

# Policy Perspectives

*Perspectives on resource management and environmental policy from the Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES), Faculty of Science and Technology, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados.*

The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) initiated this occasional outreach publication, **Policy Perspectives**, to share lessons learnt from applied interdisciplinary research. CERMES research is through learning-by-doing collaboration. **Policy Perspectives** may be used by policymakers and advisers to strengthen linkages between applied research and policymaking in the Wider Caribbean Region.

## Sargassum Adaptive Management Strategy (SAMS) lessons

### SargAdapt SAMS are done; but what lessons were learned?

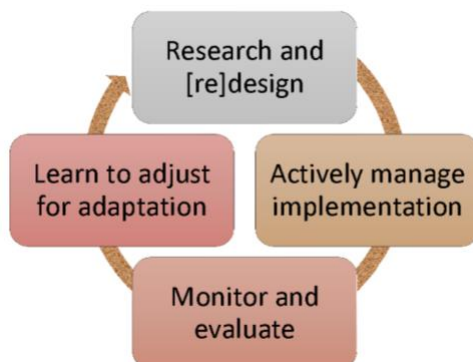
Under the UWI-CERMES project on **Adapting to a new reality: Managing responses to influxes of sargassum seaweed in the Eastern Caribbean as ecosystem hazards and opportunities (SargAdapt)** each SargAdapt country has a Sargassum Adaptive Management Strategy (SAMS) to approve and use. In this issue we review key concepts and learning.

### What is adaptive management?

Over the past two decades there is increasing attention globally to the concept of adaptive management within policy contexts, climate change adaptation and ecosystem-based adaptation.

Drawing on ecology and resilience thinking, the basic idea is that management interventions should be set up as no-regrets applied research experiments wherever possible. This is to get better and more systematic information (i.e., learning) on the relationships between different interventions and the real world.

From a policy perspective learning and adaptation results from a well-designed and working policy cycle that has monitoring and evaluation as key components for institutional learning. A simple cycle is shown, but diverse images are available online.



### How is this relevant to sargassum?

Adaptive management really proves its worth when uncertainty is high and persons engaged from policy to practice cannot get a good understanding of if or how their interventions interact with each other and the social-ecological system that they are in. It may be that they are uncertain whether to take any action at all.

If this sounds familiar, welcome to the story of sargassum in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Atlantic Ocean. Sargassum is a wicked problem in being both difficult to fully understand and having no simple solutions. So adaptive management can help.

### Why a management strategy instead of a plan?

Not just semantics. Management plans are local documents with a high degree of certainty of content and implementation. They best apply to small spatial areas and a few stakeholders. Examples would be at the town or district level. In contrast, the SAMS is a national level strategy with more uncertainty and a large number of stakeholders. It encompasses local level plans.

### What's in a SAMS for policy makers, advisers and others?

The SAMS from CERMES come in two volumes. Volume 1 is the Adaptive Strategy. Volume 2 contains Action Appendices.



The two volumes follow the same format for each country, but their content is more country-specific, especially in Volume 2.

**VOL. 1: ADAPTIVE STRATEGY**

- Introduction
- Purpose and principles
- Scope
- Authority
- Institutional arrangements
- Actions and operations
- Monetary matters
- Further action

**Concise main text**  
Won't change much  
Provides the context

While the strategy in Volume 1 is kept simple and high-level to accommodate a diversity of situations and management plans, Volume 2 is more technical-scientific and operationally detailed.

**VOL. 2: ACTION APPENDICES**

- National legislation and administration
- Stranding site maps and location profiles
- Institutional arrangements for adaptation
- Key sargassum contacts
- Considerations for monetary matters
- Local level sargassum management plans
- Action and operation guidelines
- Sargassum uses
- Useful online links, reading

**Many appendices**  
Some change often  
Support the action

There are currently SAMS for Barbados, Dominica Grenada, St Kitts-Nevis, Saint Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, and Montserrat done under SargAdapt and other projects. Examples of SAMS and related supporting information can be found on the [CERMES sargassum website](#).

**What lessons have been learned from the SAMS quest?**

- **Concept of a SAMS is generally said to be good**  
Most stakeholders easily understand the basic concepts that underpin the SAMS and agree that they apply to management of sargassum for resilience under conditions of high uncertainty.
- **Strategies and plans are not usually implemented**  
Similar to many other coastal, marine and environmental quests the SAMS may stay in draft rather than be fully implemented.
- **Political-institutional uncertainty is very high**  
One of the main reasons for SAMS and similar quests remaining only partially and/or selectively implemented is that politics and

institutional arrangements are often too uncertain and variable to provide sound foundations for longer term strategic directions.

- **Institutional arrangements are a major constraint**  
Weak institutional arrangements based on informal networking are inadequate for building the collective adaptive capacity that is needed for evaluation and learning in adaptive management.
- **Scaling up and scale mis-match issues likely**  
The SAMS notion of strategically scaling up and down between local and national level of response to sargassum is constrained by several of the preceding points that rely on good institutions.
- **Authorities under-resourced, leadership unclear**  
Sargassum authorities tend to be poorly resourced in financial, leadership and physical asset terms for their activities even if sargassum is included in disaster risk management mandates.
- **Adaptive management causes fear of “failure”**  
Authorities find it difficult to dissociate learning from what did not go as hoped from the stigma of failure or a poor success record. Public sector risk aversion, while sometimes appropriate, leads to an avoidance of experimentation even where improvement is agreed to be necessary, and the interventions are no-regrets.
- **Technical-scientific action is still in demand**  
Despite the above risk aversion there is still a strong demand for and expectation of technical-scientific action to address impacts of sargassum. Hence there is high reliance on external projects.

**Where does this leave the SAMS way forward?**

The way forward on the SAMS as a policy initiative is best summarized from the SAMS itself. This notes that what is most needed is persistence in three areas shown below in order to build resilience to a future of sargassum influxes.

