

**IMPLEMENTATION OF SIDSNET INTERNET TRAINING IN THE CARIBBEAN:
THE CPACC APPROACH
ISLANDS OF THE WORLD VI CONFERENCE, ISLE OF SKYE, 16 – 20 OCTOBER
2000**

**Ian C King, Information Systems Coordinator/GIS Specialist
Judi Clarke, Technical Support / Communications Research Officer
Caribbean Planning for Adaptation for Global Climate Change
Regional Planning Implementation Unit (CPACC/RPIU)**

Abstract

The SIDSnet Programme is an important extension of the Sustainable Development Networking Programme under UNDP, and was conceived to enable people from the forty-two Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and others involved in sustainable development and island issues to share experiences and information. SIDSnet initiated a series of workshops, on the theme “Islands and Information”, involving the use of the Internet to support sustainable development activities. Thirty national workshops were planned for the SIDS, ten of which were allocated to the Caribbean. These workshops were aimed at making stakeholders aware of the importance of the Internet for sustainable development, as well as assisting them acquire such basic skills as Web publishing. Following a Memorandum of Understanding with UNDP SIDSnet in June 1999, the CPACC Regional Project Implementation Unit coordinated and executed the Caribbean workshops using mainly regional professionals. Over one hundred and fifty persons were trained in the workshops. The exercise illustrated the utility of CPACC’s network of national contacts for implementing a consistent and effective regional training activity in a timely fashion. The workshops were also sensitive to the specific needs identified by the individual countries. The Caribbean exercise identified some of the impediments to the wider application of the Internet in the Caribbean, it also outlined possible areas that technical assistance initiatives might address to support the greater application of Internet for communication, information sharing and information dissemination.

Introduction

SIDSnet, or the Small Islands Developing States Network was conceived following the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (BPoA) emanating from the United Nations SIDS Conference. SIDSnet was established to serve as a medium for communications for SIDS stakeholders on issues regarding the BPoA, promoting SIDS experiences and the development of global SIDS agenda¹. The initiative was implemented by UNDP based on their Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP) and the Special Agency for Technical Cooperation between Developing Countries (TCDC).

The SIDSnet, through funding from the Government of Japan developed a training programme comprising of national workshops in 30 SIDS to help national stakeholders understand the importance of the Internet for sustainable development and acquire the basic skills, including web publishing and database usage, so that they can initiate participation in SIDSnet². Specifically, the objective of the SIDSnet workshops was described as follows:

¹ Small Island Developing States Network – Project Summary. Taholo Kami, August 1, 2000.

² UNDP Project Document No. GLO/98/523/A/11/31 – Support to SIDSnet Training. August 1998.

- ◆ The training component will provide local stakeholders with sufficient knowledge and skills about information and communication technology so that:
 - Local stakeholders can participate in planning and implementation of the SIDSnet programme.
 - Stakeholders can promote awareness of the importance of the Information revolution for island countries.
 - Local stakeholders can identify common issues and participate in global discussion on these issues online.
 - Stakeholders in each SIDS can develop a sense of community and identity with other SIDS's people.
 - Local stakeholders can self-administer SIDSnet with cooperation with other member countries.

The workshops were initially conceived to be implemented over two days and generally address the Internet and its utility and review SIDSnet and the tools it offers. In addition, attention was also given to wider communication and broader policy issues of Internet use in the Caribbean. Of the 30 training workshops planned, 10 were allocated to the Caribbean region.

The CPACC Project

The Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Global Climate Change (CPACC) is a four-year Global Environment Facility funded project that is scheduled to conclude at the end of 2001. The Project is implemented through the World Bank with the Organisation of American States designated as the executing agency. A Regional Project Implementation Unit (RPIU) has been established at the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies.

The project's overall objective is to support Caribbean countries in preparing to cope with the adverse effects of global climate change (GCC), particularly sea level rise, in coastal and marine areas through vulnerability assessment, adaptation planning, and capacity building linked to adaptation planning. More specifically, the project aims to assist national governments and the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development to: (i) strengthen the regional capability for monitoring and analyzing climate and sea level dynamics and trends, seeking to determine the immediate and potential impacts of GCC; (ii) identify areas particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change and sea level rise; (iii) develop an integrated management and planning framework for cost-effective response and adaptation to the impacts of GCC on coastal and marine areas; (iv) enhance regional and national capabilities for preparing for the advent of GCC through institutional strengthening and human resource development; and (v) identify and assess policy options and instruments that may help initiate the implementation of a long-term program of adaptation to GCC in vulnerable coastal areas³.

Twelve Caribbean countries are involved in the project; these are Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, the Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago. The project comprises several components, some of which are regional and some pilot activities. All countries participate in the four regional components and each country participates in one of the five pilot components. The components of the CPACC Project are follows:

Regional Components

1. Design and Establishment of Sea Level/Climate Monitoring Network
2. Establishment of Databases and Information Systems
3. Inventory of Coastal Resources and Uses
4. Formulation of a Policy Framework for Integrated Coastal and Marine Management

³ Caribbean Planning for Adaptation to Global Climate Change – Project Document. April 1997.

Pilot Components

5. Coral Reef Monitoring for Climate Change
6. Coastal Vulnerability and Risk Assessment
7. Economic Valuation of Coastal and Marine Resources
8. Formulation of Economic/Regulatory Proposals
9. Enabling the preparation of national Communication in Response to Commitments to the UNFCCC

Further information on the CPACC Project can be obtained from the website www.cpacc.org.

The Caribbean SIDSnet Training Workshops

The SIDSnet unit of the UNDP convened regional consultative meetings to review the implementation the workshops, including coordination and content. The Caribbean review meeting was held in Barbados in February 1999 and included a number of representatives from regional institutions as well as SIDSnet UNDP. One of the agreements of the meeting was to utilize the experience and expertise from related initiatives in the implementation of the workshops. Another recommendation was that the CPACC RPIU would coordinate the Caribbean training workshops, as this was consistent with the activities of the CPACC RPIU, particularly under Component 2 - Establishment of Databases and Information Systems.

The CPACC RPIU and UNDP SIDSnet signed a Memorandum of Understanding in June 1999, which formalized arrangements for the former to coordinate the workshops. This coordination included; selection of the ten countries, communication with national representatives regarding scheduling and costs, selection of trainers, coordination of reports and provide overall quality control. UNDP SIDSnet provided the training materials including CDs, met the costs of the trainers and also met the costs of a part-time technical assistant in the CPACC RPIU to facilitate the coordination of the initiative.

Only 10 of the 12 CPACC countries were selected as recipients of the training workshops. Over the period since the commencement of the project, the RPIU had been reviewing the capacity in the participating countries and based on this experience, determined that Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago were more advanced than the other CPACC countries regarding capacity to utilize the Internet and awareness of SIDSnet. As a result these two countries were omitted from the training workshops.

The workshops proved to be successful for four main reasons; the established CPACC network of National Focal Points (NFPs⁴) in the countries, the use of trainers with regional experience, sensitivity to national priorities and participant needs and finally close supervision of the activities. The CPACC Project established NFPs in each country whose main responsibility was to coordinate the national involvement in the various aspects of the project and also be the main focus of communication. The NFPs represented a reliable system for coordinating national activities within a regional framework. Furthermore, the CPACC project had already conducted a number of training activities and was both familiar to the countries and aware of respective needs and circumstances.

For this exercise, it was decided to use trainers from the region and those who had previously worked in the region. A total of nine trainers were used, with two allocated for each workshop. Where possible, the trainers were chosen to complement each other in the delivery of the workshop content. The use of

⁴ The NFP is the local agency and person responsible for coordinating all CPACC related issues in the country. Typically, the NFP chairs a National Implementation Coordinating Unit (NICU) which is a committee of relevant public and private sector agencies involved in the CPACC process or related matters. In several countries, the NICU may be a Cabinet appointed body to address the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depleting Substances issues. Other NICUs are standing environmental advisory bodies.

individuals with regional experience was advantageous as it facilitated a better understanding of the environment and the individuals being served.

An earlier initiative, the Information Systems for the Management of Marine and Coastal Resources (CEPNET) Project implemented by the Caribbean Environment Programme of the UNEP Regional Coordinating based in Kingston Jamaica had undertaken training activities very similar to those planned by SIDSnet. Both materials and personnel from the CEPNET Project were utilized in the delivery of the SIDSnet workshops.

Another important aspect contributing to the implementation of the workshops was the modification of the agenda based on country requirements. The countries were advised of the training structure and requested to comment, particularly in relation to their needs. Prior to the workshops, questionnaires were sent to countries to assess their needs and priorities. In some cases, this resulted in an emphasis on some areas such as web page development. In each activity, the composition of the participants varied and as a result, the trainers modified the program to meet the needs of the group.

The RPIU maintained close management of the training activities with respect to logistics of the individual workshops and maintaining a presence at all of the workshops. It was considered important that a representative from the RPIU attended all of the workshops in the capacity of coordinator and also as a trainer. This proved to be very useful in addressing logistical challenges and ensuring quality control. Regular communication with the UNDP SIDSnet office and the UN operations department in New York as well as the UNDP offices proved necessary to realizing the activities in the desired schedule.

The ten regional workshops were convened between August 1999 and March 2000. The workshops should have been concluded before the end of 1999, but two hurricanes disrupted two of the workshops and these had to be re-convened in January and March of 2000. During the workshops, approximately 150 individuals were trained. The majority of these individuals were employees of public institutions with a few representatives from non-governmental organizations and inter-governmental organizations, and ranged from those with limited computer experience and absolutely no experience with the Internet to quite experienced Internet users.

Discussion

The training workshops were considered to be successful as they satisfied the objectives established and were convened within an acceptable timeframe and budget. Of the 30 workshops planned, only 21 of these were convened including all 10 Caribbean workshops, notwithstanding disruption by adverse and unpredictable weather conditions. The following positive aspects were realised:

- Almost 150 persons were trained and exposed to various aspects of the Internet, policy issues and the SIDSnet, CPACC and related regional activities.
- Several individuals were introduced to the Internet for the first time, including email and webpage development. The enthusiasm demonstrated and comments in workshop questionnaires also reflected the impact of the training. Further, in two of the workshops, websites were developed and hosted through the facilities of one of the trainers⁵.
- Individuals participating in the workshops developed an internet-based email, some for the first time, and enthusiastically shared messages with fellow participants and other acquaintances.

⁵ To review websites, go to www.cpacc.org/sidnet.html

- Those who were relatively experienced benefited through exposure to areas such as webpage development and the effective use of Internet facilities, including those offered by SIDSnet.
- Discussions on issues related to the application of the Internet for sustainable development and the particular needs of SIDS including examples of the application of the Internet in other SIDS were well received. In this regard, representatives of Internet Service Providers were also invited to discuss the wider issues and also advise on available services.

The trainers were also very positive in their reviews of the training workshops as was reflected in their reports.

There were also several concerns identified during the discussions and reports of the workshop relating to the use of the Internet for sustainable development of SIDS, these included:

- The relatively high costs of Internet access and computer equipment in the Caribbean that limited access to individuals and agencies. Internet costs were considered to be related to the monopolistic nature of telecommunications arrangements in the English-speaking Caribbean.
- Decision-makers appeared unconvinced of the necessity of the Internet for communication and information dissemination. This appeared to be associated with a discomfort of the changing nature and dynamics of communication associated with the Internet.

During the implementation of the CPACC project, the experience of the workshops was greatly appreciated by our member countries, as there has been an increasing usage on the Internet for communication and information dissemination. This development is associated with an acceptance from individuals of email and the CPACC Website as critical means of communication. The workshops were able assist in the removal the fear of new technology and illustrated how the facility could support activities of the organizations.

Recommendations

In all cases, participants regarded the hosting of follow-up and advanced training activities to be important. The workshops represented the first experience that most individuals had with SIDSnet and clearly, if this initiative is to be relevant to the Caribbean, greater visibility would be necessary. The 2nd Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) Workshop on Climate Change Negotiations, Management and Strategy held in Apia, Samoa from 26 July to 4 August reviewed the SIDSnet program and offered recommendations. One of the recommendations called for regional SIDSnet offices as well as relationships with regional organizations. Based on the experience in the Caribbean, the development and application of SIDSnet programs would be better executed through an established regional initiative with common underlying concerns.