

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

Barbudan fisherfolk supporting disaster risk resilience

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In September 2017, Antigua's sister island, Barbuda, was ravaged by a super-storm, Hurricane Irma, resulting in indescribable losses of life, property, peace of mind and the list goes on and on.

Sadly, their history has now been solidly demarcated

into two distinct time periods: life before Irma and life after Irma. As rapid assessments were done, considering the social, economic, and environmental impact of the hurricane, amid great loss, one thing remained clear, the resilience of the Barbudan people.

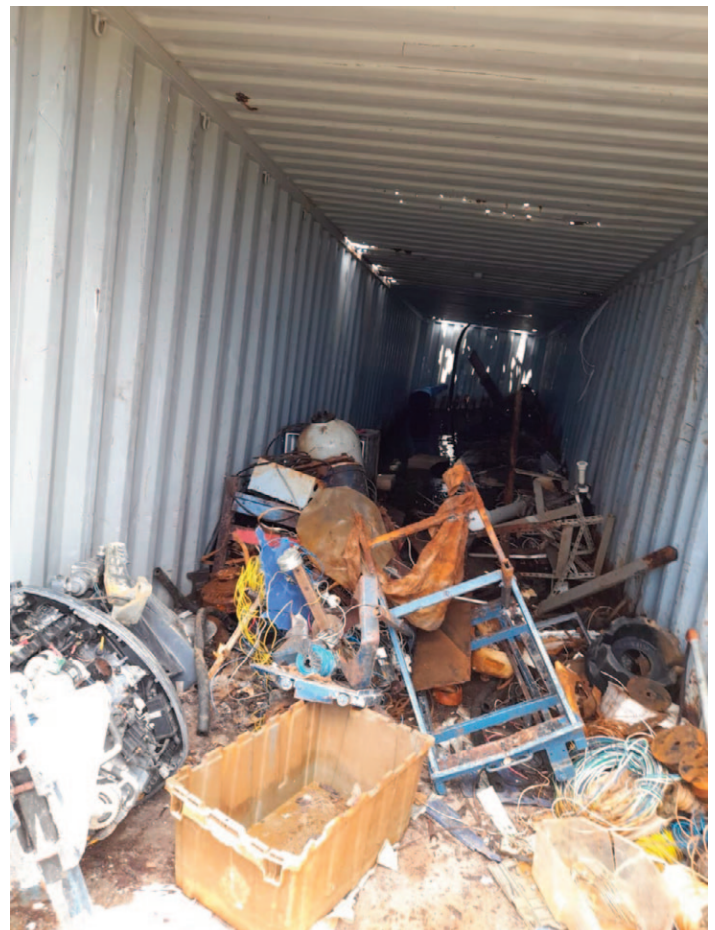
Almost five years later, and the effects of that catastrophic storm can still be easily observed - destroyed

homes and businesses, tents in backyards, and debris – everyday items in strange places.

The Codrington Lagoon, known famously for its Magnificent Frigate Bird Sanctuary and its enviable designation as a Ramsar Site – a wetland of notable and international importance, was not spared from the wrath of the superstorm. Although the mangrove system

is rebounding beautifully, some breaches in the lagoon have not yet closed, and debris still scars this beautiful ecosystem.

Now, the Codrington Lagoon is not only a place of international significance, but it is very important to the Barbudan economy. Life at sea is an intrinsic part of each Barbudan with many learning to swim and fish before they can walk and talk! Fish fea-



Photos courtesy Leroy Gore, president of the Barbuda Fisherfolk Association

tures heavily in the Barbudan diet. The exportation of fish, sea moss, conch, and lobster from our sister isle supports many livelihoods throughout the community.

Because of their connection to the lagoon, the Barbuda Fisherfolk Association (BFA) is participating as a partner civil society organisation (CSO) under the CSOs for Disaster Resilience project. This project aims to improve resilience for local communities associated livelihoods and ecosystems to hurricanes and climate extremes in the Eastern Caribbean through implementing community-based and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction (CBDRR/ Eco-DRR).

The project, which is funded by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) and implemented by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), is regional in scope, beginning in September 2019 and ending in September 2022. Under the project, the BFA has been receiving technical and organisational capacity building and a small grant which is being used toward cleanup of the mangrove system in Codrington Lagoon, to help support its natural regeneration. In particular, they would be removing corroding shipping containers which were filled with construction equipment and other materials, as well as galvanised sheeting and other large pieces of debris.

In December 2021, the BFA and its mentor assigned under the CSOs for Disaster Resilience project engaged the GEF Small Grants Programme to help strengthen the institutional capacity of the BFA. There is recognition by CANARI and funding agencies such as the IAF and GEF that apart from funding support, organisational strengthening is needed to ensure CSOs such as the BFA

can operate effectively and deliver their mandates.

From December to May, in three distinct sessions, the fisherfolk would gather at the end of the week to improve skills on planning, managing and reporting on projects, as well as financial responsibility and financial reporting. While participants were actively engaged in all sessions, the most well-received were Knowledge Management and Leadership Skills held in the month of May.

In March, 2022, the CANARI Mentor and CSO Development Consultant, Mrs Brenda Thomas Odlum and I, the GEF Small Grants Programme National Coordinator, conducted a site visit to the lagoon before actual removal work was done.

In May 2022, another visit was done, where progress could be observed. Before training, the mentor and facilitator were able to connect with the fisherfolk, and hear of their experiences, challenges and progress to support the restoration of the lagoon as a healthy ecosystem. Removal of the containers was particularly challenging, and the team



brainstormed and cut the containers into pieces, removing equipment and material, some of which were still useful. It was a gruelling, slow process that spanned from dawn until dusk and would yield no economic returns in the short term. Such is the commitment of the Barbuda Fisherfolk Association.

Up to this point, the team of fishers have removed 35 tons of debris and a shipping container from the lagoon.

As this project comes to a close in the next few weeks, we congratulate the team on their success, and eagerly anticipate news of plans for future ecosystem rehabilitation projects on Barbuda.

