

NewsFlowering Caribbean Wetlands for Universal Wastewater Management

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October 2, 2021



Castries, Saint Lucia, Saturday, October 2, 2021:– Cuba, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint Lucia are proposing enhanced international cooperation to introduce new, alternative and appropriate natural sources and resources to save wasted Caribbean water.

The five islands have been cooperating on a project marrying water and ecology, nature and natural resources, to save regional wetlands and treat wastewater — and using a popular Caribbean flower.

The Project

The Caribbean Sanitation (CARIBSAN) project is a four-year-old experiment.

Funded by the European Union INTERREG Programme, the International Water Office of France and the Water Offices of Martinique and Guadeloupe, it's success is at work in two areas in Martinique.

Representatives of the funding entities (including government ministers and departments responsible for Water) the Caribbean Water and Sewage Association (CAWASA) and national water utilities, met online on September 27 and 28 to discuss taking the germinated and cultivated project to its flowering stage.

CARIBSAN works through a popular flower called 'Birds of Paradise' and the project is both remarkable and attractive — so much so, that Saint Lucia's Stephenson King, the island's minister with responsibility for water, has wholly embraced it.

Opportunity welcomed

King was represented at the virtual launch last Monday by Permanent Secretary Ivor Daniel and representatives discussed how to adapt and adopt new methods to address old wastewater problems similarly affecting each island.

The PS welcomed "the opportunity to collaborate with our neighbours from the French Overseas Departments in the Caribbean (Martinique and Guadeloupe), who are now Associate Members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), and our other OECS counterpart, Dominica."

He also said it was "a great honour to welcome the Instituto Nacional de Recursos Hidraulicos (INRH) of Cuba in our midst for this landmark project."

Constructing Caribbean wetlands

Tracing CARIBSAN's history, Daniel recalled that in 2018, the Government and WASCO joined other Caribbean countries at the High-Level Forum (HLF) of Ministers Responsible for Water at the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association's (CWWA's) Annual Conference in Jamaica and adopted the Regional Strategic Plan for Governance and Building Resilience in the Water Sector in the Caribbean (RSAP).

Noting that "A key objective is to promote constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment and disseminate knowledge on this technique," he also said: "This objective appears to be consistent with the provisions of the regional strategic plan.

Consistencies

Daniel identified such consistencies as: "Effective management of wastewater, including its use as a resource in sectors such as tourism (landscape irrigation) and agriculture (irrigation and fertilizer); developing and executing a training programme (at the national and regional levels) to improve technical capacity in the government, the utility and the private sector, to understand and manage climate impacts on the water sector."

He said it's "also consistent with the global objective of attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goal No. 6: to 'Ensure access to water and sanitation for all.'"

Noting that the Constructed Wetlands concept was successfully undertaken in neighbouring Martinique since 2017, PS Daniel said, "Given our historical and geographic linkages with the French Antilles," Saint Lucia also has special reasons to "thank the ODE for sharing their experiences with us."

Enhanced International Cooperation

Noting too that “Enhanced international cooperation is crucial for all countries to combat climate change”, Daniel advised that “As a complementary way to address this global challenge, peer-to-peer partnerships in the water and sanitation sectors is necessary for undertaking traditional and innovative mitigation and adaptation modalities.”

He added, “The consequences of Climate Change affect the life and resources of people globally in many ways, but its impacts are particularly dire for us in the Caribbean – one of the most vulnerable regions in the world...”

Front Lines

“Water and sanitation utilities are on the front lines of these challenges,” Daniel said, as “Utilities are essential to meet Sustainable Development Goal #6 by delivering safe, affordable, accessible and sufficient water in addition to improving water quality, water use efficiency, watershed protection and sanitation.”

He continued, “The importance of treating wastewater extends beyond human and ecosystem health”, as “it can contribute to the long-term economic viability of our Caribbean economies, due to our dependence on the coastal tourism and fisheries industries.”

Alternative Technologies...

Daniel embraced “the opportunity for our operators at WASCO to be mentored in the use of alternative technologies in wastewater treatment such as a Constructed Wetlands.”

He also pointed out that “This technology will be used as part of the treatment process for wastewater to contain or degrade pollutants, where land is available.”

According to the PS, “A key benefit of implementing such a natural treatment system for wastewater treatment can be lower capital and operation and maintenance costs than other physical/chemical “grey” wastewater treatment technologies.”

In addition, he said, “There is the potential for co-benefits such as the creation of habitat, carbon storage, and the provision of recreational opportunities (e.g., birdwatching).”

Universal Wastewater Management

Daniel said the Government “is determined to confront the many challenges we face with wastewater management...” and also “hopeful that this collaboration will support our strategic approach to achieve universal wastewater management on the island...”

Such management, he added, would be “based on public health and environmental quality goals, with specific wastewater management solutions to the different zones and problems of the island, where both conventional sewerage systems and alternative wastewater treatment and final disposal could be a solution for our dense urban areas, as well as our small coastal communities.”

Feedback and Sharing

He said, “During the life of the project, feedback, sharing of experiences and lessons learnt from our diverse group of stakeholders will assist us in assessing our situation and help inform future actions that will benefit the participating countries and utilities in particular and the Caribbean in general.”

PS Daniel congratulated the organizing team and participating utilities on the successful CARIBSAN launch and — on behalf of his minister — reaffirmed “Saint Lucia’s commitment to working with all stakeholders for the success of the Project.”

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