

Connecting Site-Level Reform to Regional Frameworks

Case Study: Klein Curaçao Conservation Project by Ciaretta Profas, Beyond Impact B.V.

1. Introduction

I would like to share my experience as Senior Policy Advisor and Project Manager for the Klein Curaçao Conservation Project. This initiative was both complex and significant. It required strategic coordination, institutional alignment, and sustained engagement across multiple actors.

This case study outlines the key steps I took during the project. It was a collective effort, and I do not claim sole credit. However, I played a central role in initiating, structuring, and advancing the project during its critical phases. I launched the process, guided it through programme development and funding mobilisation, and later transitioned to another opportunity before the final stage, which included financial assurance and formal handover.

This account reflects the process from my perspective. I believe the governance model developed through this project is scalable and adaptable beyond the Caribbean, including in Pacific, Latin American, and other island contexts.

2. Context

Klein Curaçao is a small, uninhabited island located approximately 11 km southeast of the main island of Curaçao. Known for its pristine beaches, coral reefs, and rich marine biodiversity, the island represents an important natural asset in the Caribbean. Despite its ecological value, Klein Curaçao faces significant environmental pressures, including overfishing, habitat degradation, and increasing tourism impacts. In response, a comprehensive conservation project was launched to protect the island's fragile ecosystems, with a focus on biodiversity preservation and sustainable use.

The project is managed by the Klein Curaçao Consortium, responsible for day-to-day operations and site-level management, while Ciaretta Profas provides strategic leadership as Strategic Policy Advisor. This collaborative arrangement has brought together key stakeholders, including government entities, NGOs, and local users, to strengthen the island's long-term conservation and governance framework.

While implemented at site level, the Klein Curaçao Conservation Project carries broader governance and policy relevance. The reform measures and structures developed for the island contribute to wider regional biodiversity and marine policy objectives. Klein Curaçao's management approach has been shaped within the context of evolving international and regional commitments, including the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and emerging 30x30 conservation targets. As such, the initiative functions not only as a conservation project, but as a practical mechanism for translating global and regional policy ambitions into operational governance arrangements.

3. Alignment with Regional and International Frameworks

- **Alignment with Regional Biodiversity Objectives**

Governance strengthening, stakeholder engagement, and conservation planning supported national contributions to regional biodiversity strategies and ecosystem protection goals relevant to Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

- **Operationalising International Commitments**

The project translated obligations associated with Ramsar designation and biodiversity frameworks into implementable management, financing, and oversight structures.

- **Supporting 30x30 Pathways**

By reinforcing protection effectiveness, institutional coordination, and sustainable use measures, the initiative contributed to the practical conditions required for achieving area-based conservation targets.

- **Governance as a Regional Replication Model**

The experience highlighted how small island jurisdictions can address common risks such as “paper park” outcomes through governance integration, financing alignment, and multi-stakeholder coordination.

In this sense, Klein Curaçao served as a site-level demonstration of how biodiversity and marine policy frameworks can be operationalised through programme design, institutional alignment, and implementation architecture.



4. Stakeholders Involved

a) Government Entities:

- Ministry of Health, Environment, and Nature: Responsible for enforcing environmental regulations and supporting the conservation of natural areas.
- Island Government: Provides logistical support and regulatory oversight to ensure sustainable land and marine management on Klein Curaçao.
- Department of Public Works (DOW): Provides technical expertise and support in terms of infrastructure planning and implementation of sustainable land use practices.
- Environmental Department: Plays a role in monitoring pollution levels, waste management, and ensuring that environmental standards are met on Klein Curaçao.

b) Local Communities:

- Fishermen and Tour Operators: Local stakeholders who rely on Klein Curaçao for fishing and eco-tourism activities, ensuring their involvement in the conservation process is critical to its success.

c) NGOs and Environmental Groups:

- CARMABI Foundation: A leading organization in scientific research, marine conservation, and ecosystem monitoring, supporting the project with essential data and expertise.
- Sea Turtle Conservation Curaçao : Protection and awareness of turtles

- d) Private Sector:
 - Tourism Operators: Companies responsible for eco-tourism activities on Klein Curaçao, working alongside the program to ensure responsible visitation.
- e) International Agencies:
 - Expertise France: Provides technical expertise, guidance, and funding support to ensure that conservation efforts meet international standards.

5. Klein Curaçao Consortium's Role

The Klein Curaçao Consortium is responsible for the day-to-day management of the conservation project, coordinating stakeholders and overseeing the implementation of conservation strategies at site level. Under this project governance structure, key outputs included the establishment of a general permit system to regulate recreational and tourism use, the development of a research and monitoring framework for continuous ecosystem assessment, the formulation of a Klein Curaçao Development Plan to guide sustainable management, the implementation of a national awareness and communications plan, and the design of a financing framework to support long-term environmental protection efforts.

6. Key Achievements and Impacts as strategic policy advisor

I was involved from the inception through the advancement phase of the Klein Curaçao Conservation Project, contributing to its strategic development, institutional coordination, and transition toward funded implementation through the following achievements and impacts:

a) Strategic Trajectory Development

- Translated the Klein Curaçao Management Plan into an implementable programme framework —
- Identified funding requirements and priority intervention areas from the RESEMBID funding
- Aligned conservation objectives with realistic financing pathways

b) Funding Mobilisation

- Explored and assessed external funding opportunities
- Participate in consultations with Expertise France and served as the liaison between the Ministry and Expertise France, ensuring alignment on technical, financial, and compliance matters.
- Authored the concept note
- Consolidated stakeholder feedback into a coherent project narrative
- Drafted the full project proposal
- Coordinated the external review process
- Contributed to the successful acquisition of funding by the Ministry of GMN

c) Governance & Institutional Coordination

- Supported the meetings of an internal steering group within the Ministry
- Strengthened coordination between the Ministry and the Klein Curaçao Consortium
- Facilitated alignment between policy objectives and operational implementation

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- Provide regular updates to the executive body and the Council of Ministers

d) **Project Oversight & Delivery**

- Held regular progress meetings with the project manager
- Monitored implementation progress, risks, and interdependencies
- Maintained alignment with project goals, timelines, and deliverables

e) **Financial Governance**

- Supported compliance with donor and regulatory requirements
- Collaborated with the financial advisor engaged by the Ministry
- Reinforced budget oversight and accountability mechanisms

f) **Key Impacts**

- Enabled the transition from policy planning to funded implementation
- Strengthened governance structures supporting conservation delivery
- Improved stakeholder coordination and coherence
- Supported long-term conservation and sustainable management objectives for Klein Curaçao

7. **Stakeholder Engagement Strategies**

a) **Community-Led Conservation Initiatives:**

Local fishermen and tourism operators have been directly involved in shaping the conservation strategies. Workshops and collaborative forums were held to discuss sustainable fishing practices, tourism impacts, and ways to reduce human interference with critical nesting sites.

b) **Participatory Budgeting:**

The participatory budgeting process enabled local stakeholders to have direct input in how conservation funds would be spent. This ensures that financial resources are directed towards initiatives that benefit local communities and support sustainable practices.

c) **Public-Private Partnerships:**

Tourism businesses operating on Klein Curaçao have contributed both financially and operationally to support conservation programs. These public-private partnerships have led to the creation of eco-certification programs, incentivizing tourism operators to adopt environmentally responsible practices.

d) **Multi-Language Communication:**

Given the diverse range of stakeholders, communication efforts have been made in Dutch, Papiamentu, and English to ensure that local communities, international tourists, and global partners are all engaged and informed about the conservation efforts.

8. Outcomes

- **Marine Biodiversity Preservation:** The project led to the creation of marine protected areas around Klein Curaçao, resulting in healthier coral reefs and increased fish populations. This restoration effort has positively impacted the marine ecosystem, enhancing biodiversity.
- **Sustainable Tourism:** Eco-tourism has flourished with sustainable practices promoted by local operators. Tourists are now educated about responsible behavior and ensuring that Klein Curaçao remains a model of sustainable tourism.
- **Stronger Policy Framework:** The Curaçao government enacted more stringent regulations for Klein Curaçao, including restrictions on fishing and tourism management guidelines, which helped ensure the island's long-term conservation and economic viability.
- **Stronger Stakeholder Relationships:** The project has successfully brought together government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and private businesses, fostering trust and shared responsibility for Klein Curaçao's future.

9. Lessons Learned

- **Effective Stakeholder Engagement:** The advancing of the project highlights the importance of collaboration among stakeholders. Engaging local communities in decision-making processes, particularly through participatory budgeting and workshops, ensures that conservation goals align with local needs and priorities.
- **Adaptive Management:** Continuous monitoring and adaptive management were key to addressing emerging challenges, ensuring that strategies remained relevant and effective in protecting the island's ecosystems.
- **Community-Driven Sustainability:** Involving local stakeholders in both the management and benefits of conservation has proven to be a sustainable model for long-term environmental protection.

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10. Conclusion

How Site-Level Reform in Curaçao Connected to Regional Biodiversity and Marine Policy Frameworks

The Klein Curaçao Conservation Project demonstrates how site-level governance reform can generate impacts extending beyond local conservation outcomes. While focused on the sustainable management of Klein Curaçao, the initiative contributed to broader biodiversity and marine policy objectives by strengthening governance, financing, and institutional conditions necessary for effective protection.

Klein Curaçao is designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, recognising its ecological significance and the need for long-term conservation and wise use. This international status created both an opportunity and a responsibility: conservation ambitions required not only ecological measures, but governance systems capable of sustaining protection in practice.

Marine Protected Areas and other designated conservation sites are frequently established with clearly defined boundaries and regulatory frameworks. Yet many struggle to deliver tangible protection. These “paper parks” rarely result from weak conservation intent; rather, they emerge from governance gaps, including limited enforcement capacity, unstable financing, fragmented institutional mandates, and insufficient stakeholder alignment.

Klein Curaçao faced many of these structural risks. Despite its recognised ecological value and policy commitment, vulnerabilities typical of small island contexts were present. Enforcement required sustained coordination and resources. Institutional responsibilities intersected across multiple authorities. Tourism pressures were increasing. Financing structures depended heavily on project-based mechanisms.

Without deliberate governance integration, protection risked remaining symbolic.

In my combined role as Project Manager and Strategic Policy Advisor, my work focused on bridging policy objectives with implementation architecture. This included translating the Management Plan into an operational programme framework, aligning conservation priorities with financing pathways, supporting funding mobilisation, and strengthening governance and coordination structures linking ministries, implementing partners, and site-level management.

The project responded to systemic risks by addressing governance conditions alongside ecological objectives. Operational management was anchored through the Klein Curaçao Consortium, reinforcing continuity between regulatory frameworks and day-to-day oversight. Institutional coordination mechanisms improved alignment across government entities and stakeholders. Structured engagement processes incorporated fishermen, tourism operators, NGOs, and technical experts into decision-making and implementation.

Participatory budgeting enhanced transparency and shared ownership of funding priorities. Public-private partnerships diversified resource flows and strengthened incentives for sustainable practices. Multi-language communication reduced barriers across local and international actors. Scientific input supported evidence-based management.

These measures did not eliminate challenges. They strengthened the foundations required for durable conservation outcomes.

The experience of Klein Curaçao highlights a broader lesson for biodiversity and marine policy frameworks. The effectiveness of protected areas depends not solely on designation status, but on governance performance. Where enforcement is credible, financing is sustained, institutional roles are clear, and

stakeholders are meaningfully engaged, protection becomes tangible. Where these conditions weaken, even well-designed conservation areas risk becoming symbolic.

In this sense, site-level reform contributes directly to regional and global conservation objectives. Governance and programme structures developed for Klein Curaçao support the operationalization of frameworks such as the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD/KMGBF), and emerging 30x30 targets. The project therefore serves as a practical example of how international commitments can be translated into functioning management and delivery systems within SIDS and island governance contexts.

Governance is not an administrative backdrop to conservation.
It is the mechanism that determines whether protection exists only on paper or in practice.



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