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#BT Column – Projects in innovation challenge get assistance

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(From left) Finalists Antonio Hollingsworth, Michael Hinds and Dr Shelly-Ann Cox along with Minister of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology, Davidson Ishmael; Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology, Wayne Marshall; CEO of Export Barbados, Mark Hill; Kelvin Carter and Dr. Sylvia Dohnert, Executive Director of CCPF.

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By Marlon Madden

Efforts are on to significantly increase Barbados' export potential in the blue economy, as operators of three companies walked away with cash prizes on Friday to fund projects they presented during the National Innovation Challenge 2022 – Ocean Edition.

During the official closing ceremony for the challenge, which began in June and was hosted by Export Barbados (BIDC) in association with Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility (CCPF), the projects were presented as officials pointed to the need to protect the ocean space and capitalise on its potential.

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The winners, Michael Hinds of WestPoint, Shelly-Ann Cox of Blue Shell Productions and Antonio Hollingsworth of Bajan Digital Creations Inc. received up to \$20 000 each which is allocated for a pilot phase so the projects can be tested.

Hinds presented Skeete’s Bay Market Project, an aqua culture project designed to ramp up production of specific families of fish while reducing pressure on the island’s fish stock. Cox showcased her Digifish, a project for fisheries monitoring and traceability to address fragmentation in the fisheries industry and increase the island’s export of fish while Hollingsworth presented his BlueBot Project, which is designed to engage in ocean reef data mining to aid with the increase of the island’s ocean stock and fight against climate change.

All projects are aimed at reducing the island’s seafood trade deficit, save foreign exchange for the island and generate jobs, while linking various sectors.

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The Ocean Edition of the National Innovation Challenge 2022, is the second in a three-part series. The first was the Beauty Edition, and a third edition is to be launched soon.

Chief Executive Officer of Export Barbados (BIDC) Mark Hill said the challenges formed part of the stimulation of an innovative culture and ecosystem being built out by Export Barbados (BIDC), which focuses on the ocean, biological resources and people.

“So this particular challenge is very critical because it taps that key market – the oceans, which is currently contributing less than US\$1 million to our exports – and we want to see that grow significantly, and the only way for that to grow is through new innovations [and] new products that we can put into our export markets,” said Hill.

Pointing out the island was already exporting some fish products including the yellow fin tuna, Hill said “What we want to see are other products in the biotech space also within the marine engineering space as well. We also want to see our boat engineering capacity and boat-building skills also leveraged as well,” he said.

“We are excited about this initiative. It is not the last because we have to come back at this again and encourage a broader cross section of people to participate as we continue to build out our economy,” he added.

Compete Caribbean presented the cash prizes to the three companies. The companies can then get up to US\$100,000 in financing to implement the project successfully, depending on its viability.

Executive Director of Compete Caribbean Sylvia Dohnert said the support being provided to the participants in the ocean innovation challenge was one example of that organisation’s support for entrepreneurship in the blue economy.

She noted that under Compete Caribbean, which is supported by a number of partners including the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Canada, the UK and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), some US\$4.5 million was earmarked for the blue economy – one of the areas for development of entrepreneurship in the Caribbean.

“Barbados has a huge potential on everything innovative, very high human capital and how to add the knowledge that is produced by that human capital into products of more and more value-added. From the Compete Caribbean standpoint we are completely enthusiastic about supporting any initiative that leads towards that,” she said.

Minister of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology Davidson Ishmael congratulated the winners of the challenge, describing them as bold to have taken the step to pursue the projects that will contribute to the island’s development goals.

“You have an unrelenting drive to break the status quo and develop anew where few have dared to go. In this context, you have recognised and accepted an opportunity for you to take your businesses to the next level,” he said.

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consumers at home and internationally as well.



“Through Ocean Challenge 2022, you are contributing to a brighter and more sustainable tomorrow. This innovative and entrepreneurial drive has the potential to be a game-changer,” said Ishmael.

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