

# Towards a National Policy and Strategy on Environmental Management Systems: The Jamaican Experience

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## **Summary**

Jamaica can no longer afford to ignore the impact of its development on the environment. In this regard, Jamaica has like other nations committed itself to the sustainable development pathway. The long-term policy objective of the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) is sustainable development, that is, economic and social development without the destruction of the environment. Environmental Management Systems (EMS) is one of the tools selected by the Jamaican government to manage their sustainable development agenda. This paper describes the GOJ's efforts to date to develop a national Environmental Management Systems Policy and Strategy. The Government of Jamaica sees this policy and strategy initiative as an approach which brings together new tools, new forms of collaboration and an innovative policy direction, which, will move the country 'beyond the curve' along the path to sustainable development and an improved quality of life for its citizens.

## **A. BACKGROUND**

### ***Location***

Jamaica is an island nation in the Caribbean Sea, situated close to the southern tip of the United States of America, the State of Florida. It has a green hilly backbone, which culminates in the Blue Mountain Peak 2278 metres above sea level, the highest point of the island (see Figure 1).

The population at the end of 1996 was just over 2.5 million and it is expected to remain below 3 million up to the year 2020. Traditionally, the Jamaican society has been an agrarian one, but Jamaica has developed agro-industrial (coffee and rum) manufacturing and service industries that are world-renowned.

### ***Economy***

Historically, economic profitability has been based on low values assigned to the natural environment and its resources, with little regard for the effects of the production and consumption patterns and their relevant waste on the environment. Today the economy is an open extensively liberalized marketplace, facing powerful forces pushing enterprises in Jamaica towards adopting more environmentally friendly practices. However, the economy has been stagnating for almost a decade with an annual average rate of growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 0.2% between 1990 and 1998. At the same time, all governments since 1980 have been committed to private sector led economic growth and have been reluctant to intervene in the economy.

### ***System of Government***

The system of government in Jamaica is based on the Westminster Model of parliamentary democracy. The Parliament is comprised of the House of Representatives, a Lower House of elected representatives and the Senate, the Upper House, an appointed set of representatives.

The Executive arm consists of a Prime Minister with a 12-member Cabinet of Ministers. There is a Minister with responsibility for Land and Environment. The Ministry is responsible for policy formulation and implementation, which, is usually done through various agencies administering relevant legislation. In enunciating national policy the government has made firm commitments to improving the quality of the environment.

### ***National Environment Planning Agency (NEPA)/Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA)***

The principal legislation related to the environment is the NRCA Act (1991) and the premier environmental management agency for the country is the NRCA. Recent attempts by the government to improve administration as it relates to land, has seen a

merger of the functions of planning, land utilization and environmental management into one executive agency, the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA).

The core functions of NEPA are:

- policy and programme development
- development, permit and license approvals
- compliance and enforcement
- park, beach and watershed management
- public education and information
- environmental and land use database and mapping

NEPA/NRCA has been working on the development of an EMS Policy and Strategy for Jamaica through the assistance of a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Government of Jamaica (GOJ) Coastal Water Quality Improvement Project. Such a policy will provide a framework to support and promote active EMS implementation. A comprehensive Environmental Management System (EMS) Policy and Strategy is critical if Jamaica is to strengthen its position in the global market and enhance its competitiveness.

## **B. THE POLICY AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

### ***The Working Group***

National Environment and Planning Agency / Natural Resources Conservation Authority (NEPA/NRCA) has been working to promote the implementation of EMS in support of the development of a national agenda that recognizes the role of government, private sector and non-government organizations in environmental management. In this regard, the EMS policy and strategy is viewed by the GOJ/NEPA/NRCA as a step along the sustainable development path which will assist the country's ability to 'grow capital' – the natural, economic and human.

Before embarking on the development of a national EMS policy and strategy for Jamaica, the NEPA/NRCA consulted key stakeholder groups and in June of 1999 invited a number of organisations from the public and private sectors to discuss its development. The focus of the consultations was to:

1. Determine the level of support for the development of a policy and strategy;
2. Identify the stakeholders to be involved in the policy development process;
3. Discuss the steps to be taken in the development of the EMS Policy and Strategy;  
and
4. Determine the timeframe within which the Policy and Strategy should be developed.

The stakeholders fully supported the development of a policy and strategy for the promotion of EMS and agreed that the NEPA/ NRCA was best placed to give leadership to the policy development process (Figure 2).

In September 1999, the Authority convened a multi-sectoral Working Group (WG) to develop a draft policy and strategy (Table 1). The Group was provided with clear Terms of Reference (TOR) of which some important elements were:

- To define clearly the meaning of EMS as it applies to implementation in Jamaica.
- To ensure that extensive consultation with all relevant government and non-government stakeholders takes place during the development of the policy and strategy.
- To identify clearly the legislative, institutional, human resource and financial resource barriers that will hinder EMS implementation and address those deficiencies in the policy and strategy documents.
- To suggest a process for widespread promotion and implementation of EMS in all types of organisations both in the Public and Private Sectors. This should include but not necessarily be limited to the articulation of communication and public education strategies.

Since commencing its work the Group has extended its reach beyond the boundaries of its membership expertise by consulting a number of local and international organisations. Additionally, to support their effort the Working Group has reviewed the current status of EMS and EMS implementation in major countries (UK, Japan, Europe,

USA and Canada), selected benchmark countries (Cuba, Costa Rica, Columbia, Malaysia, Israel, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana) and key economic sectors (bauxite, tourism, coffee, rum and agro-sector).

**TABLE 1**  
**MEMBERSHIP OF EMS WORKING GROUP**

**Government Agencies**

National Environmental and Planning Agency (NEPA/NRCA)  
Bureau of Standards (JBS)  
Ministry of Finance  
Jamaica Promotion Limited (JAMPRO)  
Ministry of Tourism  
Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ)

**Private Sector**

Jamaica Manufacturers Association  
Jamaica Exporters Association

**Projects**

Coastal Water Quality Improvement Project (CWIP)  
CIDA/ENACT

**Liaison Groups**

University of West Indies center for Environment and Development  
Jamaica Hotel and tourism Association  
Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica  
Joint Trade Union Research Institute  
Inter American Development Bank  
E-NGOs  
CBOs  
Environmental Consultants

**FIGURE 1  
MAP OF JAMAICA**



**FIGURE 2  
POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

1. NRCA initiates preparation of the Policy by developing Terms of Reference in Consultation with Stakeholders
2. NRCA conducts Background Research
3. Consultations with interest groups
4. NRCA prepares DRAFT Green Paper
5. Further consultations with interest groups
6. NEPA/NRCA prepares Green Paper
7. Green Paper Submitted to Cabinet for Approval
8. Island-wide Consultations
9. NEPA/NRCA prepares Policy (White Paper)
10. White Paper submitted for Cabinet Approval

***Steps 1 - 7 consisted of several meetings with stakeholders to discuss development of the policy as well as a presentation to the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Land & Environment. After the research of step 2 was completed and a draft green paper prepared, meetings were held with select interests groups to discuss elements of the draft policy. These steps have culminated with the submission of this green paper to Cabinet. After approval of this Green Paper by Cabinet, steps 8 – 10 will be carried out.***

### ***Incorporating Initiatives Already Being Implemented***

Prior to the development of the policy and strategy there were a number of programmes underway which are relevant to any EMS policy considerations. These included the greening of government pilots in the Ministries of Land and Environment and Finance, the development of economic instruments for environmental management by the Planning Institute of Jamaica, the National Environmental Education Plan, and the strengthening of the Sustainable Development Council of Jamaica (SDC-J).

Additionally, the Environmental Audits for Sustainable Tourism Project (EAST) and the Coastal Water Quality Improvement Project (CWIP) both supported by the GOJ/USAID are using EMS within the Tourism Sector to improve environmental performance of hotels and commercial enterprises and to 'green' attractions and destinations.

### ***Drivers***

In embarking on the development of a national EMS policy and strategy the Government of Jamaica is responding to international trends in a proactive way and see the policy initiative not as another policy, but as an opportunity to move Jamaica to a more promising path for the future. A path which will lead to increase competitiveness for the Jamaican business sector, sustainable business practices and protection of the natural resource base which is a fundamental to the nations economic development.

In addition, the actions outlined in the Jamaica National Environmental Action Plan (JaNEAP) as well as the National Industrial Policy (NIP) commits the government to using the EMS model as one of the approaches to help eliminate the gap between policy articulation and active implementation. In JaNEAP the plans require a proactive and systematic approach to improving environmental performance, while, the NIP addresses incentives to support environmentally friendly practices.

### ***Challenges***

The implementation of an EMS policy and strategy is not without its difficulties. The challenges for effective application of the policy and strategy framework are as real as the opportunities.

One of the challenges lies in removing the levels of ignorance surrounding the use of the tool. Often EMS has been regarded as only relevant to the 'environmentalist' as a result its cross cutting nature and applicability to business and government has not been fully appreciated. Additionally, given the challenging economic climate implementing EMS is often seen as an avoidable cost rather than in terms of an investment, which will bring benefits. There is also the real cultural difficulty that businesses often fail to take action unless there is legislation, which drives them to it. Given the voluntary slant of the policy and strategy changing this mindset will require innovative approaches. Overcoming these barriers within the business sector will require an engagement of and commitment from the 'top' of business organisations.

Public engagement through a process of environmental education, which will not only sensitize people but change behavior, is also a significant challenge. The challenges facing small and medium size enterprises must be taken into account, as these types of



businesses are the majority operating in Jamaica. Developing the skill base necessary for the successful promotion of environmental management systems will also be critical. Finally, removing the culture of implementation inertia among stakeholders and building a foundation of close collaboration will be a necessary ingredient to success.

## C. THE POLICY AND STRATEGY

The final draft of the policy and strategy is now ready to be submitted to the Cabinet of Jamaica prior to its dissemination as a green paper. While the concept of policy development is often linked to the introduction of legislation, which compels action. This is not the case in the Jamaican EMS policy and strategy. The legislative instruments that have been proposed will involve strengthening and amending existing legislation and along with economic incentives are expected to bring about an increased interest in using EMS as management tool. Those considerations coupled with NEPA/NRCA's intention to introduce an alternative regulatory approach to environmental management using a verifiable EMS is expected to be a driver to the implementation of environmental management systems.

The guiding principles of the policy and strategy embrace a number of philosophies. These include sustainable growth, implementation of EMS as a fundamental tool to help achieve sustainable development, voluntary implementation of EMS and the full participation of and provision of information to all citizens of Jamaica re the quality of the environment. The policy and strategy direction is guided by three goals:

- GOAL 1:** To establish the framework within which Environmental Management Systems will be adopted across all sectors of society.
- GOAL 2:** To strengthen the legal and economic framework to facilitate the promotion and implementation of Environmental Management Systems.
- GOAL 3:** To ensure an informed public who will support and advocate for responsible environmental stewardship.

Each goal is supported by a number of strategies and specific actions, which will be pursued over five years in the first instance before going through a review process.

With respect to Goal 1 the strategic directions involved in the associated activities relate to building capacity within the public sector with the aim being to 'green' government institutions using an EMS approach. Special attention will be paid to strengthening the NEPA/NRCA's ability to utilize the tool in its environmental management activities. The Bureau of Standards will also be strengthened as it relates to providing training, information, auditors and certification services. Actions have also been designed to improve capacity within the private sector involving training consultants and conducting pilots within key economic sectors.

The strategies associated with Goal 2 relate to developing economic incentives and legislative instruments to help promote the implementation of EMS in the public and private sectors.

One of the specific strategies aligned with Goal 3 deals with the issue of external communication and environmental reporting.

*Strategy 3.1: Conduct a continuous communications campaign on EMS and have an “open house” policy regarding information.*

This strategy 3.1 combines the concepts of educating and informing the public. The actions under the strategy include the introduction of environmental reporting as part of the flexible regulatory approach, which would require public environmental reporting in order to be workable. The private sector in Jamaica has welcomed the regulatory flexibility approach but remain ‘on the fence’ with regard to the level of external reporting which may be required. Consultations following the green paper stage will focus on further ventilating these issues and arriving at final positions on the mechanism for public environmental reporting in Jamaica.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

The main challenge for setting and implementing environmental policy in Jamaica lies in acknowledging and accounting for the value of the environment to production and consumption without being perceived as dislocating the productive sector of the economy and/or imposing undue burdens on an already hard-pressed population.

The strategy to achieve active implementation of EMS includes looking at the peculiar needs of small and medium enterprises; building capacity at the national level, in terms of NEPA and other public sector agencies, such as the Bureau of Standards, as well as establishing corporate environmental leadership/recognition programmes. In addition, much emphasis will be placed on environmental education and its links to EMS.

Jamaica is preparing for a sustainable future, one which balances economic, environment and social justice needs. To succeed in that vision we need new tools new forms of collaboration among stakeholders and innovative policy directions. Policymaking is often segmented and time horizons tend to be short term. This policy and strategy recognizes and takes into consideration the interconnection among the issues and that time horizons for planning must look ahead to medium and long term impacts. This EMS policy initiative is a practical step in our quest to achieve a 'quantum leap' for Jamaica on the sustainable development pathway leading to an improved quality of life for all our citizens.