

St. Johns Antigua and Barbuda – Innovation Hub

Location: St. Johns Antigua and Barbuda

Venue: The University of the West Indies, Five Islands Campus

Intro to the City, Distinctive Aspects and Demographics:

Antigua and Barbuda is a sovereign island nation located in the Caribbean Sea consisting of two main islands and several smaller islands. Known for its stunning beaches and turquoise waters, this twin-island state has become a popular tourist destination, attracting visitors from around the world. The country has a population of approximately 99,287 as of 2022, with the majority being of African descent (87.3%), followed by mixed (4.7%), Hispanic (2.7%), and White (1.6%) ethnicities. The capital and largest city is St. John's, situated on Antigua, which serves as the main economic and cultural hub of the nation.

Overview of Local Economy - The economies of Antigua and Barbuda is heavily reliant on tourism, which contributes more than 50% of the country's GDP and accounts for over 46% of national employment. The other key sectors include fishing, maritime transport, and water management. The government has actively fostered a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem through various start-up and incubator programs, aiming to diversify the economy and create new opportunities for its citizens. In addition, businesses are unable to access relevant data to complete market research to test the veracity of their business assumptions. Furthermore, the absence of a robust framework means that businesses do not have the necessary information to make informed decisions about the registration of their businesses, which contributes to high levels of informality as a means of tax avoidance. This also contributes to statutory authorities' inability to fully understand the emergent needs of businesses. This information gap also affects service providers' ability to develop curated services to address these businesses' needs. These include specific training related to the operation of their businesses, such as accounting, marketing, and sales, as well as more general support such as mentorship or networking opportunities. There is also a lack of coordination among service providers. This includes the absence of information sharing about the services provided, data needs, or data collected due to the absence of mandates of statutory institutions or non-existent regulations around data sharing. This also means that it is very difficult to comprehensively monitor and evaluate the MSME sector at the national and programmatic levels.

Poverty and Disadvantage Challenge in the City - Despite its economic success in the tourism sector, Antigua and Barbuda faces challenges related to poverty, with approximately 18% of the population living below the poverty line as of 2016. This issue particularly affects children and adolescents, with 24% of those aged 0-17 and 25% of those aged 10-19 living in poverty. The country is also vulnerable to environmental threats, such as hurricanes, which can have severe impacts on its infrastructure and economy, as demonstrated by the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in 2017.

Introduction to Your Poverty and Entrepreneurship Program - Hosted by The University of the West Indies, Five Islands Campus – Innovation Hub, the program has a mixed target audience that includes students and staff of the campus as well as members of the wider community in the city of St. Johns, and by extension, Antigua and Barbuda, as this fits in with the university's strategic goal of accessibility. The proposed solution had two main benefits. The first is the current and recent alumni of the UWI FIC, who have ideas or projects that are potential business opportunities with growth potential. Our students come largely from deprived socio-economic backgrounds from Antigua and Barbuda, but also from other countries across the Eastern Caribbean that are enrolled at the university. It includes a large female population that has traditionally been excluded from growth-oriented entrepreneurial activities. Because of the current structure of the economy in which the government is one of the largest employers and tourism is the largest sector, even UWI graduates are under-employed upon graduation, which often forces them into inter- or extra-regional migration. The proposed program will support our large female contingent on developing products and services that solve real problems and help them develop the skills to build successful ventures, while helping them access networks. Through the Innovation Hub, the UWI FIC will further contribute to the creation of new opportunities, a more dynamic and competitive business environment that is able to absorb our graduates' engagement to compensate for their skills and reduce the need for migration.

The second is a wider pool of enterprising individuals within Antigua and Barbuda, who are micro- and small-business owners who lack the skills, business acumen, and network access required to scale and scope their businesses into economically successful entities. While there is a general focus on persons from disadvantaged backgrounds, there is a specific focus on women-owned businesses. What is known from Previous research shows that women-owned businesses accounting for 1/5 of the businesses in Antigua and Barbuda. It has been identified that institutional and cultural barriers affect women's entrance into and sustained presence in the MSME sector. Some of the identified issues include inadequate access to capital, lack of ownership of land and resources, restrictive concepts regarding the role of women in society, weak business networks, and insufficient business training. This is supported by an IDB study that points to a lack of policies and programs to support and encourage entrepreneurial activity, excessive norms and regulation, and related access to credit. These issues are exacerbated by structural factors that have thwarted the development of female-owned enterprises beyond welfare-oriented support. These policies will



gradually catalyze cultural changes that have traditionally served to limit women's involvement in entrepreneurship.

Program Operation - The program will operate out of the School of Business and Management at the University of the West Indies Five Islands Campus. The oversight responsibility will be with Dr. Edward Dixon and Dr. Karen Murdock, with support from full-time and adjunct faculty at the school.

Annual Cycle - The team is currently finalizing plans around the cycle of the program. Some of the current considerations include discussions on the role, reporting relationships, and resource requirements for implementing the program. There are also discussions with government agencies and stakeholders about their potential role in the implementation of the program and the type of support required. The tentative timeline for the start of the program is March to April 2025. We are aiming to go for the similar 10-month cycles but will see to adjust, if necessary, after the first full iteration of the program.

Unique Aspects - The approach revolves around the potential triple helix approach, in which the university partners with industry and government to deliver the program. Additionally, the program does not include all 80 steps based on the nature of the environment in Antigua and Barbuda.

Program Vision - It is hoped that the program will become an established part of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Antigua and Barbuda. It will contribute in a meaningful way to entrepreneurship development in the country by equipping entrepreneurs with the skills and competencies to move

