits of tourism that remain in the Caribbean disproportionately go into the hands of local proprietors who have invested in the sector, the entire populace deals with the negative effects of tourism.²⁵

Resort-based tourism has a number of detrimental impacts on the environment of the small developing states of the Caribbean. In Antigua, the establishment of resorts often involves clearing mangrove, the discharge of sewage, and the removal of beach sand for construction.²⁶ In general, however, tourism facilitates the pollution of the sea through sewage and motorboat oil, beach erosion and shutting-out sight of the sea due to the erection of large tourist buildings, and the disruption of coral reefs, overfishing, and disappearance of marine birds due to land reclamation for tourist projects.²⁷ Cruise ships and pleasure yachts which frequent the Caribbean sea also contribute to high levels of ecological devastation through the discharge of substantial quantities of solid and liquid waste into the sea²⁸ and the destruction of coral reefs with their enormous anchors.²⁹ Indeed, tourism relies heavily on natural ecosystems for its functioning, but also contributes to their depletion, rendering it greatly affected by climate change and natural disasters.³⁰

In Latin America and the Caribbean, tourism provides major employment opportunities for women, owing in particular to part-time jobs and flexible working hours.³¹ In the Caribbean, accommodation and food services represent 13.4% of women's employment and 7.4% of men's employment, and women represent 62% of all employment in accommodation and food service activities in the Caribbean.³² According

²⁴ Weaver, "The Evolution of a 'Plantation' Tourism Landscape on the Caribbean Island of Antigua," 325.

²⁵ Gmelch, "Behind the Smile: The Working Lives of Caribbean Tourism," 12.

²⁶ Weaver, "The Evolution of a 'Plantation' Tourism Landscape on the Caribbean Island of Antigua," 328.

²⁷ Holder, "Pattern and Impact of Tourism on the Environment of the Caribbean," 125.

²⁸ ECLAC, "Regional Environmental Policy and Sustainable Tourism Development in the Caribbean," 14.

²⁹ Oceana, "Contamination by Cruise Ships," 3.

³⁰ Mulder, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery," 35.

³¹ *Ibid*, 9.

³² *Ibid*, 11 - 12.

to the Caribbean Development Bank, Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) represent between 70% and 80% of all enterprises within the Caribbean.³³ While these firms do not represent the entirety of the tourism landscape in the Caribbean owing to the presence of all-inclusive resorts, the arts and crafts sector, local cuisine and traditional skills are generally dominated by MSMEs.³⁴ Thus, a shift away from the all-inclusive resort model, and measures to address barriers women face in accessing credit and insurance³⁵ throughout the Caribbean can increase the economic viability of many MSMEs and empower women in the region.

The Caribbean was still recovering from the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 when SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) struck. In goods producing Caribbean economies, average growth prior to the crisis was 6.4% (1999-2008), and 0.2% after the crisis (2009-2019), while in the service-producing economies growth was 2.0% before the crisis and 0.4% after.³⁶ During this extended period of low growth, the debt burden (debt to GDP) was 67.9% for the region.³⁷ ECLAC projects that the total economic cost of COVID-19 for Caribbean countries is estimated to be \$260.2 million.³⁸ COVID-19 thus represents a significant financial shock to the Caribbean region at a time when it was faced with low growth rates, high levels of debt, and thus high debt servicing costs, and while a major income-earner for many Caribbean countries, tourism, has been gravely impacted.

According to ECLAC, COVID-19 precipitated a drastic fall in tourism in the Caribbean region, a region where tourist arrivals were growing at roughly 10% each year prior to the pandemic.³⁹ While the Caribbean welcomed 38% of global cruise passengers and 34% of total cruise ship deployment in 2019, this number dropped to almost zero by

³³ Caribbean Development Bank, "Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development in the Caribbean: Towards a New Frontier," 22.

³⁴ Association of Caribbean States, "The Craft Sector in Tourism," para 2.

³⁵ Mulder, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery," 31 - 37.

³⁶ Alleyne, "The Case for Financing: Caribbean Resilience Building in the Face of the COVID-19 Pandemic," 10.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, 12.

³⁹ Mulder, "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery," 15.

March, 2020.⁴⁰ Indeed, international travel to the Caribbean fell by almost 65.1% in 2020.⁴¹ Some contemporaries have described the impact of COVID-19 on international tourism to be akin to ‘paralysis’,⁴² in The Bahamas for instance, air arrivals in 2020 declined by 74.8% compared to the year before, but the months of April to December saw a 93.6% decline compared to 2019, and arrivals for the first three months of 2021 are still 70.4% lower than they were in the first three months of 2020.⁴³ Whereas domestic tourism is the driving force behind the sector in many Latin American countries, the Caribbean relies heavily on international tourist arrivals. In 2019 for instance, the United States accounted for 43% of arrivals, while Canada accounted for a further 12%.⁴⁴ This is a tremendous difference, as evidence from abroad demonstrates that domestic tourism can still generate, on average, some 33% of pre-pandemic revenues in the right conditions,⁴⁵ whereas international tourism has ground to a halt.

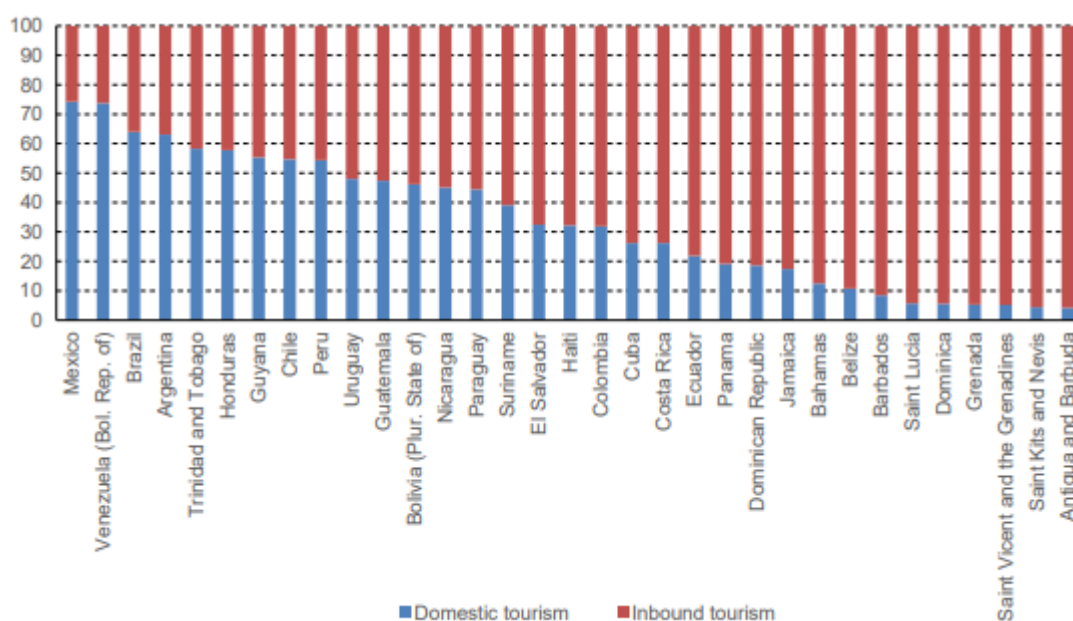


Fig. 1: Domestic and Inbound Tourism Revenues in Latin America and the Caribbean⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ UNWTO, “World Tourism Barometer and Statistical Annex, December 2020,” 4.

⁴² Mulder, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery,” 4.

⁴³ Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, “Tourism Analytics: The Islands of the Bahamas,” Figures 1 -5.

⁴⁴ WTTC, “Caribbean 2020 Annual Research: Key Highlights,” 1.

⁴⁵ Arbulú et al, “Can Domestic Tourism Relieve the COVID-19 Tourist Industry Crisis? The Case of Spain,” 1.

⁴⁶ Mulder, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery,” 11.

The International Labour Organisation has observed that 71% of hotels in the region had laid off staff by April 2020, while a further 66% reduced the hours worked by employees, and 53% had cut salaries.⁴⁷ Women, who constitute the majority of the tourism workforce, have thus been disproportionately affected, and now face reduced economic autonomy.⁴⁸ While hotels and resorts which can readily access capital curtail employment to reduce overheads, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in tourism have been among the hardest-hit by confinement measures in response to the pandemic, suffering major losses of revenue, with some facing temporary or permanent closure.⁴⁹

As international travel slowly picks up, ECLAC has observed that in their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Latin American and Caribbean nations have a critical opportunity before them to pivot and use tourism to contribute to fulfilling the sustainable development goals outlined by the United Nations.⁵⁰ Indeed, the post-pandemic recovery of Caribbean tourism must be equitable and sustainable, otherwise the widespread shutdown of MSMEs and high rates of job loss among women may exacerbate the unequal nature of the sector and perpetuate socio-economic problems with all-inclusive resorts capturing a much greater share of the tourism economy. Bolstering MSMEs in the tourism sector, addressing the isolated nature of all-inclusive resorts, and encouraging more equitable enterprises, such as cooperatives, in the tourism sector, may enable marginalised communities to tap into tourism in the post-pandemic period and facilitate a sustainable recovery.

⁴⁷ International Labour Organisation, “ILO: Sustainable Solutions Urgently Needed to Address Collapse of Caribbean Tourism Employment,” para 7.

⁴⁸ Mulder, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery,” 30.

⁴⁹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, “Supporting Small Businesses Is Critical for COVID-19 Recovery,” para 1 - 3.

⁵⁰ Mulder, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery,” 35.

Community-Based Tourism, Reconnecting All-Inclusive Resorts, and Sustainable Cruise Tourism

At present, tourism in the Caribbean appears to be characterised by the all-inclusive resort model which is associated with high levels of ecological devastation, economic leakage, loss of revenue, and inequality in the distribution of profit, rendering it wholly inappropriate for long-term development in the Caribbean region. Community-based tourism, which involves harnessing the under-utilised human capital, natural, and cultural resources of marginalised communities to create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods and the distribution of the benefits of tourism,⁵¹ may represent a suitable alternative.

Participatory decision-making is the nucleus of community-based tourism. All stakeholders, including the local community, established tourism enterprises, and the government are involved in tourism, and issues local people have are resolved, bringing the tourist space in harmony with the social climate.⁵² Although some critics argue that the participatory decision-making process may be time-consuming, local issues directly influence the tourist experience, so this approach should nonetheless be pursued.⁵³ As the image of tourism is based on the assets of the host community, including the local people and their culture and heritage, the natural environment, and tourism infrastructure and facilities,⁵⁴ the integration of these elements to produce a vibrant and sustainable tourism landscape where the benefits of tourism are more equitably distributed within the local economy is in the best interest of Caribbean nations.

There are a number of factors which make community-based tourism particularly viable in the Caribbean. The region has been a veritable cultural melting pot for several centuries, which has produced a rich and vibrant culture that permeates all-levels of society throughout the region. In Trinidad and Tobago for instance, the National Tourism Policy recognises the contribution of over nine distinct cultural groups to the arts, culture,

⁵¹ Giampiccoli et al, "Characteristics and Policies of Community-Based Tourism in Jamaica," 47.

⁵² Okazaki, "A Community-Based Tourism Model: Its Conception and Use," 511 - 512.

⁵³ Ibid, 512.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

cuisine, and celebrations and festivals of the islands.⁵⁵ Built heritage, such as historical landmarks and buildings, and the architectural heritage of Trinidad and Tobago has been neglected, however.⁵⁶ In Jamaica, too, there are many opportunities for cultural and heritage tourism to become popular.⁵⁷ As the most promising areas for community-based tourism to succeed are in eco-tourism and cultural tourism,⁵⁸ and there appear to be under-utilised cultural and heritage tourism resources in the Caribbean, the viable and market-driven products needed for community tourism development to succeed,⁵⁹ the region appears to have much potential for community-based tourism.

Ecotourism has been identified as a particularly viable alternative to the all-inclusive model in the Caribbean. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education”.⁶⁰ Ecotourism has the potential to empower marginalised groups and disadvantaged regions, facilitate the creation of community-based micro businesses, and allow revenue to circulate within rural communities.⁶¹ The Caribbean has seemingly limitless potential for ecotourism development. From bird and turtle watching in Trinidad⁶², to the oldest protected forest reserve in the Western Hemisphere in Tobago,⁶³ and hiking and bamboo rafting in Jamaica,⁶⁴ the region has an abundance of ecological marvels which can be harnessed and capitalised upon through ecotourism to empower and uplift rural communities and marginalised groups once an appropriate legislative and policy framework is implemented alongside strong institutional support. Well-known ecotourism

⁵⁵ Ministry of Tourism (Trinidad), “Revised National Tourism Policy (Draft) Trinidad and Tobago,” 26 - 27.

⁵⁶ Jordan, “Managing Built Heritage for Tourism in Trinidad and Tobago: Challenges and Opportunities,” 49.

⁵⁷ Giampiccoli et al, “Characteristics and Policies of Community-Based Tourism in Jamaica,” 47.

⁵⁸ Salazar, “Community-Based Cultural Tourism: Issues, Threats and Opportunities,” 11.

⁵⁹ Giampiccoli et al, “Characteristics and Policies of Community-Based Tourism in Jamaica,” 59.

⁶⁰ International Ecotourism Society, “What is Ecotourism,” Para 1 - 4.

⁶¹ Dehoorne and Tătar, “Ecotourism Development Strategies for Caribbean Tourism Destinations,” 288.

⁶² Turtle Village Trust, Trinidad and Tobago, “Turtle Village Trust - Ecotourism,” Para 1 - 3.

⁶³ Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, “Main Ridge Forest Reserve,” Para 1 - 3.

⁶⁴ Hotel Mockingbird Hill, “Eco Tours in Jamaica,” Para 2 - 3.

destinations, such as Costa Rica, may provide a model for ecotourism development in the Caribbean.

Community-based tourism is not limited to the diversification of the sun-sea-sand model of tourism; however, it lays the groundwork for a more equitable and locally involved tourism sector through community tourism enterprises (CTEs). CTEs are small, medium, or micro-sized enterprises that pursue sustainable tourism and benefit the localities within which they operate.⁶⁵ Although the success of CTEs is critical in facilitating a more even distribution of the economic benefits of tourism, these enterprises face a number of obstacles. In Boa Vista, Cape Verde, although there are high levels of community participation, tourists still preferred to stay at all-inclusive resorts, but this was due to a lack of marketing, as few tourists knew other facilities existed.⁶⁶ A lack of access to credit and other financial resources is another major obstacle that must be overcome,⁶⁷ but credit unions and cooperative financial institutions may potentially serve as a solution to this issue. As Kenyan CTEs have demonstrated,⁶⁸ government support, public policy, and guiding legislative framework play important roles in fostering the development of community-based tourism.

While community-based tourism has the potential to empower and economically revitalise marginalised communities through increased local participation, the existing tourism landscape will not disappear once the relevant stakeholders begin to invest in community-based tourism. Reconnecting all-inclusive resorts to the local economy is among the simplest ways to increase tourism multipliers and distribute the economic benefits of tourism. In 2019, Jamaica imported over US\$1.025 billion worth of food, 60% of which supplied the hotel, restaurant, and institutional sector.⁶⁹ Limited efforts by a handful of Jamaican all-inclusive resorts to source a food supply from local farmers have

⁶⁵ Ibid, 55.

⁶⁶ Sánchez-Cañizares and Castillo-Canalejo, "Community-Based Island Tourism: the Case of Boa Vista in the Cape Verde," 219.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 57.

⁶⁸ Manyara and Jones, "Community-Based Tourism Enterprises Development in Kenya: An Exploration of Their Potential as Avenues of Poverty Reduction," 630.

⁶⁹ International Trade Administration, "Jamaica - Agriculture," para 2.

been successful,⁷⁰ but the problem persists despite the Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries repeatedly requesting that hotels and resorts foster linkages with local farmers to reduce economic leakage as a result of food imports and ‘flying food in with tourists’.⁷¹ Governments and policymaking bodies within the Caribbean must take immediate action to incentivise hotels and resorts purchasing local produce to reduce economic leakage, and distribute the economic benefits of tourism more evenly.

Much criticism has also been directed at cruise tourism for economic benefits remaining concentrated in a narrow coastal strip,⁷² and devastating ecological impacts.⁷³ At present, cruise tourism is associated with the discharge of vast quantities of waste into the sea and the annihilation of marine ecosystems. Evidently, a major transition toward a more sustainable cruise tourism industry can contribute to preserving marine life and ecosystems and dividing the economic benefits of tourism more equitably. In order to mitigate the environmental impacts of cruise tourism, contemporaries have suggested that simple measures to reduce emissions, such as using cleaner fuels, or more renewable energy, and education programs for tourists to eliminate litter and disturbance to wildlife could be very successful.⁷⁴ Additionally, establishing designated sites for cruise tourism, and off-limits areas which may host more sensitive marine life have been proposed as viable solutions.⁷⁵ Increased local involvement in cruise tourism has been put forward as a potential strategy for increasing tourism multipliers and enabling the benefits of the industry to reach more people. Excursions and an increased availability of cultural opportunities led by members of the local community for instance, have been identified as ways to go about this.⁷⁶

Tourism is the economic locomotive of the Caribbean, so the diversification of the sector in the aftermath of COVID-19 has the potential to transform the socio-economic

⁷⁰ Silva et al, “Reducing the CARICOM Food Import Bill and the Real Cost of Food: Policy and Investment Options,” 67 - 68.

⁷¹ Silvera, “Shaw: Stop Flying in Food with Tourists - Minister Raps Hotels for Import Appetite,” para 3 - 5.

⁷² Weaver, “Model of Urban Tourism for Small Caribbean Islands,” 1.

⁷³ World Tourism Organisation and Asia-Pacific Tourism Exchange Center, “Sustainable Cruise Tourism Development Strategies - Tackling the Challenges in Itinerary Design in South-East Asia,” 18.

⁷⁴ Cerveny et al, “Sustainable Cruise Tourism in Marine World Heritage Sites,” 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

landscape of the region. Community-based tourism, particularly in the niche areas of ecotourism and cultural/heritage tourism has great potential in the region, owing to its biodiversity, beauty, and cultural richness. Diversification is not something which can have immediate effect, however, so major improvements to the all-inclusive resorts and cruise tourism which define Caribbean tourism at present, are required. In the case of the former, small-scale efforts to 'reconnect' some resorts to the local economy have been successful, and some form of government policy or incentivisation appears to be required to encourage it on a large scale, as linkages with local farmers seem to be the main way in which all-inclusive resorts can benefit the local community. In the case of cruise tourism, a heightened awareness of environmental sensitivity among passengers, off-limits areas, and more local involvement have been put forward as solutions to the ecological and economic issues the industry generates.

Strengthening and Expanding Caribbean Cooperative Enterprises

A cooperative, according to the National Union of Cooperative Societies in Jamaica, is an enterprise formed through voluntary self-organisation controlled by, and operated for the benefit of its members.⁷⁷ Despite having the freedom to draw up bylaws, cooperatives are expected to adhere to the fundamental principles of open membership, democratic control, limited interest on capital, democratic distribution of the economic results of operation, continuous education for the members, and cooperation among cooperatives, outlined by the International Cooperative Alliance.⁷⁸ Cooperatives, as people-centred enterprises, function to help their members realise their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations⁷⁹ and have a long history in the Caribbean.

The Caribbean experience colonialism has produced an entrenched culture of community-based solutions to wider socio-economic problems. Rotating savings and credit associations, where members contribute a small sum on a regular basis and cyclical pay-outs are made⁸⁰ represent one example of this. Other forms of cooperative societies emerged as a result of these barriers to credit, including Friendly Societies, community-oriented organisations which assist members with accessing healthcare, insurance, loans, and land⁸¹ and credit unions, cooperative, not-for-profit financial institutions which offer low interest loans, higher interest on deposits, and lower fees than standard financial organisations for members.⁸² The complex socio-economic issues that Caribbean people face can be addressed, in part, through the strengthening and expansion of cooperative enterprises in the region.

In the Caribbean, access to productive and financial resources is severely constrained for women. Aside from facing a severe income gap which sees women

⁷⁷ National Union of Cooperative Societies Limited, "Co-operatives in the Caribbean: An Introduction," 17.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 35 - 36.

⁷⁹ International Cooperative Alliance, "What is a cooperative?" para 1.

⁸⁰ Stoffle et al, "Women's Power and Community Resilience Rotating Savings and Credit Associations in Barbados and the Bahamas," 1.

⁸¹ Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, "Friendly Society Council Approves New Society," 6.

⁸² CCCU, "The Credit Union Difference," para 2.

earning 30% less than men in Latin America and the Caribbean,⁸³ more women have lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout the region, and the prevalence of unpaid care work has substantially increased.⁸⁴

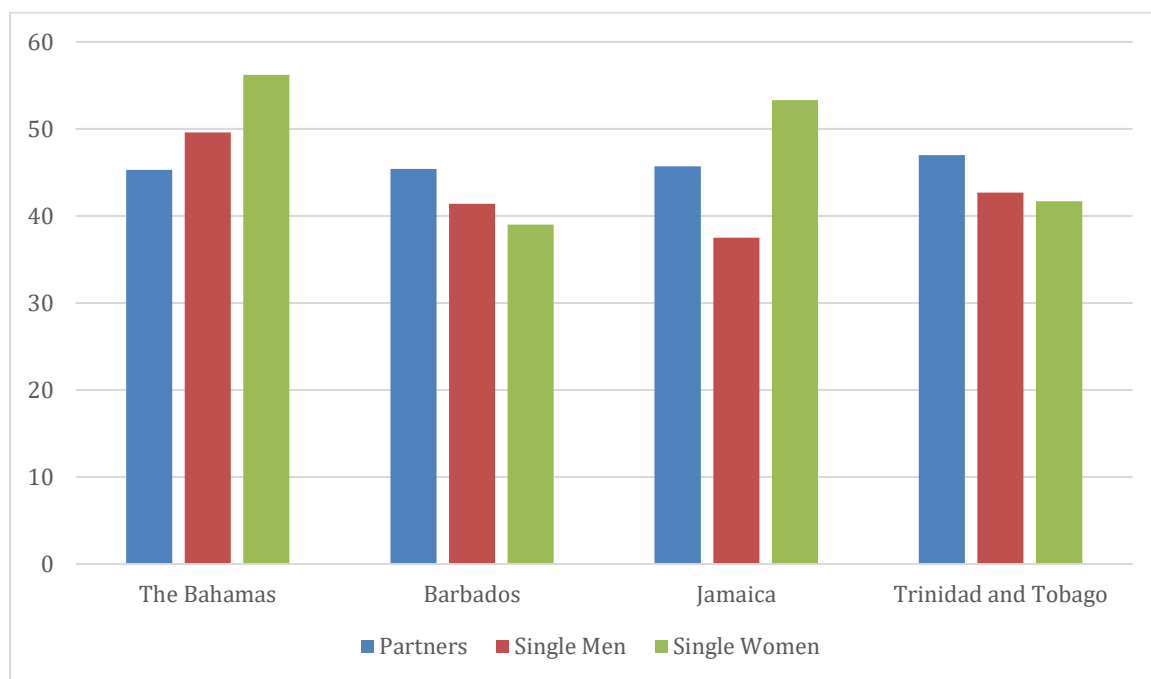


Fig. 2: Job Losses Among Women in the Caribbean by Country - IADB Data⁸⁵

As women constitute the majority of the workforce in tourism in and out of the resort setting, addressing the systemic barriers women face accessing credit throughout the Caribbean may aid in their recovery in the post-pandemic period, and facilitate a ‘social revitalisation’, which empowers women. Credit unions may be the key to this social revitalisation for women, and for MSMEs in general, as ECLAC has observed that access to credit is the key to ensuring the survival of tourism firms in the aftermath of the pandemic.⁸⁶

⁸³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, “SIGI Scores for the ‘Restricted Access to Productive and Financial Resources’ Dimension,” Figure 5.1.

⁸⁴ Alvarez and Khadan, “Are Women Worse off after 2020?” para 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid, Figure 1.

⁸⁶ Mulder, “The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Tourism Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Options for a Sustainable and Resilient Recovery,” 31.

Credit unions provide services to a membership defined on the basis of a common bond.⁸⁷ Over 207.9 million people worldwide are members of credit unions,⁸⁸ but a high proportion of the Caribbean population are members. In Trinidad and Tobago for instance, roughly half the population are members of credit unions.⁸⁹ Whereas commercial banks must maximise short-term returns to satisfy shareholder expectations, the non-profit nature of credit unions make them subservient to the needs of members, making them well-positioned to provide services to those excluded by mainstream financial institutions.⁹⁰ The members of credit unions tend to have lived in their area for upwards of twenty years, and most tend to be women.⁹¹ As they generally tend to provide small loans, low balance share accounts, and financial advice and counselling to low-income individuals who are excluded by mainstream financial institutions⁹² efforts by credit unions to penetrate more rural areas and increase membership, and increased incentivisation by the state for credit unions to grow and expand may contribute to uplifting women in the Caribbean after the COVID-19 pandemic.

An expansion of cooperative enterprises in other areas, such as tourism, may contribute to the economic revitalisation of the Caribbean in the post-pandemic period. In the north-eastern Brazilian state of Alagoas, landless, rural workers in the city of Maragogi who faced extreme poverty managed to form a sustainable tourism cooperative and drastically improved the quality and standard of life for their community.⁹³ While self-organisation is important, this cooperative demonstrates that institutional support is the critical factor for determining the success or failure of cooperative enterprises in adverse socioeconomic conditions. Not only did local farmers have a somewhat steady income due to their crops being purchased by the National Food Supply Company, but land occupation was made possible by the National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian

⁸⁷ Mckillop and Wilson, "Credit Unions as Cooperative Institutions: Distinctiveness, Performance and Prospects," 96.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 101.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 96-97.

⁹¹ McArthur et al "Credit Unions and Low-Income Communities," 407.

⁹² Mckillop and Wilson, "Credit Unions as Cooperative Institutions: Distinctiveness, Performance and Prospects," 104.

⁹³ Quandt et al, "Social Innovation Practices in the Regional Tourism Industry: Case Study of a Cooperative in Brazil," 2.

Reform, and funding was obtained from a number of other state institutions. Inequalities in accessing credit, a gap which can be bridged by credit unions, and direct state support can thus contribute to developing cooperative enterprises, which in turn provide a stable source of employment, income, and support for entire communities.

When compared to conventional firms, cooperatives appear to be more efficient and productive. As employees in cooperative enterprises contribute labour and capital, and are involved in the democratic internal governance process, cooperatives tend to enlist the highest level of participation from employees.⁹⁴ Empirical evidence gathered in a study on cooperative enterprises in Uruguay has also demonstrated that in cooperatives, the employment responses to idiosyncratic and macroeconomic shocks seems to be less elastic than in conventional firms.⁹⁵ Additionally, cooperatives have higher survival chances than conventional firms: the hazard of dissolution is about 25% lower in cooperatives than in conventional firms. While some criticise cooperatives claiming that they tend to make inefficient investment decisions and forgo investment opportunities in favour of distributing income among members, this criticism was originally directed at the Yugoslavian cooperative model, where members had no ownership stake. This arrangement is uncommon in contemporary cooperative enterprises.⁹⁶ Cooperatives thus appear to possess a number of advantages over their conventional counterparts, rendering them a potentially useful mode of business organisation in the post-pandemic period.

Although many people consider cooperative enterprises to be niche, small and have fewer employees than conventionally managed firms, research suggests that the opposite is true. The Mondragon Corporation located in the Basque Country in Spain is the 10th largest in the Spanish market, and employs upwards of 80,000 people, with a

⁹⁴ Cheney et al, "Worker Cooperatives as an Organizational Alternative: Challenges, Achievements, and Promise in Business Governance and Ownership," 593.

⁹⁵ Bundin, "Are Worker-Managed Firms More Likely to Fail than Conventional Enterprises? Evidence from Uruguay," 207.

⁹⁶ Bundin, "Are Worker-Managed Firms More Likely to Fail than Conventional Enterprises? Evidence from Uruguay," 204 - 205.

presence in over 40 countries.⁹⁷ The employee-owned John Lewis Partnership in the United Kingdom also counts more than 93,000 partner-employees.⁹⁸ While these firms demonstrate the capacity of cooperative enterprises to scale up and enter the same space as large conventionally run multinational firms, smaller cooperatives generally have more employees than their conventionally run counterparts: both the average and median numbers of employees in cooperatives are larger than for other firms.⁹⁹ Internationally, some three million cooperatives employ 10% of the global workforce,¹⁰⁰ and they are widespread throughout the Caribbean. In the post-pandemic period, Caribbean states should implement a modern and comprehensive legislative framework to allow these enterprises to flourish.

⁹⁷ Cheney et al, "Worker Cooperatives as an Organizational Alternative: Challenges, Achievements, and Promise in Business Governance and Ownership," 593.

⁹⁸ Pérotin, "What do we really know about cooperatives?" 6.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 7.

¹⁰⁰ International Cooperative Alliance, "Facts and Figures," para 1 - 3.

Recommendations

This essay has analysed Caribbean tourism and the socio-economic landscape of the region in order to identify specific and actionable solutions for existing problems which the pandemic can be used as an opportunity to pivot towards. While more research into the phenomena discussed is required, the proposed solutions which have been identified are as follows:

1. To address economic leakage and the distribution patterns of revenue generated by all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean, governments must incentivise and cooperate with stakeholders in tourism to promote linkages with local farmers and small businesses, so less foreign exchange is lost due to imports and the repatriation of profit by foreign-owned companies, more locals reap the benefits of the tourism sector, and fewer local enterprises shut down when resorts become all-inclusive. This appears to require significant dialogue to be generated prior, however, as current plans surrounding tourism develop in the Caribbean appear to encourage local participation without the onus for change being on all-inclusive resorts. Clear, specific, and actionable plans to integrate tourism into the local economies of the region are crucial for the improvement of the socio-economic situation of the Caribbean.
2. The diversification of Caribbean tourism by transitioning towards sustainable alternatives such as community-based tourism, particularly eco-tourism and cultural tourism, governments and businesses will be encouraged to preserve the environment and local culture, simultaneously offsetting the ecological impacts of tourism and ensuring more local participation in tourism, enabling the economic benefits to be more equitably distributed, and marginalised communities to get involved in the sector and obtain gainful employment on a large scale. This requires large-scale government incentivisation, as well as cooperation with private enterprise and the wider public.
3. Increasing local participation in cruise tourism through local involvement in excursions and cultural events have been identified as a measure which may increase tourism multipliers, and enable the wealth generated to go beyond a

narrow coastal strip. Additionally, Caribbean governments establishing off-limits marine areas, cruise ships using cleaner fuels, and educational programs for tourists may reduce ecological destruction, reduce the carbon emissions of cruise ships, and encourage tourists to avoid disturbing wildlife and littering, leading to a more sustainable cruise tourism industry in the Caribbean.

4. In the Caribbean, while women own and operate most micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, including those in tourism, they still face barriers to accessing credit, which is required to weather the economic storm created by COVID-19. To overcome this, credit unions within the Caribbean must actively increase their reach into rural areas and marginalised communities, and public awareness about the existence and nature of credit unions must be raised to encourage marginalised groups in need to reach out and work with the credit unions.
5. While the present nature of tourism intensifies the socio-economic problems of the Caribbean, it cannot be said to cause all of them. A comprehensive legislative framework governing cooperative enterprises, combined with strong institutional support, which credit unions and governments may assist with, may enable marginalised communities to organise cooperatives enterprises, the equitable nature of which may contribute to the resolution of some of the aforementioned socio-economic problems, and empower rural and disadvantaged groups throughout the region.

Conclusion

Owing primarily to their idyllic beaches and year-round sunshine, many Caribbean nations have managed to successfully attract international tourism, the direct, indirect, and induced economic benefits of which have become the wind in the sails of the regional economy. This has led to the proliferation of all-inclusive resorts and cruise tourism throughout the Caribbean. All-inclusive resorts are generally foreign-owned or established by foreign investors, ecologically damaging, isolated from the local economy, and usually import most of their food, leading to economic leakage and the accumulation of profit by only a few individuals. Cruise tourism is also characterised by unequal revenue distribution and damage to the marine and terrestrial environments. As COVID-19 paralysed Caribbean tourism, larger enterprises sought to curtail employment, while MSMEs face temporary or permanent closure. As women constitute the majority of those employed in tourism, and the majority of MSME owners in the tourism sector, they are seeing their economic autonomy drastically diminished. The pandemic has, however, created a unique opportunity for Caribbean nations to pivot into more sustainable forms of tourism, such as community-based tourism, and address major socio-economic problems by encouraging cooperative enterprises which have the potential to foster a productive, sustainable, and equitable employment landscape within the Caribbean, especially in marginalised areas. As the Caribbean continues to struggle against COVID-19, this opportunity must be seized in order to facilitate a sustainable recovery.

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