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Jamaica: Establishing Interdependence between the Agriculture and Tourism Industries

Crystal waters span out as far as the eye can see. Waves crash ashore, bubbling into white crests that soon retreat back out to sea. Underneath these waters, great swarms of fish weave between expanses of coral reef, protected from the predators of the open ocean. On land, lush tropical rainforests carpet mountains, home to banana, coffee, sugarcane, and many other plants that sustain the island and the world. Inside the mountains lay vast deposits of valuable minerals. The people who call this island home display a unique blend of British and African heritage, shown through a vibrant scene of food, music, and dress. Beneath all of this beauty, however, lies a land ravaged by poverty and crime. An island lacking the resources to sustain itself.

Jamaica is the third largest island country in the Caribbean Sea with a total land area of 10,831 square kilometers and a population of 2.9 million people. The island holds 1,022 kilometers of coastline and coastal plain outlining a mountainous interior. The climate of Jamaica is tropical, characterized by hot and humid summers and temperate winters. This provides an ideal climate for growing crops such as sugarcane and potatoes. Currently, 78 percent of farms on the island are small, working off of five acres or less and growing root crops and vegetables. There are a small number of large-scale farms along the more fertile coastal plains that grow mainly sugar, coffee, and bananas (Campbell, n.d.). The economy is centered around services, mainly the tourism industry and remittances, which are monies earned by individuals who live and work abroad in order to earn money to send home to their family. Jamaica also exports commodities including alumina, bauxite, mineral fuels, and sugarcane. In 2017, exports brought in 1.296 billion US dollars while imports cost 5.151 billion dollars. The main commodities imported are food, industrial supplies, and fuel (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2018).

The structure of a typical Jamaican family is largely dependent on their economic status. Among lower socio-economic classes, children born into non-marriage unions and single parent households are prevalent. As economic class increases, more families follow the layout of a traditional nuclear family unit (Hazle, 2001). As of 2016, 17.1% or almost 500,000 citizens of Jamaican are living under the poverty line (CIA, 2018). Primary education, grades one through six, is compulsory in Jamaica. Private and public institutions provide varying levels of education. The free public system has large class sizes and language barriers that limit the effectiveness of a student's education (Babb, 2019). Secondary education is also "free," however the large amount of money required to pay for uniforms, learning material and various fees prevents many individuals from pursuing their education (Trines, 2019). The unemployment rate in Jamaica as of 2017 is 12.2% (CIA, 2018). Common careers include tourism, farming, and mining. A large percentage of the Jamaican workforce is dedicated to running hotels, restaurants, and shops to support the tourism industry (Staff, 2015).

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC region) is a region comprised of 46 countries and territories. Excluding Haiti, all other nations and territories in the region are classified as "developing nations" (G, 2017). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report, *Regional Review on Status and Trends in Aquaculture Development in Latin America and the Caribbean - 2015*, "The LAC region spends a similar percentage of its GDP [gross domestic product] on education to the other regions reviewed (OECD, United States of America, World). However, LAC countries invest much

less in R&D [research and development] – about a third, as percentages of GDP – than do more developed countries. The proportion of scientists is close to one-sixth of that in developed economies.” (G, 2017). This lack of spending on research and development is a major problem in Jamaica. The current education and career structure has created a “brain drain” in Jamaica. Of the small percentage of Jamaicans who pursue higher education, a large majority of them end up leaving Jamaica for Canada, the United States of America, or the United Kingdom for higher paying stable careers. Women are especially at risk of leaving Jamaica as almost one third of all Jamaican women with a college education have left the country (Trines, 2019). This aids in explaining why remittances are a crucial piece of the Jamaican economy.

The challenge faced in improving the quality of life in Jamaica centers around effectively using the limited resources available to this island nation. The GDP of Jamaica in 2017 was 26.06 billion dollars. In the same year, Jamaica spent 3.855 billion dollars more on imports than it made in exports. That is 14.79% of the total GDP being spent on goods that could become exports with the right technology. During the 1980s and 1990s, Jamaica, in conjunction with the World Bank, eliminated import quantity restrictions and removed tariffs that in turn led to the elimination of local crops such as Irish potatoes. It became cheaper to import these crops than grow them locally, so imports increased (Campbell, n.d.). Another problem in the Jamaican economy is the reliance on remittances. In 2017, remittances accounted for 14 percent of the GDP (CIA, 2018). Reliance on remittances is a problem because the work being done to earn that income is not benefiting Jamaica or strengthening the local Jamaican economy. It is a sign that there is a weakness in the Jamaican system of education and employment that is leading its citizens to seek a life outside of Jamaica. Advancements need to be made to better capitalize on the agricultural opportunities on the island. This will be the first piece in reshaping the Jamaican economic flow to improve the economic status of the entire island.

The best way to improve the overall quality of life in Jamaica is through policy changes to enhance the local agricultural commodities markets, thereby decreasing food imports and increasing connections between local commodities and the tourism sector. Tourism is an essential component to the Jamaican economy, composing 20 percent of the GDP (CIA, 2018). Cruise ships, all-inclusive resorts, and hotels brought 4.3 million tourists to the island in 2017 (Gardner, 2018). In order to feed these 4.3 million visitors and the 2.9 million citizens, Jamaica imported 986 million dollars of foodstuffs, animal products, and vegetable products (Simoes, n.d.). In a June 2018 speech, Jamaican Agricultural Minister Audley Shaw called out this problem in the Jamaican economy saying, “Check the hotels on the north coast. The very thing that we have glut on right now, they have flown them in on planes coming with tourists to feed (them). That is one thing I can tell you that's on my radar. That has got to change” (Hines, 2018). Tapping into the underutilized agriculture sector of Jamaica would build up local farmers across the island and allow for a reduction in spending on imports. This reduction in import spending would create a more balanced and stable budget for the country of Jamaica. Funds might then be available to be dedicated to the education system of Jamaica, investing into areas that would slow the exit of native citizens in search of a quality higher education.

There are three key factors that have to be addressed when improving sustainable ties between agriculture and tourism. Demand, supply, and intermediate factors must all be considered at tourist locations. Matching demand to the current supply is the first step in strengthening the relationship. The chefs and staff involved in food procurement and preparation have to be aware of the seasonal availability of local goods and committed to shaping menus to match supply. The chefs must also be taught how to best utilize these local ingredients. Secondly, the supply of goods must meet the demand in quality, price, and availability. Goods produced locally must be of the same or better standard as those currently imported. In

addition to supporting the introduction of new but feasible crops in Jamaica, increased education and resources for local farmers enables the supply to more accurately meet demand. Finally, intermediate factors such as transportation and infrastructure must be built up to connect the farmer to the consumer (Meyer, Ashley, Poultney, 2004).

Sandals International Resorts (Sandals) has taken the first step in making this policy change in Jamaica. Sandals was founded in Jamaica in 1981 and currently operates nine all-inclusive resorts on the island (“About Sandals Resorts International,” n.d.). Since 1996, Sandals Farmer Programme has been working to develop relationships between local farmers and resorts in order to maximize the use of local commodities (Meyer, Ashley, Poultney, 2004). By purchasing from local suppliers and establishing programs to assist local farming efforts, both Sandals and the Jamaican economy have benefitted. According to Jordan Samuda, director of Sandals’ Procurement Division, “of the 5.4 million pounds of produce, including fruits and vegetables that all of our resorts (in Jamaica) consume annually, five million, or 90 percent of those fruits and vegetables are grown right here in Jamaica. And that five million is grown by over 2,000 farmers across the length and breadth of Jamaica” (Hines, 2018). This impressive feat is the result of the dedication of Sandals to buy local and invest into the land they profit from.

To address the problems of demand and supply, Sandals implemented a professional exchange between farmers and resort food staff. Local farmers were brought into the resorts to see how their products were being used and why quality requirements at Sandals are important. Management teams from the resorts were brought to local farms to observe where the food they used was coming from and how local chefs best utilized the ingredients. These arrangements strengthened ties between the farmers and the resorts and helped both sides to understand their interdependence (Meyer, Ashley, Poultney, 2004). Sandals resorts in Jamaica now feature local seasonal produce in the dishes they serve and display the names of the farmers on their menus (Morrow, 2019). Not only does this strengthen and empower the Jamaican farmers, it allows tourists to have a true taste of the land they are visiting and hopefully a greater awareness of life on a global scale. Sandals has also developed an Irish potato initiative in which Sandals provided 25 million dollars worth of potato seeds to local farmers, asking them to farm, harvest, and sell the potatoes back to Sandals. Ultimately, this will eliminate the need for Sandals to import Irish potatoes. It will save Sandals money while also providing a source of income for the local economy. Sandals Deputy Chairman and CEO Adam Stewart stated, “I think what this represents at a higher level is just to show how easily we can connect, find the gap between the hospitality sector and the agriculture sector, identify willing farmers and put them into business by donating the seeds” (Hines, 2018).

There have been past attempts to link the agriculture and tourism industries in the Caribbean which have brought to light problems that will arise and need to be addressed when considering these policy changes in Jamaica. Efforts in Quintana Roo, Mexico worked to create facilities to handle and store goods after harvest and establish “a state run middle man dedicated to procuring local products and delivering them to Cancun hotels and suppliers (Meyer, Ashley, Poultney, 2004).” One of the key causes of failure in this project was the lack of unity and communication between the government, the farmers, and the tourist companies. The Sandals operation in Jamaica has been successful because it put in the effort to increase ties between the farmers and the specific resorts where their food is used. Respect and trust has to be established between the two parties. Without this, the resorts will not trust the quality of the food produced locally and the farmers will not trust the financial actions of the corporations and government to be giving them their fair share (Meyer, Ashley, Poultney, 2004).

Expanding the connection between agriculture and tourism in Jamaica by replicating the format implemented by Sandals would strengthen the Jamaican economy and improve the quality of life of

citizens across the island. Other tourist resorts on the island should adopt similar policies to decrease their dependence on imported food. Sourcing from local farmers will not only improve the local economy but be economically advantageous for the tourism companies. In addition, once the local farmers have learned to meet the Irish potato needs of Sandals, they will be prepared to instruct other farmers on their methods and eventually eliminate the importation of Irish potatoes to Jamaica. This method could then expand to support programs for other crops. By utilizing tax incentives, the Jamaican government could set minimum standards for domestic food usage relative to total purchasing. Methods such as this are already in place in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (Baines, 2018). Requiring the use of a higher percentage of locally grown food is a logical first step in expanding the Jamaican agriculture sector towards reaching its full potential.

For many individuals, Jamaica is a vision of paradise. Vacationers from around the world visit to experience the tropical weather and unique Jamaican culture. These tourist dollars are a major portion of the Jamaican GDP, but there is potential for more of that money to be fed back into the local economy. The island has the agricultural potential to greatly reduce reliance on imported goods. Sourcing locally grown goods from farms across the island will strengthen rural economies in addition to those areas reliant on the hospitality industry. Money that was once spent abroad will now remain in Jamaica. Partnerships between the government and the tourist industry, with emphasis on policy and education, will begin to improve the import-export imbalance in Jamaica, improving the quality of life on the island.

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