



ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION NETWORKS (REIN) AND DEVELOPMENT OF A REIN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Caribbean Media Consultants was contracted by Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA)/Caribbean Regional Environmental Programme (CREP) to undertake an Assessment of Regional Environmental Information Networks (REIN) and to develop a REIN Implementation Plan in the Caribbean. This exercise involved identifying and evaluating the means, needs, roles, activities and status of a range of environmental information networks and key users of these networks within identified Caribbean States.

An Environmental Information Network (EIN) was considered to be a facility which has been established to transmit environmental information (or any related information/data) among a number of individuals or parties and employing mass media, web-based networks, electronic mail and teleconferencing methods of dissemination and information exchange. A study, yielding both qualitative and quantitative data was conducted to gather information on the existing REIN and user needs. This study also provided important feedback on the principal elements of an ideal REIN. Such responses, together with an assessment of the performance of the existing networks, generated a model which the consultants believe will both optimise existing capabilities and provide long-term sustainability for the core activities of the REIN moderating facility.

Our examination of the prevailing conditions for the exchange of environmental information indicated the indispensability of a strengthened REIN. Such a network would invariably constitute a conglomeration of networks and would provide the infrastructure for the strengthening of concentric links between such networks and serve as a conduit for the channelling of available resources to facilitate their future development.

The vision identified for the REIN envisages “strengthened regional, national and local community information and communication systems committed to continuously enhancing access and use of environmental information within the Caribbean through an effective REIN structure, and to demonstrate the benefits of integrating protected areas management with the promotion of sustainable livelihoods.”

Participating stakeholders would all have a stake in the enterprise as a consequence of the sharing of resources and the ability to facilitate an efficient flow of information between local and regional focal points. The network would be moderated by an entity with regional and international reach and with experience in the effective dissemination of environmental information. It must also, as well, be positioned to ensure sustainable support for the network.

It was determined that the CCA was best placed to serve this function, but that several intermediate steps needed to be first undertaken, having regard to limited resources and the need to more firmly establish the bona fides of the CCA as a potential moderator of the strengthened REIN.

The best available option appears to be the development of a “niche” or specialised network with specific focus on the CREP project to promote better environmental quality at selected demonstration sites. It would have as a primary focus the promotion of Integrated Protected Area Management Systems. The strategy for achieving such objectives would revolve around a menu of interventions including, but not restricted to: the equipping of all stakeholders to participate fully in electronic communication and to provide media-focused communications products; the facilitation of more systematic contacts between REIN stakeholders and the regional mass media; the routinising of contacts between Protected Area Managers; the free and ready access to progress reports and details on Amenity Area projects; the development of an electronic database on Amenity Area development in the region; the equipping of the network moderator to store and provide ready access to communications material provided by stakeholders.

Eventually, it is envisaged that such a Protected Area Network (PAN) would provide a basis for the development of an environmental management network moderated by a Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RCM) which reports to a PAN Board of Directors, chaired by the CCA and including no more than six other representative organisations. Activities that have the potential to provide a bridge between the confines of a PAN and the vast mandate of a full REIN would include a programme of contacts and direct encounters with the expanded network together with agencies into whose developmental agendas ought to be inserted matters of environmental management. These include the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED), the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) and the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery (RNM).

It is expected that the outcomes of projects to determine levels environmental awareness among key stakeholders in the region and the identification of strategic inter-organisational relationships for implementation of CREP activities at demonstration sites will advise and be advised by these proposed REIN activities.

The cost of the implementing the Action Plan is estimated at Bdos\$1,064,650.