

**REPORT ON THE  
SMALL AND MICRO ENTERPRUSES ACTION LEARNING GROUP WORKSHOP**



June 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

The Normandie, Trinidad and Tobago

**Prepared by**

**Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)**

## 1 Introduction

A regional dialogue towards development of a new economy in the Caribbean is being facilitated by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) since 2010 under its *Green Economy* programme. This programme identifies Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) as a key potential avenue in the Caribbean for contributing to economic development that is more socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. The work is funded by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) through a grant from the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The current phase of work seeks to explore how to nurture SMEs, including those operating in the informal or semi-formal sectors, to be an engine for green and inclusive economic transformation in the Caribbean using an action research and learning approach with SME ALG members and other key partners in the region. As part of this work, CANARI facilitated a regional workshop to initiate a Caribbean Small and Micro Enterprise Action Learning Group (SME ALG) held on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 at The Normandie in Trinidad and Tobago.

## 2 Objectives of the workshop

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- facilitate sharing of experiences and lessons on opportunities, challenges and issues for catalysing, supporting and empowering Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs) as a pathway to green economy in the Caribbean;
- finalise draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for establishment of a Caribbean SME Action Learning Group (SME ALG) as a peer-support and action group which will build and share evidence-based knowledge to build understanding and capacity, advocate to influence policy and build commitment, and act to deliver transformational results within the sector; and,
- identify specific actions for development of a programme of work (how can this be implemented in various sectors etc.) by the SME ALG and other partners to catalyse, support and empower SMEs in the Caribbean.



**Photo 1: Workshop participants share experiences during plenary. Photograph courtesy CANARI. June 2014.**

## 3 Participants

The participants included a cross section of representatives from the SME support sector and SME owners. These included contributors from Grenada, Dominican Republic, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. (See Appendix 1)

## 4 Methodology

The workshop was participatory and interactive. At the onset participants were asked to introduce themselves, give a summary of the work that they do and provide words that explained what SMEs meant to them. This was used as a catalyst to discuss the roles of SMEs, their feeling about them and the state of the sector. The concept of action learning, its merits, benefits and use within SMEs with a strong focus on the green economy were discussed. . Participants were also introduced to real examples of action learning in other countries including the Caribbean. They were also asked to give their own examples of using action learning



**Photo 2: Participant presenting her challenge to the ALG. Photograph courtesy CANARI. June 2014.**

Challenges faced by SMEs in the Caribbean were presented and discussed. These challenges were expressed in a role play scenario of a SME owner going to a support agency to access the relevant business support. Participants then grouped them into relevant categories and voted for their

top priorities. Two of the top four challenges were used to practice the ALG method.

The SME ALG draft Terms of Reference (TOR) were introduced and discussed. Evaluations were conducted using an evaluation line and an evaluation form that participants were asked to complete.

## 5 Findings

Support agencies and SME owners are extremely positive about SMEs; they used words such as passionate, innovative, dedication and sustainability to describe SMEs. A word cloud with the words given to describe SMEs is shown in Appendix 2.

The concept of action learning has been used by some of the participants informally however the majority of the participants have not formally used the action learning methodology.

The main challenges faced (see Appendix 3) by the participants were identified and pointed to how SMEs, support agencies and NGOs can work together in harmony to further the sector.

The top three challenges were, as voted by the participants were

1. How can we build individuals and culture in support agencies that show heart, respect and ethics to facilitate equitable relationships?
2. How can NGOs and Government agencies partner to provide support?
3. How can social enterprises be enabled and supported?

Two of the top challenges explored in plenary are shown in the table below.

**Table 1: Challenges presented to the ALG**

	<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Presenter</b>	<b>Coach</b>
1	How can NGOs and Government agencies partner to provide support?	Akilah Jaramogi	Nicole Leotaud
2	How can we build individuals and culture in support agencies that show respect and ethics to facilitate equitable relationships?	Denyse Ogilvie	Nicole Leotaud

For both of the challenges raised using the action learning approach, concrete next steps were agreed with members' commitment to report on their progress at the following ALG meeting scheduled for July 2014.

The action learning process is useful in contributing to raising questions that may not normally be considered, for unlearning commonly held beliefs and processes such as providing recommendations immediately to the person providing the challenge and formulating an innovative process to finding solutions.



**Photo 3: Participant discussing her challenges nurturing SMEs. Photograph courtesy CANARI. June 2014.**

Green economy is a relatively new concept and there is little experience particularly in supporting them. Green economy businesses were loosely defined as organisations which are environmentally responsible, socially responsible, not exploiting labour and human resources, and are equitable through the promotion and empowerment of both its employees and the community.

## **6 Evaluation**

Participants indicated that more time was needed to complete the objective of sharing of experiences. They were able to develop innovative ideas from the experiences shared. Some of the recommendations from the participants focused on using this forum and opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to SMEs and the SME sector. One participant commented "Please do not let this be a mere talk shop but the beginning of a meaningful and relevant interaction between SMEs and support organizations".

Participants indicated that the objective of completion of the draft terms of reference for the group remained outstanding, however indicating that they were aware of the limited time left over the two day workshop having taken the time to practice the action learning methodology. They expressed their desire to continue to finalise the terms of reference via e-mail correspondence and at the next scheduled workshop. Members were also aware of the need for specific actions to develop a programme of work and indicated on the evaluation form that more time was needed and more information for this to be completed.

Overall, the participants found the workshop a useful exercise to start the SME ALG in the Caribbean, have expressed interest in using the method in their various roles and committed to work together to come up with an effective and efficient regional action learning group to assist in the growth and development of SMEs and green economy businesses in the region.

## **7 Conclusion**

The meeting successfully introduced the concept of action learning to the participants, some of whom have used the method albeit informally. Time was spent practising the action learning process using challenges identified by the members. This made practical use of the process at the workshop thus achieving the meeting's objectives of introducing action learning, identifying challenges and testing the method. Action learning can be a useful tool for both support agencies and SME owners as it can assist in identifying challenges and solutions in an inclusive manner as well as allowing a group of people with similar experiences and varied experience to focus on solving problems, facilitating discussions and identifying solutions in a way which is suitable to all rather than it being forced upon them. Having a cross section of business owners and support agencies from throughout the region also gave the meeting a boarder outlook on the challenges, lessons learnt and a wider sharing of experiences.

An open and participatory approach using practical examples and role play worked well to bring the challenges faced by SMEs and support agencies alive in a way that was fun yet productive.

The TOR for the ALG is still to be finalised and this was agreed to be done after the first meeting through online communication.

A follow up meeting is essential to not only report on feedback from the previous meeting but to assist in formulating a SME ALG group that can make a difference to the sector. This meeting is scheduled for July 2014.

**Appendix 1 – List of Participants**

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Area of expertise</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Address 1</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Tel (W)</b>	<b>Email 1</b>
Dennis	Sammy	Managing Director	Nature Seekers	P.O. Box 4535, Sangre Grande PO Toco Main Road, Matura	Trinidad and Tobago	868 668 7337	<a href="mailto:Dennispsammy@gmail.com">Dennispsammy@gmail.com</a>
Clement	Bobb	Chairman/Secretary	Tobago Cocoa Farmers Association	# 13 Calder Hall Branch Trace, Scarborough	Tobago	868 315 6191	<a href="mailto:cacaotovaco@gmail.com">cacaotovaco@gmail.com</a>
Denis	Mitchell	Regional Business Advisor	National Entrepreneurship Development Company Ltd. (NEDCO) Entrepreneurial Training Institute and Incubation Centre (ETIIC)	# 13 Naparima Mayaro Road, Cocoyea, San Fernando	Trinidad and Tobago	821 5840/5822 ext. 2320	<a href="mailto:Dmitchell@nedco.gov.tt">Dmitchell@nedco.gov.tt</a>
Denyse	Ogilvie	CEO	People in Action	P.O. Box 1022 Belmont, St. George's	Grenada	473 232 0793	<a href="mailto:denyse.ogilvie@gmail.com">denyse.ogilvie@gmail.com</a>

Akilah	Jaramogi	Watershed management	Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project (FACRP)	LP 21 Fondes Amandes Hills, St. Ann's, Port of Spain	Trinidad and Tobago	868 689 7794 / 868 750 1716	<a href="mailto:facrp1@yahoo.com">facrp1@yahoo.com</a>
Celina	Edwards	Director - Member Discipline Landscaping	Women Involved in Natural Resources (WINR)	Pleasantville		686 343 0333	<a href="mailto:mcelinaedwards@yahoo.com">mcelinaedwards@yahoo.com</a>
Ashley	John	Executive Director	Constructive Solutions Inc.	Kingstown	St. Vincent and the Grenadines	784 432 1672	<a href="mailto:constructivesolutionsbb@live.com">constructivesolutionsbb@live.com</a>
Alan	Cooper	Policy Analyst, Enterprise Development division	Ministry of Labour and Small Micro Enterprise	Head Office Level 5 & 6, Tower C, International Waterfront Centre, #1 Wrightson Road, Port of Spain	Trinidad and Tobago	686 627 0756	<a href="mailto:coopera2@gov.tt">coopera2@gov.tt</a>
Beverly	Demas	Manager Entrepreneurial Development and Support Services	YTEPP Limited	1-3 Mulchan Seuchan Road, Chaguanas	Trinidad and Tobago	868 672 5411	<a href="mailto:beverlyd@ytepp.gov.tt">beverlyd@ytepp.gov.tt</a>



Jorge	Gutierrez	Gerente de Negocios y Riesgo	Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral (IDDI)	Apdo. Postal 22282 (Huacal) Calle Luis F. Thomen 654, Santo Domingo	Dominican Republic	1 809 534 1077	<a href="mailto:jorgegut@gmail.com">jorgegut@gmail.com</a>
Akosua	Edwards	Small and Medium Sized (SME) Women and Youth	Enabling Enterprise	59 Cascade Road, Port of Spain	Trinidad and Tobago	868 708 6530	<a href="mailto:akosua@canari.org">akosua@canari.org</a>
Keisha	Sandy	Technical Officer	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)	Building 7, Unit 8, Fernandes Business Centre, Eastern Main Road, Laventille	Trinidad and Tobago	868 626 6062	<a href="mailto:keisha@canari.org">keisha@canari.org</a>
Nicole	Leotaud	Executive Director	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)	Building 7, Unit 8, Fernandes Business Centre, Eastern Main Road, Laventille	Trinidad and Tobago	868 626 6062	<a href="mailto:nicole@canari.org">nicole@canari.org</a>



Appendix 2 – Word Cloud



### **Appendix 3 – Challenges identified by participants**

- How can entrepreneurs access technical services?
- How can entrepreneurs take advantage of support services available?
- How can SMEs be “greened”?
- How can a culture be built in support agencies that show respect, heart and ethics in the provision of support to SMEs?
- How to transform the education system to support entrepreneurship
- How can change agents catalyse change in their organisation
- How can support agencies access technical services?
- How can informal enterprises be sustained?
- How to effectively influence policy?
- What are the appropriate criteria or tests for business applicants?
- How can people unlearn and change?
- How can we build capacity of entrepreneurs to access available services?
- How can mentorship best support entrepreneurs? Who? How?
- How to transform the education system to encourage entrepreneurship?
- How can NGOs and Government agencies partner to provide support?
- How can we change the culture to promote and practice customer service in support agencies?
- How can leaders be patient and facilitate collective learning and development of people?
- How big can a community enterprise grow?
- How can we facilitate relationships with equity and respect?
- How are we measuring success in entrepreneurship?
- How can support agencies evaluate impact?
- How can we get draft policies approved in a timely manner?
- How to get policy makers to accept social entrepreneurs and self help organisations?
- How to manage debt?



## Action and learning about small and micro enterprises as a pathway to a green economy in the Caribbean

02-03 June, 2014  
Normandie Hotel,  
Trinidad and Tobago



## Project partners and facilitators

- Funded by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)
- Managed by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)
  - Facilitators
    - Nicole
    - Akosua
    - Me ☺



## What is CANARI?

- Mission
  - “Promoting and facilitating equitable participation and effective collaboration in the management of natural resources critical to development in the Caribbean islands, so that people will have a better quality of life and natural resources will be conserved, through action learning and research, capacity building, communication and fostering partnerships.”



## Project goal

- *explore how to nurture Small and Micro Enterprises, including those operating in the informal or semi-formal sectors, to be an engine for green and inclusive economic transformation in the Caribbean using an action research and learning approach with GE ALG members and other key partners in the region*



## Learning question

- How can we catalyse, support and empower Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) so that they bring co-benefits (economic, environmental sustainability, social equity) and address issues of the informal sector?



## Project activities

- Prepare papers and deliver 2 presentations on the POW by Caribbean GE ALG at SMMEs regional conf
- Establish ARLG on SMMEs in the Caribbean
- Facilitate two-day workshop to develop action research and learning plan for the ARLG on SMMEs in the Caribbean





### Project activities cont'd

- Support members with implementation of the AL activities
- Host second two-day workshop for AL members to share and evaluate lessons and recommendations on institutions, policy and financial instruments to support and empower SMEs so that they bring co-benefits
- Develop policy brief on lessons and recommendations



### Outcomes

- Enhanced understanding of
  - the opportunities, challenges and issues for institutions and policy and financial instruments to catalyse, support and empower SMMEs as a pathway to green economy
  - how our roles and objectives can be better articulated with one another and aligned to broader local/nat'l/ regional sectoral green economy pathways and strategies



### Outcomes (cont'd)

- Built capacity, commitment and are actively collaborating to support and empower SMEs so that they bring co- benefits
  - Social equity
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Economic benefits



### Links to the *Rural Livelihoods Programme*

- Programme goal: To support rural communities with the development of sustainable natural resource-based livelihoods through building capacity, catalysing partnerships and influencing policy to create an enabling institutional environment.



### **SMES AS A PATHWAY TO A GREEN ECONOMY IN THE CARIBBEAN**



### Caribbean green economy vision

- A Green Economy in the Caribbean context aims for long-term prosperity through equitable distribution of economic benefits and effective management of ecological resources; it is economically viable and resilient, self-directed, self-reliant, and pro-poor.



## Green economy research questions

- the **structure and character of the economy**: how to shift it towards green and inclusive pathways?
- the potential **benefits of a green economy**: where are the opportunities to contribute to poverty reduction, employment and social inclusion?
- **steering the transition**: how to build capacity for leadership and institutions for intersectoral collaboration?
- **measuring progress**: what sustainable development targets and indicators and alternatives to GDP are most relevant and feasible for the region?

CANARI Policy Brief 14



## Green economy research questions

- **social policy**: how should social protection be addressed in a green economy?
- **energy**: how can national and sectoral energy strategies be more sustainable and resilient?
- **local economies**: what should be the place of small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) and informal economic activity in a green economy, and how can their role be strengthened?
- **trade implications**: how can green transitions reduce trade dependency and create new export markets?

CANARI Policy Brief 14



## CANARI's Green Economy programme

- Programme page with lots of publications:  
<http://canari.org/greeneconomy.asp>
- Background paper on SMEs:  
<http://canari.org/documents/CANARIGE4SMMEsMcIntosh.pdf>



Participant introductions

**LET'S HEAR FROM YOU**



## Activity

- Introduce
  - Self
  - Organisation
- Give 1-3 words that you think of when you hear the **Small and Micro Enterprises**



## ACTION LEARNING - DEFINITIONS and BACKGROUND

Session 2


*Akosua Dardaine Edwards*



### ACTION LEARNING



Action Learning is a process which involves working on real challenges using the knowledge and skills of a small group of people combined with skilled questioning to reinterpret old and familiar concepts and produce new ideas




### What is Action Learning?

Action

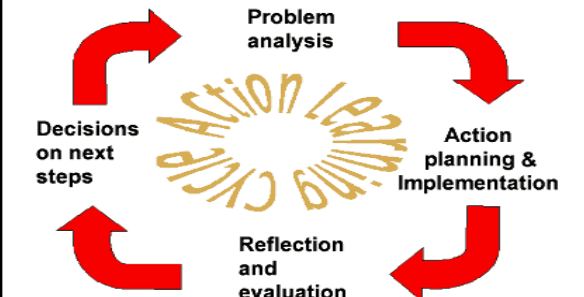
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Learning

- Address real business issues that top management is grappling with now
- Take on intellectually challenging topics
- Achieve tangible business impact
- Work with colleagues across organizational boundaries
- 
- Gain exposure to a new area of the business or organization




### Action Learning Cycle






### Action Learning Gives:-


- A simple yet powerful tool for personal and professional development
- The opportunity to work on real problems and implement solutions
- A powerful way for leaders and SME owners to learn from other leaders and SME owners





### ACTION LEARNING AND SME'S

- AL offered the opportunity to take time out of the business and "disengage" with the operational allowing them to become more strategic.
- AL's allowed the SME's to set the agenda on what they need to learn, network in their "own" way, use language that they understand and to realise that "experts" are not the only ones with the answers



### Action Learning and SME's

*People learn best when they want to learn something!*

*Case Study – SME's in Watford involved in Construction*

- They chose action learning to promote innovation and the use of new technologies among SME's
- They were all competitors and therefore focused on industry wide issues ( to improve the industry)
- For the first three meetings the members found it difficult to discuss industry issues due to the fear of their competitors in the room





## Action Learning and SME's

*People learn best when they want to learn something!*

*Case Study – SME's in Watford involved in Construction*

- *At the fourth meeting they agreed on a topic of relevant to all SME's in the area – the quality of recruitment- this set the tone for the way forward*
- *They focused on what they could have done to enhance recruitment procedures and resources in the industry*



## Action Learning and SME's

- *The solution they came up with was a "one stop shop", to be provided from a bus that would tour the country*
- *It aims would be to provide "better careers information for new recruits and improved access to placements, trainings and jobs; greater access to information about local builders, and job opportunities for local builders"*
- *The initiative also had implications beyond the recruitment issues as it would also help educate local clients, reduce skills shortages and improve the image of the construction industry*



## Discussion Time

1. Are you familiar with Action Learning (AL)?
2. Do you believe that AL is already being used or applied by organisations and SME's but being called by another name?



## ACTION LEARNING MEETING PROCESS

- Personal updates, including feedback from the last session
- Bids for space to raise issues and agree agenda
- For each issue/problem:
  - Tell the story
  - Ventilate feelings



## ACTION LEARNING MEETING PROCESS

- Clarify and state outcome
- Scope the problem
- Identify positive elements
- Identify alternative courses of action
- Agree next steps and intermediate goals
- Final check and completion
- Review the process



## Purpose of ALG

- The overall purpose of the GE ALG is to identify and promote ways in which "green economy" can advance sustainable development in the Caribbean through shaping visions, perspectives, positions and actions.





## OBJECTIVES OF ALG

- The objectives of the SME ALG are to:
- Build and share evidence-based knowledge to build understanding and capacity
- Advocate to influence policy and build commitment
- Act to deliver transformational results



## Marketplace

Session 3

*Nicole Leotaud*



## Introducing entrepreneurs

1. What is your product or service?
2. What is the history of your business: when and how did it start and who was involved?
3. Did you try to get help from support agencies? If yes, what help did you get?
4. How is your business doing?
5. Where do you want your business to go?
6. What is your experience with action learning?



## Introducing support agencies

1. Who is your target audience?
2. What support do you provide?
3. How do you evaluate how well you are providing support?
4. How do you want your services to improve?
5. How are you working with other support agencies to support each other and/or coordinate activities?
6. What is your experience with action learning?

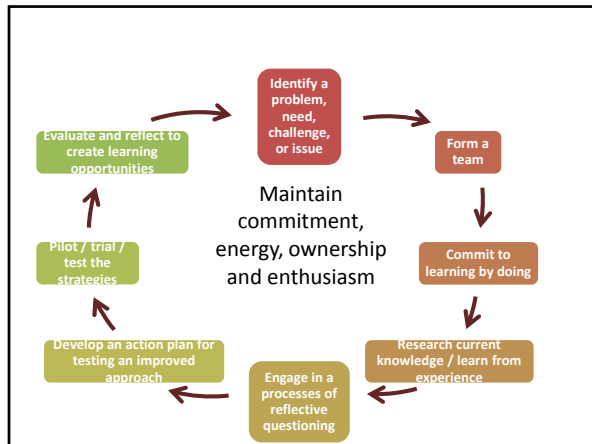


## Action learning to explore priority challenges

Session 6

*Nicole Leotaud*

## Appendix 4: Presentations



### Learning principles

- Learning is increased when we are asked questions and reflect on what we did in the experience, when we are given time and space to deal with problems, when we can see results, when we are allowed to take risks and when we are encouraged and supported.
- We can learn critically when we are able to question the assumptions on which our actions are based, ie. when we receive feedback from others and from the results of our problem-solving actions.
- When relying totally on experts we can become immobilized and fail to seek or trust our own solutions.

### Learning principles

- Non-hierarchical groups from across organisations or departments and functions are often better able to gain new perspectives.
- Group responsibility for the task empowers the members and enhances learning.
- We are most challenged when we work on unfamiliar problems in unfamiliar settings, where we can unfreeze some of our previous ways of doing things and develop new ways of thinking.
- By working co-operatively with others on real issues, the group can move to a higher level of learning.
- People learn when they do something, and they learn more as they feel more responsible for their task.

### Ground rules

- **The contract:** group agrees what to do together and how
- **Confidentiality:** discussions only within the group and with the group
- **Presenter's time and space:** whatever needed; give attention
- **The "I" language:** get closer to the specific problem
- **Open questions:** do not give advice or tell stories of your experience

### Action learning reflective questions

- What result do you want?
- How do you feel about this situation?
- What could you do differently?
- How do you know this?
- Can you explain that further?
- What is the best possible outcome?

### Action Learning Group ROLES

- Presenters
- Group members
- Learning buddies
- Learning coach

## Appendix 4: Presentations



### Presenter's role

- Describes the problem, challenge or issue for the group's input
- Listens to experiences of the group
- Accepts the group's questions and reflections
- Takes back learning to apply and put into action



### Group members' role

- Participate equally
- Give support to their colleague
- Share experiences
- Provide new perspectives
- Question/challenge
- Ask "dumb" questions
- Do not give advice, tell anecdotes, pass judgement, or talk about how the situation compares to their own
- Assist the presenter to review options and decide on action
- Reflect on the group process and give feedback to each other on what has taken place
- May or may not be associated with the situation or challenge



### OPTIONAL: Learning Buddy

- Site based colleague who acts as a sounding board and co-learner
- May not attend the formal program events
- Usually only needed if ALG members are at different physical locations



### Learning coach's role

- Focuses on helping group become more effective
- Helps members achieve clarity and optimise learning
- Ensures sufficient time for capturing learning
- Helps members to reflect on interactions & implications of actions to be taken
- Ensures norms & processes followed
- Creates atmosphere of learning & reflective inquiry
- Asks questions related to learning, problem and goal clarity



### Day 1 recap

- How can SMEs contribute to a green economy?
- How can we use an action learning approach?
- What kinds of challenges do we want to address?



### Action learning to explore priority challenges

Session 5  
Nicole Leotaud

## Appendix 4: Presentations



### SME research questions – external environment

- How does the current **policy environment** facilitate development and oversight of a sustainable and equitable SMME sector? What policy gaps still exist at regional, national and sub-national level and how can these best be addressed?
- To what extent can a **critical mass of 'green' SMMEs influence** national sectoral policies and the policies/practices of larger businesses?
- What **financing** mechanisms (loans, grants, CSR programmes) can best stimulate development and growth of SMMEs that contribute to green economies?

CANARI GE Discussion Paper #4



### SME research questions – internal organisation

- What forms of **collective organisation** are best suited to Caribbean culture and world view? Are different forms of collective organisation needed for different purposes (e.g. mutual learning; collaborative product development, marketing and branding; advocacy) or can one organisation address all these needs? How can individual and collective interest best be balanced? Are formal organisations always necessary or can informal collaboration on an as-needed basis serve equally well, e.g. for advocacy?

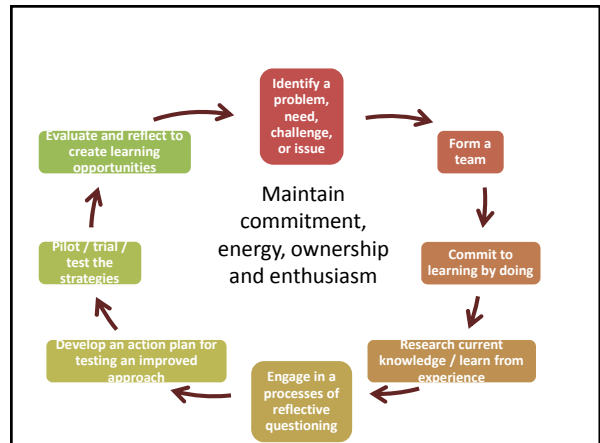
CANARI GE Discussion Paper #4



### SME research questions - support

- Is **mentoring and coaching** an effective strategy for SMME development? What institutions and approaches best facilitate this? How can mentor and coach capacity be built to facilitate the development of SMMEs that contribute to green economies?
- How can **ICTs act as a catalyst** for the development of 'green' SMMEs?

CANARI GE Discussion Paper #4



### In action learning we...

- are given time and space to deal with problems
- are encouraged and supported
- work cooperatively to solve real problems
- question the assumptions on which our actions are based
- get new perspectives from others
- receive feedback from others
- unfreeze some of our previous ways of doing things and develop new ways of thinking
- are allowed to take risks
- reflect on the experience and results and so learn by doing




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### Action learning reflective questions

- Can you explain that further?
- How do you feel about this situation?
- What could you do differently?
- How do you know this?
- What result do you want?
- What is the best possible outcome?



### Workplan: next steps

- Finalise TOR
- Group action learning agenda
- Individual action learning plans
- Mentoring
- Group communication
- Video
- Next meeting – Grenada