

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.

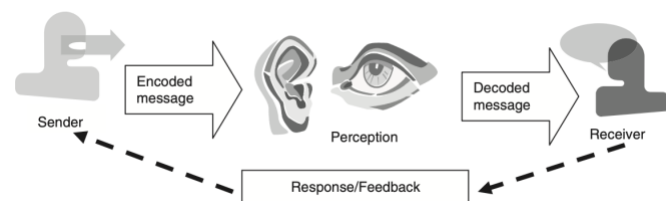
The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) initiated this occasional outreach publication, **Policy Perspectives**, to share lessons learnt from applied interdisciplinary research. CERMES research is through learning-by-doing collaboration. **Policy Perspectives** may be used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

Communicate Smart, Connect Right

The links among people — network forces behind progress

For over a decade, researchers have been working assiduously to understand sargassum phenomena. Knowledge is rapidly evolving, but unless you are a member of the global sargassum science community or enjoy reading scientific publications with technical jargon, it may be difficult to stay up to date on all things sargassum. This is often a characteristic of science frontiers.

It is thus becoming increasingly important to bridge the gap between research, communication and policy to ensure real-world impact. Promoting awareness, dispelling misconceptions, and encouraging sustainable practices has been a priority of 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)**. We share some lessons learnt in the process and practices of communication about sargassum.

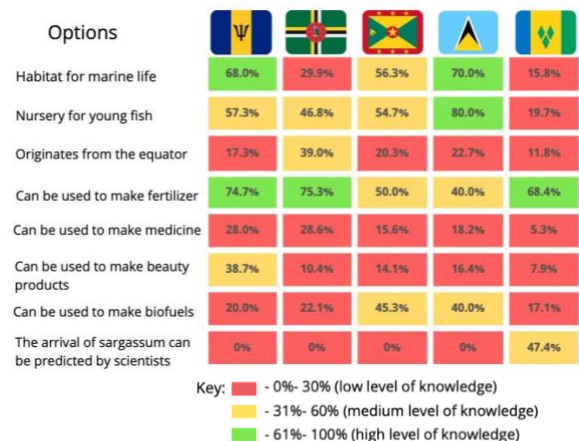


Source: McConney and Haynes (2011)

Identifying gaps

To craft appropriate and effective messages, it's important to have a baseline of the knowledge, myths, misconceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to sargassum. We did Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices (KAP) studies in the five project countries to determine if sargassum science reached those most impacted. The results show that there were some deficits, and some of these are shown in the following images.

Knowledge of Various Sargassum Related Characteristics



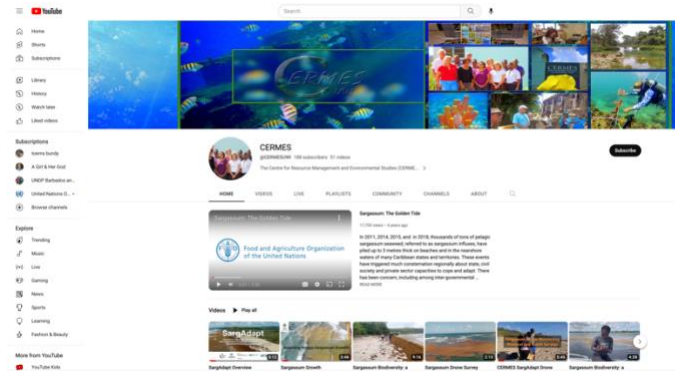
Coping with Sargassum

Barbados	Dominica	Grenada	St. Lucia	St. Vincent and the Grenadines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoiding affected areas (13%) Cleaning beaches (4%) Education and awareness (3%) Fishers fish in other areas (3%) Fishers switch target species (1%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning beaches (7%) Burning it (5%) People complain (1%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning beaches (38%) Fishers fish around the seaweed (8%) Beach stabilization (3%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoiding affected areas (26%) Fishers fish around the seaweed (14%) Keeping doors and windows closed (7%) People complain (7%) Wearing masks (6%) Cleaning beaches (4%) Sea-moss farmers work around it (3%) Protecting jewellery (2%) Beach stabilization (1%) Getting better water-sports equipment (1%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cleaning beaches (20%) Fishers stop fishing during influxes (4%) Sea-moss farmers work around it (4%) Sea-moss farmers leave farms during influxes (4%) Avoiding affected areas (1%) Burying it (1%) Wearing masks (1%) Keeping doors and windows closed (1%) Staying indoors (1%) People complain (1%)

Cultivating a social media presence

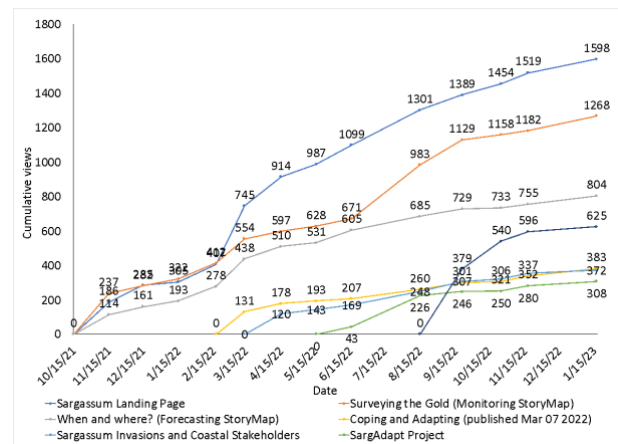
Essential today in any well-designed communication strategy is active engagement with citizens and entire societies. Evidence is often challenged by misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms, emphasizing the need for scientists to report their findings responsibly. Oftentimes, people do not believe something until they see it in mainstream media.

We have managed to engage social media audiences via [The CERMES YouTube channel](#) and [Instagram](#) platforms as quite affordable and effective tools to drive awareness, share key messages and inform followers about sargassum-related news. We also share upcoming training, seminars and webinars. Our researchers have been using catchy headlines, links, photos, videos, infographics etc. to communicate their work and attract attention to the topic of sargassum. The [Sargassum Species Identification Video Guide](#) on the YouTube channel has been particularly popular, receiving 4.3K views in a year!



Stories are the currency of the media

Esri StoryMaps is an emerging popular and effective tool used to transform often-complex scientific information into an interactive and visual narrative or “story” to educate and inspire about a variety of topics. The SargAdapt project team has been embracing creativity and managed to entice the online audience through a series of interactive [Sargassum StoryMaps](#). These share sargassum-related applied research including monitoring, forecasting and management of sargassum influx events and more. Analytics have shown a steady increase in viewership, and the monitoring storymap has attracted the most attention with over 1200 views.

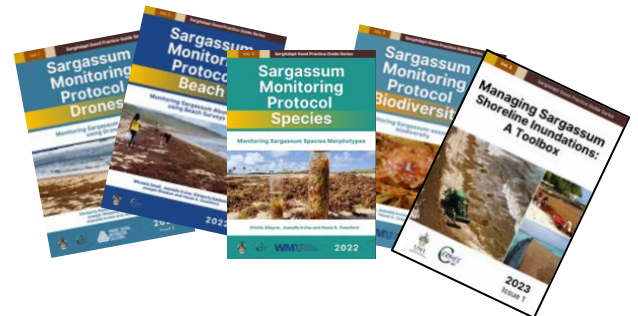


Easy-to-read guidance documents



The [SargAdapt Good Practice Guide Series](#) was launched to provide easy-to-read, practical, technical advice to Caribbean stakeholders facing this 'sargassum crisis'. Interest has been so high that requests were made for Spanish and Portuguese translations for SMP-Beach and Species. The series includes:

- **Volume 01 SMP – Drones** provides the basis for a standardised protocol for visualising and estimating the abundance of freshly beached sargassum.
- **Volume 02 SMP – Beach** provides a low technology standardised protocol for estimating the abundance of freshly beached sargassum using rapid field measurements.
- **Volume 03 SMP – Species** provides a simple, rapid method of monitoring the different sargassum varieties (species morphotypes) arriving along our shores.
- **Volume 04 SPM – Biodiversity** provides simple, low technology methods to collect, sort and identify sargassum-associated biodiversity
- **Volume 05 – Management Toolbox** is a guide to help determine the most feasible and least damaging solution for the collection of sargassum in the nearshore or on the beach of any particular site.



Having a conversation

We found that two-way communication was quite effective for building relationships between peers, managers and the public, encouraging active interactions and understanding the varying perspectives. Connecting to diverse audiences provided many opportunities to network, collaborate and build capacity, and to reflect, learn and adapt. SargAdapt featured activities such as:

- **UWI Sargassum Symposium III** featured diverse short presentations, interactive audience discussion, lively panel discussions and field trip to experience sargassum issues.
- **Webinar Sargassum social science in the Caribbean: contributions, challenges and way forward** facilitated information exchange among social scientists and others.
- **Sargassum Action Network** is a WhatsApp Group with 71 participants sharing good practices and updates on sargassum as they unfold across the Caribbean region.

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