



# CANARI POLICY BRIEF No.9

## Participatory Wetlands Management in the Caribbean

This policy brief summarises the findings of a project entitled “*Policies and institutions for wetlands management: Training for managers from the insular Caribbean*” which was implemented by CANARI in 2006 with funding from the Ramsar Wetlands for the Future Fund (WFF). The project arose from concern that wetlands in the Caribbean are coming under increasing pressure for physical development, often to the detriment of the environmental goods and services that have traditionally supported livelihoods. The research component focused on analysing the actual and potential contribution of the international Convention on Wetlands (the Ramsar Convention) in facilitating participatory approaches to and integrated management of wetlands in Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago. The project concluded with a regional workshop on *Policies and Institutions for Participatory Wetlands Management: Lessons from implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the insular Caribbean* for natural resource managers from the three project countries as well as from Dominica, the Dominican Republic, St. Kitts & Nevis, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines.

### What are “wetlands” in the Caribbean?

Wetlands in the Caribbean are commonly understood to mean mangroves and freshwater marshes or “swamps”. This limited definition omits other important wetland ecosystems, such as nearshore coral reefs, sea grass beds, and riverine and underground systems, that are included under a more widely accepted international definition of wetlands (see Box 1).

The low priority accorded to the conservation of wetlands in the Caribbean can be attributed in part to this narrow understanding of what they are. Caribbean wetlands are important, yet often undervalued, ecosys-

#### Box 1: Definition of “wetlands”

The Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as "areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six metres" (Article 1.1).



*Freshwater marsh and moriche palm stand in Nariva Swamp, Trinidad*



*Aerial view of coral reef on west coast of Saint Lucia*

**Community management of the  
Mankotè mangrove in Saint Lucia by the  
Aupicon Charcoal and Agricultural  
Producers Group (ACAPG)**



*ACAPG and charcoal pit in Mankotè, Saint Lucia*



*ACAPG and Forestry monitoring the regrowth of white mangrove in Mankotè, Saint Lucia*



*Regeneration of mangrove trees*

tems that are under severe threat, especially in coastal areas, from commercial (in particular tourism), industrial and residential developments. In order for wetlands to gain proper recognition in the Caribbean as ecosystems that are vital to sustainable development, the definition of wetlands in each country's policy and practice needs to articulate clearly the full range of wetland ecosystems that need to be managed.

**Participatory wetlands management  
in the Caribbean**

The Ramsar "wise use" principle for the sustainable utilisation of wetlands is particularly relevant in the Caribbean because of the limited size of the islands and the high dependency on the natural resources' goods and ecological services to support livelihoods. This principle integrates the conservation of wetlands with sustainable use for the health and well-being of people through an integrated management approach.

The integrated management approach is achieved through facilitation of the equitable and effective participation of all stakeholders (from government to local communities, NGOs, the private sector and academia) in decision-making about how the resources of wetlands should be managed.

Participatory wetlands management is being adopted and tested in varying degrees in the islands of the Caribbean. Consultation is becoming increasingly common, and stakeholders are informed of proposals for development in wetlands and wetlands management and asked to submit comments. In some countries, local stakeholders are assisting with wetlands management in return for stipends or other incentives (for example in Trinidad & Tobago where community members are engaged in monitoring activities at the Nariva Swamp). Deeper involvement in decision-making is being facilitated in Trinidad & Tobago through the multi-stakeholder National Wetlands Committee and the proposed Local Wetlands Committees (see Box 2). Several multi-stakeholder committees exist in Jamaica, such as the National Ramsar Committee and the National Integrated Watershed Management Council, but it is unclear how these can input into decisions about wetlands management. In Saint Lucia, the granting of co-management agreements to local community organisations designated as Local Fisheries Management Authorities (LFMAs) is contributing to shared ownership and collaborative management of wetlands (see Box 3).

The Ramsar Convention is catalysing, supporting and facilitating wetlands management initiatives in Caribbean countries that are signatories, including but not limited to:

- raising the profile of wetlands and the priority accorded to them and conferring national legitimacy on wetlands issues;
- increasing public awareness and catalysing interest and action;
- providing definitions and a technical basis for management (e.g. management approaches and principles);
- stimulating the formation and formalisation of institutional arrangements, including the development of a National Wetland Policy and a National Wetlands Committee;
- providing funding and technical assistance for wetlands management (for example as has been the case for Nariva Swamp in Trinidad & Tobago), both directly through mechanisms under the Ramsar Convention as well as indirectly by the increased prioritisation of wetlands management stimulating funding from governments and other agencies.

### **What are the challenges to effective wetlands management in the Caribbean?**

The islands of the Caribbean are faced with critical policy and institutional challenges to achieving effective integrated wetlands management for sustainable use and conservation of the natural resources:

- most countries do not have a National Wetland Policy and there are few policies for integrated management of ecological systems. While there are numerous policies for natural resource man-



*Communities farming in freshwater wetlands,  
Nariva Swamp, Trinidad*

### **Box 2: National Wetlands Committee and Local Wetland Committees in Trinidad & Tobago**

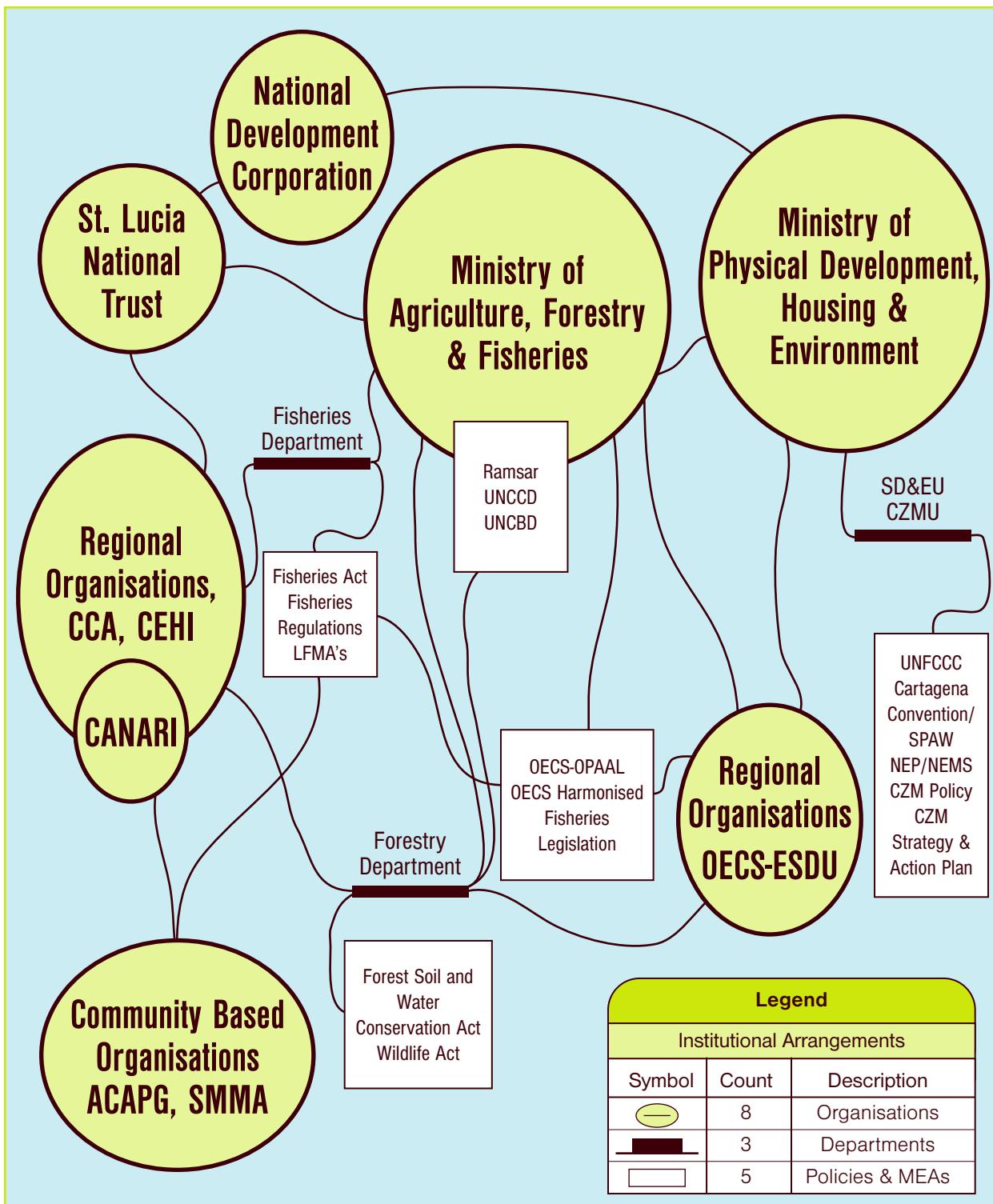
A National Wetlands Committee (NWC) was established in Trinidad & Tobago as a Cabinet-appointed multi-stakeholder coordinating committee for wetlands management, directly catalysed by requirements of the Ramsar Convention. This body became the key driver for wetlands management in Trinidad & Tobago, including implementation of the Ramsar vision, framework of principles and strategic plan through the National Wetlands Policy and annual workplans. The role of the NWC is in setting policy directions, strategies, developing projects and capacity-building. The NWC intends to establish local multi-stakeholder Cabinet-appointed management committees for all Ramsar sites in Trinidad & Tobago to implement strategies that are developed by the NWC at the local level.

### **Box 3: Local Fisheries Management Authorities (LFMAs) in Saint Lucia**

The Mankotè Mangrove was being used for the traditional extraction of timber for charcoal production but this was damaging the resource. A communal property regime was developed to replace the open access conditions and research showed that this resulted in a reversal in the trend of mangrove degradation to one of improved regeneration. The Aupicon Charcoal and Agricultural Producers Group (ACAPG) were formally recognized by the Department of Fisheries when they were granted the status of a Local Fisheries Management Authority (LFMA) and given shared responsibility for managing the Mankotè Mangrove. They became the first community group in Saint Lucia to be granted a management role over state property. The collaborative management arrangement developed involved a partnership of government and civil society stakeholders, including ACAPG, the Forestry Department, Department of Fisheries, Central Planning Unit of the Ministry of Planning, and Saint Lucia National Trust (SLNT), each with its own resource management policies and articles of legislation with implications for the management of Mankotè.

Another LFMA is the multi-stakeholder Soufrière Marine Management Association (established in July 1995), which is responsible for coordinating management activities and guiding the formulation of a comprehensive management plan for the management of the area's coastal resources and of the conflicts provoked by the diverse use of these resources. The marine management area comprises 11 km of coastline and the adjacent marine area and includes marine reserves, fishing priority areas, multiple use areas, recreational areas and yacht moorings.

**Figure 1: Complex institutional arrangements for wetlands management in Saint Lucia<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Developed by CANARI from the national consultations in Saint Lucia held under the CANARI Policies and institutions for wetlands management: Training for managers from the insular Caribbean" WFF project

agement, most take a sectoral rather than an integrated approach. Policies are sometimes in direct conflict and there are some policy gaps;

- there is inadequate implementation of wetland policies in national legislation, including implementation of international commitments made under the Ramsar Convention for countries that are signatories;
- responsibility for wetland management is often divided between several agencies (see Figure 1 for the Saint Lucia example), often with weak or no cross-sectoral links developed specifically to address wetland management issues;
- management on a sectoral basis hinders integrated planning and policy development particularly in the absence of a national framework for integrated natural resource management that guides each sector's understanding of its roles and responsibility;
- there is a perceived lack of political will to implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) such as the Ramsar Convention and national policies;
- the value of goods and services from wetlands is not recognised or quantified and therefore policy makers do not see management of wetlands as being important for socio-economic development. Consequently wetlands conservation is accorded a much lower priority than physical development, which may be damaging to the natural resource base and the livelihoods of stakeholders dependent on it.

Other challenges for wetlands management in the Caribbean include

- **research:** there are insufficient data and information available and/or accessible about the health and status of wetlands to guide management planning. There is generally no national framework to identify priority research needs and when research is conducted it often excludes consideration of traditional knowledge;
- **implementation:** translation of wetland policies into strategic and specific management and implementation plans is often weak or non-existent. The absence of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of management interventions hinders adaptive management;
- **capacity challenges:** Caribbean islands are facing numerous and varied capacity challenges in



*Regional workshop participants in the Nariva Swamp, Trinidad*



both government and civil society, including the lack of financial resources, weak institutional linkages, and shortage of skills in wetlands management and in facilitating and contributing to participatory processes.

There are also specific challenges in relation to participatory wetlands management, including:

- a lack of understanding and appreciation of the value of participation so that decision-making is top-down (and often faces political interference in implementation of policy) and government agencies are unwilling to devolve power and authority;
- lack of a clear articulation of principles and strategies regarding participatory approaches in wetlands management and tangible examples to illustrate how these can be usefully applied;
- although policy statements and some practices are becoming increasingly participatory, legislation to support and institutionalise such practice is weak or absent.

**Table 1: Lessons on the use of mechanisms under the Ramsar Convention and the application of participatory approaches in wetlands management**

<b><i>The needs</i></b>	<b><i>Useful Ramsar mechanisms</i></b>	<b><i>Application of participatory approaches</i></b>
A consensual vision is needed which seeks to balance livelihood needs with conservation of the resource.	The “wise use” philosophy can usefully guide a national vision balancing livelihoods and resource conservation and has been widely recognised in the Caribbean region.	Participatory approaches can facilitate the equitable inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making—local communities, resource users (including informal and illegal ones), interest groups and agencies legally designated with responsibility for management. This helps to identify and understand resource use needs, identify conflicts and engage stakeholders in negotiating trade-offs.
A clear framework for management (including participatory approaches) is needed. This should specify a definition of wetlands, management goals, objectives and principles (integrated, wise use), management approaches (research, restoration, sustainable use) and management responsibilities of different stakeholders. This framework needs to be supported in formal written policies (e.g. National Wetlands Policy, legislation) and in practice. This framework must allow for evaluation of the effectiveness and refinement of objectives, structures, processes, and management interventions.	Accession to the Ramsar Convention places an obligation on a country to develop a written National Wetlands Policy. Ramsar policies (e.g. definitions, Articles, the strategic plan) are useful starting guides for developing a national framework and proved to be extremely useful in guiding the policy processes in Jamaica and T&T.	The equitable involvement of all stakeholders in conceptualising and planning the management framework is critical to build shared understanding, assure buy-in, identify roles, build relationships and facilitate communication and collaboration channels, and promote transparency and accountability. National Wetlands Committees, co-management agreements, and other participatory approaches need to be developed and managed within a framework for stakeholder involvement in wetlands management that is inclusive and developed in partnership with stakeholders. This framework needs to clearly define stakeholder roles and responsibilities, while allowing for ongoing testing, monitoring, evaluation and adaptation.
Institutional arrangements need to promote an integrated approach to involve all sectors (e.g. agriculture, forestry, tourism, community development, land use planning, etc.) and at regional, national and local levels.	Accession to the Ramsar Convention puts an obligation on a country to appoint a multi-stakeholder National Wetlands Committee (NWC). This may be a useful mechanism to aid in communication and coordination among sectors and stakeholders. The establishment of a NWC in T&T was the catalyst for development of policy and stimulation of wetlands management on the ground.	Establishment of a NWC, and facilitation of other processes for integration, must be based on a rigorous stakeholder identification and analysis to understand roles, responsibilities, interests, power relations and actual or potential conflicts. Institutional mapping deepens understanding of how the many key stakeholders function in complex institutional arrangements for wetlands management. These processes inform who should be involved in management and what role they should play, and help to identify strategies for how different stakeholders can play a role. This has been used successfully in the development of collaborative management agreements in Saint Lucia.

**Table 1 (cont.): Lessons on the use of mechanisms under the Ramsar Convention and the application of participatory approaches in wetlands management**

<b>The needs</b>	<b>Useful Ramsar mechanisms</b>	<b>Application of participatory approaches</b>
Effective implementation requires adequate resources, both human and financial, to support management. Participatory wetlands management requires that stakeholders have capacity in the areas of world view/culture, skills, material resources, structures, adaptive strategies and linkages <sup>2</sup> .	Ramsar mechanisms available to assist with capacity building include technical missions and the Wetlands for the Future Fund (for example as were used in management of the Nariva Swamp in Trinidad).	Stakeholders engaged in collaborative management bring knowledge, skills and assets to the process and so increase the resources available for implementation. Participatory processes must analyse capacity needs and build the capacities of various stakeholders to effectively participate in management. Different stakeholders will have different capacity needs and needs may vary over time. Common capacity needs include: skills in the facilitation of participatory processes; technical skills in wetland management; skills in organisational development; skills in planning, monitoring, evaluation and adaptive management; functional linkages with other sectors and stakeholders; and institutional arrangements and organisational world view and culture that enables participatory management. The degree of need and the perceived need may vary between government and civil society stakeholders.

### **How can participatory approaches and the Ramsar Convention be used in the Caribbean to achieve more effective and efficient wetlands management?**

Experiences in Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad & Tobago provide lessons on how participatory approaches can address some of the challenges identified above, using mechanisms under the Ramsar Convention. Some of these lessons and Ramsar mechanisms are outlined in Table 1.

### **Conclusion and some caveats**

Participatory and integrated approaches to wetlands management are essential in small Caribbean islands which are characterised by development pressures on and a fast pace of destruction of the natural resource base and a heavy dependency on natural resources for

livelihoods, with limited livelihood alternatives. In such contexts, trade-offs between livelihood needs and conservation of the natural resources are inevitable yet the tools and methods for negotiating these are still not widely understood or adopted.

The Ramsar Convention has contributed in varying degrees to catalysing, stimulating and supporting development of national policy, institutions and actions for wetlands management, including some stakeholder participation, in some Caribbean islands. There is considerable scope to deepen the participatory process in many of these initiatives, notably through applying rigorous stakeholder identification and analysis to the establishment of National Wetlands Committees, the design of collaborative management agreements, and the facilitation of equitable participation in policy formulation and management. For example, multi-stakeholder committees are a common strategy for participation but without thorough stake-

<sup>2</sup> For more information on capacity needs see Krishnarayan, V., T. Geoghegan & Y. Renard (2002). Assessing capacity for participatory natural resource management. CANARI Guidelines Series 3. Caribbean Natural Resources Institute.

holder analysis they may exclude key stakeholders, be inadequately linked into decision-making processes with poor horizontal and vertical linkages, and/or lack the framework and mechanisms to engage a wider audience.

Some general lessons can be drawn from experiences in the Caribbean of using mechanisms of the Ramsar Convention and participatory approaches in wetlands management. However caution should be exercised in determining whether they are applicable to specific national and local contexts. For example, although National Wetlands Committees may be appropriate in larger islands such as Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago, some of the smaller Eastern Caribbean islands argue that a single multi-stakeholder committee, focused broadly on all natural resource management issues and international conventions, may be more suitable.

Further research is needed to quantify and assess the benefits derived from international conventions and how these can be maximised without imposing an unrealistic burden on small island states in the Caribbean. The value of acceding to international conventions which may impose unrealistic demands on a small island with limited capacity for implementation remains a serious question.

#### **Box 4: Acronyms Used**

ACAPG:	Aupicon Charcoal and Agricultural Producers Group
CANARI:	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
CCA:	Caribbean Conservation Association
CEHI:	Caribbean Environmental Health Institute
CZM:	Coastal Zone Management
CZMU:	Coastal Zone Management Unit
ESDU:	Environment and Sustainable Development Unit
LFMAs:	Local Fisheries Management Authorities
MEAs:	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
NEP:	National Environmental Policy
NEMS:	National Environmental Management Strategy
NGOs:	Non Governmental Organisations
NWC:	National Wetlands Committee
OECS:	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
OPAAL:	OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods Project
SLNT:	Saint Lucia National Trust
SMMA:	Soufriere Marine Management Association
SPAWE:	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
T&T:	Trinidad & Tobago
UNFCCC:	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNCCD:	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCBD:	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
SD&EU:	Sustainable Development and Environment Unit
UNFCC:	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WFF:	Wetlands for the Future Fund

### **Caribbean Natural Resources Institute**

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is a regional technical non-profit organisation which has been working in the islands of the Caribbean for over 20 years.

Our mission is to promote equitable participation and effective collaboration in managing the natural resources critical to development.

Our programmes focus on research, sharing and dissemination of lessons learned, capacity building and fostering regional partnerships.

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