GEF-IWCAM Project

Integrating Watershed and Coastal Areas Management

GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS

Briefing Note #17

The GEF-IWCAM Trinidad & Tobago Demonstration Project:
The Courland Watershed and Buccoo Reef

Introduction:

The GEF-IWCAM Demonstration Project in Tobago aimed to alleviate some of the causes of environmental degradation in the Courland Watershed and Buccoo Reef area.

Summary of principal watershed concerns:

• High nutrient levels due to the presence of land-based sources of sewage from soakaways, septic tanks and inadequate levels of treatment from small sewage treatment plants.
• Dramatic loss of vegetation due to expanding coastal developments, unsuitable farming practices and increasing forest fires.
• Lack of adequate and updated data necessary for decision making amongst all stakeholders.
• Lack of official data-sharing arrangements between government departments and agencies which hinders decision-making and duplicates efforts.
• Lack of environmental knowledge and inadequate sensitisation at the public and senior government levels.
• Little involvement by communities in environmental management.

Approach and Achievements:

• Initiation of reforestation and wild fire suppression awareness in the Courland Watershed (getting five agencies to work together).
• Geographic Information Systems mapping and data collection – introducing to and training of other agencies in GIS.
• Conduct of marine surveys, including reef checks and water quality.
• Establishment of monitoring sites on land and in the marine area, including a data collection programme, and formatting, storage, analysis and dissemination of data as required.
• Establishment of a good working relationship with a Community-Based Organisation (CBO), the Anse Fromager Ecological Environmental Protection Organization (AFEEPO), a viable community group, to rally community support and buy-in within the Courland area and to undertake and manage environmental protection activities.
• Development and construction of an artificial Wetland Wastewater Treatment System (WWTS) with technical assistance from the University of Vermont in the construction of the system. This was intended to control the outflow of pollutants associated with fish blood waste water at a fish processing plant at located at Bon Accord Estate, in the southwest of the island, an area adjacent to Buccoo Reef.
• Implementation of an extensive and effective Public Awareness and Education programme (workshops, primary and secondary school programmes etc.) and the production of films, documentaries and other educational materials to be used both during and after the project.

Summary of Impacts:

• Changing Perceptions: Given the negative impacts of pollution from the land upon the Buccoo Reef, helping people make the connection between their activities on land and impacts on the marine environment was a key focus of this project.
• Creation of Partnerships: Various agencies in both islands, Tobago and Trinidad, came together to work towards common objectives. Partnerships were also formed with community groups and land owners in the promotion of soil conservation practices and to carry out reforestation activities.
• Reforestation: A total of 553 trees of economic value, such as timber and mahogany were planted on land which had previously suffered great vegetation loss. Saplings donated by the DNRE’s Watershed Unit were planted by members of the community and youth volunteers. Lectures and demonstrations helped to educate and create awareness of the importance of reforestation for soil conservation and water supply. The reforestation drive ignited a sense of environmental responsibility in these communities.
• Public Awareness and Education: Programmes focused on people of all ages, but upon students most of all. School learning trips which included practical sessions were conducted. The land-ocean interface was featured on trips to the Bon Accord Lagoon and the Buccoo Reef. In addition, workshops were held for target groups such as contractors, ministries, divisions, and the general public.