

## **Implementing the Global Programme of Action in the Wider Caribbean: Lessons Learned from the NOAA/GPA Activities in the Region**

Since the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UNEP-Global Programme of Action (GPA) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) was signed at the White Water to Blue Water Conference in March 2004, several countries have requested NOAA collaboration to initiate the process of implementing the GPA at the national or regional level. As of July 2006, thirteen countries and two regional programs<sup>1</sup> are engaged in some type of collaboration, in different stages of advance, with the NOAA/GPA program office to promote, design, and develop national programmes of action (NPAs). Under this MOU, NOAA and the GPA agreed to promote and design National Programmes of Action (NPAs) under the GPA framework, mostly among countries in the Wider Caribbean region.

The work in each country came in response to requests submitted by each country's GPA focal agency to the NOAA/GPA implementing office. Some of the important steps to implement the collaboration include:

- Initial assessment of the potential participating agencies
- In-person meeting with the country's partner agencies to discuss aspects of the collaboration (including consultation meeting, budget, and local resource allocation)
- Assessment of institutions, capacities, needs, problems, and objectives for an NPA in each country
- Participatory consultation process (stakeholder meeting to determine priority objectives and actions)
- Drafting and reviewing the NPA (including issues, objectives, actions, and financial mechanisms)
- Endorsement and definition of the institutional roles for implementation.

After more than two years of experience in implementing the cooperation agreement and working with different governments and partner institutions in the region, the NOAA/GPA implementing office staff have learned some lessons on the challenges and best approaches for implementing NPAs that could be useful in other similar cases. The following is a list of the most important of these lessons:

### **1. Find and work with the right partner(s) (person and/or institution):**

In most cases, the national focal point for the GPA in each country does not have a designated office and/or person for the implementation of this specific program. Most of the success of the work relied on the interest demonstrated by the partner institution

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<sup>1</sup> Mexico (Yucatan Peninsula), Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, Costa Rica, Panama, Bahamas, Belize, St. Vincent, and the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System Project have requested and/or engaged in different stages of collaboration. Barbados, Dominica, Dominican Republic, OECS (Grenada, BVI), Guyana, Honduras, and Suriname are in the planning stage.

leaders and/or the individual staff members who, for professional, political, or personal interests, want to follow through with the process and work. In most cases devoting time for GPA-related activities, such as the NPA development work, is an addition to the many other activities that this person has to perform within his/her institution.

## **2. Face-to-face communication is required**

Under the NOAA/GPA agreement, the initial communication with countries started with an official request by each country to develop an NPA. Following the official request, it is important to hold at least one face-to-face meeting between NOAA staff and participants from each of the involved agencies in the country. These meetings serve to clarify the needs and benefits for developing an NPA, define the priority objectives, and build personal relationships between the staff members engaged in the work.

## **3. Define ownership of the NPA**

In addition to choosing the right partner, it is important to be very clear, from the very beginning of the inter-institutional conversations, that the NPA process is a country-owned process. All decisions must be based on country objectives, and products based on existing capacities. An external support, such as the NOAA/GPA agreement, is only a guiding technical and financial support in the beginning of the process. Sense of ownership is essential for involvement of government agencies in the process and for institutionalization and implementation of the NPA.

## **4. Develop key partnerships and promote (individual or institutional) leadership during the process**

It is important to establish the person or institution that will play the primary leadership role within the country and ensure that this actor a) understands the responsibilities associated with this role and b) can devote the resources necessary to carry them out and, to the extent possible, institutionalize the work. The other partners should understand that this person or institution is playing the lead role and support that actor accordingly.

## **5. Define clear and measurable goals and objectives for the NPA, and establish a timeline**

Countries must have goals and objectives that are specific enough to be measurable for evaluation purposes, and these goals and objectives must also have a clear relationship to advancing the main objectives of the GPA. Goals should be developed through an ecosystemic rather than a sector-specific approach (e.g., improving coastal ecosystem rather than strengthening fisheries). Participants should also consult their goals and objectives periodically to ensure that their work continues to serve them, and check their progress against the timeline to know whether efforts need to be increased in order to meet goals by the projected date.

## **6. Use existing resources and avoid duplications of efforts (do not re-invent the wheel)**

In almost every case in which the NOAA/GPA implementing office has established contact with a country, we have found existing institutional structures, legal frameworks, and capacities that can contribute to the NPA. For instance, many countries have programs for water management, river management, or coastal resources management, or relevant legal instruments (though enforcement may be neglected); the NPA's role may be more to harmonize existing programs or instruments than to create new ones.

## **7. Beware of relying too extensively on voluntary contributions**

The time and work that a government and /or academic partner can afford to spend on GPA-related activities, especially if these activities are in addition to his or her regular work, is very limited. In almost all of the cases, the partnerships developed by the NOAA/GPA staff relied heavily on voluntary commitments by the interested parties, and funds disbursed by NOAA/GPA were used for activities related to the consultation process, rather than payments to staff people. In some cases, this has caused problems when people volunteering time have been unable to devote enough hours to the project.

Since the GPA is not a regular established and budgeted activity of government agencies, it is essential to use some funds, during the initial part of the process, to hire a technical person who can help organize the information gathering and the consultation process, and follow up on all the commitments by participants of the process to generate the NPA. Relying only on voluntary commitments may delay the process.

## **8. Institutionalize the NPA**

Country governments must commit to carrying out the objectives and priorities of the NPA, including funding an office or staff position specifically devoted to carrying out the activities of the NPA. It is useful to obtain early endorsement of the process from national-level institutions to assist with institutionalization as the process unfolds.

## **9. Involve stakeholders at multiple levels**

To maximize participation and support for the NPA, it is important to involve stakeholders at different levels from the beginning. Communities and businesspeople in the target areas can help shape objectives and activities that are feasible and will provide benefits to multiple stakeholders. Some of the objectives and actions of the NPA should target the needs of local stakeholders (residents, fishermen, farmers, tourism industry, municipal governments, etc.). Local consultation should be used to validate the process at multiple stages.

Involving and consulting with stakeholders during each stage in the process will help improve participation and support, and it can also prevent problems of distrust and resistance that can easily arise if local leaders feel that programs have been imposed on them from a national level without adequate consultation.