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Abstract

Protection of natural resources, especially water quality, is rapidly losing ground to rampant, almost unrestrained development across the Virgin Islands. The usual suspects, poor monitoring and enforcement, limited cooperation and a lack of education are frequent targets of blame. However, the root cause of activities that degrade water quality - the actions of humans - the individuals in each community, are poorly understood and infrequently studied. More information exists about the USVI's complex and diverse marine ecosystem which suffers the most from poor water quality, than exists about the complex and diverse human ecosystem that causes poor water quality. In the absence of information about the variations in priorities, attitudes, values and beliefs across watersheds, researchers and policymakers lack the necessary understanding and tools for effective and strategic engagement. Without such understanding, the projected benefits to be garnered from engineering fixes are overestimated and innovative non-technical solutions to the problem are potentially ignored. This study will remedy the information gap by establishing a framework for probing the human dimensions of water quality degradation across the Virgin Islands. We will develop and administer a survey instrument to explore the variations in priorities, attitudes, values and beliefs across three watersheds and use this information to develop a rating scale that characterizes watersheds by the level of heterogeneity in these attributes.