IWEco

Integrating Water, Land and Ecosystems Management in Caribbean Small Island Developing States

#CaringForOurFuture

MID-TERM REVIEW: RESULTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

IWEco implementation structure

Lead Implementing Agency: *United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*
Co-Implementing Agency: *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*
Lead Executing Agency: *UNEP Caribbean Environment Programme Regional Coordinating Unit (CAR/RCU)*
Co-Executing Agencies: *Caribbean Public Health Agency Environmental Health and Sustainable Development Department (CARPHA/EHSD), GEF/UNDP Small Grants Programme (SGP), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS)*
Project start date: *September 2016;* end-date: *August 2023*

IWEco Participating Countries

RELEVANCE

IWEco is highly relevant to the Wider Caribbean region and particularly its SIDS in view of increasing degradation of their limited natural resources and their disproportionate vulnerability to climate change impacts. It is consistent with the GEF Focal Area Strategies for International Waters, Land Degradation, and Biodiversity as well as with UNEP's 2018-2021 Medium Term Strategy and the Bali Strategic Plan. The project is strengthening the capacity of governments to comply with multilateral environmental agreements such as the Cartagena Convention, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, and the Convention on Biological Diversity, and to achieve relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

The GEF IWEco Project's Mid-Term Review was initiated in January 2020 and covered the period September 2016 - December 2019. Important achievements up to June 2020 have also been taken into consideration.

For the project document see https://www.iweco.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/IWECO-CEO-Endorsement-Document-PCURev-2018.pdf

PERFORMANCE

Progress has been variable among the four technical project components and among the national sub-projects. Delivery at mid-term was low with only 43% of the planned mid-term targets having been partially or fully achieved. Nevertheless, by mid-term some notable successes have been demonstrated particularly in land rehabilitation/reforestation/agro-forestry as well as in capacity strengthening, stakeholder engagement, and public awareness/public education. This is attributed mainly to the sub-projects in Cuba, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad & Tobago, and the regional component on knowledge exchange and stakeholder involvement. The other sub-projects (Antigua & Barbuda, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines) and the two other regional components are behind schedule due to various factors.



While IWEco is gaining traction, there is a high risk that it cannot be completed satisfactorily without some drastic adaptive management measures and an extension of one-year, until August 2023, has been recommended for technical completion. Achievement of long-term impact and sustainability of results is heavily dependent on continued political, technical, and financial commitment, as well as uptake of the results by the Governments and regional institutions.

FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE

Among the Project's strengths are the engagement of diverse partners and stakeholders (international, regional, and sub-regional organizations, national agencies, NGOs, local communities, and the private sector), high local stakeholder buy-in and ownership, and extensive public awareness/public education efforts. Factors negatively affecting performance include the excessive lag between project design and start-up and institutional changes at the regional and national levels in the interim (e.g., institutional restructuring, reduction in institutional capacities and stakeholder buy-in, and shifts in national priorities). The change in the original lead executing agency from CARPHA/EHSD to UNEP CAR/RCU during the inception phase had major implications for project execution, which was exacerbated by the delay in establishing the IWEco Project Coordinating Unit (PCU). Challenges in the project countries included weak technical and managerial capacity, change in ownership of the intervention site (one country), and political, financial, administrative, and bureaucratic complications. Considerable and continuing effort is required by the IWEco PCU to support the countries and address changing circumstances. Asynchronous start of the sub-projects, the regional components, and the UNDP Small Grants Programme initiatives resulted in limited cross-fertilization and integration among them. COVID-19 severely disrupted activities in 2020.

KEY LESSONS

1. Timely start and flexibility

Extended delay between project design and start-up can put the project and the reputation of the implementing and executing agencies at significant risk. During this period, unanticipated changes may occur that can have serious repercussions for the project. Flexibility in project design and execution modalities is important to adapt to changing contexts and circumstances, as experienced at the national and regional levels. For example, design modifications were required for some of the sub-projects and alternative execution modalities were established for the lead execution agency (from CARPHA/EHSD to UNEP CAR/RCU) and for the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent & the Grenadines sub-projects. A timely start and early assessment and mitigation of institutional reputational risk are essential.

2. Stakeholder engagement and high-level intervention

Continuous engagement with executing partners, including face-to-face interaction, is critical, especially when trust and stakeholder buy-in have been reduced. At times, high level intervention by the implementing and executing agencies and 'behind the scene' diplomacy at a personal level are needed to resolve difficult situations.

3. Demonstrating early tangible benefits:

Engaging local communities and the private sector in project execution is an effective strategy to help achieve project objectives and to promote sustainability. However, it is important to demonstrate tangible benefits early (e.g., livelihoods, revenue generation).



4. Selection of project sites

Executing project interventions on private property is risky since the proprietors can take any action that may jeopardize the interventions and objectives (e.g., farms in Saint Lucia and private quarries in Trinidad & Tobago). Similarly, interventions on public lands can be torpedoed by private interests (as seen in Antigua & Barbuda where land ownership changed from public to private). This underscores the importance of demonstrating favourable trade-offs, providing incentives, fostering environmental stewardship, and raising awareness about the links between human actions, environmental and ecological conditions, and socio-economic benefits. Timely communication and adaptive management action to identify feasible alternatives and mitigate risks are essential.

5. Setting realistic targets

Mid-term and end-of-project targets must be realistic in terms of the time required to meet them. Achieving targets such as those related to environmental impacts of the interventions can take considerably more time than the project's lifespan and lead to low project evaluation ratings, compared to process-oriented targets such as capacity building, institutional strengthening, and reforestation that can be achieved in a shorter timeframe.

6. Strategic partnerships

Executing national/local components of a regional project through strategic alliances with partners with established presence and networks in the country increases efficiency and promotes sustainability of results. Successful execution in some of the project countries can be partly attributed to involvement of the private sector, local non-governmental organisations, and the GEF/UNDP SGP. Delegating an external organisation with country presence (such as UNDP) as the co-executing agency can help to circumvent internal issues that hamper project execution, as seen in the Dominican Republic and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines sub-projects.

7. Increasing efficiency

Execution of multiple national projects with similar objectives within the country by the same executing agency, with one project manager and project management committee, capitalizes on potential synergies and increases efficiency and cost-effectiveness (as seen in the case of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines). This strategy can be particularly effective for countries with limited capacity to execute projects.

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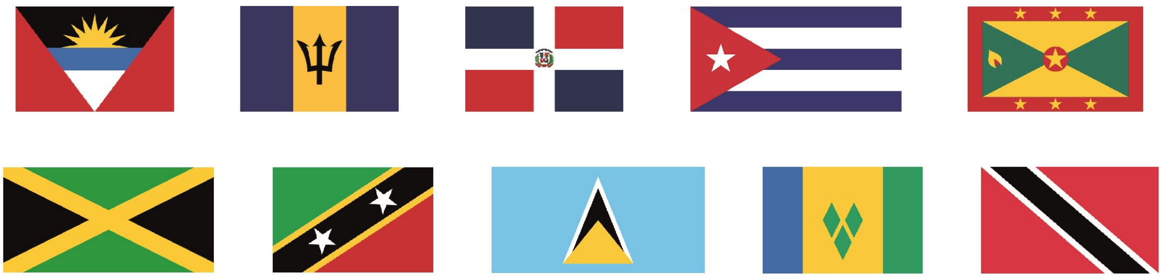

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