

REGIONAL SPOTLIGHTS

Creating New Markets for Knowledge Sharing¹

Knowledge management, which by definition is set to facilitate learning processes, plays a central role in capacity development: helping individuals, institutions and societies acquire, learn – from local and global experiences - and reinvent the knowledge that meets local needs. When adaptation happens, knowledge can be a powerful means for developing long-lasting indigenous and existing capacities. Failing to adapt to local conditions, however, could result in no local ownership and no lasting capacity development. A gap-filling approach, then, tends to prevail. In a global perspective, knowledge sharing and management is central to alleviating global threats to biodiversity, barriers to cleaner production or political hurdles to environmentally sustainable development.

In one of the major UNDP knowledge management events of 2003, the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Resource Facility, in collaboration with the office in Costa Rica, provided key support to organize the first Environmental Solutions Fair in the region. Inspired by a prior knowledge sharing event organized by UNDP's Local Governance Program in Bogotá, Colombia, in December 2002, the fair concept consisted in brokering knowledge between those who practice innovative approaches to sustainable development and those institutions or individuals interested in acquiring these approaches. Coined as a "knowledge market" where "knowledge buyers" interested in the transfer of the Costa Rican experience, and "knowledge sellers," government agencies, private sector and research centres that have participated in the development and execution of environmental politics can meet and trade experiences that have positively impacted the state of the environment.

The fair drew over 150 participants from 20 countries, mostly from Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to technical and logistical support provided by UNDP, many delegations included civil servants, policy specialists and researchers interested in learning from these experiences in environmental management, conservation, eco-tourism and environmental service payments availed themselves to the community. Linking up with potential donors was another of the successes of this fair, where over 18 donor agencies participated. Of 42 statements of cooperation signed, 32 have already received funding. Given this success, UNDP now promotes Knowledge Solutions Fairs throughout Latin American and the Caribbean region and other regions of the world.

Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front: Pollution Prevention and Control and Habitat Restoration²

Fed by the vast La Plata Basin, the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front, contains globally significant biodiversity, and supports a number of economic activities, including commercial fisheries, tourism, and transportation. It is increasingly being degraded by point and non-point source pollution, including from hydro-carbons, heavy metals and other industrial wastes, agro-chemicals, and solid wastes, and is also being affected by channelisation, sedimentation and habitat degradation.

Argentina and Uruguay, the riparian countries, have taken a number of steps to address these problems as part of their national sustainable development baselines. However, there has been little complementarity between these respective efforts, and activities have not targeted the causes of transboundary pollution because understanding of the functioning of the system and the transboundary determinants of the problem were inadequate.

Started in 1999, the \$7.3 million GEF funded, *Environmental Protection of the Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front: Pollution Prevention and Control and Habitat Restoration* project, aims to contribute to the mitigation of current and emergent transboundary threats to the waterbody by assisting Argentina and Uruguay to prepare a Strategic Action Programme as a framework for addressing the most imminent transboundary issues. As part of the SAP, water and sediments quality and pollution reduction targets for high priority pollutants will be developed based on the results of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and through participatory consensus building processes involving key authorities charged with emissions reductions and stakeholders from both countries.

The project has advanced closer towards delivering the final report of the TDA. All data, documents and maps used for the drafting of the TDA report, are being introduced into the Environmental Information System. The TDA report will provide much needed technical assistance and generate a quality product that will underpin the preparation of the SAP and its later operationalization.

Biomass Users Network of Central America³

The Biomass Users Network of Central America began ten years ago with a \$25,000 grant from the GEF Small Grants Programme in Costa Rica. Today, the network is a large international organization operating in seven Central American countries and administering multi-million dollar projects. Its goal is to build biomass programmes that catalyze rural development as well as preserve natural resources and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The first project of the Biomass Users Network of Costa Rica (the NGO's original name) was to implement small-scale biomass management efforts and to strengthen its own capacity to scale up these experiences. This initial project yielded a variety of benefits, including the regeneration of eroded soils, reduced firewood use through improved stoves and better planning, women's participation in natural resource management and less pesticide use. Through this first project, the network built important partnerships with key actors in sustainable development in Costa Rica. The network began to be recognized throughout the country for its work in agriculture and sustainable development and its capacity to manage projects.

Subsequently, several international donors, appointed the Biomass Users Network of Costa Rica as the implementing agency for their projects. The organization gradually began to undertake project development in other Central American countries as well.

In 1999, the network received a \$750,000 medium-sized GEF grant for a project called 'Strengthening Capacity for Renewable Energy in Central America'. The project undertakes capacity-building by setting up small-scale renewable energy projects in rural areas and works towards integrating environmental protection into energy policies throughout Central America. To reflect its new regional focus on sustainable agriculture, energy efficiency and renewable energy, the network changed its name to the Biomass Users Network of Central America. It is now a major player in agriculture and renewable energy in the region.

ENERGY

Regional Strategies for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Amazon⁴

The Amazon region covers nearly 8 million square kilometers of tropical rain forest and contains some of the most diverse forms of life on earth. Amazonian biodiversity has made a notable contribution to local, regional, and world economies. The search for new and sustainable ways to manage and use this biodiversity for human benefit needed also to take into account its long-term protection. Zoning of this area was needed to understand the types of ecosystems and patterns of land use and prevent the unchecked occupation of land and damage to ecosystems.

The 4 year \$4.5 million funded GEF Regional Strategies for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Amazon project had the broad objective of zoning the Amazon basin and finding viable economic, social, and environmental alternatives to the use of its natural resources without destroying its ecosystems. Specifically, the project worked to augment sustainable development efforts in the Amazon region through ecological zoning and geographical monitoring, build capacity to conserve the region's biodiversity, and manage natural resources in indigenous lands.

Implemented across Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela, project achievements include coordinating the eight Amazonian countries in standardizing ecological and economic zoning in the basin and gaining approval of a project by the Inter-American Development Bank to strengthen capacities of Amazonian countries. In addition, the project achieved regional consensus on protecting intellectual property related to genetic resources and sustainable management of the Amazon forest. 28 biodiversity information centers were created and biodiversity management capacity in 33 institutions were improved as more than 1,500 professionals were trained in biodiversity management.

The project has been successful in preserving the biological and cultural diversity of ecosystems in the region, maintaining tropical forest cover, providing economic benefits to communities through sustainable commercial uses of biodiversity and reinforcing capabilities at national, state, and municipal levels to manage resource use.

BIODIVERSITY

¹LAC SURF (2004) Environmental Solutions Fair in Costa Rica in LAC Surf Newsletter, Volume 2, Issue 1: <http://www.undp.org/surf-panama/docs/volume2-issue1eng.pdf> and Pascal O. Girot, (2004) Costa Rica's Environmental Solutions Fair: A Lac Surf Knowledge Management Event: http://www.undp.org/surf-panama/docs/solutions_fair.doc; ²UNDP Project Brief: Rio de la Plata and its Maritime Front: Pollution Prevention and Control and Habitat Restoration. <http://www.iwlearn.net/docs/plata/plata00e.pdf>; ³Partners for Change: Experiences from UNDP's Work with Civil Society Organizations through the Global Environment Facility – Case study 6.2 "Biomass Project in Cost Rica Spawns Influential Regional Network" http://www.undp.org/gef/undp-gef_publications/publications/civilsociety_english.pdf; ⁴UNDP-GEF Project Document. Regional Strategies for the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Amazon