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(CANARI)

Civil society involvement in forest management:  
the case of Haiti's terrestrial protected areas

Yves Renard  
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# **Civil society involvement in forest management: the case of Haiti's terrestrial protected areas**

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## ***Introduction***

This study examines the experience of the *Comité d'Appui à la Gestion du Système National d'Aires Protégées (CASNAP)*<sup>1</sup>, a civil society institution recently established at the initiative of Haiti's Ministry of the Environment for the purpose of assisting with the process of establishing and managing a system of protected areas in that country. Between 1996 and 2001, this process received support from the World Bank and the Government of Haiti through a project entitled *Projet d'Appui Technique à la Protection des Parcs et Forêts (ATPPF)*.

The goal of the ATPPF project was to conserve and manage the last remaining forested areas in the country, through the strengthening of planning, management and enforcement capacity at the national and local levels, the preparation and implementation of management plans for individual forests and other protected areas, and the promotion of social and economic development activities and services within and around these areas.

From its inception, the project stated its intention to espouse the goals and philosophy of participation, and sought to promote co-management as the desirable institutional arrangement for the management of Haiti's protected areas. Inspired by experiences in other parts of the Caribbean and in the rest of the developing world, it aimed at developing management partnerships at both the local and national levels and at strengthening community and civil society involvement in management.

It is in this context that substantial efforts were made, between 1997 and 2001, under the auspices of the ATPPF project, and with funding from the World Bank, to facilitate the establishment and operations of CASNAP. In early 2001, as a result of the closure of ATPPF caused by the freezing of World Bank-funded projects in Haiti, CASNAP practically ceased operations. At that time, discussions were already underway regarding the possibility of a second phase of the ATPPF following the completion of the project in late 2001, but its future and that of its various components is now uncertain, and depends almost entirely on the evolution of the overall political situation in the country.

Against this background, the purpose of this brief study, which is part of a regional programme for "Building capacity for participatory forest management" funded by the

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<sup>1</sup> Committee to support the management of the national system of protected areas.

European Commission and implemented by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), is (a) to constitute a record of the main processes that took place over these four years, (b) to extract key lessons that can be learned from that experience, and (c) to provide a basis and a reference, to be used in the event that CASNAP is able to resume its process of institutional development. The experience of the past few years has shown that this committee has the potential to become a viable entity, and it is hoped that this study will contribute, even in a modest way, to help it find its place within Haiti's institutional landscape.

### ***Forests and protected areas in Haiti***

The Republic of Haiti – the world's first Black Republic – is sadly famous for the extent of environmental degradation in the country, and for its extreme levels of poverty (Figure 1 shows the location of Haiti within the island of Hispaniola). In Haiti, more than in most other parts of the developing world, poverty and environmental degradation are intimately related, each one being a direct cause of the other, in a dialectical relationship that drives the country inexorably towards more hardship and suffering for the large majority of its people.

Most observers of Haiti's social and economic development see land degradation as one of the main factors responsible for the country's underdevelopment (Lundahl 1984). The country has, since its independence two centuries ago, depended exclusively on agriculture for its survival. Land use patterns have resulted in the removal of most of the vegetation cover, and in extremely high rates of erosion. While the factors that can explain the severity of this environmental destruction are many, there are two main sets of reasons that are generally cited to explain the extent of deforestation in all parts of this country.

These factors must be seen against the background of the country's political and economic isolation of the past two centuries, which has been responsible, to a large extent, for the absence of foreign investment, for the lack of capital investment and technological innovation in the rural economy, and for the country's almost exclusive reliance on agriculture. They must also be linked to patterns of land ownership and use, which are rooted in the land reforms processes that followed independence, when land – which had become state property at the time of independence in 1802 - was made available to officers and soldiers of the new regimes. (Haiti was, at the time, divided in two states, one ruled by Alexandre Pétion in the South, and the other ruled by King Henry Christophe in the North.)

The first factor is population growth and the resulting expansion of the labour force, which have been responsible for the continued clearing of new areas for agricultural production. With no other opportunity for income and employment, Haitians have been forced to clear more land for cash and subsistence crops. As exports crops (primarily coffee) became less profitable during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of trade conditions and international market prices, food crops often took their place, placing soils at the mercy of the forces of erosion. With Haiti's rugged topography, it took little time for soils to be washed down the ravines and rivers.

The second factor is the country's extensive use of wood, primarily because of its dependence on charcoal and firewood as its main source of energy. Consequently, forests are being cleared and trees are being cut to supply the only source of energy available to poor households, and to many businesses, principally the bakeries. In addition, wood remains an important construction material. Historically, deforestation was also caused by the intensive exploitation of logwood, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when these exports played a key role in helping Haiti pay the official debt that it had contracted towards France in order to secure its independence towards France. This resulted in an increase in the already extremely high rates of deforestation that affected the country in the years following that independence, when most of the land was distributed.

A direct symptom of this tragic environmental reality is the disappearance of most of the country's natural habitats. In Haiti, there remain very few areas, if any, that can be considered natural and pristine. It is generally accepted that not more than 2% of the national territory has retained its original forest cover (Ministère de l'Environnement 1999). The largest extents of wildlands in the country are located in the south and southwest of the country, principally in the *Forêt des Pins* and the *Massif de la Selle*.

The remaining forested areas of the country, however small they are, are important in many ways. They perform critical watershed and soil protection functions, they provide the last remaining habitats for endangered, endemic and locally important species, they form an integral part of the country's biological diversity, and they support important economic activities. Indeed, one of the distinct features of these forested areas, which differentiates them from most forests and protected areas in the insular Caribbean, is that they include large permanent human settlements, with densities of 958 persons per km<sup>2</sup> at the *Forêt des Pins*, and even higher densities in the two other main protected areas.

It is for these reasons that Haitian and foreign agencies have been involved, for several decades, in efforts towards the protection and management of Haiti's remaining natural habitats. Haiti's first protected area was legally established in 1926. In 1937, the country's main forest, the *Forêt des Pins*, with an area of 30,000 hectares, was established as a protected area. More recently, concern for the need to manage remaining natural areas resulted in the establishment of the national parks of La Visite and Macaya (both covering approximately 3,000 hectares) in 1983.

The legal authority and responsibility for the management of terrestrial protected areas in Haiti is in the hands of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and its Division of Natural Resources, under which the Forestry Department is placed. The *Institut pour la Protection du Patrimoine National (ISPAN)* has some authority over the management of historical protected areas, and principally the national park at *La Citadelle*, where major restoration work has been carried out over the past two decades with support from UNESCO.

### ***The ATPPF project***

In the late 80s and very early 90s, following the implementation of a number of projects supported by international and bilateral agencies, the Government of Haiti and the World

Bank negotiated a large forest and protected area management project, which should have been launched in 1991. The start of the project was however delayed, because of the *coup d'état* of that year, and it is only in 1994, following the return of President Aristide to office, that negotiations for the financing of this project resumed. The project actually began in 1996, under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment that had been created the previous year. The project's autonomous co-ordinating unit was established in May 1996.

Consistent with the philosophy of the Government of Haiti at the time, and with the democratic aspirations of the Haitian people, the project that began in 1996 placed much emphasis on community participation and local economic development. It viewed protected areas as sanctuaries and repositories of the country's threatened biological diversity, but also as agents of local and national development. It saw the need to involve all relevant sectors of society, including community groups, peasant organisations, local government agencies, and non-governmental organisations, in the process of planning and managing forests and protected areas.

It is for these reasons that one of the first steps taken by this project was to convene, in February 1997, a major national consultation on protected area management and financing for biodiversity conservation. The proceedings of this event, entitled *Haiti dans le dernier carré*<sup>2</sup> (Ministère de l'Environnement 1997) aptly reflected the feeling of participants that the country had one last opportunity to preserve and manage its remaining forests and natural habitats, and that nature and its resources had been pushed to their last retrenchment.

This event was significant in many respects. It generated much hope and enthusiasm among people and institutions involved in conservation and sustainable development in the country. It brought together over one hundred participants from central government, local government agencies, civil society and community-based organisations, under the patronage of the then Minister of the Environment, Yves-André Wainright. It also had the occasion, in its final session, to present its conclusions to the then Prime Minister, Rosny Smarth, who took that opportunity to reaffirm the government's commitment to the principles of participation and partnership espoused by ATPPF (Ministère de l'Environnement 1997).

The ATPPF project thus began on a sound footing. Graham Greene, a keen observer of Haiti's social and political life, once noted that this is a "country of projects". In Haiti, many externally-initiated and funded programmes and projects indeed begin and end without any significant involvement of intended beneficiaries, and large sections of the national territory are literally occupied by projects and organisations of little relevance to local needs. This project offered a difference. It stated emphatically, from its inception, that the responsibility for forest and protected area management had to be shared among a variety of actors, it listened to the needs and expectations of its intended beneficiaries, and it built a sense of ownership of this project, particularly among the civil society organisations that had been vocal at the national consultation.

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<sup>2</sup> Haiti in the last retrenchment.

Concretely, the original design of the ATPPF project had proposed three specific mechanisms for community participation and local development:

- The *Comités Consultatifs*<sup>3</sup>: these committees were meant to serve as local management bodies for individual protected areas, bringing together representatives of local government agencies, peasant organisations and community development groups. During the course of the ATPPF project, four such committees were established, one each for the national parks of Macaya and La Visite, and two for the *Forêt des Pins*.
- A small grant and loan programme, which aimed at promoting local development and sustainable use initiatives in and around these three protected areas.
- The CASNAP, as described below.

### ***The CASNAP***

The formal conclusions of the consultation of 1997 were contained in a statement signed by all participants (Ministère de l'Environnement 1997). This statement agreed, *inter alia*, to establish a *Comité d'Appui au Système National des Aires Protégées* (CASNAP), which would serve as a mechanism to support the World Bank-funded project. It decided that an interim body, the *Groupe d'Initiative de Xaragua* (GIX)<sup>4</sup>, would be charged with the responsibility of formally establishing the CASNAP within six months of the date of the consultation.

A review of the consultation's proceedings (Ministère de l'Environnement 1997) and discussions with key informants and participants in this process suggest that there were two slightly different perspectives behind the decision to establish this body. This difference, and the ambiguity it created with respect to the role of the state in this new institutional arrangement, were never truly resolved, and had some negative impacts on the overall process.

To many, including the technical experts involved in the original design of the project at the World Bank and within the Government of Haiti, this committee was intended to serve as a civil society “watchdog”, an independent mechanism to monitor progress in the implementation of the system of protected areas, and to facilitate and channel the involvement of civil society in protected area planning and management. To these people, the CASNAP would have provided the guarantee that the project, and the national agencies involved in its implementation, would not be able to follow, or return to, conventional patterns of behaviour, that they would remain true to the principles of participation and partnership on which the project was developed. To others, especially senior personnel within governmental agencies, this committee was meant to become an instrument of cooperation between the state and civil society, a mechanism that would formalise the partnership between the state, local government agencies and civil society at the national level.

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<sup>3</sup> Consultative committees.

<sup>4</sup> Named after the Arawak name for the island of Hispaniola, also the name of the hotel where the consultation of 1997 was held.

### ***Process leading to the establishment of the CASNAP***

During its first year, the GIX devoted most of its efforts to the mobilisation of potential partners at the national and local levels. It also saw the need to establish a presence and legitimacy on the ground, and thus became involved in local management issues at two levels. First, it became the interpreter of the needs and expectations of local communities and resource users in their communication with ATPPF, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of the Environment over the role and priorities of ATPPF. Second, it arbitrated specific cases of severe resource use conflicts in protected areas, again serving as an intermediary between local communities and governmental agencies.

In March 1998, the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) was contracted by the Ministry of the Environment, under the auspices of the ATPPF, to provide facilitation services to the GIX in the process of formally establishing and registering this CASNAP. This process involved the following steps:

- In August 1998, a first series of meetings and one-on-one consultations was held, for the purpose of (a) defining the roles, membership, structure, terms of reference and legal basis of the proposed CASNAP, (b) mobilising key participants and supporters, and (c) defining the Committee's first programme of work. These meetings involved local government agencies (municipalities), non-governmental organisations, community groups and representatives of governmental agencies. They provided the opportunity for lively and important discussions, and produced preliminary agreements on the constitution of CASNAP.
- Between August and November 1998, these preliminary agreements were negotiated among a larger group of stakeholders, resulting in a consensus on a brief document that outlined the functions and composition of the CASNAP, and agreed that (a) within three months, the articles and by-laws of the Committee would be drafted and negotiated among all inaugural members, and (b) the first general assembly of the committee should be convened at the end of that period.
- In June 1999, key issues were revisited, following a period of relative inactivity due to personality conflicts and to the absence of clear leadership for this process within GIX. A workshop was held, which confirmed the roles and functions of the CASNAP and carried out an analysis of key stakeholders. This workshop tentatively resolved the matter of CASNAP's composition and structure by concluding that the Committee should comprise representatives of community-based organisations, national non-governmental organisations and local government agencies. Consequently, governmental agencies would not be members of the organisation. This workshop also produced draft by-laws and prepared a package of information to be used in the process of mobilising organisations and individuals in support of the Committee.

- It is also in June 1999 that the ATPPF used CANARI's services to conduct a seminar on the theme of participatory and collaborative natural resource management, for the benefit of governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in the implementation of the various components of the ATPPF project. This seminar allowed participants to examine and discuss the theoretical basis for participatory management, and to exchange practical experiences, leading to the identification of a number of significant lessons and conclusions.
- In February 2000, the constitutive assembly of the CASNAP was held, with a review of progress made and issues encountered to date, a presentation by ATPPF and the Ministry of the Environment of their expectations regarding the future role of CASNAP, the final revision and adoption of the by-laws, and the election of a first Board of Directors. The by-laws of the Committee that were adopted at this meeting defined the objectives of CASNAP<sup>5</sup>, and confirmed that the membership of CASNAP should be limited to: (a) local government agencies, (b) community-based organisations, and (c) national non-governmental organisations. It also defined the internal rules and regulations of the Committee.
- During the course of the year 2000, CASNAP began to operate as an autonomous organisation. Its Board of Directors met periodically, and it developed and strengthened linkages with the Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture, as well as with a number of non-governmental agencies. It also provided significant support to the *Comités Consultatifs*, allowing them to reflect on their experiences at the level of individual protected areas, and helping them in their negotiations with state agencies over local management issues. In spite of these successes, the CASNAP encountered a number of difficulties, suffered from internal conflicts, and remained totally dependent on ATPPF for financial support and facilitation services.
- In January 2001, the leadership of ATPPF and the Board of Directors of CASNAP convened a workshop to address these emerging issues and agree on the way forward. This meeting resulted in the formulation of a detailed work plan, which gave priority to the institutional development of CASNAP, in order to build its autonomy and sustainability. General principles were therefore adopted to guide the institutional

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<sup>5</sup> These objectives were identified as:

- Contribute to the establishment of a National System of Protected Areas for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, and to the creation of the autonomous bodies required to manage this system
- Contribute to the formulation of policies and programmes in the field of protected area management
- Monitor, support and evaluate the implementation of these policies and programmes
- Assist in the identification and establishment of new protected areas
- Facilitate the participation of resource users in the management of protected areas, through the interpretation of the needs of local communities and the management of conflicts
- Contribute, at both local and national levels, to the definition and implementation of management plans and the establishment of management systems
- Assist in the identification of sources of funding for programmes and activities towards the protection and management of protected areas



- strengthening of CASNAP. The closure of the ATPPF a few weeks later resulted in a complete disruption of CASNAP's activities, and this work plan has not been implemented.

***Participation and co-management in Haiti: preliminary observations***

The work carried out by the CASNAP and its partners, especially the local government agencies and the *Comités Consultatifs*, has allowed these actors to extract a number of key lessons from their experience, some of which emerged during the seminar held in June 1999 at the initiative of ATPPF. These observations are:

- In protected area management as in any other field of development and natural resource management, the rationale for participatory approaches must be fully understood and appreciated by all actors, and it should not be dictated by funding agencies. In this experience, it is clear that many of the actors did not fully embrace the participatory approach, and saw it as an imposition coming from the donor community. In the case of the CASNAP, this meant that it remained very dependent on support from ATPPF, and that the lack of clarity over the purpose of CASNAP considerably delayed the process.
- The type of institutional arrangement and management regime that is being put in place through a participatory planning process should not be determined in advance of that process. It should be the result of the process. In this instance, co-management was pre-determined as the desirable arrangement, while it should have been considered as one and only one of the options to be explored in the planning process.
- In Haiti, participatory approaches to natural resource management are extremely difficult to implement, but they remain relevant. They are justified primarily by the extent of local ecological knowledge, the need to base new management regimes on existing traditional systems, the belief that decisions emanating from a participatory process are likely to be better suited to local conditions, and the urgent need to strengthen democratic institutions and processes at all levels.
- In Haiti, natural resource management issues are often at the root of severe conflicts, e.g. conflicts between the state and local residents over the harvesting of forest products; or conflicts between poor people who depend on wood and other forest products for energy and food, and larger business people who trade in wood products for the urban markets and often use corruption and violence to impose their interests. While the participatory approach is not sufficient to resolve these conflicts, it helps to reveal their root causes, and to strengthen the voices and interests of the powerless.
- Natural resource management is a complex set of processes. In Haiti, *gestion* (management) is often equated with *réglementation* (legislation), but forest managers need to understand that they have many other tools and instruments at their disposal, and that legislation and enforcement may actually be among the

- least effective instruments, in a country where institutions are weak and corrupt, and where law and order do not prevail.
- While the ATPPF project did, from its inception, propose co-management as the desirable institutional arrangement for the management of Haiti's remaining forests and protected areas, formal co-management may actually not be the most appropriate approach, in light of Haiti's peculiar situation. A management regime defines the distribution of rights and responsibilities among a variety of institutions. The formal vesting of some of these rights and responsibilities to local communities and civil society organisations may not be the best way to ensure effective and efficient management, and to meet the needs of these communities. In the context of weak institutions, it remains the role of the state to protect the rights of the citizens, and communities expect it to play that role, not to transfer it to local institutions that are young, weak and vulnerable.
- Whenever co-management regimes are being established, they demand that rigorous planning and decision-making processes be followed. In Haiti, these processes should begin with (a) a thorough analysis of issues, (b) a clear definition of the geographic scope of the management intervention, (c) the identification of all stakeholders, (d) communication between the planning and management agencies and all these stakeholders, (e) an intensive phase of information and mobilisation, (f) the negotiation of a formal or informal agreement to proceed with the planning process, and (g) a consensus on the process and methods that will be followed.
- Some of the conditions required for the success of such a preparatory phase do not exist in Haiti at present. Key obstacles to the implementation of genuine participatory processes in Haiti include: (a) the absence of credible intermediaries and facilitators, (b) the weakness of basic social services and infrastructure, (c) the deficiencies of state institutions, and (d) the lack of confidence placed by people in governmental agencies and state-initiated interventions.

In this context, it seems that the ATPPF, while retaining its commitment to participation and collaborative management, should have adopted a more classical approach to planning and management, at least in the short term. In countries and situations where democratic institutions are weak, the emphasis of new interventions should be placed on creating conditions for effective management, while progressively building the confidence and the capacities required for management partnerships to flourish.

### ***Conclusion***

The institutional arrangements that were being put in place by the Government of Haiti under the framework of the ATPPF project were quite innovative, when one considers the local context of governance in general, and of natural resource management in particular. In light of the many obstacles that these processes of institutional reform had to face, it is actually remarkable that so much could have been accomplished in this short period of time. Yet, it is still too early to draw conclusive lessons, especially since many of these

processes, including the institutional development of CASNAP, were abruptly interrupted.

This experience is however sufficient to demonstrate, once again, that participatory approaches must be tailored to local conditions. When these conditions are extreme, as in the case of Haiti, the general principles of participation in forest management would still apply, but the manner in which they would be implemented would be radically different from countries where democratic institutions and social justice prevail.

It is indeed revealing that the formula that was eventually developed by the CASNAP, as indeed by the four *Comités Consultatifs* established at the local level, was that of autonomous, non-governmental bodies comprising local communities, non-governmental organisations and local government agencies, but excluding state agencies or their representatives at the local or provincial levels. It is also not surprising to observe that, throughout these processes, some of the most consistent supporters of these new institutions and their missions were the elected representatives of local government agencies.

While the ATPPF project and its sponsors spoke of co-management (i.e. formal partnerships between the state and civil society organisations), the CASNAP and the *Comités Consultatifs* established new civil society institutions that would become “watchdogs”, advocates of popular needs and agents of community empowerment, not co-managers in the strict sense of the term. Their emphasis moved away from co-management as an immediate solution, towards building the local alliances and capacities that would, at a later stage, make co-management possible.

In a country plagued by violence, injustice and poverty, Haitian civil society organisations and local government officials invested significant time and effort in an initiative aimed at building participation in protected area management. They did so because they felt that the issues of environmental degradation are absolutely critical to the future of their country. But they did it also because they were aware that environmental and natural resource management offers one of the spaces where democratic institutions can be built and strengthened. In doing so, they demonstrated that environmental management, and especially the management of common property resources such as state-owned forests, can be central to the process of building and rebuilding democracy.

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<sup>1</sup> Committee to support the management of the national system of protected areas.

<sup>1</sup> Haiti in the last retrenchment.

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- Assist in the identification and establishment of new protected areas
- Facilitate the participation of resource users in the management of protected areas, through the interpretation of the needs of local communities and the management of conflicts
- Contribute, at both local and national levels, to the definition and implementation of management plans and the establishment of management systems
- Assist in the identification of sources of funding for programmes and activities towards the protection and management of protected areas

## Caribbean Natural Resources Institute

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional non-governmental organization concerned with issues of conservation, environment, and sustainable development in the insular Caribbean.

CANARI's mission is to create avenues for the equitable participation and effective collaboration of Caribbean communities and institutions in managing the use of natural resources critical to development.

With an office in Trinidad, the Institute has specific interest and extensive background in the identification and promotion of participatory and collaborative forms of natural resource management.

Trinidad  
Fernandes Industrial Centre  
Administration Building  
Eastern Main Road, Laventille  
Trinidad, W.I.  
Telephone: (868) 626-6062  
Facsimile: (868) 626-1788  
E-mail: [canari@tstt.net.tt](mailto:canari@tstt.net.tt)