

Small Island States and the Global Program of Work on Protected Areas: The Example of Grenada

RAQUEL SEYBERT¹, SPENCER THOMAS², and ROBERT WEARY³

¹*The Nature Conservancy, Eastern Caribbean Program
3052 Estate Little Princess
St. Croix, USVI 00820*

²*Sustainable Development Council (SDC), Ministry of Finance and Planning
Financial Complex, Carenage, St. Georges, Grenada*

³*The Nature Conservancy
118 Goodman St.
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902 USA*

ABSTRACT

In February 2004, at the Seventh Conference of the Parties meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Malaysia, over 180 countries negotiated a Global Program of Work (PoW) on Protected Areas (PAs).

This PoW contained a set of specific targets, timetables and actions to be taken by governments, including a target to establish a global network of representative and effectively managed national and regional protected areas on land by 2010 and at sea by 2012. However, implementing this strong Global Program of Work for Protected Areas has its challenges, specially when it relates to Small Island States. Countries, overwhelmingly expressed concern over the lack of adequate funding and technical assistance. In response to this concern, a Consortium of International NGOs (including The Nature Conservancy, Birdlife International, Conservation International, Flora and Fauna International, WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Resources Institute) put forward a Joint NGO Pledge in which they have offered to provide wide-ranging support to governments to implement a strong Program of Work. Specific commitments for collaboration between governments and NGOs are under development through the establishment of country-driven National Implementation Support Programs (NISPs). Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica and the Bahamas are among the four pioneer governments in the insular Caribbean setting up these Programs. The example of the partnership between TNC and the Government of Grenada demonstrates how Small Island States, that have intrinsic little capacity, can benefit from these partnerships and make significant contributions to the global conservation agenda. By joining forces with the international and in-country NGO community and by internally agreeing on coordinating priority actions across departments and ministries, the government of Grenada is ready to comply with international conservation commitments and achieve meaningful and cost-effective conservation results on the ground.

KEY WORDS: Grenada, small island states, Convention Biological Diversity, protected areas, program of work

Islas Pequeñas y el Programa de Trabajo Global sobre Áreas Protegidas: El Ejemplo de Grenada

En Febrero de 2004, en la Séptima Conferencia de la Reunión de los Partidos de la Convención sobre Diversidad Biológica en Malasia, 180 países negociaran un Programa de Trabajo Global (PdT) sobre Áreas Protegidas (APs). Este Programa de Trabajo contén un sistema de metas, de horarios específicos y de acciones que se tomarán por gobiernos, incluyendo una meta para establecer una red global, representativa y eficientemente manejada de áreas protegidas nacionales y regionales en tierra antes de 2010 y en el mar antes de 2012. Sin embargo, poner este programa de trabajo en ejecución tiene sus desafíos, especialmente cuando se relaciona a Pequeñas Islas. La gran mayoría de los países demostraran una preocupación por la carencia del financiamiento adecuado y asistencia técnica. En respuesta a esta preocupación, un consorcio de ONGs internacionales (que incluyen The Nature Conservancy, Birdlife International, Conservation International, Flora and Fauna International, WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Resources Institute) hicieron un compromiso en el cual han ofrecido proporcionar la vasta ayuda a los gobiernos para implementar un Programa de Trabajo fuerte. Las comisiones específicas para la colaboración entre los gobiernos y los ONGs están en desarrollo a través del establecimiento de Programas de Ayuda Nacionales (NISPs). Grenada, St. Vincent y las Grenadines, Jamaica y las Bahamas están entre los cuatro gobiernos pioneros en el Caribe estableciendo estos Programas de Ayuda. El ejemplo de la sociedad entre TNC y el gobierno de Grenada demuestra cómo los estados de islas pequeñas, que tienen pequeña capacidad intrínseca, puede beneficiar de estas sociedades y hacer contribuciones significativas a la agenda global de la conservación. Ensamblando fuerzas con la comunidad nacional y internacional de ONGs y internamente conviniendo en acciones de prioridad que coordinan a través de departamentos y de los ministerios, el gobierno de Grenada esta listo para conformarse con comisiones internacionales de la conservación y alcanzar resultados significativos y rentables de la conservación en su territorio.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Grenada, islas pequeñas, Convención sobre Diversidad Biológica, áreas protegidas, programa de trabajo

INTRODUCTION

The conservation of biological diversity has been described by many as an epic and urgent task. In the face of meager financial resources, numerous tools for helping scientists evaluate urgency and prioritize actions have been developed, with the ultimate goal of strategically allocating limited resources for the task at hand. However, little effort has been put into maximizing the power of conservation partnerships and coalitions as vehicles to leverage resources. The growing complexity of managing biodiversity conservation programs has led many international organizations to recognize the value of working with a wide range of stakeholder groups and bringing partnership-building to the forefront of conservation.

The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) 2015 goal clearly acknowledges partnerships as a key vehicle for meaningful implementation of conservation agendas:

“By 2015, The Nature Conservancy will work with others to ensure the effective conservation of places that represent at least 10% of every major habitat type on Earth.”

This policy statement reinforces a culture of partnership building that is evident in the Conservancy's ongoing work with approximately 500 organizations in 30 countries worldwide (TNC 2005). This statement also acknowledges that building partnerships will continue to be encouraged and that appropriate resources and tools will be invested with the ultimate goal of leveraging resources by achieving strong and lasting partnerships.

Although this need is acknowledged, building partnerships is a challenging and, many times, daunting task. Challenges arise in partnering organizations with different cultures, agendas, financial resources, constituent bases, and leadership styles. An underlying challenge also arises from the existing pressure for taking immediate conservation action, funding deadlines, donor agendas, and the time needed for building trust among organizations in order to build strong working relationships. Regardless of these challenges, emerging experience demonstrates that shying away from them ultimately leads organizations to ostracism and unsustainable long term results. In this context, TNC in conjunction with many other international organizations recognizes that partnership building is a mandatory and fundamentally necessary undertaking for any conservation project to realize long term success (TNC 2005)

Building a Partnership for the Implementation of the Global Program of Work on Protected Areas in Grenada

A good example of this global move towards building effective partnerships is the result of the last Conference of the Parties (COP-7) meeting of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD). In February 2004, at the (COP-7) meeting of the CBD in Malaysia, 188 countries adopted a Global Program of Work (PoW) on Protected Areas (PAs). For the first time ever, governments formally agreed to support the establishment of comprehensive, ecologically representative and effectively financed and managed regional and national protected area systems. It is hoped this goal will be reached by the year 2010 for terrestrial systems and 2012 for marine systems. This PoW is the most important and concrete commitment to protect biodiversity ever made by the international community. Without such commitment, it will be virtually impossible to achieve the 2010 goal of significantly reducing the rate of biodiversity loss, which was adopted by heads of state at the Johannesburg Summit in 2002. Given the dominant role of governments in designating and managing protected areas worldwide, these commitments provide a critical platform for achieving meaningful results (Weary 2004).

However, implementing this Global Program of Work for Protected Areas has its challenges, with many countries expressing concern over the lack of adequate funding and technical assistance.

In response to this widespread concern, a consortium of international NGOs (including Birdlife International, Conservation International, Flora and Fauna International, The Nature Conservancy, WWF, Wildlife Conservation Society, and World Resources Institute) put forward a Joint NGO Pledge at COP7 - with a challenge to donor agencies to make similar pledges - in which they have offered to provide wide-ranging support to governments to implement a strong Program of Work. Specific commitments for collaboration between governments and NGOs were concluded through the development of country-driven National Implementation Support Partnership (NISPs). These NISPs take the form of formalized agreements (e.g. a Memorandum of Understanding - MOU) between the NGOs and each country government where they work.

Grenada, a small island state in the southern Caribbean, being one of the signatories of the CBD with intrinsic little resources to implement such an ambitious international PoW, was one of those countries expressing serious concerns over the hollowness of this agenda if not backed up by significant financial and technical assistance. Among the international NGOs that pledged support, only The Nature Conservancy is currently working in Grenada. Therefore, in response to this concern, TNC offered

technical and financial support to Grenada for the implementation of this specific agenda. The National Implementation Support Partnership was established which outlines major areas of collaboration related to the implementation of the *PoW*, and specifies financial and technical contributions by TNC and the government agencies engaged.

RESULTS

National Implementation Support Partnership – Design Phase

The process for developing a National Implementation Support Partnership in Grenada took approximately nine months to complete. It involved a long negotiation phase of who should be engaged and how the different partners would interact.

In the spirit of the commitments made at COP7, the initial list of proposed partners included a significant number of organizations representing several government ministries and a wide representation of NGOs and research institutions in the country. When this initial proposal was put on the table it became clear that defining the final group of organizations participating in the NISP would be more difficult than initially envisioned. Different agendas, previous working experiences, and personality differences led to the need to simplify the process. TNC's short presence in the country and poor experiences with previous international NGOs did not make the process any easier. The local NGO sector felt that TNC's intention was to use their name to move international agendas. It was also felt that partnering with an international NGO would divert funds away from the national NGO sector and would cause the country to lose control over its own conservation agenda.

The concerns from the Grenadian NGO sector and some government agencies were valid and understandable. The Nature Conservancy started working in Grenada in late 2002 and, therefore, it does not have a significant track record in the country. Moreover, small island states have had bad experiences with large NGOs and research institutions in the past, in which they would promise cooperation in research and conservation projects, but would share very little, if any, of their results. These bad experiences left local institutions in Grenada very suspicious and created roadblocks that were difficult to surpass.

In the end, the final partners of the National Implementation Support Partnership included four different government Ministries plus TNC, but no local NGOs. The Ministries involved included those with the greatest responsibility for Grenada's protected area management, finance, foreign affairs, and environmental policy.

Adapting the Global Program of Work on Protected Areas to Grenada's Reality

Over the course of three months after the NISP MOU was signed, each of the partners put forward a workplan of

current activities plus new activities they felt were needed to strengthen the protected area system of Grenada. This workplan was organized following the framework of the Global *PoW* of Protected Areas. It was divided into four Program Elements:

- i) Planning, selecting, establishing, strengthening, and managing, protected area systems and sites;
- ii) Governance, Participation, Equity and Benefit Sharing;
- iii) Enabling Activities;
- iv) Monitoring and evaluation.

This exercise resulted in a wealth of information and project and financial needs specific to Grenada's reality. This information was then cross referenced with the Global *PoW* of Protected Areas' deliverables and commitments to identify gaps and potential duplication of activities. Special attention was given to early actions that need to be completed before 2008. The final result of this exercise is a master workplan for the protected area system of Grenada that reflects these early actions of the Global *PoW* of Protected Areas and what the partners identified as priority activities, taking into account the reality of the country. Some examples of activities include the development of a biological GAP analysis (to be completed by 2006) and of a Sustainable Finance Plan for the protected areas system of the country (to be completed by 2008).

An analysis of the activities identified in this master workplan leads to the following conclusion:

- i) Priority setting of activities within the protected area system is identified as a pressing need by government agencies. However, there is no systematic and coordinated approach amongst agencies to identify these priorities.
- ii) The majority of these agencies' efforts are currently dedicated to every day management activities at the site level. Very little capacity nor time exists to identify coordinated medium-to-long term conservation strategies. Hence, the difficulty of acting strategically at the system level and in leveraging efforts across sectors. A coordinating body for protected areas system has been identified in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan as a priority, but has yet to be created.
- iii) The development of management plans has been identified as a top priority
- iv) There is an acute awareness of the need to protect endemic and endangered species, but little to no resources exist to develop monitoring programs. In this context, rapid ecological assessments of the major animal and flora groups are needed (very little understanding exists on their distribution, status and trends).
- v) A clear understanding of funding levels and shortfalls of the protected area system is needed.

The design of financial mechanisms that help maintain a steady stream of funds is also perceived as important. In this context, the agencies view the need to complete valuation studies of the country's major ecosystems as a priority.

- vi) Capacity building within government agencies is a pressing need, especially the use of GIS and remote sensing technologies.
- vii) Although environmental education is perceived as a priority, there is no systematic approach nor direct link of current environmental education activities to ecosystem threats.
- viii) Finally, on a very good note, Grenada has positioned itself well to be part of regional projects (e.g. the Organization of eastern Caribbean States Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods (OPAAL) and the Sustainable Grenadines projects) and has demonstrated capacity and desire to attract and build partnerships with research institutes and NGOs abroad.

Over the past three years, the Conservancy has gained a 'hands-on' awareness of these gaps and needs. Being the only international conservation NGO working in Grenada and by working both at the national and site levels, the Conservancy is in an unique position to have an impact in this small island state, attract further funding, and leverage efforts to other countries across the Lesser Antilles chain. But first, the partnership needs to be cemented.

An Agenda for Priority Action

Although there are currently few NISP partners, there are numerous stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Protected Area PoW. Therefore, only by ensuring a close coordination and communication between NISP partners and remaining stakeholders will Grenada be able to implement the PoW. For these reasons NISP partners believe it is important to focus priority actions in accomplishing four strategic objectives:

- i) Establish and coordinate Grenada's Protected Area Committee,
- ii) Provide assistance to the Fisheries division in revamping their Marine Protected Area Program. In particular establish sustainable financial mechanisms for MPAs by exploring the possibility of establishing a Marine Protected Areas Trust,
- iii) Engage protected area management agencies in regional learning networks,
- iv) Build capacity for fundraising, proposal writing and project management

In this context, the Conservancy will support the country by seconding a full time staff within government that will be responsible for coordinating the NISP and ensure the implementation of the Program of Work on Protected Areas. This will build the momentum needed for

sustained action and prepare the country for funding opportunities beyond this initial period.

DISCUSSION

Building conservation partnerships and coalitions is not perceived as the golden bullet for managing complex conservation challenges. However, it is believed there are considerable advantages in entering into collaborative approaches. Improved technical assistance, creation of structures for exchange of skills and knowledge, avoidance of duplication of efforts, facilitating solutions for large complex problems, and increased access to financial and human resources (e.g. leveraging funds and in-kind contributions) have been cited as some of the more direct benefits of partnership building (Fisher et al. 2001). However, there are also many skeptics that question the value of these approaches. Critics refer to the tremendous amount of time and money these processes need, and argue that this time and money could be better spent in developing effective site based activities. Critics also argue that the 'common denominator' result and the need to compromise many times leave partners unfulfilled. Finally, participation of multiple organizations may lead to greater uncertainty in project management and delays in their implementation due to the need to get approval and consensus among partners (Fisher et al. 2001).

Although it is still too soon to evaluate whether the National Implementation Support Partnership in Grenada has been effective in the implementation of the Program of Work on Protected Areas, there are some successes and lessons that can be synthesize about the process so far.

NISP Partners — Even though Grenada's NISP doesn't currently include a broad constituency of partners it includes a very good representation of the government agencies that directly and, more importantly, *indirectly* have an impact in the management and establishment of protected areas in the country. The coordination effort put in place so far has increased awareness among different agencies, their roles, current projects and perceived future activities in issues related to protected areas, and land and marine use management activities. One should not underestimate the power of having a well coordinated group of government agencies working with one common agenda. Moreover, starting with only a small group of government agencies is not necessarily a bad thing. This provides the scope and time for streamlining working relationships and 'getting to know' each other before expanding the coalition with new and complementary partners.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the willingness to expand this partnership exists. There is a consensus among current NISP partners that the amount and type of work needed to strengthen the system is such that there is need for additional support, not only from other ministries, but also from civil society, especially in-country and

international NGOs and universities. To this end, current NISP partners have agreed that the University of St. George's and RARE, institutions that are already working with some of the government agencies, are natural partners and therefore should soon become signatories of this agreement.

Building Trust — History demonstrates that the concerns originally expressed by the NGO sector regarding the dangers of partnering with a big international NGO or research institutions are not unfounded and should not be loathed. Although procedures can be established to avoid overburdening and power grabbing situations, it is important to recognize the coalition will only operate effectively if there is trust among partners, transparency in its operations and acceptance of the goals the group is trying to achieve. The Grenada NISP example clearly states that the goal of this partnership is to implement the Program of Work on Protected Areas. However, given the fact that The Nature Conservancy has a relatively short track record of working in Grenada, it will be important to give time to build trust among this small group of partners. Demonstrating consistency of message and actions, managing expectations and being aware of the capacity (e.g. time, technical, funding) of each partnering agency are crucial factors to have in mind during these early stages of implementation.

Government Ownership — Since last February, TNC has acted as a catalytic facilitator that jump-started the NISP and the development and implementation of Grenada's Program of Work on Protected Areas. However, this partnership has since reached a level of maturity in which it is important for Grenada to fully take the lead in the facilitation and coordination of this effort. The government of Grenada is, after all, the signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity, not TNC. The Nature Conservancy will remain a partner and support the country with technical and financial resources for the coordination and implementation of the PoW. However, TNC should not necessarily take a leading role in the process. With the support of TNC, it is crucial that the government takes ownership of the process and advocates it before international donor agencies. To this end, TNC suggested that the group focuses initial efforts in hiring a national coordinator with a strong track record in protected area management in Grenada. This person would focus its attention in the coordination of the NISP and would act as a liaison to other efforts and institutions developing projects that impact protected areas. Special care should be given to coordination with the Sustainable Development Council, with the National Environmental Management Strategy Effort, with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States OPALL project (Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods Project) and with funding agencies and fundraisers.

CONCLUSION

In the past year, The Nature Conservancy collaborated with the Government of Grenada in translating the Global Program of Work on Protected Areas to Grenada's reality. This led to the drafting of an ambitious Program of Work on Protected Areas and the development of the National Implementation Support Partnership between TNC and several ministries within government. This program of work identifies current and future activities that partners consider high priorities to strengthen the protected area system, and also includes very pressing deliverables as specified under the Global Program of Work on Protected Areas.

Grenada's National Implementation Support Program is designed to bring together those with a clear role in protected areas, into a forum where leverage can be increased, cross-agency projects designed, and duplication of efforts minimized. It is expected that this partnership will better position Grenada to receive multilateral funding allocated to protected area systems in the near future. It is also expected that by structuring Grenada's protected area needs under an international accepted framework, such as the PoW, it will be easier for funding agencies to allocate resources more strategically to the country. Finally, it is also expected that this forum will create the enabling conditions needed to attract the attention of other international NGOs, universities and other partners not presently working in Grenada.

It would be naïve to think that the road ahead will be smooth. There will be as many successes as there certainly will be failures. However, Grenada can now clearly articulate its conservation needs to the international conservation community and demonstrate that it is committed in doing its part to help preserve the planet's biodiversity.

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