

## **Effecting the Citizen's Agenda in Climate Change**

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### **Climate Change - a present reality**

Here in the Caribbean, we are known for the sun, sea and sand, and the warmth of our people. It is a tourism hotspot and believe it... it is getting even hotter. Climate change is not something that is to come, but it is a reality of our time. The people of the Caribbean are already experiencing these impacts, but are they aware of the cause?

The hurricane season is bowling us over worse than a West Indian fast bowler, and our wet seasons are washing out play. The dry spell of 'petit careme' experienced normally in the month of September is virtually non-existent, and we cannot plan school sports events at that time of year again. So we turn to the dry season, and what blazing sun we have, to the point that some outdoor school activities have to be shortened to prevent youngsters from fainting in the heat.

What about the vegetable prices? They are shooting sky high, because water is scarce and the earth is parched in the dry season but floods are taking away all the produce in the wet season. The high period for tourism is at winter, but even then we are not sure what type of weather to expect and whether the infrastructure will withstand its effect.

All that glitters is not gold and similarly, the gleaming blue sea is rising and some of the coral beds and nursery areas below are beginning a silent suffering, as they become bleached and lose their dramatic displays of colour and life. Fishermen cast their nets and hope for something sizeable, and yet, they face opposition from the customers that complain about the 'cuthroat prices' that seem to be rising all the time. Are the connections being made?

### **Understanding the issue, making the connections**

CANARI recognises that the tremendous work done by scientists in identifying the causes of climate change, predicting the extent of sea level rise, recommending the percentage rate at which emissions should be reduced over time. But this means....well, just figures... to the individual who cannot understand this science-speak.

The families that experience a flood every Monday morning in the wet season, and who have to read by lamplight because the electricity poles were knocked over in the storm, just hear...figures. The tour guide who has to find new areas of the reef to pass over because the regular route has been reduced to rubble, just hears... figures. Even the politician, being driven to work every day in an SUV, may not understand why the government is being asked to sign a document to reduce what? Figures.

It brings us to a realisation of the fact that these figures need to be translated. Translated into something that is understood...by everyone, not just a few. The impacts are real, but the

connection with the cause is still not apparent to most. While we in the Caribbean contribute just 1% of the gases that create the problem of global warming, this hotspot is under pressure and we have to do something to stem the effects to ensure more sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods. The figures need to be translated into action... by everyone. And the figures need to become translated into something which is part and parcel of everyone's day-to-day living, because the figures are already what we are living.

## **Effective translation**

CANARI, is proudly part of the translation process. For over 20 years, the Institute has managed to effectively drive stakeholder awareness and participation in the management of natural resources through its collaborations with governments, the private sector and civil society groups. It has engaged in sound research with members of the scientific community as well as grassroots communities. It has facilitated the translation by stimulating equitable and effective participation, two-way dialogue, action learning and the promotion of sustainable livelihoods.

On this critical topic of climate change and disaster risk reduction, CANARI's efforts have always focussed on awareness and building resilience. The organisation, over the past five years, has been engaged in the development and dissemination of information on climate change, not just to highlight the phenomenon, but also to move people into action to reduce its impact and build resilience. These activities have adopted innovative strategies; in order to contribute its effort in addressing this global problem, CANARI's work has been documented to facilitate sharing with the wider community. The following are some of the experiences that have led to awareness building on climate change:

At a CANARI-facilitated workshop in Saint Lucia in 2007, stakeholders from 11 Caribbean countries met to enhance the knowledge of and catalyse action by Caribbean civil society organisations, performance artists and media persons about climate change and its actual and potential impacts on the region. At that workshop, participants also identified roles that civil society can play at the local, national and regional level in building public awareness and local capacity for adaptation. Out of this workshop, several follow-up actions were undertaken, including the development of communication tools, and discussions to develop a regional research agenda on assessing climate change impacts and capacity needs.

*Communicating Climate Change - a toolbox for local organisations in the Caribbean (2009)* <http://www.canari.org/documents/CommunicatingclimatechangeAtoolboxforlocalorgansationspdf.pdf> is a comprehensive 80-page guide that helps users to understand climate change. It utilises simple language to communicate hard information on climate change, while offering tips on how to disseminate the information. The toolbox encourages users to learn about their audiences and identify effective messengers to communicate with others. It also highlights the CANARI strategy of building networks for technical support and for crafting messages that make a connection with audiences, particularly at the local community level. This document also outlines how to plan and deliver educational activities in climate change communication.

A second document - *Addressing Climate Change (2009)* <http://www.canari.org/documents/CAtoolkitEnglish.pdf> - was produced by CANARI for Christian Aid (Jamaica). It provides basic information on climate change, but mainly, it offers practical action-approaches to climate change at the community level. The toolkit was

developed to help communities to develop responses to climate change within their local context. Some of the useful aspects of this toolkit include helping groups to identify, understand and reduce community risks and vulnerabilities - essential steps in building resilience to the impacts of climate change. Another tool was also recently developed for the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), which will guide the delivery of workshops in building community resilience. The roll-out of this training is expected to begin shortly.

### **Linking with livelihoods**

*The impacts of climate change on biodiversity in Caribbean islands (2009)* <http://www.canari.org/docs/CANARI%20Tech%20Report%20386.pdf> is a technical document produced by CANARI, that was developed through these initial discussions. It highlights climate change impact on a critical resource of the region, in that many livelihoods are tied to the goods and services produced by biodiversity and ecosystems. The impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation of terrestrial biodiversity was assessed and also the biodiversity of coastal and marine areas in the insular Caribbean. These studies contributed to the development of a ten-year research agenda, which could facilitate the filling of gaps in information and generate recommendations to build adaptive capacity.

Highlighting the synergies among climate change issues and livelihood concerns, the Institute took the lead in exploring climate change impacts on the sustainability of economic activities linked to the use of forest resources. This 2009 UNDP-commissioned exercise spanning 10 Caribbean countries, garnered information about the level of awareness of stakeholders to climate change, the impacts on forest-based livelihoods, and the degree to which there was development of intervention plans to enable building of resilience and adaptability to climate change.

The workshop revealed that among these stakeholders there was a general awareness about climate change impacts in the Caribbean but low awareness specifically on the impact on forest-based livelihoods. It also recommended that there should be more studies to support the design of on-the-ground adaptation projects that increase the resilience of forest-based communities to climate change by building on existing sustainable forest-based livelihood initiatives. Such issues while being clear areas for priority attention by policy-makers are also of equal relevance to members of the communities on which livelihoods depend - parents, children and everyone engaged in the business of the local economy.

### **A regional mandate - a regional response**

Against this backdrop of studies, workshops and dialogues with all levels of regional, national and community stakeholders, CANARI has developed a programme of action, the main objective of which is to apply the lessons learned from these experiences to build resilience through adaptation to climate change. It will lead this programme under the 2011-2021 implementation plan of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (OR 5Cs) "Regional framework to achieving development resilient to climate change" for the Caribbean.

The Head of the 5Cs, Dr. Kenrick Leslie had earlier this year stated that there is "much work to be done" in developing the framework for action and so the plan is considered to be a programme of action, marked by public outreach, engagement and communications. One of the key components of the programme will involve developing and testing viable strategies for

increasing resilience of communities in Caribbean SIDS by adaptation to climate change through knowledge sharing and innovative action.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding with the 5Cs, CANARI will lead implementation of this programme and is interested in partnering with other organisations working in the Caribbean that can add value to the effort. We are particularly interested in hearing from organisations which can bring to the table their experience and their expertise in communicating about climate change and developing climate change adaptation strategies, as we build a bank of best practices in the sharing of lessons learned.

We especially wish to encourage the participation of groups that are already working with affected and vulnerable communities, to enable action in capturing information and in building resilience to the impact of climate change. We will also be happy to learn about the experiences of other SIDS in other parts of the world, in terms of effective communication and community-adaptation strategies.

We are launching a Caribbean Action Learning Group (ALG) on Climate Change Communication to facilitate an ongoing process of sharing, joint learning, and partnerships for action.

Action learning is a **process** that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning while doing so. It is a powerful **programme** that creates dynamic opportunities for individuals, teams, leaders and organisations to successfully adapt, learn and innovate. The action learning cycle involves planning, acting, reflecting and exploring leading again to planning. The process has been utilised previously by CANARI, most notably in its Forest and Livelihoods programme area, and has generated many benefits including the development of leaders and teams of leaders, facilitation of problem solving, development of systems thinking and creativity and the creation of learning cultures.

CANARI is confident that the establishment and work of such an Action Learning Group will contribute positively to climate change communication and consequent stakeholder action. With this critical issue being a high priority of regional governments, CANARI is determined to follow through on its mandate of implementation of the programme set out in the 5Cs' agenda and is counting on responsible partnerships among our region's citizens to address this real and current issue of climate change.