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A New Wave in Caribbean Sustainable Development: The White Water to Blue Water Partnerships

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1. INTRODUCTION

In late August and early September, 2002, more than 21,000 participants from 191 governments, United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), multilateral financial institutions, and other groups participated in the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa.⁶ Their task was to assess global changes in the ten years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At the Earth Summit, as the Conference in Rio de Janeiro was widely known, the participants adopted Agenda 21,⁷ a 40 chapter program and comprehensive plan of action designed to implement the outcomes of the meeting. Its purpose was to better manage and protect the environment as well as promote sustainable and environmentally sound development in all countries.

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⁶ See <http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/>

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/english/agenda21toc.htm>

As a means to improve the implementation of Agenda 21, preparatory meetings for the WSSD examined new initiatives such as developing different kinds of multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at building more effective relationships among the various actors involved in international conservation and development policy.⁸ As a result, the WSSD endorsed the use of partnerships, also known as Type II partnerships, to improve implementation of Agenda 21.⁹ One such partnership was White Water to Blue Water (WW2BW), which we describe here. The WW2BW partnership initiative was formed with the underlying understanding that sustainable development in most regions of the world would not be possible without integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management.

The White Water to Blue Water partnership initiative was formed under the direction of an international Steering Committee, representing governments, UN organizations, non-governmental organizations, universities, and the private sector. The initial focus of the initiative was the Wider Caribbean Region (WCR), an area that extends from South Florida and the Bahamas south to the Guyanas. The basic concept is such, however, that it can easily be transferred to other regions of the world. The WW2BW process was designed to create, reenergize, and expand as many partnerships as possible with the potential to contribute to the twin goals of integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management in the Caribbean. The two key elements of the process were intensive preparatory work and the design of a highly-attended partnership Conference in Miami, early in 2004. We describe each of these, below. Our account is interspersed with commentary on the process from three different stakeholder perspectives.

2. PREPARATORY WORK

Preparatory work for the Miami Conference began approximately two years before the event. Several different methods were employed to build momentum. International visiting teams, consisting of members of the Steering Committee traveled throughout the region, meeting with representatives of government, the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organizations in almost all the states and territories in the WCR. In addition to spreading information about the WW2BW process, these teams encouraged the formation of interagency Country Teams, which functioned as coordinating

⁸ The meeting in New York in early 2002 was the second session of the Preparatory Committee for WSSD and was dubbed Prepcom II. The partnerships recommended to strengthen Agenda 21 implementation, thus, came to be known as Type II partnerships.

⁹ For a critical introduction to and analysis of Type II partnerships, see Liliana B. Andonova & Marc A. Levy (2003), *Franchising Governance: Making Sense of the Johannesburg Type II Partnerships*, in YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT 2003/2004 19-31 (Olav Schram Stokke & Øystein B. Thommessen, eds., 2003).

units prior to and at the Miami Conference. They were tasked with identifying priorities and developing cross-sectoral partnerships and management strategies before, during, and after the Conference. The Country Teams were made up of representatives from government ministries with critical mandates for watershed and marine sector affairs, such as Environment, Tourism, Agriculture, Finance, and Fisheries. They also included representatives from civil society, the private sector, and universities active in these areas. Prior to the Conference, the international Steering Committee held monthly meetings to strategize, discuss progress and developments, and delegate action items for the next month. Additionally, four main themes were established for the Conference:

1. integrated watershed management;
2. marine ecosystem-based management;
3. sustainable tourism; and
4. environmentally sound marine transportation.

Each theme was managed by co-chairs from the region, supported by a professional liaison. Theme co-chairs also held monthly meetings and were charged with developing the agenda of the Conference. This included recruiting speakers, organizing breakout sessions, and pre-identifying partnership opportunities among participants. This collection of possible partnerships, organized by theme, was assembled and transferred to a matchmaking website.¹⁰ Periodic newsletters were also distributed in the region to keep interested parties up to date on developments.

Commentary: WW2BW from a Regional Program Perspective

This partnership initiative for the Wider Caribbean Region proved to be quite useful for the region. For the first time in many years, the region had an opportunity to bring together all sectors of society to share views about sustainable development and coordinate relevant actions.

All institutions, NGOs, academia, UN agencies, private sector and civil society represented had the chance to discuss the current environmental situation in the Wider Caribbean and the challenges for the future.

For UNEP, and particularly for UNEP's Caribbean Environment Programme (Regional Seas Programme), it was a unique opportunity to liaise with almost all the partners and stakeholders concerned with the sustainable development of our common heritage, the Caribbean Sea.

¹⁰ See <http://www.ww2bw.org/home/>

Through the Miami Conference and the synergies it initiated or cemented, we were able to identify the real actors involved in the management of the Caribbean Sea and establish linkages and partnerships with those genuinely committed to the development of concrete actions to sustain our coastal and marine resources and the livelihoods of the Caribbean people.

Furthermore, it is encouraging to see that the opportunities for and results of the partnerships are being made available through a comprehensive and informative website for the benefit of all actors interested.

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3. THE PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE

3.1 Meeting Design

The Miami Conference, held over four days in March 2004, was important in formation of the partnership initiative chiefly because of the attention brought to bear on the four main themes and on several cross-cutting themes, including education, marine science, and adaptation to climate change. In the desire to create as many partnership opportunities as possible and encourage interaction and discussion among Conference participants, several deliberate steps were taken when planning the meeting agenda. Plenary sessions were designed to be short and inspirational in nature and most of the Conference was organized into small breakout sessions. The first plenary session of each day was reserved for announcements of new partnerships, which then motivated others to find a partner. Two evenings were also set aside for informal matchmaking socials, in which a large room was filled with tables, each dedicated to a specific topic. Participants could then join in informal discussions on the posted topic and in some cases formed incipient partnerships. In association with the Conference, the Smithsonian Institution also planned and organized an Institute to provide training to interested participants.

Commentary: WW2BW from a Regional Government Perspective

The Jamaican delegation was particularly pleased to participate in the WW2BW process as it was able to showcase several initiatives which were underway and to learn from others in the region who are involved in similar integrated watershed and coastal area management (IWCAM) initiatives. The lessons and programmes shared included the Coastal Water Quality Improvement Project (CWIP), the Ridge to Reef Watershed Project, the Blue

Flag Programme, as well as initiatives related to sustainable tourism and the Greening Port and marine sector operations.

The opportunity to advance technical discussions related to the completion and implementation of Jamaica's National Programmes of Action to manage Land Based Sources (NPA/LBS) of Marine Pollution and the development of ocean and coastal zone management policy and programmes were also taken. The dialog before the Miami meeting led to improved coordination of the initiatives undertaken by the separate National Councils responsible for watershed management and coastal area management.

The WW2BW process, the Miami Conference, and the subsequent follow up activities have therefore facilitated ongoing national initiatives, improved sectoral coordination, stimulated several new activities, and provided access to regional best practices. Of particular note is the follow up related to the possible adaptation of the Australian Landcare model as a tool for the restoration and rehabilitation of Jamaica's stressed watersheds. Jamaica was also pleased to share with the Hilltops to Oceans (H2O) Conference some of our best management practices later in 2004.

The impact of Hurricanes Charlie and Ivan on Jamaica in late 2004 served to further remind us in Jamaica, and all in our Caribbean region, of the need to recognise conservation and rehabilitation of watersheds and coastal areas as a "no regrets" investment; facilitating safer, more resilient and sustainable communities, societies, and nations. The WW2BW partnership model needs to be further institutionalised in the Caribbean and emulated as appropriate in other parts of the world.

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3.2 The Miami Conference

Although it was anticipated that the Miami Conference would attract about 400 participants, actual attendance exceeded seven hundred. Participants were drawn both from the WCR itself as well as from a wide variety of locations outside the region, including Africa, the South Pacific, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Ukraine, Brazil, and Argentina. At the end of four days, the Conference yielded several outputs. It generated, for example, more than 70 emerging partnerships and offers to form partnerships, all focused on integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management. The associated Smithsonian "Institute @ WW2BW" offered 32 training courses related to the four main Conference themes, led by 56 instructors from twelve countries. A meeting

report was also produced with a principal focus on the WW2BW process and the action it induced.¹¹

Each of the four WW2BW themes was the focus of one day at the Conference. In the case of integrated watershed management,¹² participants focused attention on the fact that land-based activities are responsible for eighty percent of marine pollution, which in turn is associated with a number of environmental and health impacts. As a consequence, the proper management of watersheds is essential for the protection of the marine environment and health of the region's people. The day's proceedings also addressed activities that impact watersheds, such as agriculture, forestry, settlements, tourism, and wastewater treatment. Particular attention was given to protection of water supplies by addressing appropriate technologies, through water conservation, and through better land use policy and planning. Discussions also raised issues about the transfer of benefits from tourism, the mitigation of the land degradation impacts sometimes associated with tourism, the collection of better data on tourism impacts, and associated questions of enforcement and compliance.

One substantial offer to form a partnership that emerged from these discussions was the International Corporate Wetland Restoration Partnership (ICWRP), a combined effort involving the Gillette Company, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the UN Foundation, the RAMSAR Convention Secretariat, Coastal America, and the UNESCO-World Heritage Center to help restore wetlands. Its first large-scale project will be implemented through the UN Foundation and will provide 750,000 USD in new funding. Another notable offer was the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project on Integrated Watershed and Coastal Area Management (IWCAM) in the small island developing states of the Caribbean, an initiative advocated as a concrete mechanism for advancing many integrated watershed management projects.

The marine ecosystem theme¹³ centered on the Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) approach as a tool to ensure the long-term productivity and sustainability of living resources and the environment.¹⁴ LMEs are defined as natural regions of ocean space encompassing coastal waters from river basins and estuaries to the seaward boundary of continental shelves and the outer margins of coastal currents. They generally extend over 200,000 km² or greater and have natural boundaries based on four ecological criteria: bathymetry, hydrography, productivity, and trophically related populations. The LME concept is predicated on the fact that marine pollution and living marine resources respect no political and few geographical boundaries and

¹¹ See <http://www.ww2bw.org/ww2bw-reports/>

¹² See http://www.ww2bw.org/themes/themes/watershed_management/

¹³ See http://www.ww2bw.org/themes/themes/marine_ecosystem_management/

¹⁴ See <http://www.lme.noaa.gov/>

that successful management, therefore, requires a large scale, concerted, and holistic approach for assessment and control actions that have ecosystem consequences. The approach is one that can accommodate scaling up from small local embayments, near shore, and estuarine areas to national and international ecosystem-wide sustainability concerns. Central to discussion were the issues of productivity, fish and fisheries, including biodiversity conservation, ecosystem health, and pollution, socioeconomic factors, and governance, including adaptive management and stakeholder participation.

A significant partnership offer under the marine ecosystem theme was the Caribbean Marine Protected Area Management (CaMPAM) Network and Forum, a comprehensive partnership aimed at improving communications among marine protected area (MPA) stakeholders. The partnership strategy is to bring a variety of existing efforts under a single umbrella. Organizations that have signed up for the partnership include the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), UNEP-CEP, The Nature Conservancy, Environmental Defense, the Office of International Affairs of the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, the Caribbean Marine Research Center, the University of Puerto Rico, Coral Resources Management, the Caribbean Conservation Association, the Society for the Conservation of Reef Fish Aggregations, and the World Resources Institute. The partnership uses the annual meetings of GCFI and the GCFI and CaMPAM listserves to facilitate the discussion of MPA emerging issues, for improving its MPA database with inputs from managers and scientists, for developing training activities for MPA managers, for producing and disseminating technical documents and lessons learned, and for providing technical support to small grant programs that promote sustainable livelihoods and fisheries. A steering committee was recently created.¹⁵

On the day devoted to sustainable tourism, participants examined priority sustainable development issues in the tourism sector.¹⁶ There were discussions of master planning, community tourism, destination management, guidelines for tour operations, environmental management of hotels, the education of tourists, and standards and certifications. The participants agreed that to address all these issues and actually make tourism more sustainable, all sectors of the industry had to be involved and there had to be real collaboration on the development and implementation of solutions, including training and capacity building.

One large partnership that emerged from these discussions was a Sea Turtle Ecotourism Certification Program for the Wider Caribbean, led by the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Conservation Network, (WIDECAST) and The Nature Conservancy. The partnership offered to develop standards, a

¹⁵ See <http://www.gcfi.org>

¹⁶ See http://www.ww2bw.org/themes/themes/sustainable_tourism/

training program, and a marketing strategy to promote the certification among hotels, park managers, community-based organizations, NGOs, and tour operators. The key development at the conference was securing commitments to participate in the certification program from WIDECAS members, which include, in addition to TNC, the Rainforest Alliance, the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism, the Ministry of the Environment in Costa Rica, and the Southampton Institute in the United Kingdom.

Commentary: WW2BW from a Non-Governmental Organization Perspective

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were actively engaged in the WW2BW initiative right from the beginning. NGOs participated in the press conference at the World Summit on Sustainable Development where WW2BW was launched. Several NGO representatives served on the WW2BW Steering Committee that met regularly over the fifteen months preceding the Miami Conference. Among other areas, NGOs played key roles in outreach to donor organizations and in a pre-conference workshop to explore mechanisms to sustain collaboration in the Caribbean. An NGO Outreach Subcommittee served as a vehicle for spreading the word about WW2BW and encouraging NGO participation. The Subcommittee provided crucial input on ways to enhance NGO representation from the region in the Miami conference.

Given this level of engagement, it is not surprising that NGOs figured prominently in the partnerships announced at the WW2BW Conference. An indication of the success of the partnership conference comes from both the number and diversity of new partnerships. Many of them involve government agencies, private businesses, international organizations, academic institutions, and NGOs working together toward a common purpose. NGO representatives were also members of some country delegations. Furthermore, the conference and subsequent follow-on activities increased awareness among NGOs of additional resources and potential partners to help them work on the four key WW2BW themes. The Conference also served as a high-profile venue for disseminating products prepared by various NGOs.

From an NGO perspective, several important lessons were learned from the WW2BW experience. Full NGO participation in Conference planning and partnership identification from the outset added value and brought additional resources to the process. In the event, outreach proved to be more successful among organizations with a presence in the Washington D.C. area than with individual NGOs or "umbrella" organizations in the WCR. In future initiatives like WW2BW, increased attention could be given to ways to build a better understanding of the interests and possible contributions of NGOs

from the target region, and to identify how they can be more engaged. It is also important to decide early the level of NGO participation that is feasible in a conference like the one in Miami, so that expectations can be realistic and so that individuals and organizations with the greatest potential to contribute can be included. Finally, the WW2BW experience has shown that follow through after a partnership conference is also extremely important. During this phase, as much as beforehand, funding to support the exploration, formation, and strengthening of partnerships is as important as financing for specific projects.

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The issue of environmentally sound marine transportation is an integral part of the WW2BW initiative because the impacts from boats and ships of all types affect coastal and near shore environments as well as the ocean itself.¹⁷ The impacts can be divided into two general categories: 1) operational impacts, such as the discharge of wastes, anchor damage, damage caused by wake or propulsion, and noise, and 2) accidental impacts, which might include vessel groundings and collisions. While one focus of this theme is on the adverse environmental impacts of boats and ships, WW2BW also recognized that vessels of all types and sizes yield important benefits to the region, both through tourism and through the import and export of goods.

At Miami, several key partnership proposals under this theme focused on phasing out the use of tributyltin (TBT) in the Caribbean. This stems from the recent widespread recognition that TBT, which is used as an anti-fouling biocide on ships, has a high degree of environmental toxicity. Jotun Paints, for example, expressed willingness to discuss preferential terms for commercial and government ship owners in the region who decide to use or convert to tin-free anti-fouling systems. International Paint also announced their willingness to enter into partnership with ship and boat owners interested in converting to tin-free anti-fouling systems, and Ultra-Strip Inc. said it would discuss preferential terms for those Caribbean ship operations willing to remove existing organotin anti-fouling systems. All the major cruise lines operating in the WCR also made a commitment to use tin-free anti-fouling systems on their vessels.

¹⁷ See http://www.ww2bw.org/themes/themes/enviromentally_sound_marine_transportation/

4. LOOKING AHEAD

Although the Miami Conference is now behind us, the WW2BW initiative continues to flourish. The partnership approach to environmental management continues to be seen as a critical tool for overcoming the lack of resources in the region for capacity building and technical assistance. There is growing recognition that partnerships are beneficial because they build on but do not replace existing initiatives. Further they bring a new sense of relevance and purpose to exchanges among municipal, civil society, private sector, and government stakeholders that are already under way but diffuse.

Looking ahead, there are also challenges that will have to be met to maintain the momentum achieved at Miami and to ensure that the WSSD partnership goals are achieved over the medium to long term. To address these concerns, the main institutions have started to develop new capacities and are using internet and web technology to build and maintain bridges among stakeholders, so many of whom left Miami with high expectations.

The most pressing need is the implementation of partnerships identified at the Conference and expanding incipient partnerships into full-fledged initiatives. Further, participants were also encouraged to consider what further partnership opportunities might be developed in taking WW2BW forward. In addition to the 70 emerging partnerships from the Conference, three Global Environment Facility proposals, one on Integrating Watershed and Coastal Area Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and two on Large Marine Ecosystems, should provide the substantive and resource frameworks for the two principal WW2BW themes—integrated watershed management and marine ecosystem-based management.

The WW2BW website, initially created during the planning stage, is now a key tool for tracking and expanding partnerships. It is an interactive website that allows users to find additional partners over time, report on progress, and post lessons learned. It also provides opportunities for donors to describe their interests in and priorities for the region. The website serves as a reporting mechanism on the continuing work of the WW2BW Steering Committee, in part by promoting discussions and exchanges on “hot” regional issues relevant to the initiative. The website is not a means of overseeing or controlling partnership projects, but rather a tool to help WW2BW partners collaborate, share best practices, and report to one another so that efforts are not duplicated. Its central purpose is to help partners to keep abreast of what others are doing so that they can share lessons learned as they happen and monitor the partnership experiences that are emerging.

We should also note that the WW2BW Steering Committee continues to function and encourages further dialogue with the Country Teams which are encouraged to continue their coordination at the national level. For the mid- to longer term, the formation of new mechanisms for improved

cooperation in the Wider Caribbean region has been discussed, with the prospect that the GEF might support an initiative that had broad agreement. Among the options given consideration are strengthening the Cartagena Convention, encouraging the more widespread use of voluntary approaches, creation of a stakeholder forum, bi-decadal ministerial meetings independent of any existing conventions, and development of a regional forum for donor institutions.

Recently, on December 5th and 6th of 2005, the Steering Committee also held a meeting in Panama to discuss the ongoing mission of WW2BW within the Caribbean. Over the course of two days, the WW2BW Steering Committee meeting identified key areas for improvement, including the organization's structure, funding methodologies, and communication with partners. A more formal organizational structure would facilitate WW2BW action in the name of partnerships and improve coordination and outreach with stakeholders. This structure is outlined in a draft paper and terms of reference which will be available on the WW2BW website once they are finalized. Discussion surrounding improved funding methodologies stemmed from a WW2BW participant survey, conducted in October 2005, which gave the Steering Committee excellent feedback and clearly illuminated the need to focus on financing and resources. By the end of the meeting, the Steering Committee suggested three actions:

1. a strategic partnership with funding agencies, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and incorporating the three current GEF grants in the region;
2. helping WW2BW stakeholders to be more efficient in their fundraising/proposal formulations; and
3. developing an inventory of non-financial resources available in the region, such as meeting space and translation, that could be available within a partnership.

The third focus of the meeting was on the need for improved communication within the region with stakeholders and better marketing to assist fundraising. The group decided rather than develop a new specific WW2BW event, they would develop an outreach strategy. In general, the immediate plan is to utilize existing events and improve communication materials. It was decided that a quarterly WW2BW newsletter will be distributed and the United Nations Environment Programme will also develop a WW2BW brochure highlighting specific programs. The Steering Committee also committed to reconnect with Country Teams and reach out to the private sector.

On a broader stage, WW2BW organizers and participants have carried the message about the partnership initiative and its outputs to other global and

regional forums that deal with the interrelationships among environmental protection, human health, and sustainable tourism. They include the UN Commission on Sustainable Development meeting in New York in April 2004, the Green Hotels Conference held in Montego Bay, Jamaica, in July 2004, the World Conservation Congress convened by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Bangkok, Thailand, in November 2004, the International Meeting of Small Island Developing States that took place in Mauritius in January 2005, the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico in March 2006, and the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute meeting in June 2006.

In summary, the WW2BW initiative is a concrete attempt to find new ways of implementing global commitments to sustainable development. It shows the value, in our view, of several methods that could be used elsewhere, including the early identification of partnership opportunities, an interagency team approach to partnership design, broad stakeholder involvement in planning and execution, and a varied mix of opportunities to identify, announce, and expand partnerships in the context of a large scale conference, such as that held in Miami. These techniques proved successful in the creation or expansion of more than a hundred partnership initiatives in the Wider Caribbean Region and holds promise for other regions.