

ECYMP: The Eastern Caribbean Youth Microenterprise Program

ECYMP is an 18-month Associate Award designed to accelerate the creation of sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities for vulnerable youth by supporting both increased employment and the establishment of small businesses in Barbados and the countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States:

- Antigua & Barbuda
- Dominica
- St. Lucia
- St. Vincent & the Grenadines

RESULTS:

Some of the key results of the ECYMP program to date include:

- Strengthened the capacity of 125 individuals and 57 organizations;
- \$141,000 awarded to youth enterprises;
- Relaunched Junior Achievement Barbados to educate students about entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and work readiness.



The Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), including Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and to a lesser degree neighboring Barbados, are increasingly faced with several social issues including HIV/AIDS, high unemployment rates, increasing involvement of youth in illicit activities, and growing rates of rural poverty often due to suffering rural economies and increased migration.

With an educational system that is unable to keep up with the needs of young people who need to be more productively engaged in the economic sector, there is a strong need for more effective school-to-work programs that give young people tangible options. Enterprise development offers an innovative and productive way to support eastern Caribbean youth so that they are equipped to make better decisions about becoming employed or starting up a business.

The ECYMP is designed to accelerate the creation of sustainable livelihoods and self-employment opportunities for vulnerable youth (defined here as between the ages of 10-30) by supporting both increased income-generating opportunities and the establishment of micro-businesses by and for youth in Barbados and four OECS countries.

A Participatory Approach

ECYMP is developing partnerships with local youth-serving organizations as well as the private sector through a participatory model that applies proven, evidence-based, and market-driven approaches to improve livelihood opportunities for young people. By including local institutions in the design and delivery of market-oriented youth entrepreneurship programs, the program is rapidly building local capacity.



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A Youth's Perspective

"It was always my passion, my dream, to be a successful business woman and I never gave up."

Ismela Henry, A Touch of First Class Laundromat



Growing up on St. Lucia's coastal town of Soufrière, Ismela Henry was accustomed to the yachting and tourism industry. Approximately 4,000 yachts arrive through the Soufriere Marine Management Association's (SMMA) mooring zones every year, bringing in more than 12,000 passengers annually. A recurring question in Ismela's daily interactions with the tourists was, "Where can I find a laundromat?" Currently, the closest laundromat is a 40-minute drive from Soufrière.

Ismela recognized the business opportunity for a laundromat to serve clients from yachts, small hotels and restaurants, and local residents. However, despite her enthusiasm for investing in a laundromat, she was unsuccessful in securing a loan from the local banks. Without access to funding, she resorted to offering laundry services operating out of her home, using her personal washing machine, hand washing delicates, and line drying clients' clothes.

The SMMA partnered with Ismela to submit an application for an ECYMP Accelerator Grant to supply the resources to start her business. The SMMA provides market access to yacht clients through advertising space and will refer clients to the newly established laundromat. Ismela also approached a local loans facility, BELFund Inc., to leverage funding from ECYMP. As a second private partner, BELFund offers loan access, skills training, and mentorship to Ismela. Together, SMMA and BELFund offer institutional support for Ismela to become self-employed and fill a niche in the tourism industry in Soufrière.

The Accelerator Grant of \$10,000 was awarded to Ismela and her partnership team to help bring her services to a ready marketplace. The funds are currently being used to procure equipment, materials, and cover start up costs necessary for the laundry service. A Touch of First Class Laundromat is set to open this winter with a profitable and sustainable business model. Ismela Henry will soon see her dream come true as she establishes herself as one of the few young self-employed women in Soufrière.

This process begins with a Youth Market Opportunity Assessment in each country, led by implementing partner EcoVentures International. This comprehensive and inclusive process seeks to:

- Map existing efforts and the local capacity of systems to support youth;
- Help partner organizations better understand the economic opportunities that can support youth; and
- Identify the economic sectors that can create the greatest opportunities for young entrepreneurs and workers.

Based on this assessment, ECYMP conducts tailored capacity building workshops and provides one-on-one technical assistance for local partner institutions.

Supplementing the training and technical assistance, ECYMP operates two tailored grant funds to expand microenterprise opportunities for young people: 1) A Livelihood Development Partnership Grants fund designed to support microenterprise development activities within selected youth-serving organizations; and 2) Youth Livelihood Development Acceleration Fund that can be drawn on by partner organizations (including industry associations, businesses, community-based organizations, and youth organizations) as a way to innovate, cost share, and incentivize private, public, and other local entities to expand services that support youth self-employment opportunities.

In addition, the program supports strengthening school-to-work transition strategies by carrying out assessments of Junior Achievement (JA) activities in all four OECS countries and, based on this assessment, provided recommendations for reopening Junior Achievement operations in Barbados. ECYMP worked closely with the Ministry of Education and the Youth Development Programme to pilot the JA program in two schools. The relaunch of JA Barbados was announced in June 2011 to an audience of government officials, NGOs, youth serving organizations, entrepreneurs, and the public. There was an overwhelming response from former JA graduates, the Ministries, and the business community. Private funding has been secured to move forward with rolling out JA in more schools to train a new generation of entrepreneurs.

Throughout the program's activities, ECYMP places a high priority on learning, replication, and sustainability in order to extend successful results-oriented practices to other OECS countries, and beyond.

The FIELD-Support Leader with Associates is an 8-year cooperative agreement awarded by the USAID Microenterprise Development Office to improve the state-of-the-practice of microfinance and microenterprise development. FIELD-Support is implemented by FHI 360 and a consortium of 27 development partners. Learn more at microlinks.kdid.org/field-support.

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