

National Consultations to Update the CEPF Ecosystem Profile for the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot

Understanding Capacity Building Needs of the CSO Sector

Caribbean Civil Society

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) targets the following civil society actors: community-based organizations; local, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); academia; and the private sector.

Like the global community, Caribbean civil society is heterogenous, with organizations having a wide range of interests and mandates, multiple agendas, and varying degrees of organizational capacity. There is little coherence across the sector and relatively few fora in which CSOs engage among themselves across thematic issues and countries, particularly at regional level and across language groups.

Notwithstanding the diversity of Caribbean civil society, there are a number of broad, shared contextual experiences and realities that the region's CSOs face. These include the following:

The size, scope and financial contribution of Caribbean civil society is unknown

The total number of civil society organizations operating in the region is unknown. It is difficult to obtain precise information and data or even good estimates about the size and scope of Caribbean civil society (Bowen, 2015; Webson, 2010). Several organizations are unregistered or operate informally, and among registered organizations, there are those that are inactive or waver between activity and inactivity, depending levels of funding and need. What is more, there is little or no record of the financial contribution of Caribbean CSOs over any period of time (Webson, 2010).

People's organizations have traditionally played an important role in social, economic and cultural development in Caribbean society and they gain increased importance during periods of economic crisis

Civic activity in the region goes as far back as the pre-emancipation period and continues to be important in the modern era. The sector has gone from being primarily welfare focused and volunteer-led to include technical and policy-focused organizations staffed by full-time professionals that manage large, multi-year projects (Munro-Knight, 2013). Caribbean CSOs do, however, continue play an important role in the delivery of social services as well as other operational functions; these become all the more important during periods of economic stagnation or crisis, in the face of reduced government spending on social and other services and increased unemployment rates resulting from economic contraction.

CSO participation in governance processes is growing, but this is not always adequately supported by mechanisms that take into account the conditions under which CSOs operate or facilitate meaningful participation

Caribbean CSOs have been engaging more in national and regional policy and decision-making processes and are increasingly recognized as important actors in those spheres. In Jamaica, for example, the Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) Board, Town and Country Planning Authority (TCPA) Land

Development and Utilisation Committee (LDUC) Board and National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) Advisory Board all include members drawn from civil society.

Regional and international organizations also engage with CSOs in programmatic and policy advisory capacities. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), for example, hosts Civil Society Consultative Groups (ConSoCs) in 26 countries across Latin America and the Caribbean, including the CEPF-eligible countries of The Bahamas, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica. ConSoCs are a platform for collaboration and consultation through which the IDB seeks an exchange of information and technical expertise based on the work of each member CSO.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), has long recognized that civil society can play “a vital role” in regional development, including policy formulation and implementation (CARICOM Secretariat 2002, para. 5 cited in Bowen, 2015). CARICOM’s Charter of Civil Society sets out wide-ranging rights and responsibilities for citizens of member countries, including the right to take part in national and regional governance. Notwithstanding recognition of the importance of social partners, the Charter has “not been incorporated into CARICOM’s juridical structure or into national laws” and there is no formal CARICOM structure for regional consultation with civil society groups (Bowen, 2015). In its *Strategic Plan for the Caribbean Community 2015 – 2019*, CARICOM articulates an intention to develop mechanisms for participatory governance arrangements in CARICOM, including a permanent arrangement for engaging/consulting with regional representatives of the private sector and civil society (NGOs, labor, youth, media etc.) at the meetings of Councils (CARICOM Secretariat, 2014).

Some observers have suggested that CSOs are “over consulted and under involved” (Bowen, 2015) and have expressed skepticism about governments or the public sector genuinely considering the views of civil society or helping such groups develop (Jessop, 2016). What is more, the time that some CSOs spend engaging in consultative processes is often uncompensated and unprogrammed and this represents a real cost to organizations that face funding gaps and demands from donors to keep management support costs and overheads to a minimum.

Caribbean CSOs face systemic weaknesses, challenges and limiting factors

Notwithstanding the importance of the sector to Caribbean societies, the region’s civil society faces weaknesses and limitations including:

- *Institutional and operational gaps*, including human resource deficiencies, weak governance and management structures, and poor succession planning.
- *Funding challenges in the face of declining levels of international funding*. Geopolitical shifts in the 1990s resulted in program funding directed at the Caribbean in the 1970s-1980s being channeled to Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Many organizations were unprepared for this change and did not have systems and staffing in place to recover from the shock. The “graduation” of a number of Caribbean states to middle, and even upper income status (The Bahamas) also resulted in donor focus and dollars being shifted away from the region.
- *Some of the laws governing civil society are outdated and do not reflect modern Caribbean societies and international governance standards*. The legislative norm for many CARICOM Caribbean countries is either the (repealed) 1960 England and Wales Charities Act or provisions under a given country’s Companies Act. Both models need to be examined to determine how effectively their provisions strengthen civil society beyond procedures for establishment,

registration and taxation (Towle, Moody, & Randall, 2010:33).

- *There are some changes to the legal framework governing NGOs, particularly in CARICOM member states, but these focus on regulating non-profits and are “less expansive” about protecting the sector.* Furthermore, several laws do not proactively create an enabling environment that permits NPOs/NGOs to freely engage in activities for the benefit of their members and the public (Towle, Moody, & Randall, 2010). Reporting and accountability requirements are onerous and expensive in some states.

Unpacking the Capacity Building Needs of the CSO Sector and Conservation Sub-grouping

The questions below are designed to elicit information about the sector at national level, with a view to understanding how weaknesses and barriers can be addressed as well as what capacities exist and are needed across the sector.

Strengths and weaknesses of the civil society sector

1. Taken as a whole, what are the main strengths and weaknesses of the civil society sector in your country?
2. What are the main enabling factors and barriers that the sector faces?
3. How can each of the weaknesses and barriers identified be addressed?

Capacities that exist within the civil society sector

4. Do environmental and conservation organizations in your country have capacities in the areas listed below? Is there a critical mass of capacity in each area or are there deficiencies? Where there are gaps, please specify what they are and identify what needs to be done in your national context to fill them.

<i>Capacity Area</i>	<i>Adequate capacity exists within the CSO sector in the country</i>		<i>Capacity Gaps</i>	<i>What can be done to fill them</i>	<i>Notes/Comments</i>
	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>			
<i>a. Capacities to support site or species management and implementation For example, ecosystem/species/habitat mapping and monitoring; forecasting and modelling; conservation planning and actions; stakeholder</i>					

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	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>			
engagement and analysis; conflict resolution; gender analysis; public outreach and education.					
<i>b. Capacities to generate, access and use information to effect change</i> For example, research; information packaging for various audiences (policy-makers, communities etc.); traditional and social media communication; public awareness campaign development and implementation etc.					
<i>Capacities to engage in national or sub-national policy analysis and dialogue processes related to environmental governance and management and in the development of policy and legislation</i> For example, policy and legislative analysis skills, quantitative and qualitative research, community and peer mobilization, coalition building, advocacy, media communication etc.					
<i>Capacities to monitor and evaluate</i> For example, do CSOs monitor and evaluate environmental impacts and trends and are they able to do this effectively? Do					

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	<i>Y</i>	<i>N</i>			
results feed into planning and decision making? Do CSOs hold public sector agencies to account?					
<i>Other – please fill in</i>					

Platforms and mechanism for civil society collaboration/joint working

Please answer questions 5 and 6 by completing the table below

5. What national and regional platforms and mechanisms exist for civil society networking and collaboration? Please list. Please identify any that are specific to the environmental management/biodiversity conservation community.

6. How effective are the mechanisms/platforms identified? If they are not fully effective, what can be done to strengthen them?

<i>National platforms/mechanisms</i>	<i>Regional platforms/mechanisms</i>	<i>Environmental/conservation platform (Y= Yes)</i>	<i>Level of effectiveness</i> <i>3. Effective</i> <i>2. Inconsistent</i> <i>1. Unsatisfactory</i>	<i>What can be done to strengthen them?</i>	<i>Notes/Comments</i>

Ongoing civil society capacity building projects

7. Are there any ongoing civil society capacity building projects in your country? Please identify projects by name. What needs are they meeting? What needs are unmet?

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