Implementing & Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in the Caribbean: The Role of the Ocean
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Implementing and Monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals in the Caribbean: The Role of the Ocean

WORKSHOP STORY

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A collaborative NASA-funded project of *Old Dominion University (ODU)*s[1] *Mitigation and Adaptation Research Institute (MARI)*[2] and *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)* aims at identifying and articulating the knowledge needs for the implementation and monitoring of the *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*[3] in Caribbean *Small Island Developing States (SIDSs)* and then matching these needs to knowledge, tools, and data. In 2015, the United Nations agreed on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the "*Road to Dignity*" as the former Secretary General of the United Nations called it. This agenda aims towards seventeen SDGs. Worldwide, many governmental and non-governmental organizations are strongly engaged in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and the World Bank, other financial organizations, and the business world are increasingly focusing on the SDGs. Making progress to the SDGs poses problems to society that are difficult or impossible to solve. Knowledge on how to make progress towards the SDGs is incomplete and contradicting. Reaching the SDGs even on a local level involves the whole of society and making progress requires a rethinking of economy. Moreover, the goals are strongly interconnected and there are many interactions between the individual goals that are variable across different economic, social, and cultural settings. Dr. Hans-Peter Plag, Director of MARI and the Principal Investigator of the project underlined that "*the governments cannot implement the SDGs without the people, and they cannot implement them for the people. They have to implement them with the people. This necessitates bringing the SDGs to the people in a way that demonstrates the benefits of the 2030 Agenda to the people.*"

With the goal of finding ways to bring the benefits of the SDGs to the people and to connect the policy makers to experts that can help with this, a workshop on "*Implementing and Monitoring the SDGs in the Caribbean: The Role of the Ocean*" was held in January 2018 in Saint Vincent. This workshop, which was co-sponsored by the U.K. *Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme (CME)* Programme[4] and Tiwah[5], brought together 42 participants from sixteen countries representing a wide range of stakeholders. The workshop facilitated a dialogue between the governments and people of the Caribbean SIDS, regional organizations, and experts about ways to facilitate progress with knowledge. One participant remarked that "*this workshop benefited from having a very diverse audience comprised of many different organizations, private, public, and governmental. One of the great benefits was that it was not overwhelmed by one type of representative.*" Dr. Julian Roberts, Blue Resources, U.K., remarked that "by bringing together a diverse audience of politicians, senior decision makers, scientists and academics from across and beyond the Wider Caribbean Region, this workshop was an important input into a broader understanding of the interconnectivity of the different SDGs and how they support the development of an ocean-based economy in the Caribbean."

The workshop utilized a design-based approach to participatory modeling promoted by MARI, which starts with a community agreement on the challenges and the goals that are to be reached, and identifies the knowledge needed to make progress toward these goals. Agreeing on specific targets to reach and indicators to measure progress provides a basis to identify those social, economic and environmental variables that need to be monitored, and to specify requirements for the monitoring. Finally, these requirements can then be matched with existing observations and data products and gaps can be identified where this is not possible.

Opening the workshop, Hon. Saboto Caesar, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Rural Transformation, Industry and Labour of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, noted that the workshop was about solving problems that many in the SIDS had nothing to do with. He stated, there was often a disconnect between the theory and implementation, "*so we need to come up with relevant solutions, grounded in practical actions. A way to do this is to implement SDGs in a small space, a geospace for SDGs to prove we can do it over a large space.*" He made clear that this is not a state-based but grass-roots effort of intervention. Keynotes in the opening session underlined that for making progress towards the SDGs, a transdisciplinary effort is required across all societal and disciplinary boundaries at all levels from local to global. Dr. Plag voiced that a core principle for bringing the SDGs to the people and engaging them is to create and change consciousness through integrated information. He said "*for a geospace that can create ownership for the SDGs in local communities, integrating Earth observations with socio-economic data and tools to derive the urgently needed evidence-based knowledge from the data is fundamental in this effort.*"

Bringing together many groups that often dont interact initiated many new human relationships and collaboration initiatives. Joseph Smith Abbott, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Labour of the Government of the Virgin Islands found that the exchange related to the advancement of the planning and implementation of the SDG 14: "*Life below water*" between governments, the scientific community and civil society

[1] See http://www.odu.edu.
[2] See http://www.mari-odu.org.
[3] See http://www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs.
[4] See https://www.gov.uk/guidance/commonwealth-marine-economies-programme.
[5] See http://www.tiwah.com.

Figure 1. A field trip introduced the participants to on-the-ground challenges in the designated geospace, which often are caused by problems originating far outside the Caribbean. For example, Sans Souci beach on Saint Vincent's east costs is a major ecologically valuable nesting beach for leatherback turtles. The beach had been cleaned only two months before the visit and plastics and other waste from all over the world had reassembled in a short time.

was extremely useful and timely. In particular, he stated that "*very few opportunities through fora are afforded where their distinct agendas, knowledge and understanding of the issues facing each community and a genuine search for the manner in which gaps can be bridged are convened. The workshop was successful in advancing a space for the refinement of the science-policy space and its ability to transform decision-making to solve common problems in the management of the shared marine space that belongs to the Caribbean Region.*" Christopher Corbin of the United Nations Environment Programme located in Jamaica pointed out that "*the United Nations Agencies have been asked to provide support to Caribbean countries to achieve the SDGs. We also need to ensure that our programmes, projects and activities align with those goals. The workshop offered a unique opportunity to identify regional needs and priorities, relative strengths of each agency and most importantly potential partnerships for implementation at local level.*" Dr. Emily Smail representing the Blue Planet Initiative noted that ""*the workshop provided valuable linkages to science and policy in the Caribbean. These linkages will support novel real world solutions for sustainable development to be developed and implemented in St. Vincent and the broader region.*"

Danielle Evanson, Programme Manager, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Resilience, and Lorenzo Harewood, Technical Administrative Associate, both at United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Barbados and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), found that "*the workshop presented an innovative and participatory forum for engagement on diverse issues related to SDG implementation in the region. The experiences shared by participants and the technical capabilities that exist within other organisations aligned to the attainment of SDG 14, have provided an expanded knowledge base from which UNDP intends to build partnerships to support countries and communities in their sustainable development aspirations. The workshop has therefore initiated the process of facilitating a closer collaboration amongst development agencies, national authorities, NGOs and other actors and beneficiaries.*"

Vaughn Martin, Director of Serenity Dive in Saint Vincent, who had not attended any such workshop before, said

Figure 2. The workshop facilitated small-group deliberations through all levels from representatives of local NGOs and businesses, academia and United Nations agencies to the Minister level. Hon. Minister Caesar (left) is engaged in an effort to match knowledge needs to existing products.

"*being at the workshop was a great eye opener for me. There was a lot of information given that I was never aware of that existed that would aid in my continued work that I do with the environment and especially the lionfish. I am quite excited about the relationships built as we move forward with a common goal. I was very happy to be part of this workshop and look forward to be part of many more.*"

Dr. James Lord, director of *Sustainable Grenadines Inc. (SusGre)* commented on the role of the workshop for a local NGO and said "*A world without poverty, where everyone gets a fair shot at success and happiness, and where humanity satisfies its needs while protecting life on Earth. It is amazing that not only has this ambitious vision been agreed by the nations of the world, but we have a road map for how to get there by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals are worth getting behind - and the world needs all of us to get on board. SusGren is on board and this workshop helped us to do more by giving me a deeper understanding of the SDGs and connecting me with scientists, policy-makers and development practitioners from across the Caribbean and beyond.*" Sade Deane National Coordinator, Caribbean Youth Environment Network in Barbados, said "*The workshop was able to emphasize the importance of getting valuable information to stakeholders. Examples and models were presented to help inform and understand the linkages for participants in their own respective fields. However, each participant must ensure the information is engaging, widely educating and making stakeholders awareof more sustainable results.*"

A key element of the discussion was the implementation of the Blue Economy, which seeks to establish a sustainable use of marine resources as a component to the economies of the SIDS. Adopting a Blue Economy was seen as aligned with targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Dr Roberts emphasized that "a growing number of Caribbean countries are exploring national development strategies that are underpinned by ocean resources. As development of marine areas increases in the future, conflict between competing interests can also be expected to increase. It will be difficult to resolve such conflicts without a more comprehensive and integrated approach to marine planning and decision-making, which recognises the interactions and the interdependent nature of the various systems on islands, and, therefore, the inherent interconnections between the SDGs." Mr. Corbin added that "*as a result of their small size, Caribbean islands face unique challenges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated manner. The workshop enabled sharing of experiences among government, civil society and UN agencies. We not only identified our challenges but opportunities for real action.*"

The deliberations at the workshop resulted in a number of findings and recommendations of relevance for the sci-

Figure 3. During a meeting of a workshop delegation with Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Prime Minister presented to Joseph Smith Abbott (to the left of the Prime Minister), Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Labour of the Government of the Virgin Islands the first of 3,000 soursop trees that his government is providing to the Virgin Islands in support of hurricane recovery. Hon. Minister Saboto Caeser (second from the right) has been closely collaborating with Dr Plag and the project team in developing the concept for the geospace and facilitating the diverse workshop participation.

ence communities, and these recommendations will be utilized in follow-on activities. To feature a few, Mr. Corbin expressed his opinion that "*achieving the SDG Goals requires bold thinking and even bolder action. The workshop facilitated discussion among academics, government agencies, private sector, non-governmental agencies and UN bodies. We are all working together towards common, practical solutions.*" Many of the common threats faced by the SIDS are also threads to the US coasts. They include sea level rise, increasing sea surface temperature, ocean acidification, coral reef bleaching, micro-plastic pollution, mangrove and sea grass bed disappearance, coastal erosion, invasive species (in particular Sargassum and Lionfish), damage from cruise ships/intensive tourism, water and terrestrial pollution, land reclamation and conversion, ocean floor and sand mining, onshore development, lack of fish stock agreements and enforcing of those that exist and a general decline in health of marine waters and ecosystems. Government ministries across the region are largely operating in silos, and among the SIDS of the Caribbean, there is limited capacity and data sharing leading to a lack of evidence-based and data-based support for policy development.

Rose Osinde Alabaster representing the GEOGLOWS Initiative of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) noted that "*there was definitely a request for more scenario-based modelling approaches that should be more available to inform decision-making including scenarios, demonstrating what could be done. Given that the states have different national contexts, establishing the baselines on the current monitoring efforts would be of vital importance for identifying gaps and for more contextual monitoring responses.*" Dr. Douglas Cripe, Work Program Coordinator at the Secretariat for GEO added that "*a great potential for citizen science exists, especially with respect to in-situ monitoring of the oceans.*"

During a meeting of a delegation of participants with Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minster of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Prime Minister characterized his countrys role in the 2030 Agenda implementation by saying that "*we want to be the voice, specifically of the Small Island Developing States of the world*" and acknowledge that the workshop initiative was supporting this role.

In the closing of the workshop, Hon. Minister Caesar emphasized that "*our task is to draft a 2030 roadmap with the SDG achievement our sole target*" and urged the workshop participant to support the full development of the "*geospace for SDGs*" as a model for the world. The concept of this geospace played an important role in the workshop and the first implementation on an area on the east cost of Saint Vincent with about 11,000 people is now a focus of follow-on activities. As stated above, a core principle for bringing the SDGs to the people and engaging them is to create and change consciousness through integrated information. For a geospace that can create ownership for the SDGs in local communities, integrating Earth observations with socio-economic data and tools to derive the urgently needed evidence-based knowledge from the data is fundamental. GEO can play an important role in this.

Figure 4. On the last day of the workshop, some of the participants had a chance to taste the invasive lionfish. Workshop participant Vaughan Martin, director of Serenity Dive, who made the lionfish available to the hotel's chef, said that "*we have to eat them to beat them.*" Those who tasted the fish generally were very pleased.

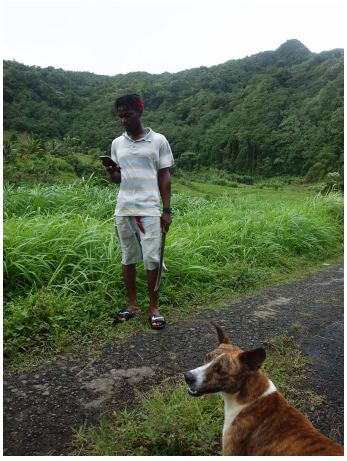

Figure 5. The population of the designated geospace for SDGs on the east coast of Saint Vincent uses many traditional techniques in a rural environment while being connected to information through modern equipment, with the latter opening the opportunity to change consciousness through integrated information.

Figure 6. A population of roughly 11,000 people lives in the designated geospace for SDGs on the east coast of Saint Vincent. The area combines close to pristine environments with agricultural areas and spread-out settlements and a coastal area. Off the coast is a reef rich in fish.

Acronyms

CME Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme

MARI Mitigation and Adaptation Research Institute

NOAA National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

ODU Old Dominion University

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

SIDS Small Island Developing State

SusGre Sustainable Grenadines Inc.