



## Small grants can make a big difference

Outcomes of and lessons learnt from the small grants component of *Building civil society capacity for conservation in Caribbean United Kingdom Overseas Territories*

March 2012



Jost van Dyke students and Jost van Dyke Preservation Society Officer prepare for a coral coverage monitoring dive off the eastern edge of Jost van Dyke (left). Jost van Dyke students on the turtle tagging course (right)

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ANT	Anguilla National Trust
ARLG	Action Research and Learning Group
BVI	British Virgin Islands
CANARI	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
CSO	Civil society organisation
GBP	Great Britain Pound
JvDPS	Jost van Dyke Preservation Society
MNT	Montserrat National Trust
NTCI	National Trust for the Cayman Islands
UKOT	United Kingdom Overseas Territory
USD	United States Dollar
YESA	Youth Environmental Society of Anguilla

## 1. Introduction

This paper provides a review of the outcomes of, and lessons learnt from, the small grant component of the *Building civil society capacity for conservation in the Caribbean United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOTs)* project, a three-year (2009-2012) research and capacity building project, coordinated by the Commonwealth Foundation and implemented regionally by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI), under funding from the Darwin Initiative (Darwin). For more information on the overall project, see [http://www.canari.org/civil\\_sub3.asp](http://www.canari.org/civil_sub3.asp).

The main aim of the paper is to provide policy pointers for donor and other agencies implementing small grant and capacity building programmes in the Caribbean. However, it also contains useful lessons for civil society organisations (CSOs) about designing and implementing projects under small grants.

The project's capacity building efforts and small grant making focused on the National Trust and a selected partner civil society organisation (CSO) in each of the five Caribbean UKOTs, as shown in Table 1 below.

*Table 1 Project participants*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Trust</b>	<b>Partner organisation</b>
Anguilla	Anguilla National Trust	Youth Environmental Society of Anguilla
British Virgin Islands	British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust <sup>1</sup>	Jost van Dyke Preservation Society
Cayman Islands	National Trust for the Cayman Islands	Rotaract Club of Grand Cayman <sup>2</sup>
Montserrat	Montserrat National Trust	Montserrat Small Business Association <sup>3</sup>
Turks and Caicos Islands	Turks and Caicos National Trust	Rotaract Club of Providenciales

The small grant component was designed to assist participating organisations with some aspect of building their organisational capacity, or that of an institution or network to which they belong. The intention was to fund strategic organisational development activities that it might otherwise be difficult for organisations to fund under their project activities, such as strategic planning, training or study tours. The grant size was between GBP 5,000 and 6,000 (approximately USD 7,500 to 9,000 at the time).

Given the short time period between the completion of the small grant projects (February 2012) and the preparation of this paper, the analysis focuses on short-term

<sup>1</sup> Did not submit a small grant proposal.

<sup>2</sup> The Rotaract Club of Grand Cayman only attended the section Action Research and Learning Group meeting and did not take up the option of a small grant.

<sup>3</sup> Submitted a small grant proposal and then withdrew it when the activities were funded by another organisation (Caribbean Development Bank).

outcomes in terms of organisational and institutional development as well as the lessons learnt from the process of grant preparation, implementation and oversight. A follow up assessment in a year's time to determine the longer term impacts would therefore be useful.

The findings are based on the observations of the author, who acted as the small grants co-ordinator; interviews with three CSO project managers; feedback from all participating organisations at the final Action Research and Learning Group (ARLG) meeting in March 2012; and discussions with an external facilitator who worked closely with two organisations in their strategic planning activities.

## 2. Outcomes

### 2.1. Important organisational needs addressed

Information about organisational needs was collected initially from a series of national meetings in the UKOTs (see [http://www.canari.org/civil\\_sub3\\_sub1.asp](http://www.canari.org/civil_sub3_sub1.asp)) and then discussed in more depth at the first ARLG meeting<sup>4</sup>. This provided the basis for determining the focus of the project's capacity building activities as well as catalysing ideas for small grant projects.

An analysis of the extent to which the main organisational development needs identified at the start of the project have been addressed under the small grant component is presented below:

#### *2.1.1. Strategies implemented to diversify funding sources*

Historically, most National Trusts have been dependent on a government subvention for approximately 50 to 60 per cent of their income. However, in the past few years, many Trusts have had their subventions cut and when it is paid, it is often late. The balance of the Trusts' funding, and that of the other CSOs, comes from grants and membership dues. Because the UKOTs are classified as part of Europe, they are excluded from most of the funding mechanisms and programmes available to sovereign small island developing states. This means that they rely on Europe (and particularly the UK) for most of their grant funding. In-country fundraising and tax-deductible giving were therefore identified as the main areas that could be better exploited in most islands.

Two of the grantees, Jost van Dyke Preservation Society (JvDPS) and National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI) addressed fundraising in their small grants. JvDPS focused its second grant on developing a private giving fundraising plan to increase its unrestricted income<sup>5</sup>. JvDPS successfully tested two new approaches to raising unrestricted income - its first annual 'gala' fundraising event and a donor drive targeted

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<sup>4</sup> A total of three ARLGs were held during the life time of the three-year project in March 2010, March 2011 and March 2012 (see [http://www.canari.org/civil\\_sub3\\_sub2.asp](http://www.canari.org/civil_sub3_sub2.asp) for more information).

<sup>5</sup> Unrestricted income is the income that can be used to cover any of the organisation's costs, including salaries, rent, utilities etc., as opposed to restricted funding that is allocated for a specific activity, typically under a project.

at yachting and other foreign visitors. Over a short period of time, these two activities contributed over USD 20,000 to its unrestricted fund and helped to identify a number of new private donors based in the United States. JvDPS also reported that fundraising has now become better integrated into the organisation, with Board members playing a role in donor cultivation.

NTCI's website upgrade established an on-line payment system to improve opportunities for donations and to provide a convenient mechanism for merchandise and membership payments. Overall, NTCI's project has increased traffic to the website which it is hoped will, in turn, lead to increased on-line donations.

### *2.1.2. Advocacy role enhanced*

Although National Trusts are non-profit organisations, their legal status as statutory bodies often means that they must obtain government approval for projects they plan to implement. Combined with the fact that they get a large portion of their funding from government, this makes it difficult for Trusts to take on an overt role in lobbying or advocacy.

In Anguilla, the Youth Environmental Society of Anguilla (YESA), as an independent youth-led CSO, chose to tackle this issue by building the capacity of YESA members to become more effective environmental advocates. YESA's project built skills in and exposed its members to advocacy techniques through workshops, production of an advocacy manual and a five-day study tour to learn from another campaigning organisation in the British Virgin Islands (BVI).

Since YESA and the Anguilla National Trust (ANT) enjoy a close working relationship, this provides an avenue for ANT to lobby and raise public awareness on issues that it cannot campaign about directly. This partnership strategy could provide a useful advocacy model for the other Trusts.

### *2.1.3. Improved human resource base and levels of staffing*

All participating CSOs noted that they had fewer staff than they would like, resulting in existing staff being over-extended. The Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT) used the small grant opportunity to contract in temporary staff to manage its project, and NTCI and ANT also contracted in expertise for some aspects of project delivery (website development). While this is not a long-term solution to the staffing need, it temporarily freed up time for CSO leaders to work on other, more strategic programme aspects. It demonstrates a willingness to delegate and has helped to widen the pool of skills and expertise that these CSOs can call upon.

Another way that grantees sought to address this gap and support their mandate as conservation organisations was by training volunteers to assume conservation roles. In its first grant, JvDPS trained its core community-based volunteer group in conservation monitoring skills. YESA increased the advocacy skills of its members to improve environmental advocacy and NTCI has begun to develop the skills of its school-based members to implement conservation projects.

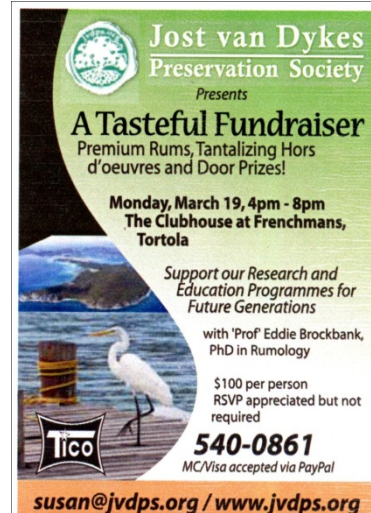
### **CASE STUDY 1: Jost van Dyke Preservation Society's project to enhance its private giving fundraising**

The Jost van Dyke Preservation Society (JvDPS) is Jost van Dyke's (JvD)<sup>6</sup> only environmental CSO, established in 2004. Over the last few years, the Society has focused its fundraising efforts on grant funding, with good success. However un-restricted funds have been limited and financial stability has been difficult to achieve. JvDPS therefore decided that a good use of its small grant would be to develop a private, unrestricted fundraising plan and campaign.

JvDPS' main target for its private giving is the large, relatively affluent visitor population. JvD is dependent on short-term, mostly one-day tourism from the main tourist hubs on the British and US Virgin Islands and ancillary services to the large charter and private yacht population (approximately 8000 vessels per year come through JvD). However, with no banks or ATMs on-island, JvDPS had to come up with a clever and creative plan to capture visitors' cash. Within a four-month period, JvDPS developed a new fundraising plan and implemented some innovative approaches to seize those tourist dollars:

- Production of eye-catching donation envelopes, placed in strategic locations, aimed at encouraging visitors to donate their change at the end of their day.
- 'Reef Sandwiches' and 'Sloop Burgers' were added to the menu of local restaurants. Menus clearly state that US\$1 from the sale of each goes towards two of JvDPS' most well-known projects: coral reef conservation and its heritage sloop building project.
- Once per month JvDPS's Director keeps a Board member-owned boutique open after normal closing time. A percentage of the night's sales go to JvDPS.
- JvDPS has applied to install 10 yacht mooring balls off JvD. This would provide an annual rental income of between US\$12,000 – 20,000.
- The first annual, fundraising 'gala event' was held. This year, JvDPS held an invitation only, US\$100 per head, 'rum tasting' night (see Photo). It was held on Tortola to facilitate attendance of as many guests as possible and brought in US\$8,000 on the night.

Not only has JvDPS earned well-deserved funds, it has gained some valuable lessons for the future. Fundraising is now much better integrated into the JvDPS programme, partly because Board members have realised the important and significant role that they can play in this area. JvDPS found that events are very important, not just for the funds secured on the night but also for raising its organisational profile, which increases the potential for future financial returns. JvDPS plans to reinstate its defunct quarterly newsletter as the Society has realised the value of this communication tool for reaching a wide, varied and potentially lucrative audience. Finally, the organisation needs to constantly educate people and visitors about its funding needs, even if staff and Board feel they've already said it a thousand times already!



Flyer for JvDPS' gala fundraising event

<sup>6</sup> Jost van Dyke (JvD) is one of four inhabited islands of the British Virgin Islands (BVI), with a tiny community of 200 - 300 people. BVI comprises approximately 60 islands; the two main islands are: Tortola and Virgin Gorda where the majority of the BVI population and service industry is based.



#### *2.1.4. Enhanced strategic role and direction*

Faced with low staffing levels and the complex operating and funding environment, many of the CSO leaders had tended to focus on day to day activities at the expense of long-term planning and strategic visioning. Several organisations have been operating without a strategic plan.

The small grants afforded the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) and TCNT the opportunity to conduct comprehensive, externally facilitated reviews of their strategic direction, including Board roles and responsibilities and staffing structures. For both organisations, this was the first time such a comprehensive strategic review had been undertaken. ANT, whose current strategic plan had come to an end, also carried out a review of goals and objectives, involving members and partners through a questionnaire. ANT developed a new strategic plan for the next five years (2012 – 2017) and its first five-year financial plan and budget for the same planning period. All three organisations have developed an enhanced strategic focus and worked towards building a greater sense of stakeholder ownership in their respective organisations. TCNT reports a significant improvement in staff morale following its small grant project.

#### *2.1.5. Improved clarity on Board role and participation of Board members.*

CSOs in the Caribbean often struggle to get the most out of their Board, for a variety of reasons. In this case, staff in several organisations expressed dissatisfaction with Board members' level of support for organisational development and programme delivery.

Board members did not assume a role in small grant project delivery, with the exception of the implementation of the private giving fundraising plan under the second JvDPS grant. However, clarity on the Board's role has been improved through the strategic planning exercises at TCNT and, to a lesser extent, MNT. These exercises provided an avenue for challenging and reviewing the Board's role and input to the organisation. At TCNT, following its strategic planning, there has been a re-invigoration of the Board and a number of standing committees, all chaired by Board members, have been established. For JvDPS, the Board was not only instrumental in the successful delivery of its second project but a major project outcome has been that a clearer role for Board members in fundraising has been identified and agreed upon.

#### *2.1.6. Role in protected areas management strengthened*

At the time of the national meetings and first ARLG meeting, several of the Trusts seemed reluctant to take on additional protected areas management responsibilities, even when the relevant government partner seemed willing to devolve responsibility. However, by the time of the final ARLG meeting, there was much greater enthusiasm for this aspect of their mandate, with several projects underway or being developed to facilitate this, in part as a result of the small grant projects.

While none of the CSOs addressed protected area management directly under their grants, components of the ANT, JvDPS and TCNT projects have contributed to the shift in thinking. Both ANT and TCNT already have a mandate to manage protected areas and, through their strategic planning exercises, they have sought to consolidate their

role. During its next strategic planning period (2012-2017), ANT aims to develop a protected area systems plan and to lobby the government to designate other areas for protection. TCNT plans to negotiate an MOU with the Department for Environment and Coastal Resources regarding TCNT's role in environmental and protected area management.

For JvDPS, the skills training in environmental monitoring for community-based volunteers will enhance the organisation's potential to support conservation efforts on Jost van Dyke and nearby 'out-islands', such as Green Cay, which is a designated protected area (under BVI National Parks Trust (NPT) management).

#### *2.1.7. Improved linkages with other CSOs.*

The overall project (and specifically the small grants component) was designed to provide an opportunity for participating CSOs to work more closely at the national level with existing partners and to identify new ones.

ARLG members expressed an interest initially in working collaboratively with their national partner on their small grant projects but in the end, only TCNT and the Rotaract Club of Providenciales delivered a joint project. However, some grantees worked with other partners. JvDPS delivered its first project in conjunction with a US based partner, Sea Trek, and NTCI has improved its working relationship with Caymanian schools as part of its youth guardians and website development projects.

Although linkages with other CSOs did not feature heavily in the small grants component, there is a strong working partnership between the Anguilla organisations and the final ARLG meeting provided a sense that partnerships were likely to be further strengthened in Turks and Caicos and renewed in Montserrat.

#### 2.2. Proposal writing skills enhanced

CSOs were required to complete a simple application form comprising eight questions and provide a budget. Completed applications were four to five pages in length. For some organisations, drafts of the proposals went back and forth a few times between the small grants coordinator and the applicant in order to improve the finished product in terms of relevance, clarity in needs identification and adherence to the guidelines. As a result of this process, CSOs have improved their proposal writing skills and some have gone on to use the application template as building blocks for other proposals.

## CASE STUDY 2: Turks and Caicos National Trust's Refocus and Capacity Strengthening project

In 2008, the Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT)<sup>7</sup> had a dramatic 58 per cent reduction in its government subvention. Consequently, the TCNT had to make a 50 per cent cut in its staffing and programme delivery suffered. Not surprisingly, this negatively affected staff morale and long-term organisational planning was pushed to the back burner as the Executive Director became over-burdened with operational tasks. The low turn-out at Board meetings compounded the situation, leaving staff frustrated by the Board's poor level of support. Against this background the TCNT decided to use its small grant to help it confront its changed operating environment. Its project set out



TCNT workshop promoting biodiversity through small business development

to assess the long-term threats and opportunities facing the organisation; re-evaluate its programme goals and objectives; the skills, roles and responsibilities of Board and staff; and, refresh its public image as a steward of TCI's biodiversity.

The Trust contracted a strategic planning facilitator, who led a 10-day review process comprising interviews with the Trust's main stakeholders, a visioning workshop with Board and staff, participatory preparation of a strategic plan, and a one-day staff skills training. The outcomes have been very encouraging: The Trust now has a more manageable and focused programme, Board members have shown greater interest in organisational targets through the establishment of three Board-led standing committees on public awareness, economic development and membership. Staff communication and outputs have improved and they feel confident about the future growth and development of the Trust. Following its internal development work, the TCNT and its national partner, the Rotaract Club of Providenciales, pooled small grant funds towards a collaborative sub-project called, *The Integrated Biodiversity Conservation Project*, a public awareness campaign designed to refresh the Trust's public profile, raise awareness of the islands' biodiversity and capitalise on Rotaract's member support. The sub-project used the slogan 'A Loss of Biodiversity Means a Loss of Identity' and each of the Islands was given a theme based on a distinct, identifiable aspect of its biodiversity. The various activities - field trips, school presentations, a national photo competition and workshops for community-based micro enterprises, all received considerable media coverage. The project also inspired ten women of Salt Cay to set up a local craft group (see Photo) which has since received product development and marketing support from TCNT.

<sup>7</sup> The Turks and Caicos National Trust has offices on three islands of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). TCI is made up of about 40 small islands and cays. The larger, inhabited islands are Grand Turk, Salt Cay, Providenciales, North Caicos, Middle (or Grand) Caicos, and South Caicos. TCI has a population of approximately 33,500. Source: [http://www.macmillan-caribbean.com/uploads/db351e82-0141-411b-a83e-df1933d48fe5\\_History%20of%20TCI.pdf](http://www.macmillan-caribbean.com/uploads/db351e82-0141-411b-a83e-df1933d48fe5_History%20of%20TCI.pdf)

### 3. Lessons learnt and pointers for the future

#### ***Relatively small grants, accompanied with technical assistance, can successfully address organisational development needs***

The analysis of outcomes shows that a simple application process for relatively small amounts of funds (total funding pool for ten grantees in five countries was GBP60,000), accompanied by relevant technical support, can effectively address organisational development needs. The technical support mainly took the form of facilitated identification of project ideas, clarification of organisational strengthening needs and capacity gaps, and assistance in proposal formulation and in developing terms of reference for contracted project inputs. The support was enhanced by CANARI's familiarity with the work of the target CSOs through other activities under the project<sup>8</sup> and previous working relationships with many of the participating CSOs. Technical support in the form of external, independent facilitation of strategic planning activities also proved to be very helpful in focusing Board and staff on their organisational objectives and roles and responsibilities.

#### ***CSOs have been innovative in exploiting available human resources but can do more to strengthen this approach***

The small grants have demonstrated that CSOs can employ innovative strategies to bring in human resources to support their organisational mandate. Approaches included training community-based volunteers; building a core group of school-based volunteers; contracting in services and temporary staff; and drawing on Board members for specific tasks.

The constrained human resource pool in the UKOTs is unlikely to change but CSOs could build on the good progress made so far by:

- *Continuing to use volunteers strategically to free-up staff time and particularly that of the Executive Director.* As demonstrated by a couple of the projects, training and use of volunteers can assist in programme delivery. Volunteers may also be useful in providing administrative support. CSOs should consider developing a volunteer policy including performance management and identification of specific roles for volunteers, and formulation of a volunteer recruitment system.
- *Getting more out of Board members.* Board members successfully contributed to fundraising activities in one of the projects and many responded positively and showed a willingness to contribute when involved in strategic planning exercises. The extent to which Board members will continue to contribute to programme activities is unclear, but in future CSOs could usefully pay more attention to recruiting and deploying Board members to deliver specific organisational development tasks.

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the small grants component, project activities included: national meetings in each UKOT; three ARLG meetings, all with capacity building components; a study visit to Bonaire to analyse the work of CSOs in biodiversity conservation in this territory and other Dutch Caribbean islands.

- *Strengthening working partnerships.* The strategic planning activities indicated that functional partnerships (where there is joint planning, clear roles and responsibilities, and shared use of resources and decision-making) between CSOs, and between government agencies and CSOs, are still poorly developed. This kind of working partnership is critical to successful co-management of protected areas and can expand the human resource base available to both CSOs and government. CSOs may need to devote greater attention to reviewing and enhancing the quality of their partnerships to reap greater benefits such as: access to bigger funding pots through joint funding arrangements, human resource support to project delivery and boosting biodiversity conservation gains.

***Devoting time to organisational planning and reflection is critical to organisational development and must be revisited on a regular basis***

For some organisations, the small grants programme has addressed a number of long overdue organisational development needs. Project outcomes include such benefits as improved staff morale, a re-invigorated Board, new donors and a greater sense of ownership of stakeholders in the organisation. Despite the very real funding and human constraints in Caribbean UKOT CSOs, organisations will need to foster a culture of planning and reflection to build on the good progress made to date. Project outcomes are likely to be more sustained with follow up to consolidate gains and review progress, on a yearly basis with major planning exercises at three to five year intervals.

***In-country fundraising efforts produced positive results for one CSO and there is potential to build and learn from its experience***

Most UKOTs have a large and regular pool of high-net worth visitors. In many, there is also a large private sector, including those that service these visitors. Research to better understand this 'market', cultivating the gatekeepers, formulating the right donor 'ask' and hosting one or more fundraising events that would appeal to this clientele could yield much needed unrestricted income.