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

Discussion Paper: Socio-economic Context of the Hotspot

Key Trends

The status of biodiversity in the various Caribbean islands is linked to countries’ political frameworks, as well as existing socio-economic conditions.

**Caribbean economic pressures and economic stimulus measures compromise regional biodiversity, but biodiversity conservation can be an integral part of a green economy model**

Caribbean islands are vulnerable to external shocks such as natural disasters, fluctuating commodity prices in the world market and volatility in the tourism sector, which is a main income-earning sector in most countries. The region’s islands are generally classified as middle-income countries. However, a number of them are burdened by a high level of debt: Antigua, Barbados, The Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Saint Lucia, for example, all have debt to GDP ratios above 60% (Caribbean Development Bank, 2016). Debt servicing obligations limit fiscal space for economic and social investment, including investment in the natural resource base. Moreover, regional economic growth slowed during and after the global economic crisis of 2008, and this was coupled with reductions in external resource flows to the Caribbean, including Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and private investment. Stimulus measures implemented by countries to address the above have included short-term construction initiatives that can degrade habitat and reduce biodiversity. Overall, the Caribbean still has an infrastructure-driven development model, which generally comes at the expense of biodiversity (UN-Environment 2016; UNECLAC 2015). This is at odds with the high level of dependence by Caribbean countries on natural resource-supported economic activities, such as fisheries, agriculture and tourism. Notwithstanding the economic importance of the natural resource base, the value of ecosystem services is still not incorporated into development planning and overall there are few economic instruments across the Caribbean that promote biodiversity conservation.

On a positive note, there is an increased thrust towards green growth in the region. A Green Economy aims for long-term prosperity, rather than solely for growth, through equitable distribution of economic benefits and effective management of ecological resources. It is economically viable and resilient to both external and internal shocks; self-directed and not driven by external agendas or funding opportunities, and self-reliant by being based predominantly on domestic production and investment (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute 2017). Biodiversity conservation initiatives fit squarely into this model. Some examples of Caribbean Green Economy Initiatives include Barbados’ Green Economy road map which addresses the tourism, agriculture, housing and transport sector. Dominica has an “Organic Island Initiative”, a ten-year programme of action to merge food production, eco-tourism and agro-tourism initiatives under an organic food production umbrella (Geoghegan et al. 2014). In 2017, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) initiated the development of a sub-regional Green Economy Action Plan to be developed with support from CANARI.
Settlement patterns are in flux
Traditionally, the people of the region have settled along the coast due, in part, to inland topographic limitations. Tourism infrastructure has also been concentrated along the coastline and has also damaged coastal habitats in many countries. Tourism and human settlement-related pollution has also harmed marine biodiversity though run-off. While there has traditionally been a trend towards urbanization and the migration of people to urban centers in the Caribbean, more recently, population centers in rural areas have also been growing (Grenada Land Division, pers comm). This can result in habitat fragmentation in addition to habitat destruction and species loss.

Government expenditure focuses on health, welfare, crime and poverty reduction programmes at the expense of environmental and biodiversity measures
The Caribbean region has a high incidence of both communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and hypertension. For instance, in 2014 there were 280,000 persons living with HIV in the Caribbean. Hypertension is present in 25 to 26 percent of men and 15 to 22 percent of women in the Caribbean. This represents a heavy economic burden, but also a priority area of expenditure for Caribbean Governments. Other expenditure priorities include crime, and youth unemployment (UNECLAC 2015; United Nations Development Programme 2016).

Questions/Information Gaps
1. Please review the socio-economic issues (a – e) below. Are there any other notable issues or trends in your country? If yes, please add to the list. For each issue on the list, including any you may have added, describe the overarching trends in your country and, where relevant, explain how they are affecting biodiversity conservation/the management of natural resources (government budgetary allocations, donor funding, sites, species, policy, people’s actions or activities on the ground etc.).
   a. Population growth, population structure
   b. Settlement and migration patterns
   c. Human health
   d. Crime
   e. Poverty and unemployment
2. Are there any ways in which traditional gender roles and gendered division of labor influence men’s and women’s knowledge, management practices and stewardship over their environments in your country? If yes, please describe.
3. Are there any projects in your country that specifically address women’s participation in natural resources management or biodiversity conservation? If yes, please describe (project location, focus, donor, project term, if known).

References

Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, 2017. *OECS green economy diagnostic: Exploring opportunities for green economy transformation in the Eastern Caribbean*,

UN-Environment, 2016. Environment in the 2030 Agenda in LAC_vENG_FINAL.
