Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)

Report of the Regional Workshop on
Managing Information for Civil Society Participation in Natural Resource Management

Trinidad and Tobago
October 18 - 20, 2004

Introduction

The workshop was developed based on a priority demand by participants at a regional workshop entitled *Preparing for Partnerships: governance and civil society participation in natural resource management* (held in Trinidad, March 2004). At a workshop session facilitated by Maritza Hee Houng on *"Information Management Needs for Participatory Natural Resource Management,"* participants identified a critical need among Caribbean non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for a better understanding of the range of issues which they face in accessing, storing, generating and disseminating information. Although faced with limited financial, human and technical resources to deal with simple day-to-day operations, many civil society organisations are aware that information management is a key strategy in their quest towards an evolving partnership with the state and other agencies.

The feedback provided at the session resulted in the development of this workshop "Managing Information for Civil Society Participation in Natural Resource Management," which aimed to address the specific issues identified.

These issues included:
- Managing the internal records of NGOs
- Creating an institutional memory through records management
- Developing and maintaining a library/information centre of relevant materials (e.g. books, documents, reports, conference papers)
- Establishing computerized systems for both library and internal records
- Developing information technology skills including accessing web-based resources
- Storage of processed information
- Retrieval of stored information
- Dissemination and sharing of information to members and other users
- Marketing of information resources
- Repackaging of information for specific target groups
- Developing skills in evaluating and selecting information resources
- The need for information policies in NGOs

Participants

A total of 10 participants from nine Caribbean countries attended the workshop representing a range of natural resource management organizations. Spanish-speaking participants were facilitated at the workshop with the assistance of a CANARI staff member and a participant from the Dominican Republic. A complete list of participants is attached at Appendix 1.

Workshop Sessions

The workshop sought to address the above listed issues in sessions as follows (Appendix 2 provides a detailed listing of the Sessions):

The Role and Scope of NGOs in the Information Chain

The focus of this session was on:
- The value and use of information by civil society in the management of natural resources
- Current international and regional mandates relevant to civil society and information management and the potential role for civil society in the development of these mandates
- Strategies for civil society involvement in these mandates

Having access to information is a prerequisite to civil society engagement in natural resource management. The value and use of up-to-date information, which can be generated and shared with relevant others, is as an aid to informed decision-making, and one way to empower civil society.

There are numerous international and regional mandates on information management and public participation emerging from the international community. They all promote, support and encourage civil society access to information, participation in the decision-making process and in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs, as a basic requirement for sustainable development. Mandates include Agenda 21; the Inter-American Strategy for Public Participation in Decision-making (ISP) for Sustainable Development; the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) Programme of Action (POA); and the Caricom Charter of civil society.

Participants were encouraged to play an active role in the development of these mandates by working towards implementation of those which have not been fully exploited by NGOs such as the SIDS POA and the ISP. Strategies for involvement in these mandates and for playing an active role in the information chain include: collaborating with other key agencies who may have gained access to or have knowledge of the decision-making processes; gaining access to national information through Freedom of Information Acts; keeping in touch with new global mandates such as Millennium Development Goals; and sharing relevant information with other civil society members.

Other mainstream strategies also suggested and further developed in the other sessions focused on NGO actions in keeping abreast and informed of international and regional developments to ensure that NGOs get access to resources and projects on information issues, managing internal information, acquiring external information and establishing management systems.

Participants were also asked to question and analyse the requirements for setting information policies and strategies in their institutions.

Developing a Model for NGOS in the Information Chain in Natural Resource Management

In this session participants were given an overview of the changing role of NGOs, made aware of the information requirements for managing multiple stakeholder relationships and introduced to a model for information gathering.

NGOs are increasingly focussing their energies on capacity-building, institutional development and partnership with various organisations. These areas are crucial to civil society's role in building coalitions for development and forming cross-society dialogues.

In the formation of coalitions and dialogues with multiple stakeholders, it is essential for NGOs to communicate and interface with all parties (actual and potential), know their information needs, and analyse, synthesise and feedback information to where it is needed in a useful and comprehensible format.

Using the model for information gathering pictured below, participants were asked to build an information model for the development of a neighbourhood park for use as a natural resource attraction, outlining the information gathering strategy.

MODEL FOR INFORMATION GATHERING
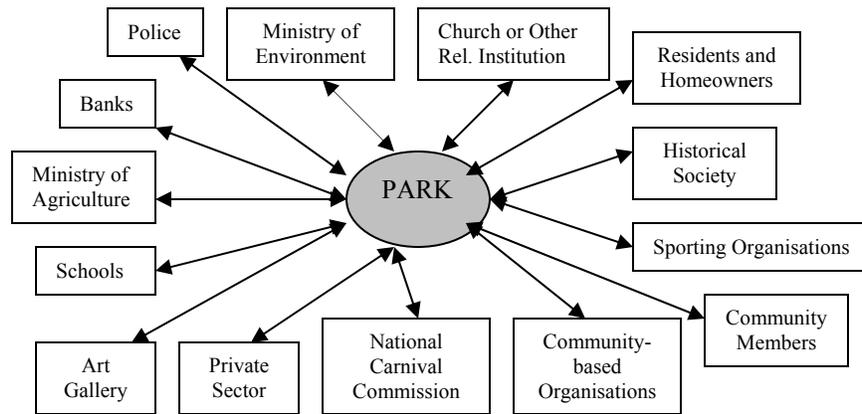
GROUP WORK 1:

Case study: Establishment of a small neighbourhood park

Stakeholders: Residents   Land owners   Unemployed persons
                 Police   Local institutions Sports persons (of various types)
   Homeless   Relevant Government authority (local and national)

Information Gathering Strategy

1. Type of Information required
▪ Land ownership
▪ Development plans for site and
  surrounding area
▪ Physical characteristics: mapping
  and land suitability
▪ Impact assessment
▪ Demographic analysis
▪ Public perceptions re land and
▪ Use of land (taboos, religious beliefs)
▪ Funding

2. Data gathering methods
▪ Review existing data – government agencies
▪ Seek local knowledge
▪ Hold stakeholder meeting

3. Conduct Information Analysis

4. Planning and implementation
• Planning and implementation mechanism
  (Technical Co-ordination)
• Mobilise funding
• Mechanism for ongoing consultation and information
  dissemination

Challenges
• Maintenance
• Employment
• Training
• Funding
• User conflicts

GROUP WORK 2:

Case study: Rincon de Guanabo Natural Park (Protected Area) - Cuba
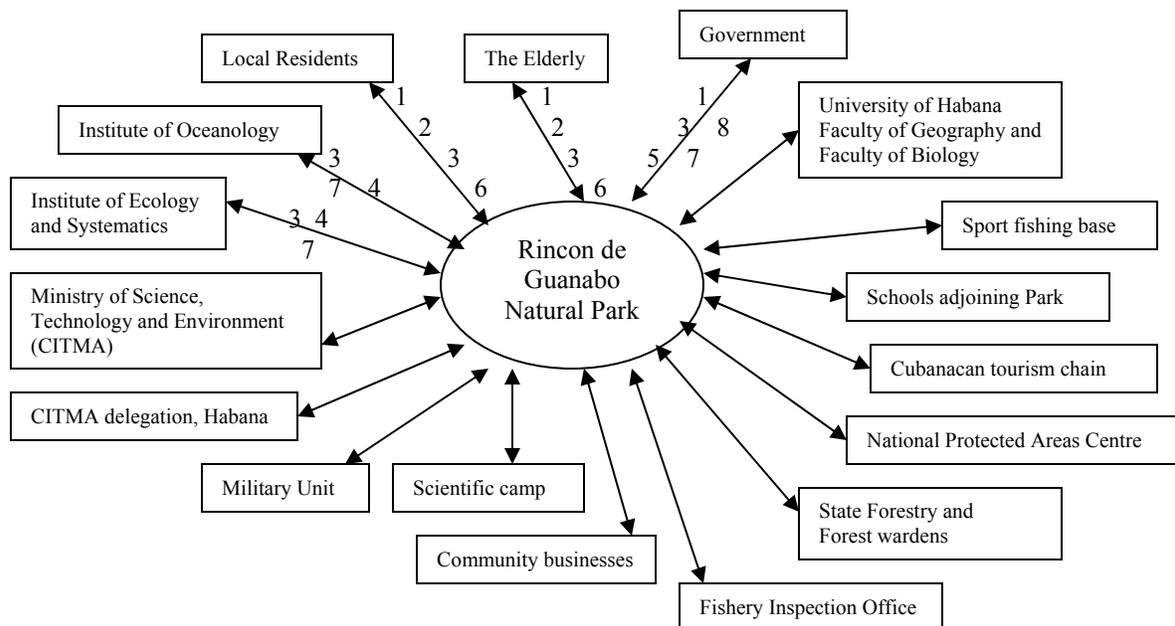
Type of Information required:
- Historical **1**
- Social **2**
- Environmental **3**
- Advisory/technical **4**
- Economic **5**
- Cultural **6**
- Statistic **7**
- Maps and plans **8**

Challenges:
- Getting stakeholders/beneficiaries to listen
- Strengthening linkages among all involved (no information network exists)
- Conflict among users
- Financial resources
- A co-management structure
- Management plans for the protected area

Participants were also asked to engage in a practical assignment to:

1. Identify a natural resource problem which affects the population of a particular country/region.
2. Propose the types of information needed to address the problem.
3. Identify existing sources of information – both international, regional, local, and of all types – printed, visual, Internet based.
4. Propose methods for generating the information – research, collection, analysis of other information.
5. Propose methods for disseminating the information to a concerned community.

Assignment 1 – Ecological Reserve "La Coca"

1. Natural resource problem:
   Contamination from silicate mining

2. Type of information needed
- Environmental Impact Assessment
- Stakeholder analysis
- Current legislation
- Feasibility studies
- Cost/benefit analysis studies

3. Existing sources of information
   INTERNATIONAL:
   • UNEP
   NATIONAL:
   • Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
   • Institute of Physical Planning
   • University of Habana
   • Environmental Secretariat
   LOCAL
   • Municipal office
   • Local Government
   • Community-based Organisations
   • Local Administrative Institutions
   • Libraries and documentation centers

Records Management

The Records Management component was presented in two sessions. The first session focused on providing definitions of terms used in the field and the philosophy and major pillars of the record keeping process. The detailed presentation included a demonstration of basic techniques, using sample materials, for identifying types of materials and determining which were to be filed, read or routed to another location, as well as an introduction to the categories and principles of files management. This was followed by guidelines for developing the file structure and file system, covering details such as selection of filing methodology, file classification, the use of visual aids, subject lists, filing equipment and supplies.

These actions were ones which participants felt they could initiate immediately on return to their organizations. Besides identifying a great need for these types of processes, they felt that the simple, low cost actions could be easily implemented by they themselves without too much reliance on external support.

The second session focused on records retention and provided guidelines for decision-making on retention and disposal of materials. There was an introduction to electronic records management, elaborating on the differences between manual and electronic records. Participants were guided through the stages of setting up Electronic Records Management Systems (ERMS) with emphasis on the value of web resources and emails as components of a records management system.

Issues were raised about security considerations when selecting both hardware and software, to ensure that the integrity of data and systems are maintained, the new methodologies available for data protection using encryption coding and the legality and acceptance of digital signatures. Participants indicated an interest in having the facilitator make field visits to assess their record management systems.

The Caribbean Digital Library

This session highlighted the role of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean's (UNECLAC) Caribbean Documentation Centre (CDC) in providing information services for the member countries of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC). The facilitator introduced some of the information services offered by the

CDC, for e.g., online current awareness and current contents bulletins, as well as results of research on information policies in the region. The presentation also documented ECLAC's progress in information initiatives over the years starting with its innovative development of the Caribbean Information System for Economic and Social Planning (CARISPLAN) system, CDS/ISIS[1] training, its web site and the current progress with the Caribbean Digital Library (CDL). The importance and role of the Digital Library in both building Caribbean content and making it more widely accessible was stressed. Participants were encouraged to support the continued development of the CDL by adding their sites to the Library listing. A short discussion period indicated that most participants were unaware of the existence of the Library, and given ECLAC's mandate as the agency responsible for follow up to the SIDS POA in the region, there was agreement that there is good potential for NGO input and usage of the CDL.

Managing Information/Knowledge in NGOs

This session detailed the methods and processes applied in managing information resources. In an effort to assist participants at making informed decisions on the management of these resources, the session explained standard library systems involving cataloguing, classifying and indexing, and established the relationship between these methodologies and their application in a digital environment. It also addressed the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on information management and the scope that ICTs offer to NGOs for generating, accessing, and disseminating information with the goal of increasing citizens' participation in development.

ICTs:
- Provide extended possibilities for managing information as electronic documents require less storage space
- Facilitate the updating of material
- Allow easy manipulation and transferral of data
- Are readily available from a wide range of sources

Participants were engaged in another practical assignment aimed at reinforcing what they had learned from the session.

1. With your knowledge of both standard library techniques (cataloguing, indexing, abstracting) and ICTs (for e.g. databases, webpages, email) propose new information product(s) which your NGO can develop, for increasing access to your institution's information and creating new knowledge for your users.

2. You may use practical examples of information materials held by your institution.

Assignment 2 – Group response

1. New information products:
- Fact sheets - on issues that may arise
- on frequently asked questions
- Swapping inventories/databases with other libraries or orgnaisations
- Using newsletters/website to alert users of new publications received
- Build capacity to update/build website

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[1] Information storage and retrieval software developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to satisfy the need expressed by many institutions, especially in developing countries, to be able to streamline their information processing activities by using modern (and relatively inexpensive) technologies.

Field Trip to the Institute of Marine Affairs: the information role

A field visit was facilitated by the Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA). The session enabled participants to view some of the systems and services described in the sessions and to get a first-hand view of an active information programme which supports research personnel, generates several levels of information products, and works with local communities (schools) in delivering information to support sustainable use of natural resources.

The field trip included a visit to the IMA's library for a demonstration of the on-line catalogue and standard library routines; a presentation by the IMA's Data Processing Unit on facilities for geographic information systems and remote sensing data; and a presentation by the Education Unit on the IMA's education and awareness programme with local schools. Participants were also updated on IMA's involvement in an international information project, the Ocean Data and Information Network for the Caribbean and South America (ODINCARSA), and the potential of the Network for delivering marine information in the region to a wide host of users.

External Sources of Information

Having explored aspects related to managing internal information resources, this session was intended to aid participants in accessing relevant information from external sources. In view of the predominance of on-line or web-based resources, participants were taken through several levels of Internet search devices, from search engines, portals and metasearch engines to directories and Caribbean natural resource web pages. Participants were urged to support web-based resources which offer on-line training and sites dealing with NGO development and participatory management by visiting these sites and in some cases, establishing contacts with the relevant organisations. Participants' attention was directed to the need for utilising existing non-Internet Caribbean resources such as local libraries, repositories for indigenous knowledge and experts, and to ensure that their information management efforts included plans for digitising their information. Digitising better facilitates the transfer of information to a widespread audience, allows easy updating of material and preserves the lifespan of documents.

The experience of the Sustainable Economic Development Unit in building a Caribbean Sustainable Development Network: the information role

The Caribbean Sustainable Development Network (CSEDNet), supported by the University of the West Indies' Sustainable Economic Development Unit (SEDU) played a supporting role in the initial stage of CANARI's project *Governance and Civil Society Participation in Natural Resource Management* by providing insights into civil society requirements for capacity-building. CSEDNet had previously carried out a survey of NGOs in the region to assess their capacity and requirements for participation in and carrying out of sustainable development initiatives. This workshop on information management is one of several activities carried out under this broader project. In this session participants were provided with an update on the SEDU experience in building the network, the approaches used, the problems experienced and the continuing efforts at increasing NGO information dissemination through the CSEDNet web site.

Disseminating Information

The final session moved on to the next stage in the information management process – that of information dissemination. Several dissemination methods were described ranging from traditional library services (accepting questions and providing answers, doing reference queries,

selective dissemination of information), to services offered in the electronic environment (database searches, digital information sharing, web pages, e-mail, electronic networks and on-line publishing). In addition to methods and techniques, participants were introduced to the major factors (relevance, timeliness, specificity, user skills) which impinge on dissemination.

A third assignment was intended to assess participants' grasp of the sessions on "Internet Resources and "Disseminating Information" as well as to draw on presentations made at the IMA.

Assignment 3 1. Identify a community which is facing a natural resource management problem as a target group for your project, (e.g., information on crop pests for a farming community, or marketing of agricultural produce, or erosion of a beach). 2. Identify the types of information which can be sourced or generated by the use of ICTs which will assist in resolving the problem.	**Destruction of a mangrove by a hotel development** Types of Information needed: ▪ Importance of mangrove to the area ▪ Environmental legislation re. mangrove destruction ▪ # of persons that will be affected ▪ Inventory of characteristics of the specific site Sources of information: ▪ Books ▪ Websites ▪ National Environmental Agency

Conclusion

▪ Participants held various positions of responsibility in their organizations ranging from Executive Directors to Administrative Assistants. The workshop was principally intended for the organisations' Executives with the aim of increasing their awareness and understanding of the importance of information management and the need for policies and involvement in the international information forums such as the World Summit on the Information Society. Stress was also placed on the need for them to have interaction with international and regional organisations in order that the mandates generated by the latter related to bridging the digital divide in the Caribbean may be achieved. In retrospect, that goal may not be readily achievable given the limited time frame available to properly explore the issues. However, it did generate some discussion and this hopefully can be built on in follow-up workshops.

▪ The expectation is that participants will see information management as a useful tool for keeping them informed and involved in natural resource management initiatives.

▪ Main obstacles to implementing and achieving some of the information management goals set by civil society organisations remain limited human, financial and physical resources to devote solely to information management tasks. Often organisations, de-prioritise information management necessities when faced with more pressing daily requirements, demonstrating that information management may be seen as less of an immediate necessity and more of a luxury. However participants indicate that the exposure to the **simple** and **low-cost** but effective methods to managing their records allows them to be more optimistic about putting these methods into immediate practice. And it has been acknowledged that records management will assist in reducing the need for a larger storage space.

- All sessions were well received and participants appear to be better able to appreciate the need to access additional material from external sources, as evidenced by their productions in the practical sessions.

- The responses to the two specialty information units elaborated on at the workshop - the ECLAC CDL and the IMA's Information Programme suggest that there is a need to provide additional information on the range of information resources available to NGOs in the region. This could result in new projects and services and increased interaction between agencies in the region in information sharing. This could be explored as a project to be shared in workshops, directories, and/or in the development of web-based directories.

- The Workshop Team was quite satisfied with the interaction both with and between participants. Continued feedback on their use of the knowledge gained would be appreciates as well as new suggestions for new input and changes to the workshop design.

- Participants were asked in the final session to indicate the experiences which they had at the workshop. The responses indicated that participants have:

  - A better appreciation for the importance of records management
  - A desire and enthusiasm to apply what was learnt at the workshop to their organisations
  - Better understanding of the importance of records management in building an institutional memory and of the value of records management in dealing with problems of limited space and limited human resources in NGOs
  - A better appreciation for the need for retention policies
  - A new awareness of the value of Internet-based resources
  - A new awareness of the possibility of using information as an income generator for the organization
  - A new insight into the importance and value of the integrity of information being provided
  - A true appreciation for the practical approach in which the workshop was delivered

A verbatim record of participants' responses to the workshop are attached at Appendix 3.

APPENDIX 1

List of participants

RESOURCE PERSONS / ORGANISORS

Ms. Maritza Hee Houng
Coordinator for the Caribbean and Latin
America
The International Network for the Availability
of Scientific Publications
8 Hillside Avenue
Cascade
Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 624 2820
Email: heehoung@tstt.net.tt

Mr. Vijay Krishnarayan
Managing Partner
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
Administration Building
Fernandes Industrial Centre
Eastern Main Road
Laventille
Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 868 626 6062
Fax: 868 626 1788
Email: vijay@canari.org

Ms. Alana Lum Lock
Programme Associate
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
Administration Building
Fernandes Industrial Centre
Eastern Main Road
Laventille
Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 868 626 6062
Fax: 868 626 1788
Email: alana@canari.org

Ms. Sarah McIntosh
Staff Partner
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
Administration Building
Fernandes Industrial Centre
Eastern Main Road
Laventille
Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 868 626 6062
Fax: 868 626 1788
Email: sarah@canari.org

CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS

Ms. Sandra Ferguson
Secretary General
Agency for Rural Transformation
Po Box Marrast Hill
St. George's
Grenada
Tel: 473 440 3440
Fax: 473 440 9882
Email: art@caribsurf.com

Mr. Darnley LeBourne
Programme Officer
Saint Lucia National Trust
PO Box 595
Clarke Avenue, Vigie
Castries
Tel: 758 452 5005 / 453 1495
Fax: 758 453 2791
Email: natrust@candw.lc

Mr. Carl Hanson
Executive Director
Negril Coral Reef Preservation Society
PO Box 2725
Norman Manley Sea Park
Norman Manley Boulevard
Negril
Westmoreland
Jamaica
Tel: 876 957 3735
Fax: 876 957 4626
Email: coralreef@cwjamaica.com

Srta. Patricia Lamelas
Executive Director
Centro para la Conservación y Ecodesarrollo de
la Bahía
De Samaná y su Entorno
Avenida La Marina
Tiro al Banco
Santa Bárbara de Samaná
Samaná
Apartado Postal No. 143
República Dominicana
Tel. (809) 538 2042
Fax. (809) 538 2792
E-mail: cebse@samana.org.do
          lamelasp@hotmail.com

Señora Alina Lopez
Comite SIBARIMAR de Pronaturaleza
Calle 504 N° 5B12
Guanabo 19120
C. de la Habana
Cuba
Tel. (537) 964184
Fax. (537) 963 892
E-Mail: sibarim@cubarte.cult.cu

Ms. Lucia Mings
Executive Director
Environmental Awareness Group
Museum Building
PO Box 2103
St. John's
Antigua
Tel: 268 462 6236
Fax: 268 463 7740
Email: eag@candw.ag

Mrs. Rita Morson
Administrative Manager
Anguilla National Trust
PO Box 1234
The Valley
Anguilla, BWI
Tel: 264 497 5297
Fax: 264 497 5571
Email: axanat@anguillanet.com

Ms. Susan Otuokon
Executive Director
Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust
29 Dumbarton Avenue
Kingston 10
Jamaica
Tel: 876 960 2848-9
Fax: 876 960 2850
Email: execdir@jcdt.org

Mr. Dennis Sammy
President
Nature Seekers
10 ¼ mm Toco Main Road
Matura
Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: 868 668 7337
Fax: same as above   I
Email: natseek@tstt.net.tt

APPENDIX 2

Agenda

18 October

8.30 – 12.30
Session 1- Opening and introductions
- General introduction to the workshop and introduction of participants and resource persons; and
- Participants' expectations

Session 2 – The role and scope of NGOs in the Information Chain – Ms. M. Hee Houng
This presentation is intended to provide participants with an overview of the information scenario, and to set the framework for the workshop. The session will explore issues relating to the role of NGOs in information access and delivery, and the possibilities offered by international and regional mandates for extending civil society's role in natural resource management. Discussion period included.

Session 3 – Developing a model for NGOS in the Information Chain in natural resource management. – Ms. Grace Talma
This session will provide participants with a theoretical model for building their information capacity for natural resource management. Participants will be challenged in an interactive practical session to develop a practical model.

Lunch

2.00 – 5.00
Session 4 - Records management – Ms. Joanne Georges
This session will provide participants with an understanding of the concepts and need for organizational records management. It will include roles, responsibilities and methods of file management. A practical session will engage participants in demonstrating knowledge gained.

Session 5 - The Caribbean Digital Library – Ms. Sandra John (UNECLAC)
This presentation by Ms. John, Chief, Documentation Centre, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean will feature the development of UNECLAC's Caribbean Documentation Centre and its role in building Caribbean information resources, including digital resources. ECLAC plays a major role in sustainable development in the region, and it is expected that the collaboration with NGOs afforded by the workshop will increase the availability of information and the capacity in information sharing.

Recap of day one and close

19 October

8.30 – 12.30
Session 6 – Records management – Ms. Joanne Georges
Continuing on the previous afternoon's work, this session will address the issues relating to policies for long term records management, including retention and purging. Participants will be updated on the role of information and communications technology in providing new methods for records management.

Session 7– Managing information and knowledge in NGOs – Ms. M. Hee Houng
Participants will be provided with an understanding of the concepts, methods and processes involved in managing a range of information resources available to NGOs. In the context of a growing digital divide, the session is intended to heighten awareness and decision-making on information issues. Participants will demonstrate knowledge gained in a practical session.

Workshop session: - Managing Information/Knowledge Management in NGOs:
Practical Approaches and Methods

Lunch

1.30 – 5.00
Session 8 - Field trip to Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) - Information Centre
Presentations by Mrs. Donna Spencer, Chief Information Officer, and the staff of the Information Centre will provide participants with a first hand view of IMA's Information Centre. Participants will be exposed to the specialized services to internal clients including the online catalogue, the generation and management of research data for natural resource management, e.g., remote sensing, maps, databases, GIS, and current information projects, as well as demonstrations of IMA's work in providing information to its external community, including NGOS.

Recap of day two and close.

20 October

8.30 -12.30
Session 9 – External sources of information – Ms. M. Hee Houng
This practical session is intended to assist participants in accessing Internet based and other resources for natural resource management. Local resources as well as search engines, websites, and training tools for improving ICT skills are included.

Workshop Session – The Role of NGOS in the Information Chain

Session 10 – Dennis Pantin

Lunch

2.00 - 5.00
Session 11 - Disseminating information – Ms. M. Hee Houng
This session will address the critical issue of disseminating information. It will inform participants of the range of methods and approaches to dissemination and the special demands of an NGO clientele for natural resource management information.

Workshop Session – Completion of assignment of Session 9

Conclusion - Wrap up - Evaluation

BRIEF BIO DATA – MS. JO-ANN GEORGES

Jo-Ann has been working in Records Management for just over 20 years having started as the Records Management Officer at the Central Bank of Trinidad & Tobago in 1982. After leaving the Bank Jo-Ann worked as a Records and Information Management Consultant in the Banking, Insurance and Manufacturing industries in Trinidad, Barbados St. Kitts and St. Lucia. She is now the Records Manager at the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies and lectures in the Certificate in Records Management Programme run by the University. Jo-Ann has a special interest in the management of electronic records.

BRIEF BIO DATA – MS. GRACE TALMA

Grace is a human resource management consultant and manages her own consultancy business, Grace Talma and Associates. Grace has specialist training in Organizational Development and Leadership with special emphasis on the NGO sector (MA, Springfield College, Tampa) and has had extensive experience in managing and working with NGOs. She has worked throughout the Caribbean and is the Human Resource Management Consultant for the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States/Export Development Unit, (OECS/EDU). She is the current chairman of the United Nations Association of Trinidad and Tobago and adjunct Professor in Human Resource Development, Leadership and Organization at Springfield College, Tampa, USA.

BRIEF BIO DATA – MS. MARITZA HEE HOUNG

Maritza is an information and development consultant and has had extensive experience in the region in the development of information systems, training, and information related development projects. She has specialist experience in the field of agricultural and environmental information and has worked for several international agencies, including the Food and Agriculture Organization, Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO, OAS, and CTA. Maritza is the Caribbean Representative for the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP), (UK), an international NGO which supports the production, organization, promotion and dissemination of information and knowledge particularly in developing countries.

BRIEF BIO DATA – MS. SANDRA JOHN

Sandra is currently Chief, Caribbean Documentation Centre at UNECLAC. A graduate of UWI, with post graduate training in Library Studies and Management Studies, Sandra has a wealth of experience in specialist information management. She has worked with health, engineering, insurance and social and economic development, and law information. Her regional experience includes assignments with CAREC, UWI, the OECS and UNECLAC. Her research interest in the productive use of information technologies, with a focus on how these technologies make an impact young people in the region, led to the establishment of The Caribbean Digital Library. She continues to lead this development.

APPENDIX 3

Participants' Responses to the Workshop

On records management –
"I had little idea that there was so much involved in records management – I can now see the importance of records management – there is so much I have learnt that I can apply at the office."

"The Workshop was indeed timely as I am about to begin cleaning up the office – the Records Management sessions will help me."

"Records Management sessions were the high point for me."

"The critical issue we face of limited human resources and space made the records management sessions particularly relevant."

"Building the institutional memory through records management was an eye opener."

"I identified with the need for retention policies for internal information and will take that back to my organization."

"The extent of the sessions which covered multi-media materials was very useful."

"The invitation to the workshop itself raised the issue of the need for records management. We had not though about it. The workshop was very useful."

"I would like another workshop to explore (the management of) special materials for example, underwater photographs."

"The sessions were excellent – I would like to have similar training on financial records."

On other sessions
"The Workshop covered a wide range of issues. In particular the issues of designing systems to allow user access, the need for marketing of the information as an income generator, the ability to handle multi-media materials in the system, the need for retention policies, and the important matter of developing in the public view trust in the information provided were new ideas which I gained."

"Maritza's sessions were very useful and clear. I now feel less intimidated by the concept of information management.:"

"I expected a theoretical approach to the topics but was pleasantly surprised by the practical approach."

"The sessions were highly relevant to the work of my organization, was very practical and was well presented by a group of professionals. It is unlikely that I can do as good a job in imparting the knowledge gained to other staff."

"It is one of the best workshops I have attended."

"Since our collection is small I can easily apply some of what I learnt to manage it. I now have a better understanding of the importance of information management in building an institutional memory for the future."

"I was very impressed with the sessions on websites for natural resource management."

"The Workshop exceeded my expectations"

"I have knowledge that will help me to start a database and a website, and resist becoming a repository."

"I was impressed with the information on websites and will share that with students while I begin to make the library functional. The IMA education programme with schools gave me ideas for follow-up."

MHH/ 06/012/04