

# National Environmental Management Strategies - Guidance For Improved Environmental Management In The OECS Member States<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The central challenge for environmental management in the OECS States is to ensure levels of environmental quality that maximise opportunity for economic and social development for present and future generations, without compromising the integrity and sustainability of biological diversity, environmental and cultural assets.

According to a study commissioned by the OECS, the economic benefits of maintaining high levels of environmental quality are among the highest of any component of the OECS economies, estimated to total in excess of \$1,614 million in 2000 for the OECS Member States collectively<sup>2</sup> This amount represents approximately 25 percent of the collective annual GNP of the OECS States.

Cognizant of the fact that their achievement of economic growth, international competitiveness and improved quality of life are largely dependent on high levels of environmental quality the Governments of the OECS Member States embarked on the formulation of National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS).

The NEMS is intended to provide the enabling framework for environmental management by identifying a process by which the MS can better manage their environmental resources. It provides direction and guidance for planning decisions so that in MS efforts towards sustainable development, wise environmental management decisions will be made, therefore reducing the ad hoc manner in which environmental management is currently being undertaken. In order to integrate environment in the MS, the NEMS establishes links with existing national environmental strategies, and programmes as well as those in relevant sectors of economic and social development.

It formulates national environmental objectives and identifies actions to meet those objectives, indicating clearly what needs to be done, and by whom. It also spells out indicators by which the progress of environmental management following the NEMS will be monitored and measured. The NEMS are to be reviewed within 5 years following their completion. Implementation plans spanning two years were developed for each of the NEMS. The first year plan was detailed and the second year plan was broadly defined. The expectation being that the NEMS implementation would be assessed at least annually. Indicative budgets were included in the workplans.

The OECS Governments conviction and decision to prepare NEMS is in accord with the Principles of the *St. George's Declaration Of Principles For Environmental Sustainability In The OECS(SGD)* signed by the MS in April 2001. It also complements all relevant international agreements and commitments to which the individual MS is a party, including the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the Millennium Declaration, Mauritius Strategy and the various global and regional conventions and agreements in the field of the environment.

## 2. Outline of the NEMS Development Process

The NEMS were prepared through a series of national and community consultations over a three and a half-year period. These consultations were undertaken largely with the objective of determining public priorities for future environmental management initiatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) comprises of Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, Commonwealth of Dominica, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada.

<sup>2</sup> "Economic Opportunities Associated With The Environment In The Member States Of The Organisation Of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)" prepared by H. Jack Ruitenbeek and Cynthia Carter for OECS Natural Resources Management Unit (NRMU), 2000, and available from OECS-Environment and Sustainable development U nit (ESDU).

In order to facilitate the NEMS preparation process and to help build ownership, Government approved multi-sectoral steering committees were established to guide the NEMS process. Terms of reference and work-plans for the functioning of the steering committees were also developed. These steering committees were represented by public sector, private sector, community based organizations and non-governmental organizations that play significant roles in the management of the environment.

The MS also recognised that effective communications played a central role in the NEMS preparation and implementation process. As a result, public awareness/ communications strategies were developed to provide the framework through which broad acceptance of the NEMS is achieved throughout the range of stakeholder interests in the individual member states.

Prior to establishing strategic directions for the NEMS, review of current environmental obligations, mandates, documents and activities underway in each MS was carried out, in order to establish the nature and extent of activities relevant to the NEMS. During the reviews, much effort was expended to find consensus on critical environmental and developmental issues and to obtain the active participation of broad areas of the civil society and the public services.

As far as possible local counterpart consultants were utilised to focus on key elements of the NEMS preparation such as the programme/document review, the awareness/communication and to provide support for community consultations.

Currently, all but three of the OECS Member states have formally approved their NEMS (Anguilla, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, St Vincent and the Grenadines and St Kitts and Nevis). The British Virgin Islands developed a NEAP which serves the purposes of a NEMS. Two of the three are awaiting cabinet approval (St Lucia and Montserrat) and one is still a draft document (Commonwealth of Dominica).

Currently, the OECS MS are focusing on implementing their NEMS. Implementation of the NEMS is defined by the requirements of the document itself. A number of agencies will be involved in its implementation. Some may carry out activities as part of their own separate programme of activities, while others will be involved in collaborative activities.

The NEMS is a planning document and therefore not static. Its ambition is to become a “living document” that is used to guide policy formulation and programming in the environmental sector, but that is also modified and improved over time, as more experience is being gained, as results are being obtained and measured and as new lessons are being learned. Smooth implementation of its activities will, however, be dependent on the capacities of the various stakeholders and budgetary considerations, as well as the fact that a number of activities that will be spoken to in the NEMS may already be underway. Implementation of the NEMS should therefore be evolutionary, not revolutionary, if the changes that are clearly required to ensure sound environmental management in the OECS MS are to last.

### **3. Major Challenges – NEMS Development and Implementation**

A number of challenges were encountered in developing the NEMS, some of which can affect the successful implementation of the NEMS and therefore need to be addressed. The following summarises some of the major challenges which arose and outlines lessons learned and approaches that could enhance the performance of the NEMS.

#### **➤ Timeliness Of The NEMS Preparation**

MS are engaged in a plethora of environmental management activities some by virtue of the national obligations of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs); requests made by regional agencies; others by national responsibilities. It was anticipated that following the signing of the SGD, preparation of the NEMS was a priority for MS. In most MS, preparation of NEMS was either delayed, or the process once begun was protracted. The stop-start nature of the process resulted in the general reduction of a sense of urgency and motivation, turnover of persons leading the initiative, and a loss of sense of importance of the results. As the financial resources available to prepare the NEMS were coming to an end, some MS

had to “rush” to prepare their NEMS. In some instances, the short timeframe did not allow for adequate discussion of action priorities, applicable strategies, and stakeholder-specific inputs.

#### *Lessons Learnt*

There is need to ensure ease of transfer and continuity whenever there are changes with arrangements or persons in country charged with the responsibility for leading the NEMS process including coordinating implementation. This would have minimized the undue prolonged periods experienced with the NEMS preparation.

#### ➤ **Inter-sectoral support**

Implementation of various aspects of the NEMS is the direct responsibility of several ministries or departments and not that of the NGOs or private sector or community based organizations. Therefore more effort needed to be spent to gain the support of key departments within several targeted ministries. Interpersonal relationships appear to play key role in the support ministries and departments provide each other.

Even where agencies responsible for environment were seen as the lead agency for NEMS preparation and coordination of NEMS implementation, it was not clear how these agencies would be given sufficient clout to ensure responsiveness of the various other ministries in discharging their obligations under the NEMS. In other words, the environment agencies have been given responsibilities without the required authority to fulfill them.

#### *Lessons Learnt*

In order to gain broader support for its implementation, the NEMS must continue to be promoted as a broad based mechanism for integrating existing and proposed environmental priorities and activities of all relevant departments/ Ministries, with clear benefits to individual Departments/Ministries. Benefits to communities and private sectors should also be highlighted. To achieve this, the linkages to issues such as planning and development, sustainability, goods and services from natural resources and livelihoods need to be addressed. Additionally, Agencies with responsibility to coordinate environment need a legislative framework within which to carry out their duties.

#### ➤ **Human Capacity**

In some of the MS, the focal point for many environmental issues is essentially a one-person operation, with responsibilities to coordinate many things but with very little resources to accomplish the work required. Most departments seem over-burdened with work, have small operational budgets and operate on immediate issues, often dictated by senior decision makers/politicians; consequently there is little time for serious planning or addressing broader issues. With the small number of staff access to required information was at times extremely difficult when relevant person was unavailable for extended periods of time.

#### *Lessons Learnt*

Even with the best intentions, single person operations are unable to accomplish the required duties without support of a coordinating team. Where a longstanding and proactive coordinating mechanism existed, NEMS development was very dynamic. Technical and financial support for sustained implementation of the NEMS in the MS necessary given the limited national resources applied directly to environmental management.

#### ➤ **Communication, Public Awareness and Commitment**

Communicating the NEMS was deemed to be critical and the efforts to convey the purpose of the NEMS and to provide openness to the preparation process were commendable in some instances. Even where a high public profile of the NEMS was achieved and there seemed to be support for what was being said about the NEMS, the implications of going through the process and subsequent implementation of the NEMS was not fully understood. Steering committee members were to facilitate intra-agency dialogue on the NEMS to augment the extent to which public sector agencies and NGOs understood and accepted their role in the NEMS preparation and subsequent implementation. In the absence of these internal agency discussions, the commitment towards the NEMS was not as strong as expected.

### *Lessons Learnt*

More time than anticipated was required to ensure that the implications of having a NEMS were fully internalized by key agencies including environment agencies. Future communication and awareness efforts concerning the NEMS need to be intense, recurrent and sustainable without being redundant. It will be necessary for national agencies to integrate as far as possible their environmental public awareness and education programmes to demonstrate the linkages across sectors more tangibly to the target groups.

Steering Committees established to support NEMS implementation need to be chaired by persons with sufficient stature and political clout to engender and enforce cooperation from the relevant institutions in the different sectors.

Generally, it must be noted however, that the collaborative approach promoted by OECS-ESDU in facilitating the NEMS development allowed the individual MS to shape the NEMS to fit the local reality. MS were given some guidance concerning the process for NEMS development but had total flexibility within a specified budget, to modify the process to ensure that the MS received the greatest benefit. This increased the local support for the initiative.

## **4. The Way Forward**

To facilitate NEMS implementation the following activities will be undertaken by OECS-ESDU. Efforts will be made to establish linkages with other agencies engaged in complementary activities within the OECS MS.

1. All of the NEMS speak to the need for national environmental legislation to provide an appropriate legal framework for improved coordination of environmental management functions in the MS. This has also been identified as a priority area. As a result, frame harmonised environmental legislation will be developed and drafted which MS can tailor to suit their national requirements. The legislation will also serve to rationalise, streamline and consolidate the roles and responsibilities of the many agencies involved in environmental management.

OECS with support from UNEP is also developing frame model law relating to biodiversity. The objective of the undertaking is to develop a holistic and integrated model law that implements at least four MEAs (CBD, CITES, CMS, and the Ramsar Convention), relating to the management and protection of biological diversity.

Both activities will be well coordinated since there are many synergies, as well as logical divisions.

2. "Mainstreaming" of environmental management must be through the establishment of appropriate structures necessary to ensure that sustainable development policy formulation, planning and management becomes an integral part of government. To build on the institutional assessment carried out for the Windward island OECS MS, integrated institutional frameworks to provide the basis for a coordinated and environmentally sound approach to development will be undertaken in selected MS.

3. A public awareness and advocacy programme is being developed with the Caribbean Institute of Mass Communications (CARIMAC) of UWI Mona Campus and the MS. The programme will be designed to ensure that their mandates and programs geared towards environmental sustainability are enacted, funded, implemented and maintained. Attempts will therefore be made to influence the political climate, public perceptions, policy decisions and funding determinations in order to improve environmental planning and management. This involves not only work to promote a defined solution, but also to counter unacceptable proposals.

4. Collaborate with UNEP CAR/RCU NPA initiative with a view to strengthening the long term financing for the implementation of the OECS NEMS.