

“Improving biodiversity conservation in the Caribbean Islands Biodiversity Hotspot through Collaborative Social Accountability (CSA)”

Port of Spain, 20 January 2023 – Overexploitation, habitat loss, invasive alien species, and climate change are among the major threats faced by Caribbean ecosystems. Creating new civil society and public sector-led participatory mechanisms and strengthening existing ones is one way in which stakeholders from different sectors can come together to co-produce solutions and appropriate responses to address these challenges and improve biodiversity protection, management and restoration in Caribbean Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).



Credit: IHO

Launched in December 2021 under the current Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) investment in the Caribbean Islands, the project "Collaborative Social Accountability for Improved Governance in Protecting Biodiversity Hotspots" aims to apply collaborative social accountability mechanisms to facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships for biodiversity conservation and climate change adaption in the Caribbean. Local communities are being engaged in conservation and long-term partnerships with governments. This is the first time that this framework is being applied to biodiversity conservation.

Collaborative social accountability (CSA) refers to a broad range of methodologies, tools and mechanisms for constructive engagement of citizens and civil society organisations (CSOs) with public-sector institutions to bring about greater voice for citizen's concerns and responsiveness to their needs.

Funded by the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) and CEPF, this four-year project (2021 -2025) is being implemented by the Collaborative Social Accountability Team (CSAT) formed by the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo (Technological Institute of Santo Domingo - INTEC) in the Dominican Republic and Integrated Health Outreach Inc. (IHO), a non-governmental organisation based in Antigua and Barbuda.

The project aims to improve biodiversity conservation and strengthen the protection of vulnerable and threatened species in and around selected Caribbean KBAs¹ in Antigua and Barbuda, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. In a parallel complementary thrust, the Caribbean Regional Implementation Team (RIT) at CANARI will work in close collaboration with the CSAT to replicate the initiative in The Bahamas, Haiti, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

As part of the mobilisation in Antigua and Barbuda, the CSAT convened a series of community meetings in November 2022 to elicit feedback from fisherfolk, community groups and residents of several communities in the North-East Marine Management Area (NEMMA) on the environmental services that they would want to see delivered by the government and on ways service delivery could be improved for the greater protection of the KBAs and the threatened species.

“The idea of collaboration as bi-directional, and not one-directional, is crucial,” said IHO Executive Director Nicola Bird. “It is important that governments are held accountable for their engagements, but we also have to look at the role that the communities can play in this process. Mutual understanding and a collaborative partnership between governments and communities are key to improving the management and protection of our protected areas,” she added.

These meetings led to the development of a community scorecard that highlights the community’s perception of the government’s delivery of environmental services, and a service delivery index. The service delivery index summarises the services that the community would like to see delivered, such as the control of illegal dumping and the commitments taken by the government to address these needs.

To further this process, IHO hosted the first meeting between government representatives and community members in Antigua and Barbuda on 13 December 2022 to share the findings of the service delivery index and collectively identify ways to address the gaps. Follow-up multi-stakeholder meetings will be held throughout 2023.

Community outreach and CSA training are currently underway in the Dominican Republic and will be launched in Saint Lucia and Jamaica in the coming months.

“The ongoing collaboration and participatory engagement between the community and the government and having systems in place to achieve the sustainable management of the protected areas is the ultimate goal. Not just discussions, but concrete actions to meet the needs,” concluded Nicola Bird.

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¹ KBAs were selected through a democratic process (vote) during inception meetings held in December 2021 in Antigua & Barbuda and in January 2022 in the Dominican Republic in the presence of community groups and public sector representatives.