



CARIBBEAN NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE

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CONCEPT NOTE

Building civil society capacity for conservation in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories

1. Project overview and coordination

Building civil society capacity for conservation in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories

is a three-year (2009-2011) research and capacity building project, coordinated by the Commonwealth Foundation (the Foundation) and implemented regionally by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) under funding from the Darwin Initiative (Darwin). It builds on the findings of and capacities built under earlier and ongoing CANARI projects in the Caribbean, notably:

- *Improving governance through civil society involvement in natural resource management in the Caribbean* [2001-2006 funded by EC/Hivos]
- *Developing and disseminating methods for effective biodiversity conservation in the insular Caribbean* [2003-2005 funded by MacArthur]
- *Going from strength to strength: Building capacity for equitable, effective and sustained participation of civil society organisations in biodiversity conservation in Caribbean islands* [2008-2010 funded by MacArthur]
- CANARI's extensive experience over its 20-year history of assisting government agencies and civil society organisations with processes of visioning, strategic planning and organisational development.

It will also draw on the Foundation's experience of strengthening civil society's capacity to engage with governments and promote their interests in the fields of sustainable development, good governance, culture and diversity.

The Foundation will also establish a UK-based Advisory Committee of organisations who have or are working in the field of conservation in the Caribbean, such as RSPB, JNCC, Kew etc.

2. Problem being addressed

The project is rooted in the growing worldwide awareness of the value and fragility of the biodiversity in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and the role that civil society can play in conserving this. For example, the House of Commons Environmental Audit thirteenth report noted that the biodiversity in the UKOTs is as valuable as, and at a greater risk of loss than, biodiversity in the UK itself. It described the situation as "the eleventh hour for many species" and strongly urged the UK Government to act rapidly to protect UKOT biodiversity. Much of this rich biodiversity lies in the Caribbean UKOTs, which are also particularly vulnerable to climate change.

The Message from the 2008 Conference on Climate Change and Biodiversity in EU Overseas Entities, organised by the International Union for the Conservation in Reunion echoed this concern and emphasised that civil society participation is essential to biodiversity conservation, including obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other international conventions. This includes important roles in policy development, planning, research and monitoring, on-the-ground biodiversity conservation, advocacy, communication and public awareness and education. Strong civil society organisations (CSOs) can also play a critical role in catalysing, facilitating and coordinating wider civil society participation in biodiversity conservation.

Research conducted by CANARI (see <http://www.canari.org/docs/policybrief7.pdf> and <http://www.canari.org/docs/331mangones.pdf>) has identified several important barriers to equitable and effective civil society participation in biodiversity conservation in Caribbean islands, including:

- existing civil society capacity insufficiently valued or leveraged by donors and government partners;
- capacity of CSOs to participate in natural resource governance limited by inadequate human or financial resources;
- insufficient attention paid to creating resilient, sustainable organisations as opposed to strong individuals;
- lack of skills or experience within government to effectively facilitate participatory and co-management processes
- capacity of organisations sometimes depleted rather than built as a result of complex donor and partner requirements;
- challenges transitioning from volunteer group to professional organisation;
- prevalence of a self-reinforcing cycle of unclear strategic direction, financial crisis, over-dependence on one or a few key individuals, no succession planning, outdated governance structures, and rifts between board, staff and members.

3. Target audience

In the five Caribbean UKOTs, the National Trusts are the primary civil society organisations charged with biodiversity conservation. They are called upon to play a critical but complex role, combining partnership with government agencies, mobilisation of other civil society actors, while maintaining their independence to voice the concerns of their members. The Trusts have therefore been selected as the primary beneficiaries of this project, together with a selection of other NGOs in the Territories with comparable levels of capacity and similar capacity needs.

Bermuda will be also used as the focus of a case study and study visit to examine the role played by civil society in developing and implementing the Island Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Several of the meetings will also be held in independent Caribbean countries where National Trusts are playing a significant role in biodiversity conservation and policy development.

4. Project goal

Effective contribution in support of the implementation of the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS), as well as related targets set by countries rich in biodiversity but constrained in resources.

5. Project purpose

To enhance the capacity of the 10 identified CSOs to directly support the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in their respective Territories as well as to strengthen overall civil society participation in biodiversity conservation in Caribbean UKOTs through the catalytic role these CSOs will play as facilitators, mobilisers and change agents.

6. Project approach

The project seeks to address the barriers outlined under Section 2 above through a process of **participatory research, action learning** and **capacity building** involving a core group of 10 CSOs. Rather than focusing just on the capacity gaps and weaknesses, this approach acknowledges that each participating CSO already has significant strengths on which it can draw, build and share with others in order to strengthen the collective effectiveness of all participating CSOs – and by extension their partners

and beneficiaries – to promote and engage in effective biodiversity conservation. This approach builds on CANARI's experience of facilitating Action Research and Learning Groups under several of its programmes. It also draws on feedback from the CSOs that participated in *Improving governance through civil society involvement in natural resource management in the Caribbean*, who all highly valued the opportunities to exchange information and experiences and recommended the institutionalisation of such exchanges in future projects.

See Section 10 for more details on the approach and the project activities.

7. Project objectives

The project has three complementary objectives, collectively designed to enhance civil society participation in biodiversity conservation and the implementation of obligations under the Conventions:

- to identify the key enabling factors, at both the institutional and organisational level, for effective civil society participation in biodiversity;
- to build the capacity of the five National Trusts and five other national-level CSOs, and indirectly all other civil society stakeholders, in the Caribbean UKOTs to effectively participate in biodiversity conservation; and
- to build a regional network of civil society stakeholders engaged in biodiversity conservation.

8. Project results

The project will be working towards contributing to changing behaviours and the structure and function of institutions for biodiversity conservation in Caribbean UKOTs including:

- CSOs effectively and equitably participating in institutions for biodiversity conservation;
- CSOs acting as effective advocates regarding the needs and issues facing Caribbean UKOTs in regional and international processes for biodiversity conservation (including at CBD COPs);
- CSOs engaged in directing, monitoring and evaluating their own capacity building;
- CSOs collaborating with each other and their partners in government, academia, the private sector and the media to share information and to help each other build capacity;
- UKOT CSOs maintaining stronger links with CSOs in other Caribbean islands, increasing regional collaboration and sharing of lessons and capacity.

Specific outputs from the project include:

- capacity needs of at least 10 Caribbean UKOT CSOs identified and tailored capacity building programme designed;
- organisational capacity of at least 10 Caribbean UKOT CSOs enhanced through tailored training and other capacity building to meet the identified priority needs;
- UKOT CSO effective involvement in biodiversity conservation enhanced through regional collaboration and the creation of (formal or informal) networks of Caribbean CSOs; and
- greater awareness of Caribbean UKOT CSOs and their partners (governments, donors, intergovernmental and technical support agencies) of how to facilitate civil society participation in biodiversity conservation.

The achievement of these outputs and contribution to behavioural change is expected to contribute to medium- and longer-term to outcomes, including:

- greater civil society participation in biodiversity conservation in the 5 Caribbean UKOTs (e.g. in policy development, planning, advocacy, and on-the-ground initiatives).
- CSO involvement in development and implementation of Island Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans and the CBD Island Programme of Work in the 5 Caribbean UKOTs.

- effective representation by UKOTs at regional and international fora (CDB COP 10, Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting etc.).

Desired project results will be refined in collaboration with the participating CSOs.

9. Guiding research questions

The following guiding research questions will be refined with the participating CSOs at the first ARLG meeting and in consultation with members of the Advisory Committee:

- What are the barriers to and enabling factors for effective self-organisation of CSOs involved in biodiversity conservation in the UKOTs?
- How can CSOs effectively monitor and evaluate their own strategic development?
- What tools and methods work best for building the necessary capacity in such CSOs in the Caribbean?
- What mechanisms can be developed and stimulated to sustain effective cross-learning between CSOs in the UKOTs and across the wider Caribbean?
- How do civil society networks function at local, national and regional levels in conservation and how is capacity built in a network? Can networks function more effectively?
- What role(s) are CSOs best fitted to play in promoting conservation and sustainable development in Caribbean UKOTs at the start of the 21st century?
- What enabling framework (policies, structures, processes) is needed to facilitate and optimise this role?

10. Project activities

The core project activities comprise:

a) Four Action Research and Learning Group (ARLG) meetings and training workshops

The ARLG meetings will target 2 senior persons from each participating organisation (e.g. Executive Director, Board member). At the end of each meeting, participants will have identified and committed to addressing key needs within their organisations (e.g. initiation of strategic planning process, development of a policy on Board's roles and responsibilities, fundraising strategy, etc.). Meetings will be held outside the main tourist season whenever possible to minimise costs.

b) Study visit:

Four-day study visit to Bermuda to:

- network with and analyse the differences and commonalities between governance structures of civil society organisations in Bermuda and the Caribbean UKOTs;
- analyse the differences in economic, social and cultural context and institutional framework that may enable or disable civil society involvement in implementing the CBD commitments;
- identify lessons from the Bermuda context that can be transferred to the Caribbean UKOTs, including a case study of the civil society engagement in the development of Bermuda's Island Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

Additional study visits and exchanges may be identified and conducted by participating CSOs and funded under their small grants (Activity d).

c) Communications

Development of a communication strategy in consultation with participants, and a variety of communication materials developed and disseminated (either in print or electronically) including:

- short case studies (provisionally of Centre Hills, Montserrat project implementation; Bermuda Island Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process; Nevis Historical and Conservation Society development of sustainable financing mechanisms

- a policy brief summarising the project findings, targeting policy- and decision-makers,
- two guidelines booklets published in both hard and electronic format, provisionally on *Civil society participation in natural resource management* and *Civil society development and management*
- electronic newsletters, published twice a year;
- extranet, listserv and project website, possibly shared with participants of CANARI's complementary *Going from strength to strength* project;
- media releases in the UKOTs and wider Caribbean;
- regional and international conference presentations and journal articles by CANARI staff and other participants, as opportunities present themselves.

d) *Small grants and peer mentoring:*

A £60,000 will be established so that each of the 10 participating CSOs can receive a small grant to be used to build a specific priority organisational development capacity, in areas where it is often difficult to secure project funding (e.g. strategic planning, study or exchange visits, training workshops). Where participating CSOs have capacity that they can share with others, this fund can also support peer mentoring among the participating CSOs to support capacity building by each organisation. This will also enhance relationships among CSOs in the Caribbean UKOTs.

e) Monitoring activities:

A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed for the project by CANARI and the participants to facilitate monitoring at both the project and organisational levels. Capacity to develop and implement this will be built in the participating CSOs. Assessments will be facilitated via the ARLG meetings and meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee.

