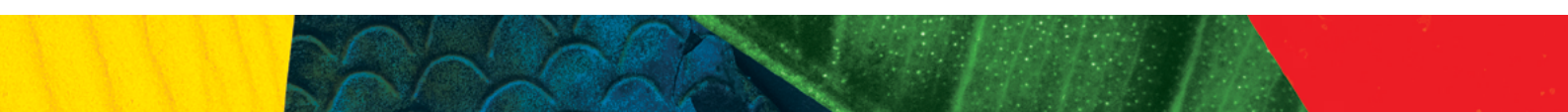




Mauritius
& Seychelles
accelerator
lab

Learning in uncertainty: tourism recovery across Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This knowledge product outlines the learning cycle of the UNDP Mauritius and Seychelles Accelerator Lab and lessons learnt on tourism recovery in both countries. A special thanks goes to the grassroots individuals and communities involved in the local tourism value chains across Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles, who shared their roles, contributions, and lived experiences with the Accelerator Lab.

Author

Ayooshee Dookhee

Data Analysis

Melany Poorun-Sooprayen

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Edited by

Amanda Serumaga, Stéphane Bellerose, Sharon Sunassee and Jean-Yan Norbert

Art Direction & Design

Ziyaad Pondor

Photography

UNDP Communications Team
Michel Denousse - MADcreation

Co-building the Accelerator Labs as a joint venture with:



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CONTENTS

SECTION 1	INTRODUCTION	4
	1.1 The report	5
	1.2 Collective Intelligence	6
	1.3 Key insights	7
SECTION 2	YOUTH IN TOURISM: A SURVEY	12
	2.1 Trends	13
	2.2 Key findings from the data	16
SECTION 3	THE EVOLUTION OF TOURISM ACROSS THE THREE ISLANDS	22
	3.1 Looking back to look forward	23
	3.2 Stories from the frontlines of tourism delivery	24
SECTION 4	FUTURE TOURISM MODELS / EMERGING DIRECTIONS	32
	4.1 Tapping into grassroots distributed insights	33
	4.2 Boosting the entrepreneurial ecosystem	35
	4.3 Where do we go from here?	38
SECTION 5	WHAT NEXT FOR THE MAURITIUS AND SEYCHELLES ACCELERATOR LAB?	40
SECTION 6	ANNEX	42
	6.1 Survey Methodology and Outreach	42
	6.2 Survey Questions	44



Data collected and referenced from desk research date from the period April 2021 - August 2022.

SECTION 1

Introduction



1.1 THE REPORT

Located across vast oceans and often isolated, small islands share some commonalities, among which is their resilience. Though they are far from the big economic markets, and more vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) see themselves as [Large Ocean States \(LOS\)](#), as their ocean territories are far larger than their terrestrial areas. For both the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles, the tourism sector has been a vital economic lifeline for decades.

Tourism is omnipresent in the lives of people in Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2019, travel and tourism represented 19.5% of Mauritius' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 42.9% of the Seychelles'. In Mauritius, 1 in 8 persons is directly employed in tourism and in the Seychelles, the figure stands at 1 in 10 persons.

Through this report, which is the result of an in-depth study on the local tourism value chains of the three islands for the past year and a half, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mauritius and Seychelles Accelerator Lab aims to provide a glimpse into the realities of communities who have coastal and tourism-dependent livelihoods. The report also provides an opportunity to discuss ways to leverage new and old resources of intelligence, harnessed at various levels – from government to grassroots – to understand complex problems, make informed decisions and find new solutions.

We hope that the findings of this report will serve to galvanise decision-makers in the tourism sectors of Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles, to take bold actions towards supporting tourism-dependent communities. This includes young people looking for meaningful and decent jobs in the sector, and older people exiting the industry and willing to transmit their knowledge to keep the sector alive for decades to come. We also hope that the findings can be a call to action for local partners to work together with the Accelerator Lab on further exploration and experimentation, and towards the co-creation of resilient future tourism models.

SHARE OF	TRAVEL & TOURISM	MAURITIUS
	GDP	19.5%
		SEYCHELLES
		42.9%

1.2 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE: WHAT IS IT AND HOW CAN IT BE USED TO SCALE DEVELOPMENT LEARNING?

From official data to ethnographic research, traditional methods of research and intelligence gathering have enabled decision-makers to understand and respond to complex challenges. As the Lab explored the local tourism landscape for Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles and potential recovery routes, it rapidly became clear that a concerted and collective effort was needed to simultaneously leverage traditional knowledge and mobilise new sources of information, ideas and insights.

This realisation paved the way for the Lab to explore [collective intelligence](#) as a framework for generating development learnings.

Collective intelligence is guided by several design principles, which promote diversity of people and thinking, independent and free expression of opinions, views and ideas, the integration of different types of data, and citizen and data empowerment. It presents a framework for mutual and distributed learning, which can prompt national actors to engage with and implement development strategies that are context-specific, place-based, and more participatory.

For this knowledge product, the Lab relied on participatory and consultative workshops with key stakeholders in the local tourism value chains, ethnography work with tourism-dependent communities, and data collection. These methods combined have informed the findings, analysis and emerging directions of the report.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE



Collective intelligence is the enhanced capacity that is created when people work together to mobilize a wider range of information, ideas and insights.

Collective intelligence relies on a strong combination of **people, data and technology**. The sharing of knowledge, culture and tools allows to anticipate patterns, model new capabilities and test solutions.

SOLUTION/ INNOVATIVE MODEL

In Rodrigues, the semi-autonomous island within the Republic of Mauritius, the Lab captured a model of tourism recovery [that differed from what is](#) happening in Mauritius and Seychelles. There, community values and community solidarity emerged as pillars of resilience for the population.

For example, the **'Tourism Alternative Livelihood'** scheme in Rodrigues enabled those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic to reskill in sectors such as beach cleaning, coral restoration, and the restoration of hiking paths, among others.

IN 2020 **447** EMPLOYEES OF THE TOURISM SECTOR IN RODRIGUES RE-TRAINED THROUGH THE SCHEME

1.3 KEY INSIGHTS



The Lab explored several aspects linked to the tourism sector, such as work, labour and wages, and found that many jobs, once pillars of tourism, were at risk of disappearing. Adverse implications for productive employment in roles such as cooks, front office staff and waiting staff in accommodation services, were noted across the three islands, especially as these roles were often taken up by women and young people.

Several state-led incentives helped the tourism industry and its workers cushion some of the economic and social fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, such as the [Government Wage Assistance Scheme](#) (GWAS) in Mauritius, and the [Employee Transition Scheme in Seychelles](#), which were designed to assist redundant workers and to facilitate reskilling.



INSIGHT 1 THE INCLUSIVE INTEGRATION OF MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES AND INFORMAL ACTORS IS GOING TO BE KEY TO A RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR TOURISM

Two dominant models characterise the tourism offer of Mauritius and Seychelles, and to a lesser extent Rodrigues. The first is enclave tourism, marked by large establishments (e.g., hotel chains) offering all-inclusive services, and the second are service providers that exist outside of hotels, often MSMEs or informal actors. The latter found themselves in 'survival mode', barely having the financial and psychological resources to keep afloat, as trainings aimed at reskilling and upskilling were targeting employees from large establishments who had lost their jobs. Some of the difficulties that MSMEs faced also included inadequate financial and digital literacy, and the inability to access the closed value chain of hotels (who were still operating under quarantine protocols). Due to these challenges, several MSMEs were forced to abruptly end all economic activity.

Enclave tourism has been criticised for a lack of community involvement and participation. MSMEs, on the other hand, often ensure cultural linkages with local communities beyond mere employment opportunities. They therefore contribute to the social and environmental development of the tourist destination.



INSIGHT 2 TACKLING HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE IS NECESSARY BUT NOT ENOUGH

A key concern during the height of the pandemic was whether tourism destinations have the health standards and infrastructure to keep their offer competitive. During a learning inquiry on health infrastructure, it was observed that [tackling health infrastructure](#) is necessary but not enough; and that accessible and inclusive mobility infrastructure is paramount. Stakeholders from the government, the private sector and the tourism ecosystem all highlight the need to adapt the current local infrastructure, for example, repurposing road spaces to include greener areas.



INSIGHT 3 MAURITIUS REMAINS AN ATTRACTIVE TOURIST DESTINATION

Europe is the main market of the Republic of Mauritius. In a post-pandemic context, and now a cost-of-living crisis triggered by the war in Ukraine, there will be continued repercussions on tourist arrivals. Through inquiries into future tourism models for the Republic of Mauritius, it became apparent that Mauritius can still be an attractive tourism destination, but its attractiveness hinges on the country's ability to offer sustainable tourism. Community-based tourism emerged as a promising model to ensure sustainability, for example, exploring [the integration of the artisanal fisher community](#) in the local tourism value chain. Artisanal fisher communities in Mauritius and Rodrigues are numerous, and yet, their trade is dying.

To revive artisanal fishing and the community livelihoods that depend on it, initiatives such as the [EU-funded ECOFISH \(Mauritius\) Project](#), implemented by the UNDP, are crucial. The ECOFISH project offers a holistic approach as it proposes a mix of innovation and good practices to support the economic empowerment and the sustainability of artisanal fishers.

Conversations with fisher communities in several coastal areas of Mauritius and Rodrigues further outline the need for developing a community-based tourism approach, where their involvement can bring localised economic benefits and contribute to keep Mauritius' tourism offer attractive.



INSIGHT 4 UNSUSTAINABLE COASTAL DEVELOPMENT IS A BARRIER TO ATTRACTING DIGITAL NOMADS

The Republic of Mauritius introduced the [Premium Travel Visa](#) in a bid to attract digital nomads, which is projected to reach 1 billion by 2035. Many [SIDS](#) launched digital nomads programs during the pandemic as part of a larger SIDS tourism offer.

Digital nomads seek an independent lifestyle filled with adventure and reliable internet connection. Their style of travel is different to the traditional tourist, who vacations (short-term) as opposed to settling for a period longer than two weeks. By default, digital nomads look for more than the 'sun, sea and sand' offer, which has been a longstanding and largely successful proposition by islands such as Mauritius and Seychelles. In addition, digital nomads seek easy and accessible mobility options, good quality dining options, and a choice of outdoor and cultural activities.¹

However, there are some barriers to attracting more digital nomads and retaining those already on the island for visa renewals. These include the unsustainable coastal development concentrated on exclusive hotel infrastructure, and less accessible and affordable accommodation options.

Discussions with actors across the tourism value chain underscored the value in developing eco-friendly, community-based, and culture-oriented tourism for digital nomads. Many digital nomads visas are for one year. The Accelerator Lab in Barbados noted that many digital nomads have transitioned into residents by extending their stays, and in some cases relocating entirely. In Mauritius too, digital nomads are renewing their one-year visa to stay longer. One emerging trend that can be observed is the link between tourism and immigration, and specifically in the retention of new digitally savvy tourists.

¹ UNDP. 2020. Draft Strategy and Action Plan to Reposition the Mauritian Tourism Sector 2021 – 2024.



INSIGHT 5 OLDER TOURISTS REQUIRE INCLUSIVE HEALTH AND MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURES

25% of the tourists coming to Mauritius are 55 years old and above. It was observed that [reliable, accessible, and inclusive and healthy infrastructure is](#) important to older tourists, and that digitalisation can play a leading role in achieving this standard. Some of the potential solutions that emerged include mobile applications that connect tourists to local communities, for example the fisher community, prior to their visit. In any digitalisation effort, some actors are bound to be left out. It was also noted that many MSMEs in the tourism value chain did not have a revenue stream during the border closure periods. Despite efforts to pivot their services – either online or through upskilling to offer new and adapted services – they were not able to do so efficiently or fast enough. The potential of agile and innovative MSMEs in delivering on new tourism models, targeting the '[silver tourism](#)' market, is enormous but policy measures will need to be redesigned to create an enabling digital ecosystem for them. In the future, digitalisation efforts need to consider that most micro-enterprises are one-person led, and that they often cannot attend in-person training.



MAURITIUS:
25%
TOURISTS ARE
+ 55 YEARS OLD

 SECTION 2

Youth in Tourism: a survey



2.1 TRENDS

GLOBALLY, AN ESTIMATE OF
4 IN 10 YOUNG PEOPLE
 WORK IN **HARD-HIT**
 INDUSTRIES
LIKE TOURISM²

In Mauritius, for example, travel/hotel/tourism remains one of the top ten fields of study, suggesting that young people are interested to work in the industry. In Rodrigues, discussions with young people highlighted that prior to the pandemic, tourism had been a crucial sector that unlocked formal and informal jobs for many young people. In the Seychelles, foreign labour dominates the local tourism industry, and young people are finding it hard to find meaningful employment locally.

To gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and aspirations of young people to work in tourism, the Lab launched the 'Youth in Tourism' survey, which was live for three months and collected over 200 responses from across the three islands.

The results of the survey revealed that COVID-19 has certainly impacted young people in the tourism sector, but discussions with the respondents demonstrated that young people faced pre-existing vulnerabilities prior to the pandemic.

At the same time, the results revealed the extraordinary leadership and resilience of young people faced with tough challenges such as job losses and loss of a physical space to learn. While the data shows a worrying picture concerning workforce retention, it also opens further avenues of research and exploration in areas such as entrepreneurship and finding inclusive ways to integrate MSMEs into the value chain.

The survey was mostly conducted in-person, which enabled the Lab to connect with respondents and have discussions that uncovered more than what the data showed. These include several trends:

² International Labour Organization. (2022, April 25-29). The future of work in the tourism sector: Sustainable and safe recovery and decent work in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_840403.pdf

MAURITIUS

An internship is compulsory to validate a student year for graduation. Due to the pandemic, hotels stopped receiving students for training or internships as several of them were repurposed as quarantine hotels. Many students had to complete their internship in another sector, for example construction.

Globally, the tourism workforce has contracted. The travel and tourism sector already had a high staff turnover before COVID-19 hit, but the situation worsened during the pandemic. For Mauritius, it is expected that many young people who left the local tourism sector due to the pandemic will not return, which will cause an overall reduction in the local tourism workforce. While a successful tourism recovery relies partly on the arrival of tourists in high numbers, the sector will need to anticipate how this possible reduction in workforce could negatively impact service delivery.

RODRIGUES

Rodrigues has a vibrant community of young people who are agile entrepreneurs while also in employment at the same time.

Most participants who worked for an enterprise in Rodrigues often had a side 'hustle'. This suggests that young people in Rodrigues are tapping into several economic activities, indicating an emerging possible future where people are multi-skilled, multi-sourced and multi-faceted. A solution that emerged as part of the discussions was to catalyse and formalise entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystems. This would provide a platform for young people to collectively generate and harmonize solutions available in the various communities related to the tourism value chain. According to the young people met, a way to ensure this is via accompaniment, mentorship, and coaching, which is partly being provided by SME Mauritius (Rodrigues Branch).

SEYCHELLES

- As in Mauritius and Rodrigues, young people involved in tourism in Seychelles were affected by the flight bans and drop in tourist arrivals. This in turn reduced foreign exchange earnings and curbed the purchasing power of many Seychellois. Additionally, a reduction in foreign exchange earnings drove up the prices of imports.

The Lab noted that young people in Seychelles were very interested to become entrepreneurs in adventure tourism and agri-tourism to diversify current offers in the tourism sector. It was also observed that enhanced links between tourism and agriculture may improve the country's food security while connecting large hotels to the farming community. This model could lessen Seychelles' dependency on foreign labour in the tourism sector, which participants highlighted as a major barrier to local employment opportunities.

2.2 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DATA

1. GENDER AND AGE REPRESENTATION

In Rodrigues and Seychelles, over half of the respondents identified as female, whereas in Mauritius, 59% of the respondents identified as male. Of the persons interviewed, the majority were under 30 years old, spread across the three islands.

Figure 1. Gender representation across the islands

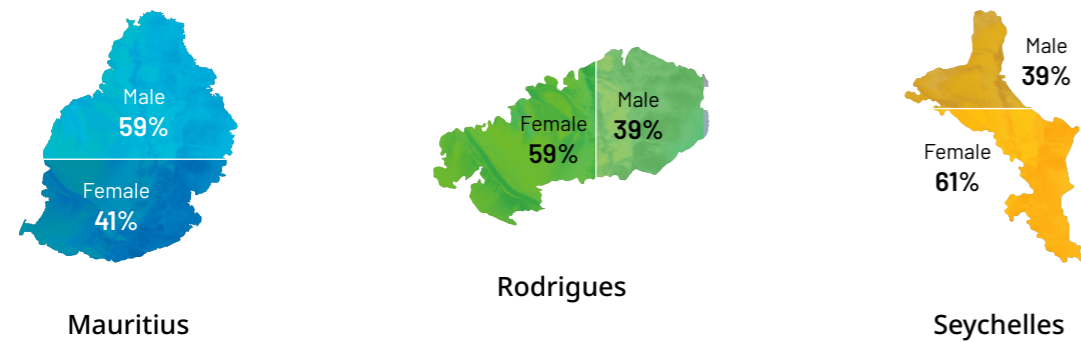
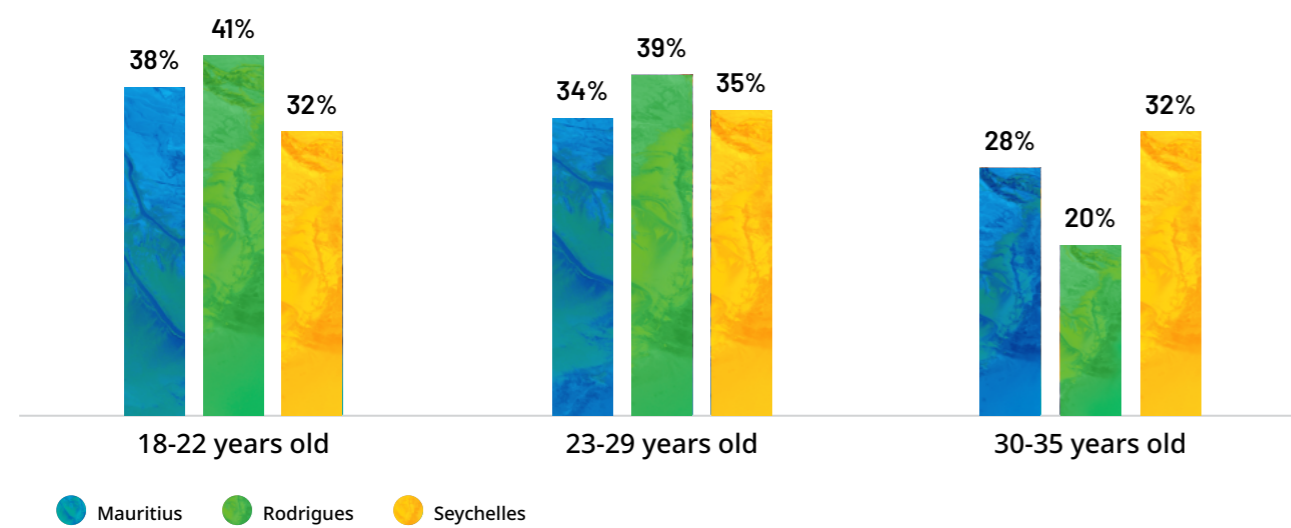


Figure 2. Age Representation across Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles



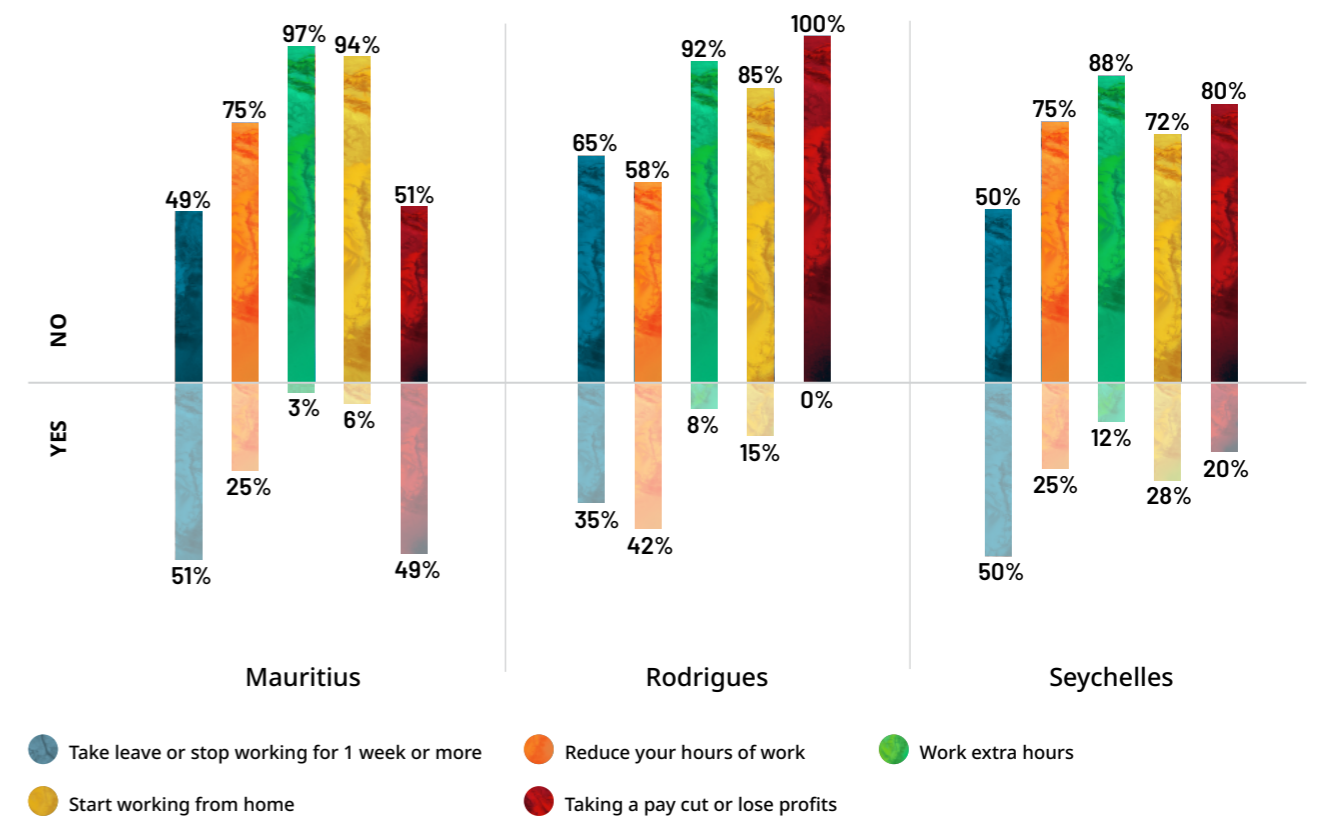
2. WORKPLACE AND WORKFORCE

Of the persons interviewed, 70% were working in a paid job at the time the survey was conducted, and of these, students excluded, 68% were employees as opposed to being self-employed or working in a family business. The Lab assumed that many young people experienced job losses in all three islands before conducting the survey. However, the data revealed that **more than half of the respondents were able to keep their jobs or worked reduced hours.**

Table 1. Profile of the participants

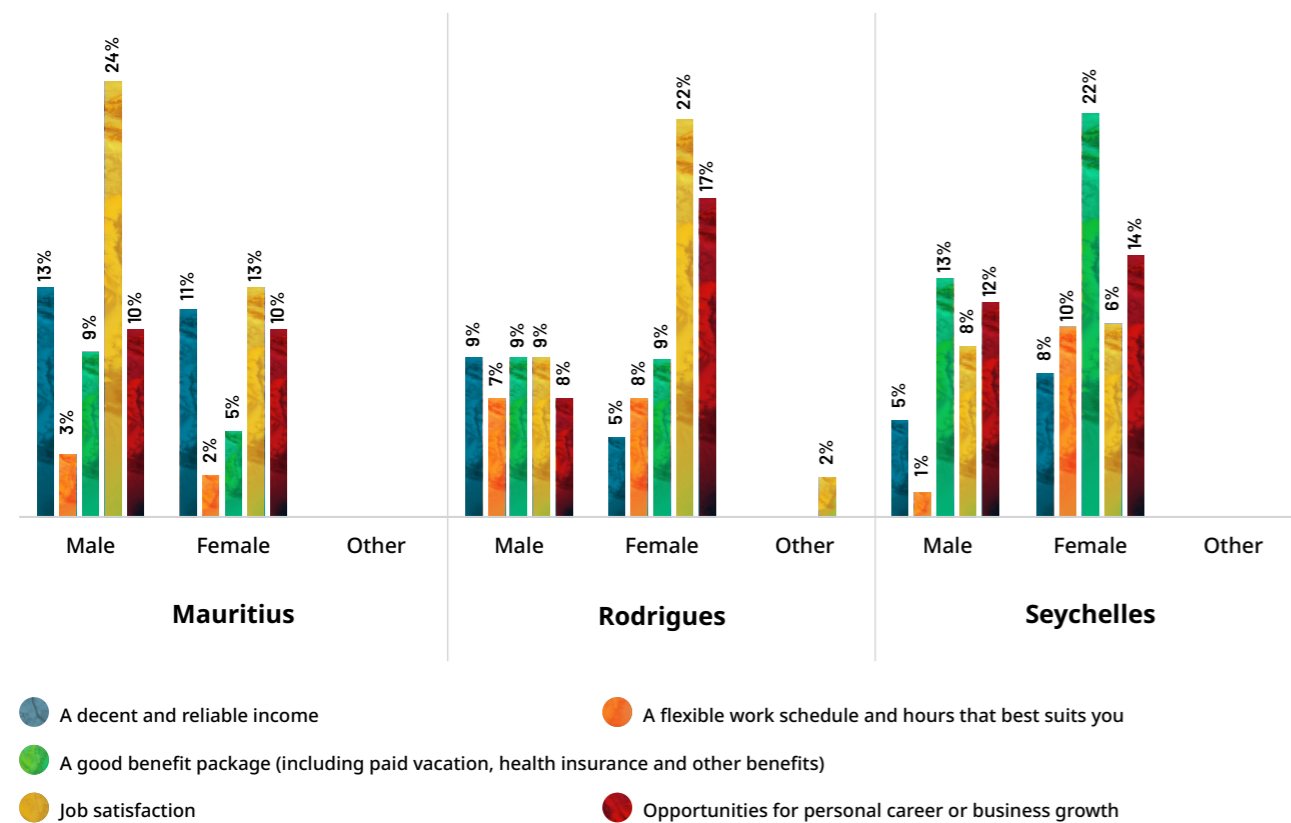
	Student	Employee	Self Employed	Family Business
Mauritius	28%	42%	9%	21%
Rodrigues	43%	37%	13%	7%
Seychelles	22%	62%	7%	9%

Figure 3. Changes in work since March 2020 (Lockdown)



Job satisfaction emerged as an important consideration when looking for a new job for most of the respondents in Mauritius and Rodrigues respectively. In the Seychelles, respondents valued factors such as a **good benefit package** (including paid vacation, health insurance and other benefits) and **opportunities for personal career or business growth**.

Figure 4. What is the most important factor you consider while looking for job?



50%
OF RESPONDENTS
EXPRESSED THAT
THEY WOULD
PREFER
TO MOVE

Long hours, low wages, and a high turnover rate in the tourism sector are well documented globally. In the contexts of Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles, this became increasingly apparent during our conversations with young people. A common factor uniting young people from each island is their passion for working in tourism. Yet, they expressed that they felt insufficiently valued. When asked whether they would move to another country or prefer to continue living in Mauritius, Rodrigues or Seychelles, **half of the respondents expressed that they would prefer to move**. Mauritius ranks as the 5th most affected country by the 'brain drain', with about 41% of Mauritian graduates leaving their home country for OECD countries. An International Organisation for Migration (IOM) [report](#) further notes that there is limited statistics on emigration for Mauritius, reducing the capacity to analyse emigration trends and the development of proper policies to include the diaspora, or attract part of the diaspora to return.

Figure 5. If you have the opportunity, would you like to move to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in your island?



IN THE MAURITIAN
TOURISM INDUSTRY
24.2%
OF FIRMS
LET GO OF WORKERS
DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

When the pandemic hit, many businesses in the tourism sector made decisions to reduce working hours or cut jobs. A group of academics from the University of Mauritius surveyed 100 enterprises across the different sub-sectors of the Mauritian tourism industry, and their data revealed that 24.2% of firms confirmed that they had let go of workers due to the pandemic and about half had reduced their workforce by more than 50%³.

Based on the existing literature, data collected by the Accelerator Lab and lived experiences narrated to the Lab when meeting young people in the sector, **there is clear evidence of an emerging challenge on both workforce retention and staff shortage**.

³ Tandrayen-Ragoobur, V, Tengur, N.D, Fauzel. (2022) COVID-19 and Mauritius' tourism industry: an island perspective. Journal of Policy Research in Tourism Leisure and Events. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358204978_COVID-19_and_Mauritius_tourism_industry_an_island_perspective

3. EDUCATION

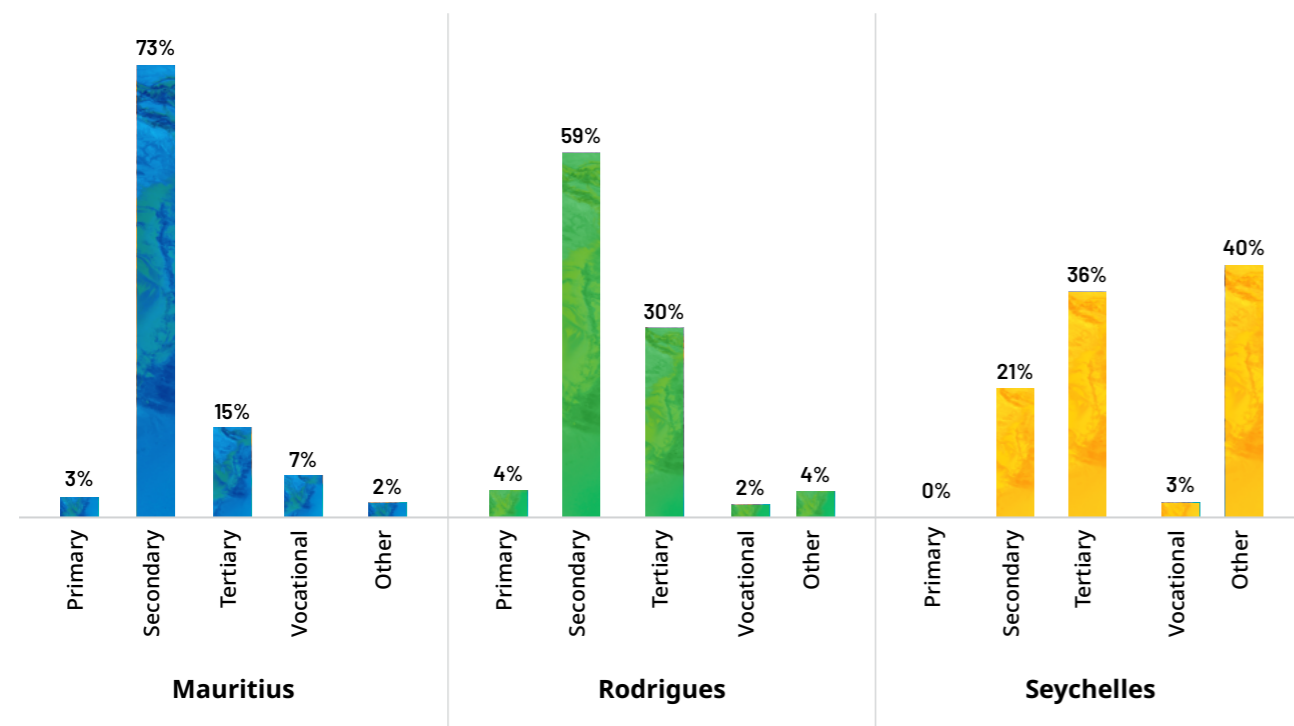
In Mauritius, 73% of the respondents stated that they completed secondary education in comparison to Seychelles where 40% of the respondents stated 'other', which could be a reference to technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In Rodrigues, over half had completed secondary education.

Sex-disaggregated data reveals that in Mauritius female respondents had a lower education level compared to male respondents, whereas for Seychelles more female respondents had completed tertiary education compared to male respondents.

The data also tells us that very few people – across all three islands – enrolled in an academic or vocational training program since March 2020.

IN MAURITIUS
73%
 COMPLETED
**SECONDARY
 EDUCATION**

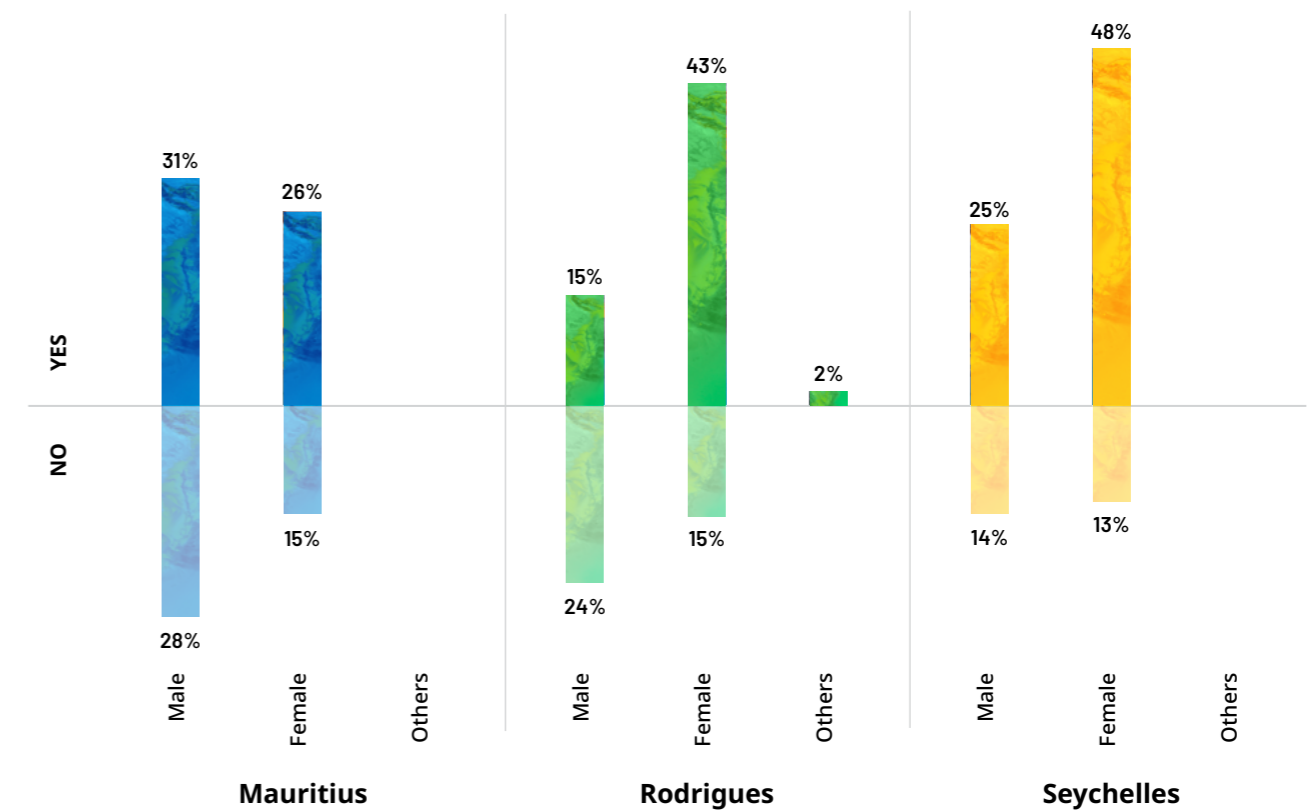
Figure 6. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?



4. FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

In general, COVID-19 did change future work aspirations but to varying degrees in the three islands. In Seychelles, 48% of female respondents state that their future work aspirations have changed as opposed to 25% of male respondents. **Female respondents in all three islands were more numerous than male respondents in saying that COVID-19 changed their future work aspirations.**

Figure 7. Would you say that COVID-19 has changed your future work aspirations?



 SECTION 3

The evolution of tourism across the three islands



MAURITIUS

As early as 1800s

Mauritius' tourism story mentioned in the writings of J.H Bernardin de Saint-Pierre

1950s

Development of civil aviation

Emergence of the tourism industry :

- hotels were built
- people were trained
- air access was liberalised

RODRIGUES

1972

Opening of Plaine Corail Airport

Due to easier access, tourism flourished

Construction of guest houses (auberge) to accommodate tourists

Late 1990s & Early 2000s

46,000 visitors yearly from Mauritius

SEYCHELLES

1930s

3 maritime companies brought tourists to the archipelago

Visitors would spend on average up to 6 weeks on the island

1972

Opening of the Seychelles International Airport

Consequently the number of tourists gradually increased

BEFORE COVID-19

1.3 tourist per resident

3.1 LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

Mauritius, Rodrigues, and Seychelles have unique tourism pathways. These destinations have grown economically and socially through tourism and have welcomed millions of tourists over the past decades.

Mauritius' own tourism story can be traced to the 1800s in the writings of J.H Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. However, it was only in the 1950s, with the development of civil aviation, that tourism began to emerge. In the process, hotels were built, people were trained, and air access was liberalised. These initiatives contributed to mould tourism in its early years, and to gradually develop the sector into a major economic pillar for Mauritius.

Rodrigues, which is situated 600 km to the north-east of Mauritius, draws part of its charm from its isolation. Before the airport in Plaine Corail opened in 1972, the island was only accessible by boat. The tourism sector started flourishing slowly and the island saw major development in the construction of guest houses ('Auberges'). By the late 1990s and early 2000s, Rodrigues was receiving a yearly average of 46,000 visitors from Mauritius, a figure equal to the entire population of the island.

Under the British occupation, Seychelles had a few visitors from the African continent and India. In the 1930s, three maritime companies brought tourists to the archipelago, and [visitors used to spend on average up to 6 weeks in the destination](#). With the opening of the Seychelles International Airport in 1972, the number of tourists gradually increased. In the years before COVID-19, the island, which has a population of approximately 100,000 people, counted 1.3 tourist per resident.

In the past decade, Mauritius, Rodrigues, and the Seychelles saw steady growth in tourism arrivals and spending, in part due to the evolution of increased air connectivity, digital marketing and a growing tourism offer of sun, sea and sand, and unique biodiversity. In turn, the industry's expansion provided jobs, livelihoods and human connections between locals and foreigners. While tourism can be seen as a force for the socio-economic development of these islands, it also led to extractive and exploitative conditions both for the planet and people.

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 virus spread worldwide, tourism changed again, bringing the industry to a standstill.

Humans will continue to face future pandemics, wars, natural disasters, and other external shocks. In particular, SIDS will face the effects of climate change in disproportionately disruptive ways as the planet warms. Our current epoch is referred to as the Anthropocene, a geological time period in which humans have significantly altered the biological, chemical and physical systems of the planet. However, the term implies that all humans have equally contributed to the fundamental changes to our planet contrary to the evidence showing that, for example, [92% of the greenhouse gas emissions come from the Global North](#).

The [2020 Human Development Report](#) shows us that people can also be protagonists of change. Amid global disruptions, tourism will continue to evolve and in doing so it keeps changing the daily conditions of the people who depend on it for a living. Thoughtfully developing sustainable tourism models is non-negotiable. Through intensive outreach and community engagement, the Lab collected stories from people on the frontlines of tourism, who also dream of a sustainable future for tourism.

3.2 STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES OF TOURISM DELIVERY



MR. TRAVIS CLIVE FRED

Deputy Director,
Food and Beverage,
Hygiene and Safety,
SEYCHELLES

For Mr. Fred, the pandemic came as an 'atomic bomb' and he felt the consequences on his general wellbeing and mental health. Like many other Seychellois interviewed, he runs a side business alongside his main job in tourism to boost his income. He remains optimistic for Seychelles and tourism but believes that achieving self-sufficiency and reducing dependency on one single sector can ensure the resilience of the country.



MS. GISELLE LABROSSE

Executive Housekeeper
SEYCHELLES

Ms. Labrosse is an Executive Housekeeper at a luxury hotel on Mahé island. She joined the tourism sector as a trainee 20 years ago, just after her studies in tourism. Her experience in hotels helped her grow in more senior roles over the years. When COVID-19 hit, her employer offered her the opportunity to be upskilled at a five-star hotel for six-months, which she enjoyed a lot. She was lucky to not lose her source of income and benefitted greatly from the training. She manages 39 staff and believes the tourism sector offers opportunities for everyone.



Ms. Larose is a single-mother and sole manager of her restaurant. The pandemic changed her life completely. She was forced to let go of her staff and faced difficulties to cope financially and mentally. Despite these challenges, the tourism sector remains enriching and motivating, as it saw her grow from a 27-year-old young woman to one who now owns and manages her business at 45 years old.

MS. DOLLY LAROSE
Owner and Manager,
Chez Madame Larose
RODRIGUES



MR. ROBERT
Restaurant Owner,
Robert et Solange
Food Shack
RODRIGUES

Mr. Robert runs a very successful beachside food shack in Rodrigues. However, in recent years, the degradation of Rodrigues' lagoons has left almost no fish or seafood, and he struggles to get good quality catch to keep his restaurant open. To him, current tourism development favours mass infrastructure projects which exclude local communities. While it is true these communities depend on tourists for a livelihood, it is also true that tourists depend on what the community has to offer to be able to enjoy Rodrigues to its fullest.



**MS. MARIE CLAIRE
EDOUARD RABAIS**
Entrepreneur in Octopus
Fishing and Food Processing
RODRIGUES

Ms. Rabais is a woman entrepreneur based in the idyllic south coast of Rodrigues, where there are several other women-owned small businesses. She was the first to introduce labels on her products to provide buyers with information on the identity of who makes the products and where. She has endured several challenges, one of which was COVID-19. Her resilience, expertise and experience have made her a force and source for inspiration for her community, family, and other women in the region.



Mr. Ramsamy is the owner of a small water-based business in the Southeast of Mauritius. His business thrived before COVID-19, and it was possible for him to hire local skippers and tourist guides. COVID-19 brought an abrupt end to his economic activity, forcing him to let go of his staff and even sell one of his boats. He moved his activities to the premises of a hotel nearby to get more clients. His business relies on local communities in the region for the provision of fresh and local food to his clients. Worried about the amount of waste and pollution produced by locals and tourists alike, he is advocating for waste bins to be placed at the embarkation point in Grande Rivière Sud-Est. The young entrepreneur has a pessimistic view of the future of tourism for the island, in part because of the limited understanding of decision-makers regarding the needs of small business owners in the sector.

**MR. NEERAJ
RAMSAMY**
Owner,
WOW Water Sports
MAURITIUS



Ms. Nobutsing's passion for the sea led her to explore scuba diving and to become a certified Rescue Diver, who enjoys navigating the deep oceans with tourists. She is also a mermaid and designs her outfits herself to free dive into the sea. This activity has been a way for her to demonstrate her creativity and to raise awareness for ocean conservation. To her, 'mermaiding' epitomises beauty, fantasy, mythology and reverie. She uses the concept, which she refers to as 'edu-tainment', to educate the public, especially children. COVID-19 impacted her greatly as she lost the ability to work with tourists, but she maintains that the sector will thrive again, though it will need to change to respond to current environmental challenges the island faces.

**MS. DUSHLA
NOBUTSING**
Mermaid
MAURITIUS



**MS. VINESHA
TEELUCK**
Entrepreneur
MAURITIUS

Prior to selling preserved fruits in Mahébourg, Ms. Teeluck worked for ten years in the private sector as an administrative secretary. When COVID-19 hit, she chose to quit her job to help with the family business run by her parents on the beach of Blue Bay. Due to sanitary and lockdown protocols, which closed down public beaches, her family moved their business to the town of Mahébourg. Today, she handles all facets of the business and feels enthusiastic about being self-employed. She even expressed her wish for her sisters to join the family business after their tertiary education. COVID-19 brought several changes and challenges to her, her family, and their business. Importantly, it taught her to be brave and embrace entrepreneurship and working for oneself.

 SECTION 4

Future tourism models / Emerging directions



While not exhaustive, the Lab's exploration of the tourism industry across the three islands, shows two interconnected emerging directions. Dominant tourism models have enabled island economies to thrive, yet COVID-19 has evidenced that these models have always had drawbacks. The emerging directions are intended to provide possible solutions and avenues of exploration and experimentation towards the co-building of new, resilient, and inclusive tourism models.

- **Tapping into grassroots distributed insights to strike a balance between economy, environment, and communities**
- **Diversifying the entrepreneurial and digital ecosystems to support inclusive models of tourism**

4.1 TAPPING INTO GRASSROOTS DISTRIBUTED INSIGHTS TO STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT, AND COMMUNITIES

Grassroots insights have revealed behavioural patterns in tourism-dependent economies that show remarkable entrepreneurial spirit. During the two border closure periods in Mauritius, a family-managed 'tabagie' (small shop) located on the east coast of the country was severely impacted following the sharp decline in its clientele. Facing low sales, the owner of this tabagie, a 43-year-old homemaker, decided to put her current activities on hold and register for a fishmonger permit ('bayan poisson'), which would allow her to buy fishers' catches and sell them to interested buyers.

The role of the fishmonger has historical roots, which began in the 1860's when the railway network was introduced in Mauritius connecting rural agglomerations of sugarcane and tobacco plantations to urban zones. Fishing villages such as those found on the east coast of Mauritius received little attention. Today, fish mongering remains a role that is male-dominated, except in Rodrigues where the Lab encountered several women fishmongers.



4.2 DIVERSIFYING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM TO SUPPORT INCLUSIVE MODELS OF TOURISM

**IN SEYCHELLES
60% OF HOTEL
ACCOMMODATION
IS FOREIGN-OWNED**

In both the Republic of Mauritius and the Republic of Seychelles, accommodation services represent the largest share of tourism services. In Seychelles, accommodation services generate 69% of income with 60% of hotel accommodation foreign-owned, promoting economic leakages which have negative consequences for local entrepreneurship⁴.

While local entrepreneurship features prominently in the Mauritian tourism value chain, the products and services remain limited to oversaturated markets such as beach hawking or tour operators. In Rodrigues, the Lab found that local entrepreneurship thrives in informal settings, often in Rodrigues' main economic centres – fishing, the agricultural sector and tourism.

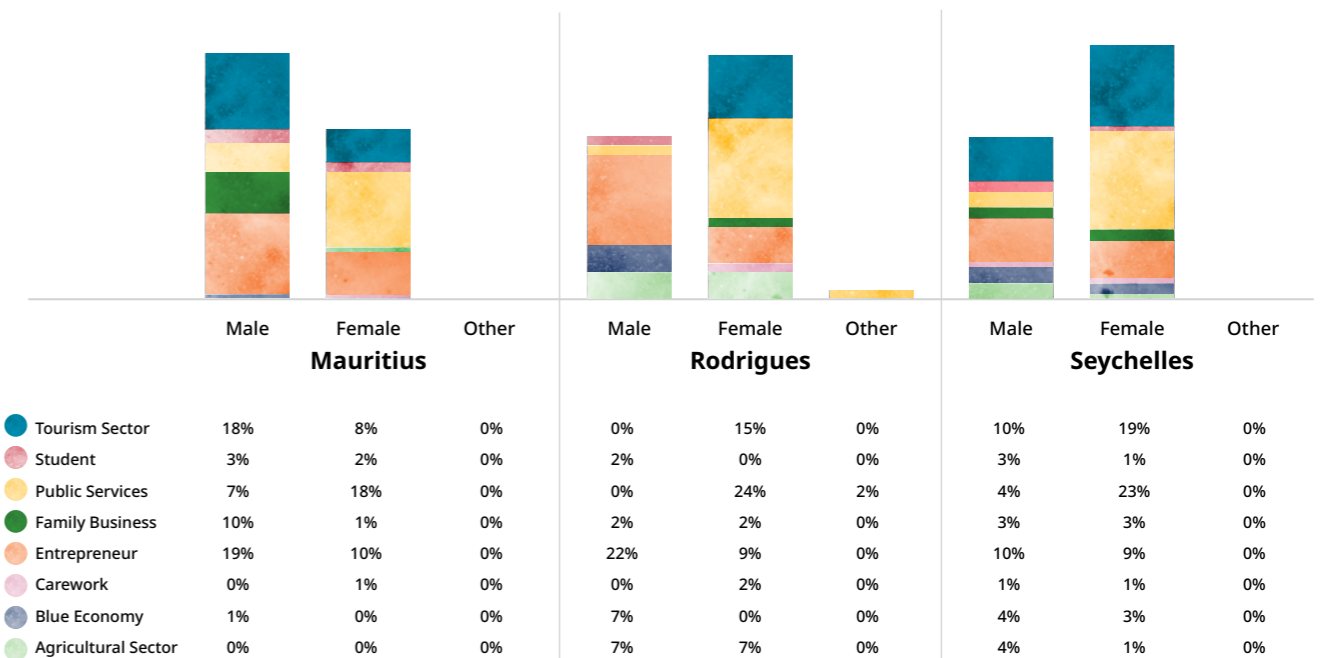
This quick pivot from “tabagie manager” to fishmonger showcases several capabilities that grassroots communities have, notably, survival and entrepreneurial instincts. Grassroots communities are at the frontline of tourism activities, yet current models such as the ‘all-inclusive’ hotel packages or ‘enclave tourism’ cut out many grassroots communities from tourists, yet these communities remain at the frontlines of service provision in the sector.

Grassroots communities are also stewards of traditional knowledge, that is often a gateway for tourists to develop a stake in the local community’s wellbeing, cultural heritage and history. Tourism destinations are more than the products and services they offer, and assets such as culture and communities should be leveraged in the design of future tourism models.

LINKING COMMUNITY ASSETS TO THE PRESERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, RESTORATION AND REGENERATION

Tourism dependent communities often place emphasis on resource conservation. For example, in the Seychelles, [a self-led group of 7 men called Fresh Focus](#) are working to keep the island clean by organising beach and hike trails clean-ups. The initiative’s goal is to raise awareness and educate the local population about the necessity of grassroots climate action but also to promote Seychellois culture and the rehabilitation of nature. In this context, tourism can be seen as a social system. This framework fosters co-design, exploration, and experimentation, with the local community and tourists alike.

Figure 8. If you were not in the tourist sector, which other sectors would you have wanted to explore?



⁴ Andrea Giampiccoli, Oliver Mtapuri, John Nauright, “Tourism development in the Seychelles: a proposal for a unique community-based tourism alternative”, Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, vol. 19, No. 5 (March 2020)



The 'Youth in Tourism' data, combined with anecdotal evidence collected from conversations with young people, reveals that entrepreneurship is of growing interest, especially among young men. However, the data also shows that many would like to remain in tourism despite the challenges brought on by the past two years.

Mauritius and Seychelles have a long way to go in terms of diversifying from the current mass tourism model. Rodrigues' scale and remoteness has allowed the island to remain largely untouched, and, in this context, it has been able to design services that take into consideration the economy, the environment and the communities.

As these challenges continue to grow, young people have proven to be a source of inspiration and novel ideas.

For example, in Rodrigues, the Tourism Office, led by a young woman, is developing a series of niche value propositions in areas such as gastronomy, sport tourism and eco-tourism.

These new tourism offers are expected to attract a diversity of customers, who are more environmentally conscious and who seek experiences rooted in indigenous culture and benefiting local livelihoods.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are creating new markets within the dominant classic tourism market (all-inclusive model). Registered SMEs with the Tourism Authority of Mauritius for example, are providing services that satisfy tourists' demands but are still not sufficiently innovative or diversified. For instance, only 16 out of 2810 licensed small enterprises are offering eco-tourism services (nature- or adventure-based tourism) and only 10 are providing non-motorised water sports such as canoes and kayak (Mauritius Tourism Authority, June 2022).

IN MAURITIUS
ONLY 16
 OUT OF 2810
 LICENSED SMALL
 ENTERPRISES
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ECO-TOURISM
SERVICES



SIZE MATTERS

The small size of SMEs should, however, not be underestimated. The more SMEs there eventually are, the bigger their environmental impact. Tourism-dependent economies should promote entrepreneurship and SMEs development, but strategic direction is required as to what type of services they provide, and whether those services meet social and environmental needs.

The Lab met several owners of SMEs across the three islands, and during these encounters, it became evident that some of them have more than just economic motivations. Many of these owners employ local people, protect the local culture, and are concerned by the state of the environment.

One such owner is Mr. Jean-Roland Speville, who owns and runs JR Snack in Petit Gabriel in Rodrigues. He implements sustainability practices in his business, such as water-saving equipment, food waste management, and relies solely on locally sourced and seasonal produce. These interventions, he explains, are at no extra cost, making them practices that can sustain future economic shocks. **However, his business remains dependant on the constant supply of seasonal and local produce.**



Orchestrating collective intelligence at scale also requires co-design and partnerships.

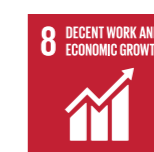
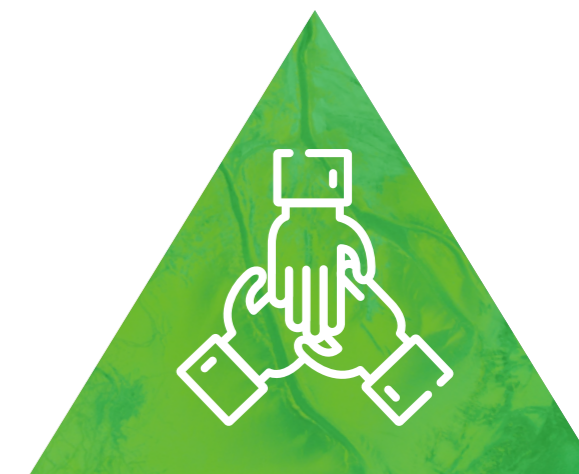


1. THE GOVERNMENTS OF MAURITIUS AND SEYCHELLES CAN PARTNER WITH THE LAB TO MAKE BETTER USE OF COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

Tourism needs champions from within who can galvanise the sector and take greater strides while safeguarding both people and the planet. Priority actions include diffusing the learnings more widely and mobilising cross-government coordination. It needs governments to make the most of new sources of data – one such opportunity area could be tapping into citizen-generated data to learn more about trends in tourism.

2. THE PRIVATE SECTOR HAS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE TO PLAY IN PIONEERING SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT TOURISM MODELS

Tourism development is not just a business opportunity. Its recovery relies on increased investment in developing models that promote creativity, co-designed with communities and those at the frontlines of service delivery in the sector. The private sector in both Mauritius and Seychelles has an enabling role in ensuring that sustainability and resilience stand at the core of their business practices. In doing so, the private sector is able to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth and SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production.



4.3 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The emerging directions provide a start to continued exploration. However, the critical next step is to mainstream new forms of mobilising intelligence and to harness distributed problem solving.

To scale intelligence more strategically necessitates the Accelerator Lab to explore other components of collective intelligence such as data and technology. To do so, we will need to map and document many more good practices and initiatives that help connect grassroots solutions, models of resilience and best practices in the private and public spheres into a national repository of knowledge commons. This can support open innovation, co-design and experimentation at scale.



3. SIDS AS KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS CAN BOOST EXCHANGES, DYNAMIC LEARNING AND COOPERATION

Tourism is an economic lifeline for many other SIDS facing similar vulnerabilities. One of the priorities for our Lab is to keep sharing learnings and key takeaways across the Labs in the SIDS. Labs in SIDS are at varied stages of research and learning on tourism more broadly, therefore, establishing a solid knowledge network can open strategic avenues for embedding grassroots knowledge and intelligence into the UNDP programmatic offer for SIDS, such as the [Rising Up for SIDS](#) and the [SAMOA Pathway](#), which underpin climate action, blue economies and sustainable development.

 SECTION 5

What next for the Mauritius and Seychelles Accelerator Lab?



As the UNDP Mauritius and Seychelles Accelerator Lab closes on the present learning cycle, it is eager to begin a new one on food systems. The focus will be on exploration and solutions mapping that can reveal grassroots intelligence on smart agricultural practices and solutions for food self-sufficiency and food security. This new field of research will not be detached from the tourism learning cycle - tourism is omnipresent in the lives of most Mauritians, Rodriguans and Seychellois, and thus, learnings are bound to intersect.



 SECTION 6

Annex

6.1 SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND OUTREACH

The survey contained **28 questions**, including two optional questions, multiple choice and open text. The survey has been inspired by and adapted by an [International Labour Organisation \(ILO\) survey](#) on the impacts of COVID-19 on Work and Aspirations.

The survey, only available in English, was conducted for a period of three months. Even if it was disseminated via social media campaign, most responses came from in-person outreach in all three islands. After data cleaning and removal of invalid responses, **88 responses** were recorded from Mauritius, **77** from Seychelles and **46** from Rodrigues.

The main objectives of the survey were to use the data and insights generated through the online survey to:

1. **Guide co-design** of youth-led interventions for future tourism models
2. **Identify and map** young people involved in the local tourism sectors of Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles and their innovative capacities and solutions to respond to the challenges of the past two years
3. **Address challenges and gaps** to inform programme efforts and influence the development of policy solutions to co-design resilient and inclusive future tourism models

The section that follows presents the survey results. While the main four lines of inquiry have been used to analyse the data, the results were explored through a demographic lens, in particular: gender and specific age groups. In addition, while analysing the survey results, the Lab has been able to draw further insights on two main axes of inquiry: workforce retention and entrepreneurship development.

The survey findings may be limited on the account of representation where collected information represent only age and gender and therefore does not fully represent other factors such as socio-economic markers or dis/ability, or other vulnerabilities.

There are also some limitations concerning geographical coverage, especially for Seychelles. Various geographical regions across Mauritius and Rodrigues were surveyed, however they were mainly concentrated on Mahé island for Seychelles.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK:

Our survey questionnaire was designed to assess four interconnected lines of inquiry:

1. **Professional life (present)** - how have working youth in the tourism sector been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. **Professional life (past)** - what did the professional lives of young people in tourism look like before COVID-19?
3. **Education** – how has education or training in general been impacted by the pandemic?
4. **Future** – how do young people feel about their future in the tourism sector post-pandemic?

6.2 SURVEY QUESTIONS

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. **What is your gender?**
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
2. **How old are you?**
 - Between 18-22 years old
 - Between 23-29 years old
 - Between 30-35 years old
3. **What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?**
 - Primary
 - Secondary
 - Tertiary
 - Vocational
 - Other
 - Specify other:

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE PRESENT

4. **What are you currently doing?**
 - Working at a paid job or business
 - Studying or training
 - Looking for work
 - Specify other:
 - Doing household (caring for children or family)
 - Volunteering
 - Other
5. **Are you self-employed, an employee, or working for a family-business?**
 - Self-employed
 - Working for family business
 - Employee
6. **Which of the areas of tourism do you currently operate in?**

*For example: 1. Accommodation services-serviced apartments,
2. Creative industries – handicraft sales*
7. **On average, how many hours per week nowadays?**
8. **Optional: how much are you currently earning (in Mauritius/Seychellois Rupees?)**
9. **On a scale of 1-10, how worried are you about losing your job in the next 12 months (not worried → extremely worried)?**
10. **In which year did you start working in your job or business?**

11. **Since March 2020, did you have to:**
 - Take leave or stop working for 1 week or more
 - Reduce your hours of work
 - Start working from home
 - Work extra hours
 - Take a pay cut or lose profits

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE PAST

12. **As a result of the pandemic, did you leave or lose a paid job, a business, or any other income-generating activity, even if it was part-time or temporary?**
 - Yes
 - No
13. **What was your previous job?**
14. **For how many years/months did you work at that job?**
15. **Optional: how much were you earning (in Mauritian/Seychellois Rupees)?**
16. **What were the reasons for the job stop?**

LET'S TALK ABOUT EDUCATION

17. **Since March 2020, at any point, were you enrolled or planning to enrol in an academic or vocational training program?**
18. **Because of the pandemic, at any point since March 2020, did you have to:**
 - Switch to online classes or distance learning
 - Drop out without completing your studies or training
 - Give up your plans to enrol in an academic or vocational program
19. **What are your thoughts about how the pandemic affected your education?**
20. **Currently are you attending, or enrolled in any academic or vocational training program?**
 - Yes
 - No
21. **Thinking about the future, do you think that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect the completion of your studies or training?**
 - Yes
 - No
22. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement, "I developed new skills during COVID-19 that will improve my work prospects over the long term"?**
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Don't know
 - Somewhat disagree

LET'S FINALLY TALK ABOUT THE FUTURE

23. **Would you say that COVID-19 has changed your future work aspirations?**
- Yes
 - No
24. **What is the most important factor that you consider while looking for a job?**
- A good benefit package (including paid vacation; health; insurance; and other benefits)
 - A flexible work schedule and hours that best suit you
 - A decent, reliable income
 - Job satisfaction
 - Opportunities for personal career or business growth
25. **How do you think the pandemic will affect your work prospects over the next 12 months?**
- Better
 - Somewhat better
 - Stay the same
 - Somewhat worse
 - Much worse
 - Don't know
26. **Imagine you wanted, or needed, to get a new job. What would be the main obstacles you face?**
27. **If you were not in the tourism sector, which other sectors would you have wanted to explore?**
28. **If you have the opportunity, would you like to move to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in Mauritius/Rodrigues/Seychelles?**
- Move to another country
 - Stay in Mauritius/Rodrigues/Seychelles
 - Depends
 - Don't know yet





Mauritius
& Seychelles



accelerator
lab