

CSO CASE STUDY 14

Title: A Policy for the Management of National Parks and Protected Areas in Jamaica

Country: Jamaica

Author: Michelle Harris

Introduction

In 1987 the National Resource Conservation Division, the main environmental management agency in Jamaica published a report on the state of the environment. This report, known as the Jamaican Country Environmental Profile, highlighted deteriorating environmental conditions and emphasized the need for the government to implement policies and legislation to counter these negative trends. One of the issues that was highlighted in the report was the urgent need to implement new legislation and strengthen existing ones for more effective management of Jamaica's National Parks and Protected areas.

In an attempt to address these issues the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to implement a project (PARC) to establish a Protected Areas Management System which would form the basis for the National Policy on Protected areas.

A Green paper on National Parks and Protected Areas presented the main issues involved in establishing protected areas and proposed policies for dealing with those issues. Fourteen public meetings held in parishes, island-wide, as well as meetings targeting government, non-government (NGO) and donor organisations facilitated a public review of the document. Copies of the Green paper were made available at parish libraries, Parish Councils and other government offices across Jamaica. Subsequent discussions and comments formed the basis of revisions to the document. In November 1997, upon approval by Parliament and Cabinet, the revised document officially became the Policy for Jamaica's System of Protected Areas

Based on the new policy two National Parks were established: the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park and the Montego Bay Marine Park and management of these two parks were delegated to two NGOs.

The type and extent of policy change

The National Policy on Parks and Protected Areas was the first environmental policy in Jamaica which involved collaboration between government and non-government organisations in policy formulation and implementation.

It reflected a change in policy practice and legislation regarding the approach to environmental protection and management in Jamaica. For the first time in the history of environmental policy in the country, management of the environment had been delegated to civil society.

Explanation of the Policy Change

a) Political Context

There are three main factors which influenced the new policy:

First, in previous years the Government had established the environment as a national priority by creating the Natural Resources Conservation Division (NRCDD) after the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and continuing with the enactment of the 1991 law establishing the Natural Resources Conservation Authority as the lead environmental management agency in the country. In addition to this, the government of Jamaica prepared a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) which documented the major environmental problems facing the country and the appropriate policy framework, institutional arrangements, legal instruments, strategies, programs and projects to address and mitigate these problems.

The Political environment was therefore favourable to the idea of sustainable development, sustainable environmental management and using participatory and decentralized means.

Second, as a development partner to the Government of Jamaica, USAID had already bought into the idea of decentralized approaches to environmental management and therefore their contribution to the design of the PARC project strongly emphasized the involvement of NGOS.

Finally, the government had recognized that environmental NGOs were playing a significant role in environmental management and conservation in Jamaica, especially in the area of advocacy and public education. Additionally NGOs had demonstrated their capabilities in developing and managing environmental and conservation projects so they had proven their capacity to handle this additional responsibility.

This policy change can be viewed as part of a process and was therefore linked to three things. The changing ideology about environmental management, sustainability and inclusive development; the role of the international development agency USAID in translating that into a practical example as in the PARC project; along with the consistent performance of environmental NGOs in management of environmental projects and advocating for change in environmental management over a number of years.

b) The Ways Civil Society affected the policy change

Although the policy change was mainly driven by the Government, civil society had a role to play in influencing the outcome of the policy change.

It was not involved in the design of the PARC project. Nonetheless, their direct involvement in terms of the management of the two national parks is perhaps the most significant way in which CSOs influenced the policy process by demonstrating the principle and practice of the co-management approach to natural resource management and the value of partnerships in the environmental management.

Based on the earlier work done by NGOs such as the well-established Jamaica Conservation Development Trust (JCDD) and the National Environmental Societies Trust (NEST) environmental NGOs were perceived by the government as having a good understanding of the environmental problems and their solutions and the ability to galvanise support from the communities to address environmental issues.

However, through collaboration, CSOs were able to influence the formulation and implementation of the environmental policies. This involved active engagement with the policy making process in terms of contributing to the ideas for the policy and galvanizing public support for it.

c) The nature of research based evidence

Evidence for this new policy came from two sources The Jamaican Environmental Profile of 1987 and the USAID-GOJ PARC project.

First, in 1987 the NRCD published the Jamaican Country Environmental profile which was a report highlighting the rapid acceleration of environmental degradation in Jamaica and the need to improve environmental management systems.

The second source of research based evidence came from the successful design and implementation of the PARC project. The philosophy of the PARC project was based on the modern concept of conservation. Therefore, acknowledged in the design of the project was the need to involve local communities and NGOs in the sustainable management of the park's resources, in addition to collecting reliable environmental data to guide the protection and sustained use of these natural resources. The pilot showed that NGOs could be good managers of environmental resources

d) External factors

The process generated by the Stockholm Conference on the Environment in 1972 culminated in 1975 in the formation of the Natural Resources Conservation Department (NRCD) within the Ministry of Mining and Natural Resources. The NRCD became the umbrella environmental management agency with a broad mandate to protect environmental quality

The 1990s saw Jamaica joining the rest of the world in embracing the concept of 'sustainable development'. This was demonstrated in the passing of the NRCA Act and the policies, institutional arrangement, programmes and projects which followed.

The 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) in Brazil, like the Stockholm Conference twenty years earlier, was another milestone. Out of it came Agenda 21, a comprehensive blueprint for the global and local actions required for the transition to sustainable development. Agenda 21 help set the framework for the Jamaica National Environmental Action Plan (JANEAP).

Prior to the formulation of this policy there were no prevailing policies that comprehensively protected ecosystem diversity, species diversity and genetic diversity. However in becoming a Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993, Jamaica bound itself to implement specific obligations under the Convention.

The role that USAID played as an International Development Organization in Jamaica was central in influencing the nature of the new policy, with the PARC project including the NGO component. Based on the evidence of the case it is doubtful that if this intervention were not made on the part of the USAID then the essential character of new policy would not have featured NGOs in this way.

Conclusion and lessons learnt

This case study is a good example of early attempts at collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations in environmental policy formulation and implementation in Jamaica. NGOs were able to provide the blue print for the policy through a practical demonstration of the management of National Parks and Protected Areas in the PARC project. It is also an excellent demonstration of the value of decentralized management of natural resources.

The outcomes of the policy have been that the legal mechanism and the related institutional arrangements have had a positive effect on Jamaica's natural environment and have advanced efforts to protect our natural resources and biodiversity. It has enabled the active participation of civil society in the process of policy implementation.

Some lessons learnt are:

- Environmental Policy formulation and implementation is only effective when all stakeholders are involved in the process
- Environmental NGOs can make a significant impact on the attempts at environmental protection and natural resource conservation.
- Research based evidence is useful to highlight the dynamics of the participatory approach to environmental management.
- Strategic partnerships are critical for sustainable development

Sources of documentation

- Jamaica Citizen Management of Public Parks in Jamaica <http://www.ispnet.org/Documents/jamaica.htm>
- See also: FY 1997 Development Assistance: Jamaica <http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp97/countries/jm.htm>
- See also: Laleta Davis-Mattis: Jamaica's commitment to the conservation and management of natural resources: Ten years in retrospect. http://www.nrca.org/legal/discussion_10Y_in_retro.htm
- http://nature.org/event/files/jamaica_nisp_factsheet.pdf
- State of the Environment Report, Jamaica 1995
- <http://www.nrca.org/publications/SoE/SOE/soe.htm>
- Case Study of the Blue and John Crow National Parks in Jamaica Christine Scott Dunkley and Shermaine Barrett 2001 CANARI Technical Report N° 282 <http://www.canari.org/dunkley.pdf>
- Jamaica Conservation Development Trust
- <http://64.45.40.146/pages/management.htm>

About the Author

Michelle Harris is a Phd student at the University of the West Indies Mona where she focuses on Non-governmental Organizations and their impact on National Planning and Implementation for Sustainable Development.