Report on the Panos Caribbean Action Learning Group Meeting - Environmental Communication

Hotel Four Seasons | Kingston, Jamaica

4 April 2014

Contents

1. Context and Background to the Meeting

The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) is implementing a project on "Consolidating the role of civil society in biodiversity conservation in the Caribbean islands", funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. This project is designed to enhance the ability of CSOs to access the CEPF and other relevant grants by building capacity in core areas such as effective development of projects, writing proposals, managing projects, project monitoring and evaluation, and effective communication with diverse target audiences as well as their overall organisational development (including strategic planning and management, financial management and fundraising, and human resource management).

One component of this project is to establish and facilitate two pilot National Action Learning Groups in the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. A workshop to pilot a national Action Learning Group (ALG) was held in Kingston, Jamaica on 14 February 2013. Twenty CSO representatives from 17 organisations took part in the workshop, along with two CANARI-trained Volunteer Mentors. Eight of the organisations that were represented at that workshop are CEPF grantees or sub-grantees. While that workshop did not lead to the formation of an ALG set in Jamaica, a few participants indicated an interest in the methodology.

On 28 February and 1 March 2014, CEPF grantee Panos Caribbean hosted a CSO-Media Training Workshop on communicating biodiversity conservation as part of its project "*Strengthening the Engagement of Caribbean Civil Society in Biodiversity Conservation through Local and Regional Networking and Effective Sharing of Learning and Best Practices*." The two-day workshop brought together 20 participants, 12 of whom represented civil society organisations working in biodiversity conservation, and eight of whom were working practitioners from the print and electronic media. An important outcome of this workshop was the decision by participants to form two working groups to take forward proposals by the meeting to:

i.   Develop a sustained environmental media campaign that includes private sector partnerships; and

ii.   Establish Panos Caribbean as a clearinghouse for information and communication on biodiversity conservation and create the next generation of environmental advocates".

Two working groups were established to take these ideas forward. It was decided that the ALG methodology would be used to support problem solving and the process of taking action as the groups worked towards developing the proposals listed above. Support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation made it possible for Panos Caribbean, in collaboration with CANARI, to organise and host an action learning session on 4 April 2014 to review the progress made by the two working groups on their initiatives, and provide feedback and suggestions to further advance them.

2.   Objectives

The objectives of the 4 April 2014 ALG workshop were to:

- Promote continued sharing and learning in communication on biodiversity and biodiversity conservation while drawing on the experience and expertise of the group.
- Provide an enabling environment for the realisation of goals crafted under the CEPF-supported project [and the 28 Feb – 1 March workshop in particular].
- Facilitate the measurement of outcomes from the CEPF-supported project.

Left to right: Hugh Dixon (STEA), Ingrid Parchment (C-CAM), and Esther Figueroa (Independent Filmmaker).
Photo: Emma Lewis

3.   Participants

The following individuals took part in the session:
  i.   Hugh Dixon, Executive Director, Southern Trelawny Environmental Association (STEA)
 ii.   Emma Lewis, Independent Blogger
iii.   Esther Figueroa, Independent Filmmaker
 iv.   Indi Mclymont-Lafayette, Regional Coordinator, Panos Caribbean
  v.   Ingrid Parchment, Executive Director, Caribbean Coastal Area Management   (C-CAM) Foundation

Co-facilitators Nicole Brown (left) and Petre Williams-Raynor
Photo: Emma Lewis

The meeting was co-facilitated by Petre Williams-Raynor, Senior Programme Officer, Panos Caribbean and Nicole Brown, Country Coordinator, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Caribbean Regional Implementation Team (RIT) and Associate, Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI). Adene Chung, Project Assistant, Panos Caribbean provided administrative support.

Participants included representatives of two current CEPF grantees, namely C-CAM and Panos Caribbean. Two of the participating organisations are involved in on-the-ground work in three of the

CEPF's highest priority key biodiversity areas (KBAs) in Jamaica:
- Cockpit Country KBA (STEA)
- Hellshire Hills KBA (C-CAM)
- Portland Ridge KBA (C-CAM)

Based on confirmations received by Panos Caribbean, 18 participants were expected at the session, but after last minute cancellations only eight people took part, including the facilitators and Panos support staff. Despite the smaller than anticipated turn out, the session was productive and it advanced the conceptualisation and development of the environmental media campaign that had been proposed at the Feb/March media-CSO workshop.

4.   Methodology and Process

The Action Learning (AL) methodology was adapted for this session. The key elements used were the presentation and focussed questioning formats. Participants were actively encouraged to use questioning as a tool for problem solving rather than immediately resorting to identifying prescriptive solutions to the issues and challenges that were being discussed by the presenter. This meeting was the first face-to-face encounter of the participants since the Feb/March media-CSO workshop and the group has not subsequently functioned as an AL set.

The meeting was originally intended to allow the members of the two working groups to share progress made on their concepts and proposals since the Feb/March media-CSO workshop and provide support and feedback to help overcome challenges in the elaboration of the concepts and the move towards implementation. But as the individuals present at the meeting were all part of the same working group, the discussions centred exclusively on the development of a sustained environmental media campaign and the day's agenda (see Appendix 1) was modified to accommodate this change in the composition of the participants.

Session presenter Esther Figueroa (Independent Filmmaker)   *Photo: Emma Lewis*

Between the Feb/March media-CSO workshop and this meeting, a draft concept note had been prepared by a working group member, Esther Figueroa, and revised based on feedback from other members. This draft concept paper formed the basis of the meeting's discussion, with Ms. Figueroa as presenter.

# 5.	Main Results

## 5.1	Outcomes

- ***Agreement on general concept and approach for "Many Voices" Campaign***

By the end of the meeting, there was consensus on the general concept and approach to be taken for the "Many Voices" national environmental education and awareness platform and campaign.

- "Many Voices" provides an overall framework for environmental communication by civil society and conservation/environmental management groups from other sectors using a range of traditional and new media, as well as face to face methods.

- It is simultaneously a p*latform* for communication campaigns, a *driver*, and a *facilitator*.
    - The *platform* is the conceptual resource space where all come together for transformative environmental communication.
    - The *driver* is the functional/institutional lead for the campaign(s), coordinating activities and pulling in resources etc.
    - The facilitator role relates to providing a vehicle for training, capacity building, information, guidance etc. (This is the narrowest role.)

- In its driver role, "Many Voices" will provide quality control for campaigns and serve as a clearing house for information.

- "Many Voices" attempts to close the gap between outputs and information needs and will respond to the specific needs for:
    - coordinated information sharing on environmental issues and biodiversity conservation;
    - communication support to individual organisations and groups;
    - knowledge support (including the establishment of a skill/expertise bank);
    - increasing the reach of existing outreach and public education efforts to move beyond "preaching to the choir" and get to new audiences through a range of media and methods; and
    - improved understanding of how to use information and communication bring about changes in attitudes and practices (behaviour) vis a vis the natural environment .

- Discrete thematic campaigns (e.g., biodiversity conservation; livelihoods and natural resources; ecosystem services etc) will be implemented under the "Many Voices" umbrella. Each campaign developed will have its specific objectives, targets and timelines.

- Platform partners from civil society, the media, and the private sector will be invited to come on board to support and be part of "Many Voices". The ways in which partners can take part will be diverse and include, for example, the provision of information for a specific thematic campaign; the provision of production services for a specific thematic campaign; supporting information

dissemination; and drawing on media and communication expertise from within the group. One of the limiting factors to current environmental/conservation outreach and education campaign is the cost of airtime on electronic media. Media platform partners will be approached to provide bundled packages of airtime at discounted rates or with a part in-kind contribution of airtime, the use of which will be managed/allocated through "Many Voices."

Participants Emma Lewis (Independent Blogger) and High Dixon (STEA). *Photo: Nicole A. Brown*
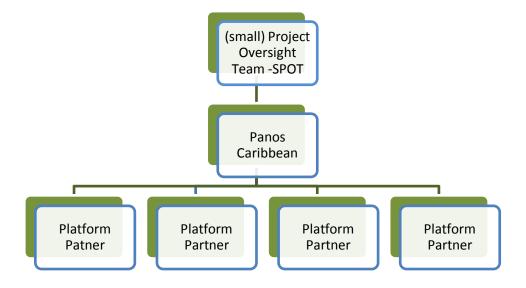
- An incremental approach must be taken to developing "Many Voices." The current conceptualisation round will be built on through the identification of partners and collaborators, the development of "projects" within the "Many Voices" framework, and the identification of funding.

- *Logistics, Structure and Institutional Arrangements/Framework*

   - Given its mandate and role, Panos Caribbean would be an appropriate organisation to take on the role of institutional driver /coordinator.

   - A (small) Project Oversight Team (SPOT) will provide guidance in an advisory capacity. Participants in the meeting will form the interim SPOT, pending confirmation of commitment.

   - Platform partners will be invited to play a role in shaping the activities of "Many Voices" and in implementation.

      See Figure 1.

Figure 1

- *Action Points/Next Steps*

1.	Panos Caribbean to determine its institutional requirements (time, human resources, financial resources etc) in order to play a coordinating role and confirm its ability to do so.	*Communicate with group via email by 18 April 2014*
2.	Meeting participants to determine if they are willing and able to continue as the "conceptualising committee" or interim SPOT.	*Communicate with group via email by 18 April 2014*
3.	Disseminate updated Executive Summary of the existing concept note to participants in the Feb/March media-CSO workshop to get buy in; and identify other platform partners.	*Esther to update by 18 April 2014 and targeted dissemination to potential partners coordinated by Panos. Initial dissemination/ partner outreach list to be developed based on submissions by (interim) SPOT members.*
4.	Process responses to 3 above.	*Panos to coordinate*
5.	(Interim) SPOT to regroup after responses have been processed to determine next steps.	

5.2   Reflections on the Action Learning Process/Methodology

Petre Williams-Raynor, Panos Caribbean.
Photo: Emma Lewis

As explained in Section 4, the AL methodology was significantly modified for use in this session and while it cannot be considered a true AL set, the application and use of focussed questioning served this process well.

- ***Thorough interrogation of issues***: Focussed questioning allowed for a deeper interrogation of the issues that were laid out in the concept note and presented to the group and, importantly, of the assumptions behind it.

- ***Support for consensus building***: Through the use of focussed questioning, participants realised early on in the meeting that there was less of a shared understanding of the proposed concept than had been assumed at the start of the day. Even though participants had reviewed and commented on the concept note prior to the meeting, the discussion and process of questioning revealed differences in understanding and underlying assumptions about "Many Voices" and its roll out.

- ***Time consuming***: Building consensus was time consuming, particularly once participants realised that they had come to the table with disparate notions and assumptions about "Many Voices". The trade-off, however, was the strong, shared understanding that emerged by the end of the session.

- ***An enabling environment for examination:*** The emphasis on "focussed questioning" and the rejection of prescriptive advice gave participants an opportunity to move away from a discourse framed around "right" and "wrong" and gave them permission "to not know". Indeed, it was through the process of questioning that the differences in understanding and of underlying assumptions among participants emerged.

- ***Future application:*** Panos Caribbean has indicated that it would use the focussed questioning approach in future and has noted its usefulness in problem solving.

While this experience cannot be considered a true and complete application of the AL methodology, it has shown how elements of the approach can be adapted and modified with positive results for group processes and collaborative working.

Appendix 1: Meeting Agenda

AGENDA

Action Learning Group Meeting

As follow-up to Panos CSO-Media Training Workshop
(14 Feb 28 and 14 Mar 1)

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Sections shaded in green reflect the actual focus of the meeting.

TIME	ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
8:30 am – 9:00 a.m.	Registration	
9:00 am – 9:15 a.m.	Welcome and Introductions	Petre Williams-Raynor, Panos Caribbean
9:15am – 9:30 a.m.	Rules of Play	Nicole Brown, CANARI
9:30 am – 10:00 am	Presenter #1: Sustained Environmental Media Campaign	Esther Figueroa, Independent Filmmaker
10:00 am – 11:10a.m.	Feedback and Focused Questioning	Petre Williams-Raynor/Nicole Brown
11:10 am – 11:25 a.m.	Agreement on Action Items	Petre Williams-Raynor/Nicole Brown
11:25 – 11:35 a.m.	**STRETCH BREAK**	
11:35 – 12:05 p.m.	Presenter #2: Creation of Panos Caribbean as a Clearinghouse	Christopher Serju, Jamaica Gleaner
12:05 pm – 1:15 p.m.	Feedback and Focused Questioning	Indi Mclymont Lafayette
1:15 – 1:30 p.m.	Agreement on Action Items	Indi Mclymont Lafayette
1:30 – 2:00 p.m.	Evaluation, Next Steps& Closing	Petre Williams-Raynor
2:00 pm – 3:00 p.m.	**LUNCH**	