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## Community policing in the Portland Bight Protected Area, Jamaica

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**Source:** UNESCO Wise coastal practices for sustainable human development — forum of discussion<sup>2</sup>.

Efforts to conserve the natural environment often fail — even where there is adequate environmental legislation — because of non-compliance with regulations, and the high cost of enforcement. Non-compliance may have a variety of causes, e.g. profit, lack of environmental awareness, a don't-care attitude towards the environment, lack of an alternative, damaging behaviour may be cheaper or easier than environmentally-friendly behaviour, and the absence of deterrence due to the lack of enforcement.

In Jamaica, environmental degradation and a lack of compliance with environmental regulations has taken place in the context of the traditional top-down approach, and must be viewed against the historical background of a slave society dominated by plantation owners. Distrust of the police and a desire to beat 'the system' are almost written into the genetic code of working-class

Jamaicans. And so the challenge of natural resource management is not just to deal with bio-physical issues but also to contend with socio-cultural problems, which underscores the point that natural resource management is more of a social science than a natural science.

People seek to beat a regulatory system that belongs to somebody else, and operates in someone else's interest, or is perceived to do so. So a first strategy towards increased compliance is to create, within the users of the natural resources, a sense of ownership of the laws and regulations. This was achieved in the Portland Bight Protected Area of Jamaica by getting the fishers to prepare their own fisheries management regulations using the local fisheries associations and the Fisheries Management Council. Thus the fishers now feel they own the regulations rather than viewing them as a system of rules being imposed on them

1. Caribbean Coastal Area Management (C-CAM) Foundation, Jamaica, West Indies

2. All contributions to the forum can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.csiwisepractices.org/> (enter the name: csi and the password: wise). You can also participate to the forum by sending an e-mail to: [moderator@csiwisepractices.org](mailto:moderator@csiwisepractices.org)

from above. (For more information on the process, go to the full paper at <http://www.unesco.org/csi/act/jamaica/HGwardens.htm>).

Even when the local community owns the regulations, some may still resent outsiders coming in and arresting their relatives and friends for non-compliance. A better way to cement a new culture of compliance and natural resource management is to empower the community leaders as enforcement officers. In the Portland Bight Protected Area, some 50 fisherfolk were officially appointed 'Honorary Game Wardens' and 'Fishery Inspectors' under the Wildlife Protection Act and the Fishing Industry Act, thereby providing them with powers of search and arrest. All the enforcement officers are given training and they are informed that compliance is the objective, not making arrests.

One of the fears with this approach was that the community enforcement officers might abuse their authority. Careful selection of suitable persons, thorough training, and close supervision have resulted in not one case of abuse of authority, or false arrest, since 1996, and a 100 per cent conviction rate in those cases which have gone to court.

Another fear was that Honorary Game Wardens and Fishery Inspectors would excuse their friends and relatives and harass their enemies, or take bribes. No such cases have been observed; in fact

the reverse. The community enforcement officers advise their relatives and friends not to embarrass them by committing an offence, as they would be forced to personally arrest them so as to prove they are not corrupt. This is especially true of the female Honorary Game Wardens and Fishery Inspectors, who have warned their partners, sons, sons-in-law and nephews.

It should be pointed out that the 'hard' enforcement cannot be done by these community volunteers. Already some have been threatened with bodily harm, and they are advised in such cases to make a full report of all observations. At the present time they are not insured. The protected area will benefit from full-time Protected Area Rangers with full police powers who will follow up on the intelligence provided by these local 'eyes and ears'.

In many parts of the world, getting communities to police themselves is being encouraged. The approach being taken in the Portland Bight Protected Area is a version of this, and should advance the discourse. This approach has the potential to be effective for other types of offences such as traffic violations and breaches of health and planning regulations.



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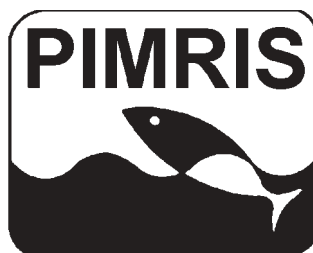
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