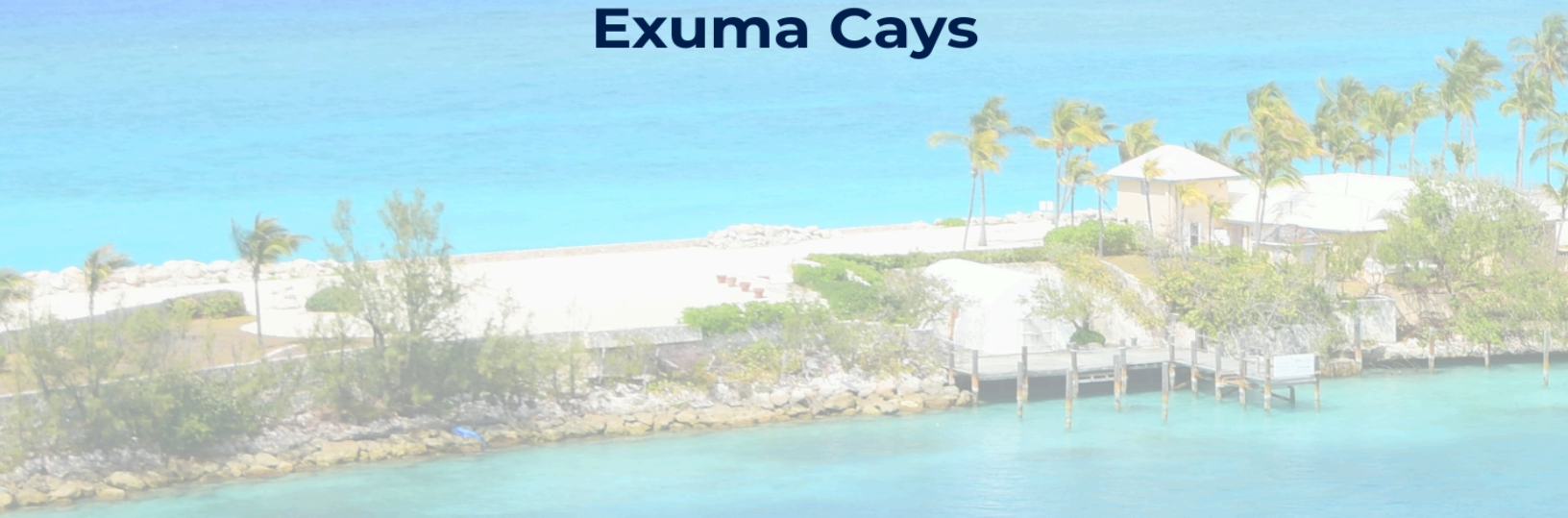
Organization for Responsible Governance

ORG BAHAMAS

Community Perceptions on Local Development, Sustainable Tourism and Public Engagement:

A Comprehensive Survey Analysis in the Exuma Cays



Prepared By:

Organization for Responsible Governance

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Overview:

In October 2025, the Organization for Responsible Governance (ORG) conducted a community survey in the Exuma Cays to better understand local perspectives on sustainable development and tourism initiatives, with a specific focus on the planned Yntegra boutique hotel development on Big Sampson Cay. The survey primarily targeted residents of Black Point and Staniel Cay, communities that have historically had limited opportunities to influence decisions on environmentally sensitive projects. As tourism and development continue to expand, so do the social, economic, and environmental considerations that directly impact these communities' livelihoods and long-term opportunities.

ORG, a non-partisan, non-profit organization, was engaged by Turtlegrass Resort and the Save Exuma Alliance to conduct this research as part of a targeted effort to understand community perspectives on local development initiatives. This engagement aligns with ORG's broader, ongoing commitment to promoting inclusive, transparent, and participatory governance in The Bahamas. Building on over ten years of experience leading citizen engagement and governance initiatives across the country, ORG recognizes that sustainable development cannot be achieved without meaningful public consultation and stakeholder engagement. These are principles that are supported by global research, including studies by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2022), the World Bank (2021), and the OECD (2020). Citizen participation strengthens community cohesion, accountability, and social development.

In emerging destinations like the Exuma Cays, opportunities for residents to meaningfully contribute to decision-making on environmentally sensitive developments have historically been limited. The results of this survey provide a baseline of community attitudes regarding the Yntegra project, highlighting cautious optimism about potential local employment and economic benefits, alongside concerns about environmental protection, transparency, and follow-through. Findings also raise questions about the equitable distribution of benefits and a clear desire for broader community-centered consultation regarding development.

Globally, research confirms that early and meaningful participation strengthens development effectiveness, accountability, and social cohesion (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2021; OECD, 2020; Mansuri & Rao, 2013). By grounding local development in community insight, these findings can help the developers, non-profits, and government authorities working in the Exuma Cays design more inclusive and responsive strategies that support sustainable social and economic outcomes for the affected communities while ensuring responsible development of the Big Sampson Cay site that balances economic opportunity, environmental protection, and community agency.

Research Context and Objectives

The survey conducted by ORG was undertaken to understand public perceptions regarding a planned boutique hotel development on Big Sampson Cay, a site that is potentially environmentally sensitive. The development, led by Yntegra Group in partnership with Rosewood Hotels, has engaged with local communities primarily to communicate potential benefits such as economic opportunities and employment. At the same time, stakeholders, including developer Turtlegrass Resort and community group the Save Exuma Alliance, have raised concerns regarding potential social and environmental impacts. Relationships between Yntegra, Turtlegrass, and The Save Exuma Alliance have become contentious, generating significant media attention, which can be expected to have had an effect on the community in the islands close to Big Sampson Cay.

To best understand community perceptions in this context, ORG applied a “walkabout” approach, conducting in-person visits, direct conversations, and structured surveys within the community to capture perspectives and contextualize resident responses. This approach was selected as particularly suited to lower socio-economic communities like those on Black Point and Staniel Cay, where historically, engagement in high-profile development processes has been limited.

In The Bahamas, projects with potential environmental impacts require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) under the Environmental Planning and Protection Act (EPPA), 2019, and proponents must obtain a Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC) from the Department of Environmental Planning and Protection. While these regulations include provisions for public consultation, they do not specify the level or quality of community participation expected.

The Yntegra project has received government endorsement, marked by a recent highly publicized groundbreaking ceremony. Alongside other recent issues in Exuma, such as a controversial moorings contract and SpaceX activities, the development has attracted significant local and national media attention.

The research aimed to document residents’ priorities related to quality of life, economic opportunities, and environmental protection, while capturing concerns about current and proposed development projects. Specific attention was given to assessing trust in governance processes, the perceived need for public consultation, and gaps between community values and governmental or developmental execution.

ORG’s research sought to provide structured insights into local priorities, serving as a baseline for developers, government, and environmental organizations to build more impactful and meaningful stakeholder engagement strategies, supporting more inclusive and sustainable social and economic development in these communities.

Survey Model

The walkabout survey model has proven particularly effective in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) such as The Bahamas, where close-knit community ties and informal communication networks make personal engagement essential for meaningful data collection. By meeting residents in their homes, businesses, and communal spaces, this approach builds trust and fosters open dialogue, enabling the collection of both quantitative data and rich qualitative insights that might be overlooked through digital or formal survey methods.

Across the Caribbean, walkabout-style surveys have been successfully applied in participatory environmental management and recovery planning. In Grenada, for instance, door-to-door surveys conducted after Hurricane Ivan helped identify priority sites for mangrove rehabilitation by integrating fishers' and residents' firsthand knowledge. Similarly, in Saint Lucia, this method was used to gather diverse community perspectives that informed marine protected area zoning, balancing biodiversity conservation with the protection of local livelihoods.

These examples demonstrate that walkabout surveys effectively address barriers common in small communities in Small Island Developing States, such as limited internet access, survey fatigue, and mistrust of external actors. The method promotes inclusivity and local ownership by validating community expertise and ensuring that data collection reflects lived realities. It also aligns with international best practices in participatory conservation planning, which emphasize legitimacy, transparency, and collaboration as essential elements of long-term environmental stewardship.

In contexts where development proposals are sensitive or contested, individual survey engagement offers distinct advantages over focus groups. One-on-one interactions minimize the influence of dominant voices, ensure confidentiality, and create space for candid responses, conditions that are particularly important where social or political dynamics may inhibit open discussion (NOAA, 2010). This personalized approach reflects global standards in participatory justice, particularly within SIDS, where fair and inclusive engagement is foundational to building trust and resilience (Springer, 2024).

By adopting this culturally responsive method in Staniel Cay and Black Point, ORG ensured that the survey process not only generates reliable data but also strengthens community relationships and supports collaborative conservation rooted in mutual respect and shared responsibility.

Survey Design

This survey employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of community perspectives in the Exuma Cays. By combining structured numerical measures with open-ended narrative

responses, the methodology captured not only measurable trends but also the nuanced views, concerns, and priorities of residents regarding sustainable development and local governance.

The survey instrument consisted of 29 structured questions, organized into six key thematic areas: Personal Characteristics, Awareness & First Impressions, Environment & Culture, Jobs, Economy & Infrastructure, Governance & Fairness, and Final Thoughts.

Quantitative questions primarily utilized a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or concern on specific statements. This approach facilitated statistical analysis of community perceptions and enabled comparisons across different demographic groups.

The following table reflects the linkage between the Theme, Indicator and Rationale in the construct of the survey. The full survey tool can be accessed in Annex #2.

Theme	Indicator	Rationale
About You	Which island do you live or work on?	To identify the respondent's geographic location and determine whether perceptions vary by island or proximity to the proposed development site.
	Settlement or area?	To capture finer geographic distinctions for community-level analysis of responses.
	What is your age group?	To analyze variations in awareness and opinions across age demographics.
	Occupation	To understand how perspectives differ based on professional background or reliance on local industries such as fishing or tourism.
Awareness & First Impressions	How familiar are you with the Yntegra project? (Open-ended)	To gauge baseline awareness and information access among residents regarding the proposed development.
	Did you know the project may include: use of Crown Land, seawall, dredging, diesel generators, etc.?	To measure specific awareness of key project components that could have environmental or social implications.
	A resort development is being proposed by Yntegra. Which development approach would be most favorable? (A/B choice)	To assess public preference for the scale and sustainability level of development, helping identify community values regarding growth.
	Overall, how do you feel about the Yntegra project?	To determine overall sentiment and initial perceptions toward the proposed project.

	Do you have any additional comments on your first impressions? (Open-ended)	To capture nuanced opinions, concerns, or suggestions that quantitative measures may not fully reflect.
Environment & Culture	How important is it to protect local seagrass beds, coral reefs, fish life, beaches, and clean water?	To understand community prioritization of environmental conservation and natural resource protection.
	How concerned are you about the seawall affecting erosion and water quality?	To measure perceived environmental risks associated with physical infrastructure.
	How concerned are you about dredging damaging seagrass, coral reefs, and conch habitats?	To assess perceived ecological threats and awareness of marine ecosystem interdependence.
	How concerned are you that large-scale resort development could affect local quality of life?	To capture concerns about social and environmental pressures from population and infrastructure expansion.
	Which type of resort approach would you most support to protect and promote culture? (A/B/C choice)	To evaluate cultural values and preferences for development models that balance modernization with heritage preservation.
	How would you feel if the Yntegra project proceeded without environmental safeguards? What suggestions do you have? (Open-ended)	To gauge expectations for environmental responsibility and gather community-driven recommendations for protection.
Jobs, Economy & Infrastructure	Do you think the Yntegra project will create good, long-term jobs for Bahamians?	To assess perceptions of economic benefit distribution and employment sustainability.
	Are you aware of sustainable resort operations that balance environmental efforts and local employment?	To identify awareness of alternative development models and local benchmarks for responsible tourism.
	How concerned are you about the Yntegra project competing with local businesses or stressing public systems?	To explore perceptions of potential negative economic and infrastructural impacts on communities.
Governance & Fairness	What are your thoughts about the government leasing or granting Crown Land to foreign developers? (Open-ended)	To capture perceptions of fairness, equity, and sovereignty in land use decisions.

	Should Crown Land development agreements include environmental restrictions and public consultation?	To assess support for transparency and accountability in government land agreements.
	Do you believe the government allows environmental destruction through unfair enforcement? If yes, examples?	To measure public trust in governance and perceived effectiveness of environmental regulation.
	Have you been to any public meetings about the Yntegra project?	To understand levels of civic participation and prior engagement opportunities.
	Do you feel local opinions are considered in development decisions? (Explain)	To assess perceptions of inclusion and representation in decision-making processes.
	Who do you feel the Yntegra project approval benefits mainly?	To capture perceptions of equity and beneficiaries in development outcomes.
	How much do you trust each of the following to give accurate information (Yntegra, Turtlegrass Resort, SEA, government, etc.)?	To understand which sources communities deem credible and which they view with skepticism.
	Should developers consult with nearby communities and businesses before moving forward?	To evaluate expectations for participatory planning and collaboration between developers and communities.
Final Thoughts	How important is a healthy marine environment to your livelihood and Exuma's economy?	To identify perceived linkages between environmental sustainability and economic well-being.
	Do you have other questions, concerns, or ideas you would like decision-makers to hear? (Open-ended)	To provide an open space for additional community-driven recommendations and feedback beyond predefined categories.

Qualitative components of the survey included open-ended questions, providing respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on their perspectives, share concerns, and provide suggestions. These narrative responses enriched the quantitative data by adding depth, context, and local insight that would not be captured through closed-ended questions alone.

Demographic questions were included to collect basic respondent information, including age group, occupation, and island of residence. This information allows for analysis of how perceptions, priorities, and concerns vary across different segments of the population, supporting targeted and evidence-based recommendations for development planning and

community engagement. The survey was designed without any prior data on baseline community understanding of the project's scope or potential impact and did not assume that participants had this prior knowledge. Accordingly, questions were included to assess the level of awareness and understanding among residents, ensuring that the survey captured both informed perspectives and knowledge gaps.

All descriptive information used in the survey regarding the proposed Yntegra development was drawn from publicly available sources on established media outlets and project websites to ensure accuracy and neutrality. For example, to inform questions about the proposed seawall at Big Sampson Cay, ORG referenced the dimensions (390 feet long, 40 feet wide) as previously presented to the community at an earlier meeting (*Eyewitness News, 2025*), using this information as a reference point for respondents.

By employing this mixed-methods approach, the survey generated robust, actionable data, balancing measurable trends with community voices to inform sustainable development strategies and governance decisions in the Exuma Cays.

Methodological Considerations

Limitations

Several limitations were encountered during the execution of this survey that may have influenced the data collected.

Several contextual factors influenced the data. The transitional nature of the Exuma Cays' population, particularly during peak tourism and work seasons, created uncertainty around the true size of the resident sample. The absence of a recent local census further complicated population estimates for these islands, with the latest official data available from 2010 (Bahamas National Statistical Institute).

In addition to the methodological limitations outlined, it is important to acknowledge several contextual factors that may have influenced the data collected.

The research took place in a context already shaped by heightened public awareness and contention surrounding the Yntegra and Turtlegrass developments. In the months leading up to data collection, both developers had engaged in public-facing activities, including community donations, town halls, surveys, and media coverage, which likely shaped respondents' perceptions, expectations, and willingness to participate. This prolonged and visible back-and-forth between the developers and the government may have introduced response bias, as some residents expressed skepticism about survey neutrality or assumed that the research was affiliated with one of the projects.

Potential confounding factors arose from residents' conflation of the local development projects: many respondents could not distinguish between the Yntegra and Turtlegrass developments,

often assuming that activities on Big Sampson Cay were associated with both. A limited awareness of Turtlegrass Resort was also noted, highlighting gaps in public knowledge that may have affected responses.

The field team also observed instances where community members expected payment to participate or sought to tailor their responses to what they believed the researchers wanted to hear. These individuals were not included in the survey, ensuring the reliability of collected data. Nonetheless, these interactions provide valuable context about community dynamics in the Cays, suggesting that historical engagements with outside actors may have normalized expectations of compensation or strategic participation in consultation processes.

Data collection was additionally challenged by resident hesitation and reluctance to participate, particularly in Black Point, where 61 of 69 declinations occurred, representing 94% of total declinations. Some of those that declined to take the survey noted that they perceived the survey as potentially biased in favor of Turtlegrass and Save the Exuma Alliance, despite ORG's role as an independent third-party organization.

The survey team spent 10 days in the community, which allowed for comprehensive engagement but may have introduced community-level bias, particularly among groups with affiliations (or perceived affiliations) with one of the developers. Research was conducted across multiple environments, including workplaces, stores, government offices, restaurants, parks, and door-to-door visits, capturing perspectives in varied social and spatial contexts. Surveys were conducted at different times of the day to reflect daily routines and maximize accessibility. Surveys also took place on National Heroes Day, though few were conducted on Sundays out of respect for the community's religious observances.

Practical difficulties such as respondents being inebriated and adverse weather conditions affected the team's ability to consistently conduct door-to-door surveys.

A significant number of respondents noted a lack of participation in public meetings, highlighting potential challenges in outreach and inconsistent processes for stakeholder engagement. These factors may reflect restricted exposure to information about development projects, potentially affecting the representativeness of survey responses.

These additional factors collectively highlight the complexity of conducting community perception research in small, highly connected island environments where social relationships, timing, and public narratives can significantly influence engagement and responses.

While these factors presented challenges, they simultaneously highlight the value of this survey in capturing community knowledge, perceptions, and gaps in understanding, which directly relate to the research objectives of assessing community priorities and concerns.

Strengths

Despite these challenges, the survey methodology offered several key strengths. The mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative measures with qualitative open-ended questions, provided depth and context to the numerical data, enabling a nuanced understanding of community perspectives.

The walkabout data collection methodology allowed ORG researchers to engage residents directly in their homes, businesses, and communal spaces, fostering trust and encouraging detailed responses that might not have been obtained through remote or digital methods. This personal engagement was particularly valuable in a close-knit SIDS context, where face-to-face interaction promotes participation and validates community knowledge.

Additionally, the survey maintained transparency in reporting response rates, including the geographic distribution of decliners, which strengthens the credibility of the findings and allows for the acknowledgment of potential response biases.

Taken together, these methodological strengths and limitations provide critical context for interpreting survey findings. They clarify how residents prioritize quality of life, economic opportunities, and environmental protection, as well as how they perceive development initiatives and governance processes. By documenting both challenges and advantages, this ensures that the survey results are considered within the practical realities of community engagement in the Exuma Cays, enhancing the reliability and applicability of the insights for evidence-based planning and decision-making.

Sampling Approach

The target population for this survey consisted of residents of Black Point and Staniel Cay in the Exuma Cays. Given the close-knit nature of these communities and the potential for limited participation in formal public meetings, the researchers employed a systematic door-to-door approach to maximize coverage and ensure inclusion of residents who might otherwise be overlooked.

Field researchers visited households, local businesses, and places of employment on both cays, engaging residents in person to encourage participation and facilitate detailed responses. This approach not only increased accessibility, it also allowed for richer, face-to-face interaction, fostering trust and providing opportunities for residents to elaborate on their perspectives.

The most recent detailed population data for the Exuma Cays communities included in this survey: Staniel Cay, and Black Point, comes from the 2010 national census. According to that census, Staniel Cay had a population of 118, and Black Point had 414 residents. While the 2020 census was delayed until 2022 and initial results have been released, more specific island-level data has not yet been made publicly available. Consequently, 2010 census figures were used as a limited reference to guide sample size considerations and planning for the survey.

The survey successfully collected 125 completed responses, representing a substantial portion of the target communities considering their relatively small populations. The 125 respondents represent approximately 21% of the total 2010 population of these communities. This sample size is considered useful for community-level insights in small populations, aligning with established guidelines for surveys of populations under 1,000 (United Nations, 2005; World Bank, 2020). However, the sample's representativeness may be influenced by factors that have been previously noted.

By using this targeted, in-person sampling method, the survey looked to achieve broad community representation and strengthen the validity of findings, particularly in the context of Small Island communities where informal engagement and local knowledge are essential to understanding community dynamics

Participant Profile

Island of Residence	Number of Participants	Percentage
Black Point	**73**	**58.4%**
Staniel Cay	**38**	**30.4%**
Nassau	**9**	**7.2%**
Mainland Exuma	**2**	**1.6%**
Long Island	**1**	**0.8%**
Over Yonder Cay	**2**	**1.6%**
Total	**125**	**100%**

Participation and Declination Patterns

In total, researchers approached 194 individuals across Black Point, Staniel Cay, and other locations. Of these, 125 completed surveys were successfully obtained, while 69 individuals declined to participate when approached. Participation and declination rates are important

indicators of the reliability and representativeness of the survey results. High participation rates suggest that the data reflects a broad spectrum of community perspectives, whereas high declination rates may signal potential sampling bias and can also provide insight into levels of public trust, engagement, or interest in the subject matter.

Island	Participated	Declined	Total Contacted	Declination Rate
Black Point	73	61	134	45.5%
Staniel Cay	38	5	43	11.6%
Other	14	3	17	17.6%
Total	125	69	194	35.6%

The declination rate varied notably by location. Black Point had a higher declination rate (45.5%) compared to Staniel Cay (11.6%) and other locations (17.6%). Several factors may have contributed to this difference, with community dynamics and perceptions of the project appearing to be particularly influential.

During the survey, researchers observed that some residents in Black Point expressed views suggesting that the Yntegra project could present potential opportunities for employment and local investment. Some in the community appeared less willing to participate in questions that might be perceived as critical of the project, which may have contributed to lower participation rates in this area.

These variations in participation highlight the importance of interpreting survey results within the social and cultural context of each island.

While the data collected provides meaningful insights into community perceptions, it also reflects the nuanced attitudes and sensitivities that exist regarding local development initiatives, demonstrating that engagement methods and trust-building are critical components of effective community-based research.

Demographic Characteristics

Survey participants represented a broad range of age groups, capturing the perspectives of both working-age adults and older community members. Respondents in their 20s through 50s were actively engaged in the local economy, providing insights into current employment opportunities, economic priorities, and daily interactions with community infrastructure. Older residents, ranging from their 60s to 80s, contributed perspectives informed by long-term experience and historical knowledge of past development patterns and community changes.

Participants also demonstrated diverse occupational backgrounds, reflecting the economic structure and livelihoods of the communities. Common occupations included boat captains, contractors, and hospitality workers, among others, enabling the survey to capture a range of perspectives across sectors tied to tourism, marine activities, and local services.

The data were not disaggregated by age or other descriptive characteristics, as no notable differences were observed across these variables; observed variations were primarily between islands. This diversity in age and occupation indicates that the survey data represent multiple dimensions of community experience, providing a comprehensive understanding of how different groups perceive local priorities in Black Point and Staniel Cay.

Survey Insights

Environmental Protection Concerns

Survey results indicate that the Exuma Cays community places an overwhelming priority on environmental protection. Nearly all respondents (96.8%) rated protecting seagrass beds, coral reefs, marine life, and clean water as “extremely important,” with only 3.2% indicating it was “not important.” This near-unanimous consensus underscores the central role of the environment in community values.

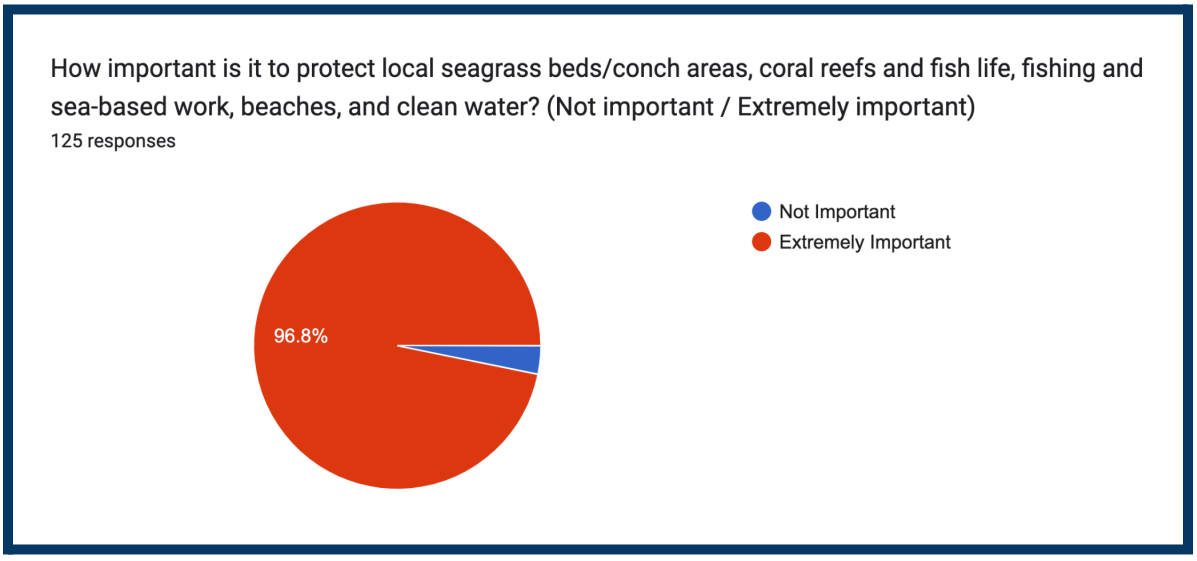

Figure 1.1, Importance of Environmental Protection

Concerns about specific project impacts were also prominent. 75% of respondents expressed concern about the planned 390-foot seawall* near Sampson Cay affecting erosion and water quality, with half (50.4%) reporting being extremely concerned.

**To inform the survey question regarding the proposed seawall at Big Sampson Cay, ORG referenced the dimensions (390 feet long, 40 feet wide) as presented in plans shared at an earlier community meeting. While Yntegra has indicated that these dimensions were presented as a concession, the information had been previously communicated to the community and was therefore used by ORG as a reference point for the survey question (Eyewitness News, 2025).*

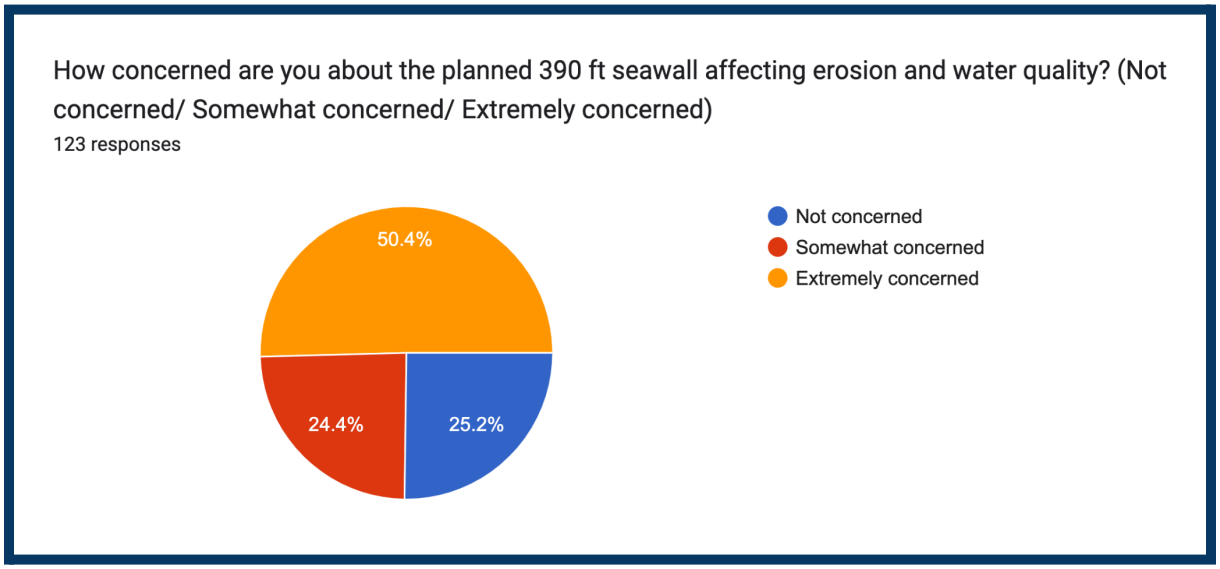

Figure 1.2, Seawall concern

Similarly, 72.0% expressed concern about the potential effects of dredging on seagrass meadows, coral reefs, and juvenile conch habitats, while 26.8% were not concerned.

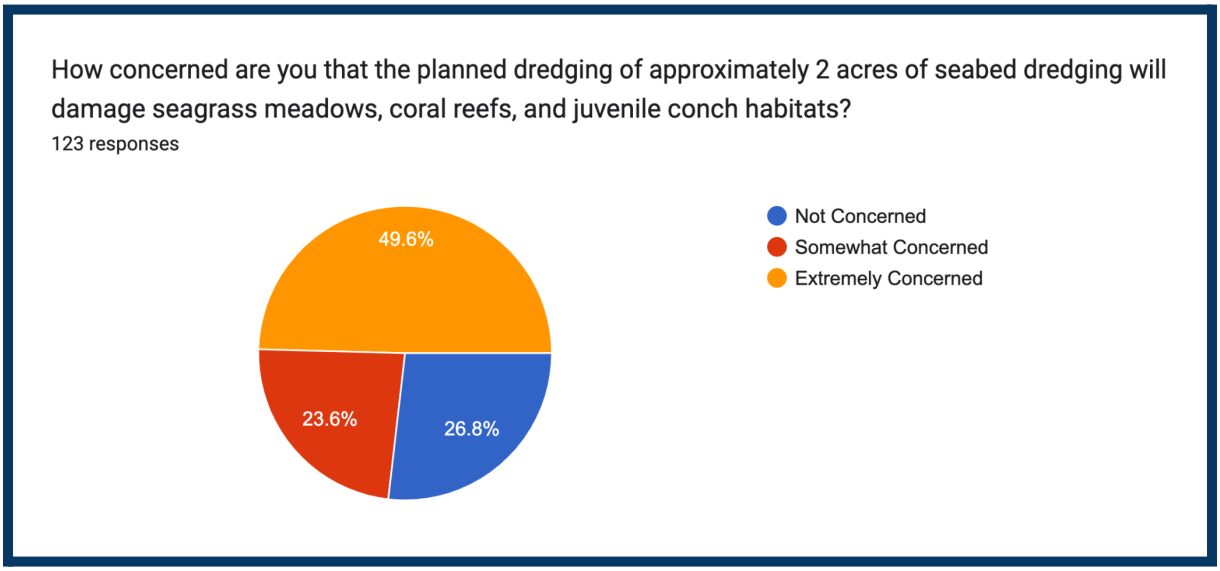

Figure 1.3, Dredging Concerns

When presented with hypothetical development scenarios, a majority (65.3%) favored a small-scale eco-resort powered entirely by solar energy and designed to minimize environmental impact, as opposed to a mid-sized resort with significant dredging and environmental impacts (34.7%). A similar question regarding cultural preservation showed 54.4% support for the smaller eco-resort, while 19.2% preferred the mid-sized resort and 26.4% were unsure.

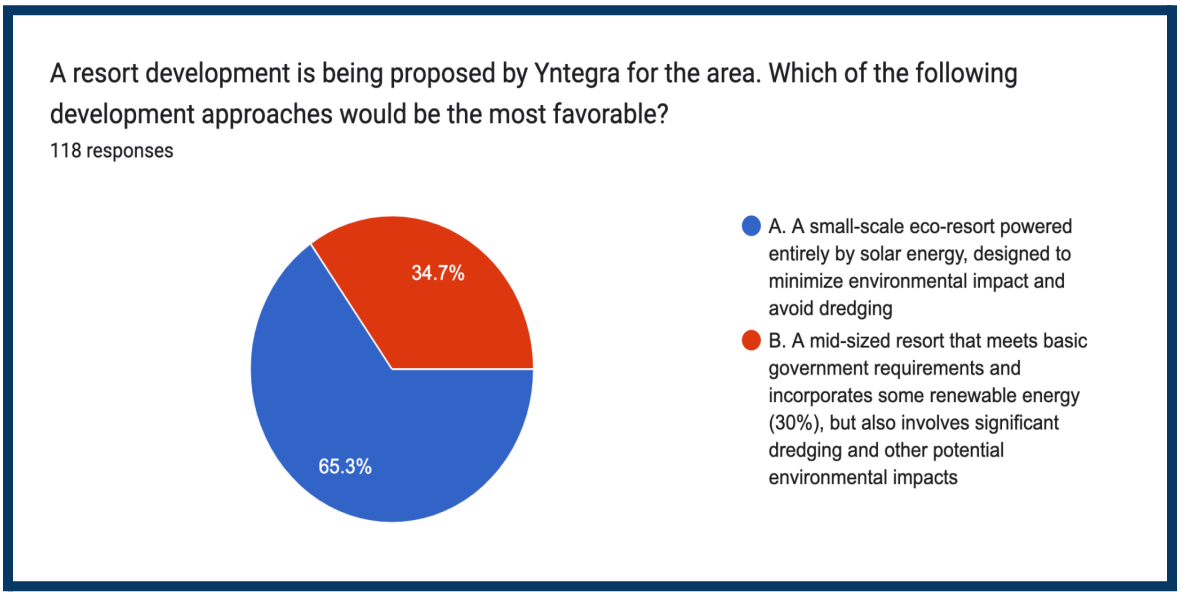

Figure 1.4, Favorable development approaches

Qualitative responses revealed strong sentiments about environmental safeguards. Many respondents described ignoring such safeguards as a “slap in the face” and emphasized the government’s responsibility to enforce Bahamian environmental protocols. Suggestions included developers actively listening to local residents and engaging independent researchers to conduct environmental assessments.

Job Creation in The Bahamas

Community perceptions of employment benefits from the Yntegra project were cautious. The largest share of respondents, 29.6%, anticipated mostly foreign employment; 24.8% expected some Bahamian jobs, but not many, another 24.8% were unsure, and 20.8% of respondents believed the project would create good, long-term jobs for Bahamians.

These responses highlight mixed perceptions regarding the distribution of employment benefits and the project’s potential to support the local economy.

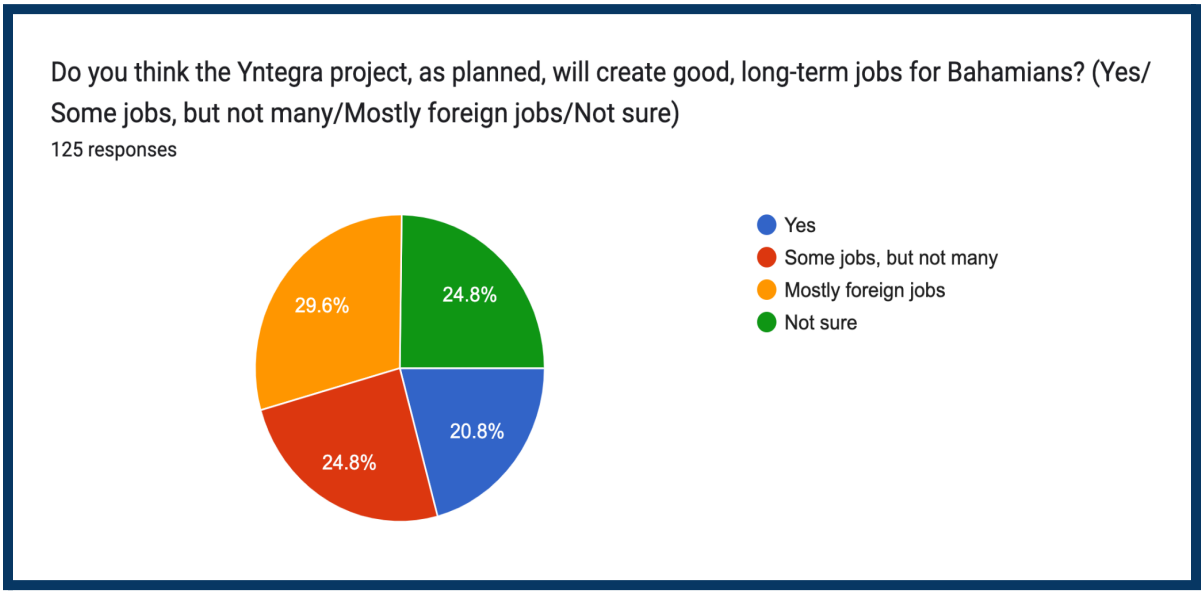

Figure 1.5, Job creation

Trust in Governance and Perceived Beneficiaries

Respondents reported varied perceptions of who benefits from the Yntegra project approval. The largest proportion, 31.5%, identified the government as the primary beneficiary, followed by 20.2% who cited developers, 16.1% who cited investors, and 13.7% who believed the project would primarily benefit the people of Exuma. An additional 18.5% of respondents were unsure.

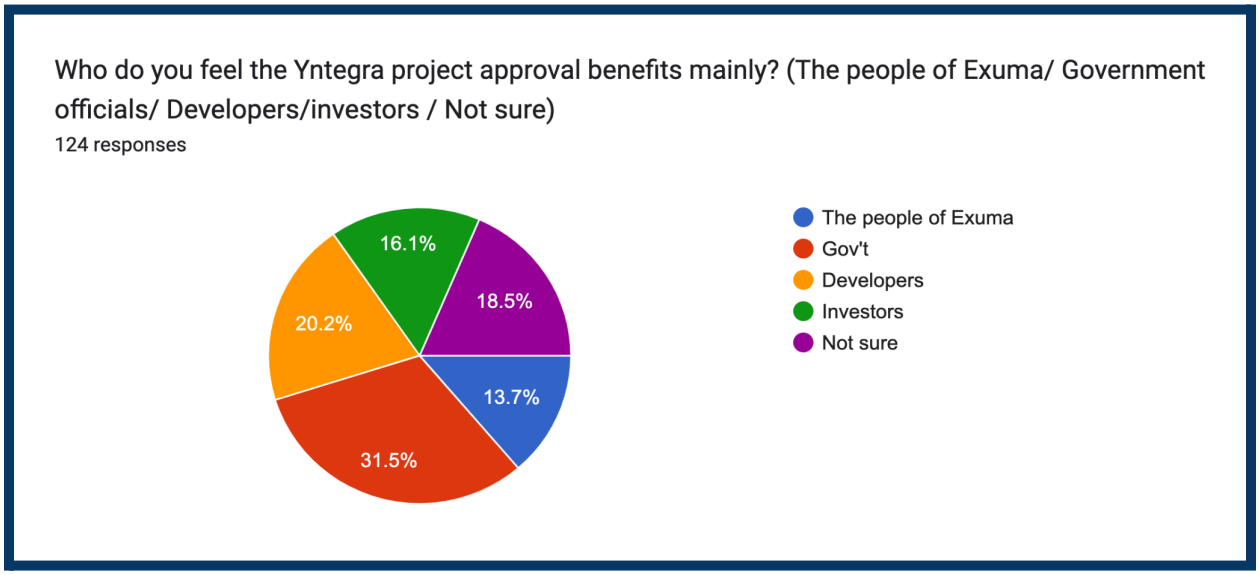

Figure 1.6, Project Benefits

When environmental regulations are not enforced, 59.3% of respondents believe that the government allows environmental degradation in Exuma. The remaining 40.8% of respondents were either unsure or expressed neutral views, with some noting a general expectation that such outcomes occur. These responses suggest a degree of skepticism among residents regarding governance and regulatory oversight

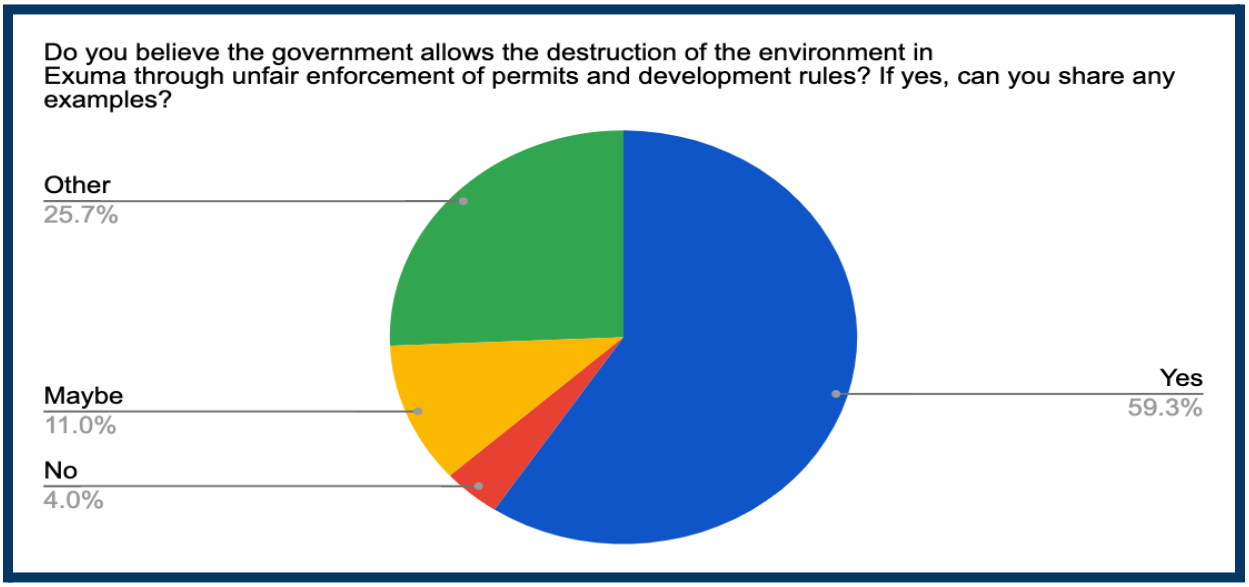

Figure 1.7, Destruction of environment through unfair permit enforcement

Examples of unfair enforcement practices include:

- **“The government doesn’t want them to destroy the environment, but that’s what happens. Even when they try to do good, they do bad.”**
- **“The government will say one thing and do another.”**
- **“Yes, prime example, Yntegra, allowing them to dredge and build a seawall and hurt the environment.”**

Awareness of sustainable resort practices among respondents varied, with 40.8% recognizing initiatives emphasizing local employment, 32.8% unaware of any such practices, and 26.4% unsure, reflecting differing levels of familiarity within the community. Resorts often recognized were Staniel Cay Yacht Club, Over Yonder Cay, Turtlegrass Resort, and Fowl Cay.

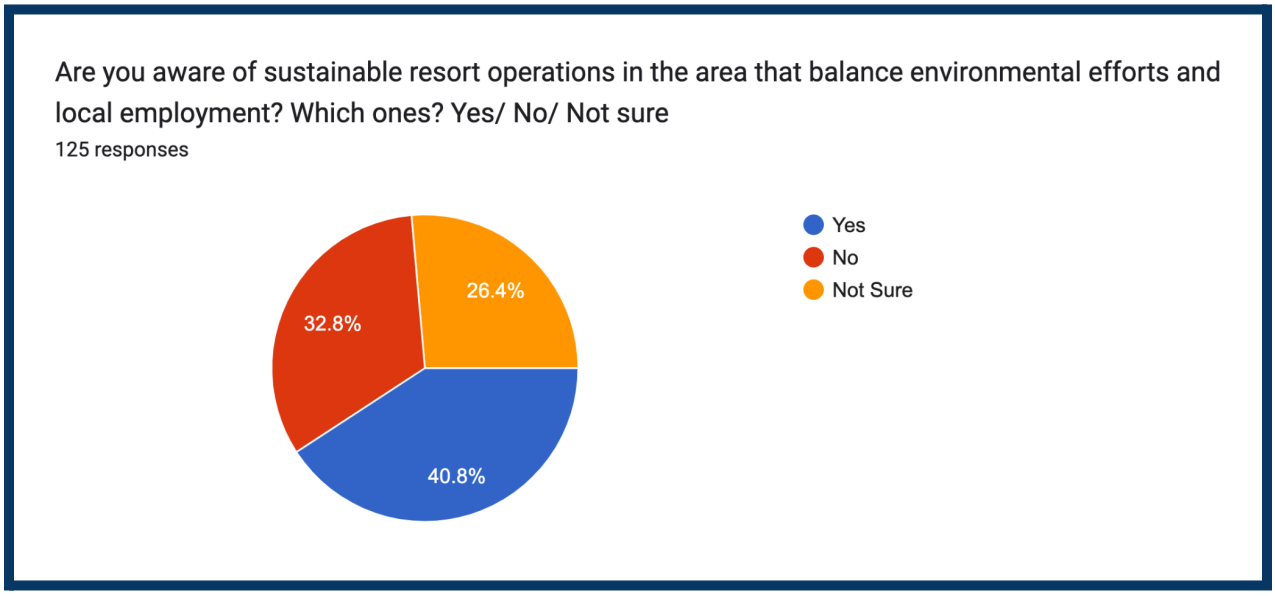

Figure 1.8, Sustainable resorts in the area

A majority of participants, 56.9%, expressed little concern about the Yntegra project competing with local businesses or placing stress on water and waste systems. Meanwhile, 24.4% were somewhat concerned, and 18.7% were extremely concerned.

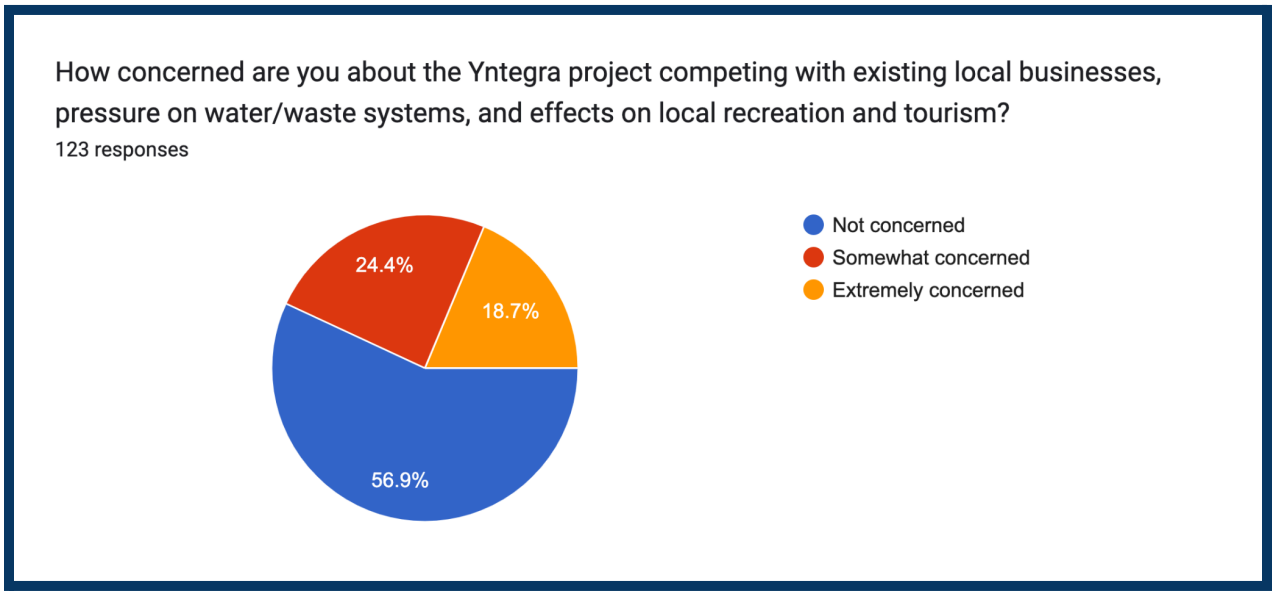

Figure 1.9, Competition with existing businesses and pressure on systems

Survey participants were given a list and asked to rate their level of trust in each group (trust, somewhat, do not trust, not sure):

- Turtlegrass Resort & Island Club
- Yntegra
- Save Exuma Alliance (SEA)
- Government
- Community Leaders/Local Leaders
- Scientists/Environmentalists

There was also a qualitative component that allowed contributors to explain if they trusted multiple or none. Many respondents stated no trust towards the government and the developers, suggesting skepticism about motives and transparency.

Respondents differentiated among a few factors: Scientists/environmental leaders, along with local community representatives, appeared to be the most trusted.

Residents of Black Point were not as familiar with SEA, as SEA's presence in Black Point appeared to be minimal compared to involvement in Staniel Cay, shown in quotes below:

- **"Who is SEA ?"**

- **“ I don’t know anything about SEA, that’s a foreigners group. “**
- **On SEA: “Who is that?”**

Trust patterns were nuanced. Respondents generally trusted scientists, environmental experts, and local community representatives most, while showing distrust toward the government, and developers. Familiarity with the Save Exuma Alliance (SEA) varied geographically, with residents of Black Point largely unaware of the organization.

Thematic Insights Involving Public Trust

Several themes emerged regarding trust and credibility in local decision-making:

Theme	Common Indicators	Sentiment
Community Trust	“Trust community reps”, Locals know best”, “Listen to the people”	Positive/empowering
Scientific Credibility	“Trust scientists”, “Trust environmental experts”	Positive/Respectful
Distrust in Governance	“Government doesn’t listen”, “No trust in officials”, “Permits unfair”	Negative/Distrustful
Corporate Development Skepticism	“Developers only care about profit”	Negative/ Critical

Public Consultation, Environmental Safeguards, and Crown Land

Community input strongly supports inclusive development processes. 83.1% of respondents believe Crown Land development agreements should include public consultation and environmental safeguards.

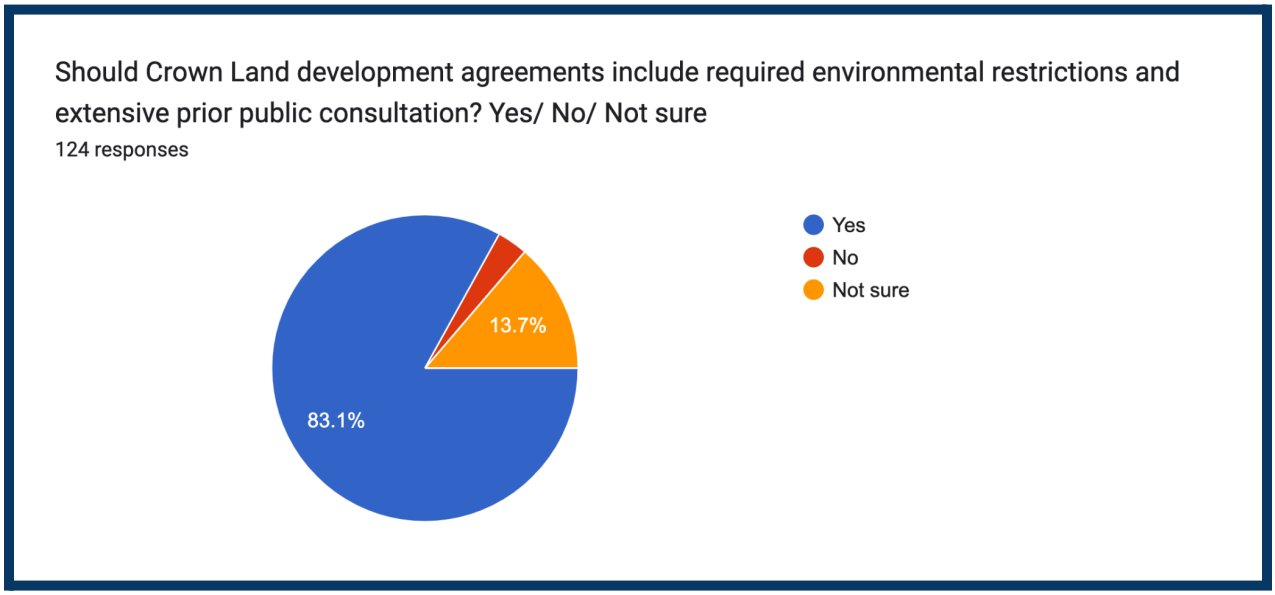

Figure 2.0, Crown land development agreements

Qualitative responses revealed frustration over tokenistic or performative consultation efforts. 64% of participants felt their voices were ignored once decisions were pre-determined by developers or the government. Representative quotes include:

- **“They still go ahead with the project even if we disapprove.”**
- **“I went to both Turtlegrass and Yntegra and Yntegra is not listening, they are already in with the government and think that means they are with us.”**
- **“They are told that they are considered, but on a minimal scale. Issues that pose a threat to investors, if it comes from locals, it's shut down, by government officials or money.”**

20% of participants acknowledged the occasional public consultation efforts, but believed that they are driven by perceived optics, rather than genuine concern for the public’s thoughts, shown in quotes below:

- **“Sometimes, the issue is the foreigners are confusing the people. Both are trying to pay the people off, and the people accept it from both sides, so no one knows how anyone really feels.”**
- **“No, because they look at them providing jobs over who will be affected by the development… Sometimes these foreign businesses shut down and we give up so much for a paycheck.”**

Approximately 7% believed that there is active consultation, highlighting experiences where locals were able to give their opinions:

- **“(Does your opinion matter?) Some, in small areas. Certain things they ask for they don’t do.”**

- **“Yes, I liked that they gave everyone an opportunity to speak. They let everyone speak.”**

Participants were also asked about their thoughts on the government leasing or granting Crown Land for resort projects to foreign developers.

77.6% of respondents expressed a strong opposition to the idea of Crown Land being leased or granted to foreigners. Statements showed that they viewed Crown Land as a national asset belonging to Bahamians, not to be transferred to foreign control. These sentiments are shown in the quotes below:

- **“I didn’t even know they could get crown land. I thought the point was that only Bahamians could get it. I don't want to sound negative but we have to listen to our brothers and sisters and be good neighbors.”**
- **“I have a problem with that. Bahamians can't even get crown land. If our Exumians were able to get crown land, I would feel better. We have Bahamians here who can't get a piece of crown land. Try the young Bahamians out! Give them the land to create an eco-friendly resort.”**
- **“I'm a Bahamian, 54 in a week. I've been trying to secure a parcel of land since I was 22, I'll be 54 in a week and I haven't been able to. I'm greatly concerned that Bahamians can't even get a parcel of the land.”**

Additionally, about 16.8% of participants offered conditional support to government leasing or granting Crown Land to foreign developers, stating:

- **“You can lease, but not sell. If you lease, you get your land back, development or not.”**
- **“If the government owns the property and ensures Bahamians benefit, that’s fine. But right now, they give land to foreigners and not us.”**

A minority (approximately 5%) of respondents fully supported foreign development on Crown Land, citing economic necessity and employment opportunities. Participants stated:

- **“I don’t have a problem with this once they create an Act where Bahamians benefit from this too.”**
- **“It’s a good idea. We have thousands of acres in Exuma and Bahamians can’t afford it and if Bahamians have land, they want people to buy or lease.”**
- **“Bahamians aren’t doing anything with Crown Land anyway. Lease it but don’t sell it.”**

Awareness of the Project and Public Engagement

A majority of community members, 56%, reported not having attended any public meetings related to the Yntegra project, while 40% reported that they had attended public meetings. The remaining respondents were uncertain. Many participants reported being only partially informed,

often relying on informal sources such as word of mouth, social media, or online searches for information.

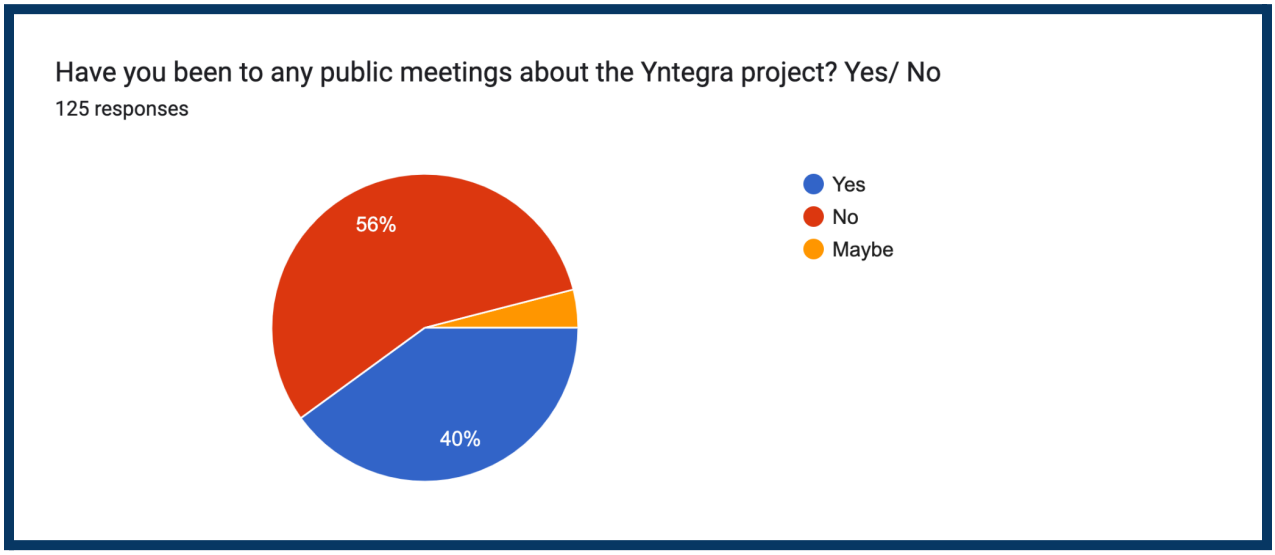

Figure 2.1, Attendance of public meetings related to the Yntegra project

This highlights inconsistencies in community engagement and underscores the need for ongoing transparent, localized communication strategies to ensure equitable participation in decision-making.

Familiarity with the Yntegra project varied, with qualitative responses showing many individuals being somewhat familiar with the project, but many people had limited knowledge of the project, citing gossip or online resources as a main source of information:

- **“Not very, two white men fighting against each other”**
- **“I’ve seen it online”**
- **“Heard things in the Street”**
- **“Not very. Lots of sipsip”**

Findings reveal a disconnect between development and the level of public engagement surrounding it. Data suggests that key portions of the Exuma community remain underinformed and disengaged from public consultation processes. Qualitative responses reference gossip, online personal research and informal conversation as main sources of information, highlighting a reliance on unofficial communication channels, rather than structured outreach attempts. These results stress the need for more transparent and local communication strategies, in order to make conversations between developers, government entities, and local stakeholders more equitable.

Mixed Sentiment Toward the Yntegra Project

Respondent opinions were mixed, with 34.6% expressing positive views, 27.4% expressing negative views, and 37.9% remaining neutral, reflecting a balance of perspectives and a substantial portion of respondents who remain undecided or reserved in their assessment of the development.

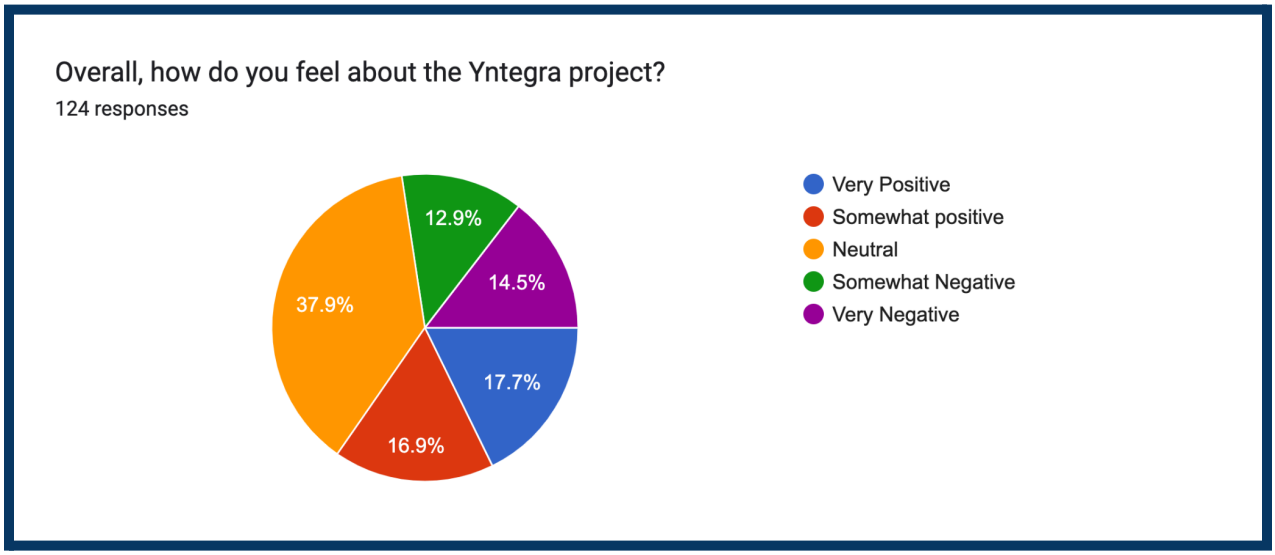

Figure 2.2, Overall feelings about the Yntegra project

- **34.6%** of respondents were positive,
- **27.4%** expressed negative views, and
- **37.9%** remained neutral

Qualitative responses further illustrate the community's nuanced perspective. Neutral sentiments were most common, reflecting cautious observation and a hope that the project can benefit everyone, followed by positive comments emphasizing potential local employment and stakeholder compromise, with fewer negative responses highlighting concerns about transparency, fairness, and unfulfilled promises.

Positive remarks include:

- **"Yntegra is a good thing to employ young men in the Cays but we don't want them to damage our sea beds."**
- **"Build the resort but don't destroy the environment. Find a compromise between the amount of people you want there. There are ways to go about it without having a big impact on the environment."**
- **"I would like to see the project happen but they need to abide by the rules."**
- **"Hurry up Yntegra!"**

Negative comments focused on lack of transparency and perceived unfairness:

- **“They took my headshot and haven’t hired me yet. They only helped the children, not adults. The things they’re doing are simple and not big. (Yntegra) Everything they do is with cameras. Everything is to be seen.”**

- **“Yntegra needs to come to the people and explain what’s actually going on. The government and the people don’t agree but only the people suffer.”**

- **“At first they were listening but now… We have had 3 locals work for Yntegra so far. One died waiting on funds, we have two others that haven’t been paid. If this is how it is now, (October 2025) imagine later. People were asking for money, and the next day, they were fired.”**

- **“Yntegra told us to put our names down if we are looking for employment. Then they turned around and said that that list of people looking for employment were supporting their project and dredging. Those people on that list were putting their name in a pool for employment, not to agree to damage our environment.”**

Neutral comments were dominant and emphasized compromise and shared benefit:

- **“I want both parties to compromise and come together. Where both dudes can be happy. That would be good if it works like that. I don’t want to fight, everyone can be successful. We need both. Turtlegrass and Yntegra.”**

- **“I hope that it works out for everyone. Bahamians, environment and developers. We all are Bahamian citizens. We need to come together as one and work together. The two companies have good initiatives. Let’s solve our differences.”**

- **“Everyone should come together as one and try to build up the island and make everyone happy. Stop fighting. They both have money. Everyone wants a job.”**

- **“I hope that whatever happens, it happens for the betterment of the people. I don't know a lot about Turtlegrass or anything about SEA, I just want the developers to make the country better. I don’t want to see the country be destroyed.”**

These results show that the community is neither uniformly supportive nor opposed to the Yntegra project. Approximately a third of respondents expressed positive views, fewer expressed negative views, and the largest share (37.6%) remained neutral, indicating that opinions are still forming despite ongoing discussion, uncertainty, and limited public engagement.

Qualitative insights highlight both cautious optimism about economic opportunities, such as local employment, and frustration over transparency and follow-through. The community’s views

are diverse, underscoring the importance of continued engagement and clear, transparent communication to enable meaningful participation in decision-making.

Importance of a Healthy Marine Environment

Residents consistently emphasized that a healthy marine environment is foundational to livelihoods and local culture. Fishing, conching, diving, and tourism were cited as dependent on intact ecosystems. Participants expressed concerns about unequal enforcement of environmental regulations, drawing comparisons with other development projects and stressing the need for consistency and fairness. Representative quotes include:

- **“If the sea dead, we dead, that’s where everything comes from.”**
- **“It’s my work. If I’m not touring, I fish and dive. It’s my livelihood.”**
- **“Tourists come here for the water, the fish, the beauty. If we lose that, what do we have left to sell?”**

Several qualitative responses highlighted ties between cultural heritage and environmental stewardship. Residents spoke of teaching younger generations to respect the sea, stating:

- **“We have to take care of it because it takes care of us.”**
- **“My father and his father fished these waters; if we don’t protect it, the next generation won’t have anything.”**

Residents are concerned about all ongoing developments, expressing perceived inconsistency of government enforcement and unequal treatment of development projects:

- **“The government and the people have to work with Turtlegrass and Rosewood. We have a lot of people unemployed. Why is Sampson Cay different from the rest of the islands? We have cruise ship islands where they dredge. Where is the difference between Sampson Cay and Coco Cay? And Sampson Cay is not in the land and sea park?”**
- **“Don’t try to come down on one people and not the rest. They were unfair. Bell Island did it years ago and they never fixed that.”**
- **“My problem with Sampson Cay is these people fighting and I understand why now. Tyler Perry dredged too, why such a big deal with this one? Tyler Perry didn’t hire us to do work for him, at least we are benefiting from them dredging now.”**

Residents drew direct comparisons between major resort projects, cruise developments and smaller local operations, illuminating a pattern that showed political or economic influencing enforcement outcomes.

Environmental concerns were intertwined with equity, governance, and fair access to development benefits, showing that ecological stewardship cannot be separated from social responsibility.

Suggestions for Decision-Makers and Final Thoughts Made by Survey Respondents

In final open-ended responses, 91 participants offered practical recommendations, calls for fairness, and hopes for better governance. Common themes included:

- Genuine, early, and inclusive public consultation
- Transparency in decision-making and enforcement of rules
- Ensuring equitable benefits for local residents
- Accountability and consistent governance, free from political favoritism

The qualitative responses revealed a mixture of practical insights, frustration and hope for fairer governance. While tones and focuses varied between participants, there were resounding calls for equity, accountability and authentic public consultation. This is reflected in the statements below:

- **“Come to the people first before you make decisions for us.”**
- **“The government needs to stop signing these deals then bringing it to the public after. The people don’t understand their power and the government needs to be more accountable to us. People don’t know this is happening here.”**
- **“If they really want to help, they must listen to the ones living here all year round.”**
- **“We need a formal and larger debate about the country. Make it known to the country so we can all make informed decisions. This is the first of its kind in Exuma. We need to hear and be advised from other communities on if this makes sense or not.”**

Respondents often linked their suggestions to the need for consistent and transparent enforcement of regulations, stating:

- **“Rules should be the same for everyone, big projects or small people.”**
- **“Stop protecting people because of politics.”**
- **“We need leaders who care about the country, not just the next election.”**

These comments seem to indicate that for community members, environmental protection and governance are inseparable. Residents want to be informed, included and respected. They call for fairness in the application of laws, achievable benefits for locals and stronger environmental protection.

Conclusion

The findings from this survey highlight a complex and nuanced set of perspectives among residents of Black Point and Staniel Cay regarding development, environmental protection, and governance. While the survey had certain limitations and strengths, as discussed in preceding sections, the results provide valuable insights into a community already experiencing

heightened public attention and contention surrounding the proposed Yntegra boutique hotel development on Big Sampson Cay. This ongoing visibility may have influenced perceptions, expectations, and participation, and also underscores the importance of documenting community attitudes in this context.

Across the communities, environmental concerns emerged as a dominant theme, with residents expressing strong concern for the protection of reefs, seagrass beds, and water quality, as well as the potential impacts of dredging and large-scale construction. The data clearly show that a healthy marine environment is closely linked to local livelihoods, cultural heritage, and community wellbeing.

On the topic of economy and employment, community members exhibited cautious optimism. While some residents see potential benefits from job creation and local investment, there is notable skepticism regarding the distribution of opportunities, particularly the balance between foreign and local employment.

Regarding governance and trust, respondents expressed skepticism and a lack of confidence in government oversight and decision-making processes. Many highlighted the need for more meaningful consultation and transparency in development projects, including those involving Crown Land. Community members emphasized that their voices are often underrepresented, reinforcing the importance of inclusive and participatory engagement strategies.

The survey also highlighted the community's focus on culture and local identity, with residents prioritizing the preservation of heritage and the amplification of local voices in development decisions. This aligns closely with preferences for sustainable and environmentally conscious development, including small-scale eco-tourism initiatives that balance growth with environmental protection.

Overall, the survey reflects a community that is both protective and hopeful: protective of their environment, culture, and economic future, and hopeful that responsible development can benefit both residents and the broader Exuma region. The insights indicate that continued dialogue, transparent communication, and inclusive consultation are essential to fostering informed participation and ensuring that development aligns with the values and priorities of the local community.

By gathering diverse perspectives and providing decision-makers with objective insights, ORG aims to support development processes that are fair, accountable, and aligned with the long-term social, economic, and environmental priorities of the communities. ORG offers these findings to provide guidance for developers, non-profits, and government entities working with these communities, offering an opportunity to deepen engagement, support inclusive decision-making, and advance sustainable social and economic outcomes.

Annex 1 - Methodology

Survey Development and Review Process

The survey instrument and field approach were designed and validated through a three-phase development and review process to ensure objectivity, clarity, and neutrality:

Phase I

ORG prepared an initial draft based on established frameworks for community engagement and international environmental and social governance (ESG) standards.

Phase II

The draft was reviewed internally and externally for neutrality, accessibility, and cultural appropriateness.

Phase III

The survey was pilot-tested, and revisions were made to question wording, sequencing, and structure to avoid leading phrasing or bias.

Each phase focused on improving objectivity, minimizing potential for influence, and ensuring the survey could accurately capture diverse community views on development and environmental management.

Transparency and Independence Commitment

This project was conducted under ORG's Transparency and Independence Commitment, which was a non-negotiable precondition of ORG's participation, as a nonpartisan, apolitical, and independent registered Bahamian not-for-profit dedicated to inclusive, transparent, and accountable decision-making, and of any funding agreement.

In this engagement, funded by Turtlegrass Resort & Island Club, ORG's role was to design, facilitate, and report on community engagement in a manner that ensured all voices were heard and accurately represented, without bias, influence, or endorsement.

ORG designed and led all survey and engagement methodologies. Turtlegrass Resort staff could provide factual context but had no authority to edit or influence the survey structure, interpretation, or final report.

Findings are to be presented exactly as collected, whether or not they align with perspectives of developers of government. The full methodology is to be published, and the final report released publicly by ORG.

Both the funding agency and the community are to receive the same version of the report simultaneously. No party is to receive partial access.

Responses are confidential and reported in aggregate. Enumerators did not engage in advocacy or make assurances regarding the project.

ORG's facilitation does not imply endorsement of either Turtlegrass Resort or Yntegra's development plans or advocacy positions.

This commitment, co-signed by both ORG and Turtlegrass Resort & Island Club, was required under ORG's Research Ethics and Independence Policy as a condition of engagement.

Ethical Oversight

The project complied fully with the ORG Research Ethics and Independence Policy, and UNDP Ethical Guidelines for Data Collection and Use (2021).

Although not legally subject to institutional review, ORG voluntarily applied equivalent standards of:

- Respect for Persons: informed, voluntary participation;
- Beneficence: minimizing risk and protecting data;
- Justice: ensuring equitable representation across settlements and demographics.

Field Team and Supervision

The survey was carried out by two ORG staff members, a Senior Project Manager, experienced in stakeholder engagement, community-based surveys, and participatory consultation throughout The Bahamas and a Project Assistant.

The fieldwork was directly supervised by ORG's Executive Director, who oversaw methodological integrity, neutrality, and adherence to the organization's research and transparency policies.

Enumerator Field Protocol

Enumerators were required to read all prompts verbatim, avoid interpretive comments, and refrain from sharing opinions or project information beyond the standardized context sheet.

Fieldwork occurred between Oct 7-17th, 2025, with supervisory check-ins and quality control of completed forms.

Informed Consent and Participant Protection

Before each interview, enumerators read the following consent statement:

"This survey is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or stop at any time. Your responses will be confidential and will not include your name or identifying details. The

information will be used only for community research to inform public discussions about development in the Exuma Cays."

Verbal consent was obtained from all participants. No minors were interviewed. Interviews were postponed if respondents appeared inebriated or distressed.

Responses were anonymized during entry and stored on encrypted, access-controlled servers. Only ORG's research team had access to identifiable field logs.

Data Processing and Analysis

Quantitative responses were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. Frequencies, percentages, and margins of error were calculated for all items.
Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed:
Themes were categorized into domains such as environmental stewardship, governance trust, Crown Land, and livelihoods.
Representative quotes were chosen to illustrate each domain.

Funding and Independence Disclosure

The Exuma Cays Community Survey was funded by Turtlegrass Resort & Island Club. Funding was explicitly contingent upon full adherence to ORG's Transparency and Independence Commitment and Research Ethics and Policy.
Turtlegrass Resort provided logistical support only and had no role in:
The design or content of the survey;
The selection or training of enumerators
The analysis or interpretation of findings; or
The drafting or approval of this report.

Annex 2 - Survey Tool

The complete survey instrument used for data collection is available at the following link:
ORG Exuma Cays Sustainable Development Survey Final - Google Docs
This tool includes all quantitative and qualitative questions administered to residents during the walkabout survey.

Annex 3 - Survey Responses

The full dataset of survey responses can be accessed at the following link:
ORG Sustainable Development / Sustainable Tourism Walkabout Survey (Responses) - Google Drive
This includes anonymized quantitative and qualitative responses collected during the study.

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