

SARGASSUM SEAWEED 2015

In early 2015, Barbados was inundated with the phenomenon known as the Sargassum seaweed particularly on the east and south coasts of the island. The presence of the seaweed created several challenges for sea bathers, fishermen and those charged with keeping the environment clean.

The accumulation of the seaweed resulted in an offensive, pungent smell, as large, brown, unsightly heaps of weed were scattered along the beaches. Although agencies such as the **National Conservation Commission, the Coastal Zone Management Unit, the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Transport and Works; the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of the Environment and Drainage** all tried in various ways to clear the beaches, the seaweed proved to be a challenge to remove in a timely manner.

The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, (the research arm of the University of the West Indies) collaborated with entrepreneur, Mark Hill of BioGen, in a beach cleaning exercise near the Hilton Barbados Resort, where horses were used to remove the seaweed, without resulting in beach erosion. BioGen was also formed to use the seaweed, because of its biomass potential, to make products for export. The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute and BioGen created a video of the clean-up exercise.

Although the seaweed provided opportunities for entrepreneurs to use it as fertilizer for plants, because of its nitrogen properties, the seaweed has also had a negative effect on sea turtles. The seaweed compromised the preservation of the sea turtle population by creating an obstacle for nesting turtles attempting to reach the shore to lay their eggs in the sand and it also obstructed the hatchlings from making it back to the shore.

In an effort to bring awareness to the challenges and solutions of the Sargassum seaweed, a Sargassum Symposium was held on 17 August 2015 organized in collaboration with the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), the Faculty of Science and Technology and the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies.