

White Water to Blue Water

A partnership in the wider Caribbean to promote sound water and ecosystem management

Description of Initiative:

The White Water to Blue Water (WW2BW) initiative is designed to promote the practice of integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management in support of sustainable development. The initiative recognizes the need to mobilize resources from all sources and consequently explores innovative mechanisms through partnerships and capacity building.

Announced by the U.S. Government and partners at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), WW2BW continues to operate in the Wider Caribbean Region. To ensure wide representation at all levels, the initiative immediately developed an international steering committee comprised of experts from or with an interest in the region such as: national governments, local and international non-governmental organizations, academia, regional organizations, the donor community, the private sector, and others.

The Steering Committee sought to create partnerships and improve capacity through a variety of activities that work across traditional sectoral lines. Small, internationally representative “visiting” consultation teams traveled to the Wider Caribbean countries and encouraged the formation of national “country teams.” Country teams, drawing from diverse government ministries such as health, finance, water, environment, agriculture, as well as from civil society, the private sector, and academia, are designed to facilitate an ecosystem as well as participatory approach to management, while simultaneously considering social and economic development.

The Steering Committee also developed several breakout groups along more traditional thematic lines related to the initiative (e.g., integrated watershed management, marine ecosystems, tourism, transportation, and science). These groups, chaired by experts in the region, spur greater cooperation and more partnerships by helping to develop networks that can bring people and ideas together. A partnership clearinghouse website has been developed for the region – detailed information on individual projects is posted and made accessible to all partners. This website, designed as a management and networking tool for stakeholders from all sectors in the region, is being run by UNEP’s Caribbean Environment Programme.

To help solidify developing partnerships and foster new ones, the U.S. hosted a White Water to Blue Water Partnership Conference March 22-26 2004. The conference included a “learning institute,” of the sort first offered at the WSSD, to facilitate knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practices, lessons learned, and concrete skills to take back home.

The initiative has also brought together international organizations, with input from universities and non-governmental organizations, to consider ways to deepen communication and cooperation among regional and international organizations. Participants have recognized numerous potential benefits: reducing duplication of efforts, identifying gaps, opportunities for capacity building and sharing lessons learned, creating a critical mass for funding/financing new

technologies, etc. These participants have committed to continuing the dialogue in the coming months and years.

The outcomes of WW2BW support achievement of a wide spectrum of nearly all the Millennium Development and WSSD goals and targets including: encouraging ecosystem management, maintaining/restoring fish stocks, improving access to clean water, assisting developing countries in coordinating policies and programs at the regional and subregional level, considering development of a network of marine protected areas, facilitating partnerships and scientific research, and more.

Mainstreaming/Sustainability:

The initiative will capitalize on the diverse composition of the country teams to mainstream integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management into the national sustainable development planning and budgetary processes. The country team relationships will help open channels of communication between the various sectors such as finance, health, and environment to provide new opportunities for water resource managers to discuss their issues in national endeavors. Further, many country teams include civil society participation, which helps institutionalize stakeholder involvement in national processes and decision making.

The financial viability of the initiative continues to improve for multiple reasons. First, cooperation between similar, complementary, or overlapping endeavors facilitates an economy of scale and/or reduction in duplication. For example, fixed mooring buoys for dive boats can be procured on a mass scale, or cruise ships already plying the waters can collect data for scientists, and remotely sensed watershed data can be shared openly. The initiative has succeeded in bringing people together along these lines and continues to improve cooperation and communication.

Further, the process of coordination is drawing widespread attention to the integrated watershed and marine ecosystem-based management issue. The attention has resulted in new funding and strategic partnerships such as the creation of a North American “node” between the UNEP’s Global Programme of Action office (UNEP/GPA) and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The node will provide effective support to GPA-related activities in the Wider Caribbean including management and protection of the coastal and marine environments from pollution originating from land-based activities and physical alteration/destruction of habitats.

Replicating the Initiative:

The initiative has potential to be replicated in other regions of the world, but requires strong leadership on behalf of one or a few countries. All of the components described above -- visiting consultation teams, national country teams, matchmaking website, substantive Steering Committee/Co-Chair/and other discussions – can all be performed in other regions. To this end, the WW2BW conference organizers sponsored the participation of representatives from Africa, the South Pacific, and Europe. Several lessons can be shared from our experience:

- Lead country/countries should work in a region of close proximity to them.
- Know the players and organizations.

- Engage regional stakeholders early.
- Engage one's own domestic agencies early in the process for assistance and agreement.
- Ensure, upfront, manpower and resources to drive the process. Partnering is time and personnel-resource intensive.
- Pick strong leaders to chair the thematic groups networking people and ideas.
- Provide avenues for long-term application (such as node and partnership website).
- Use many communication technologies to reach a broad range of stakeholders.
WW2BW relied on email, websites, fax, and telephone communications, and face-to-face meetings to develop stakeholder buy-in and understanding of the goals and process of the initiative.