

**OECS**

**Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods**  
**Project**

**(OPAAL)**



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**December 2004**

**(Adapted from the OPAAL Project Appraisal Document)**

## **Background**

The Eastern Caribbean region is endowed with a rich biodiversity, which, partly due to its isolation within the Caribbean Sea, has resulted in relatively high rates of national and regional endemism.<sup>1</sup> The rates of endemism in the region vary with island topography. In the Leeward Islands for example where species are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters, land-use changes and invasive species, there is less diversity relative to the larger, less vulnerable islands of the Windwards. This is clearly demonstrated in Dominica which has the most diverse wildlife remaining in the Eastern Caribbean and characterized by the relatively high levels of endemism due to its tremendous terrestrial and marine biodiversity, high level of forest cover, and unique ecosystems which include 8 active volcanoes and the only boiling lake in the Western Hemisphere.

One recent survey of the world's biodiversity hotspots identified the Caribbean as the fifth ranking "hotspot" and one of the highest priorities in any global strategy for biodiversity conservation and sustainable management.<sup>2</sup> In a second study based on faunal distributions, the Eastern Caribbean region was classified as a unique marine eco-region of the tropical northwestern Atlantic province and as the most threatened given the highest priority ranking for conservation purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the significance of the region's biodiversity endowment, there have been reductions in both its quantity and quality over time. Much of the terrestrial landscape in the Lesser Antilles has been heavily modified particularly in the "low" islands (e.g., Antigua and Barbuda). As a result, much of the rural area is dominated by grasslands and savanna sub-types derived from anthropomorphic influences; mainly clearing for sugar cane production and the direct harvesting of forests for production of wood and charcoal. In contrast, secondary forests predominate at mid-elevations in the "high" islands and the only remaining primary forest ecosystems that are undisturbed are confined to the relative higher and inaccessible elevations (e.g. in Dominica)<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, many of the region's highly productive offshore ecosystems have come under increasing pressure in recent times from a variety of anthropogenic and natural sources.

Efforts aimed at protecting the critical ecosystems in the islands of the Eastern Caribbean have not been very successful, even when the legislative foundation for the establishment of management programmes for such areas has long been in place. In fact the lack of congruence between nation building and the sustainable use of natural resources remains the biggest hurdle to attaining the goals of sustainable development. The nexus between poverty and the loss of natural capital through over or indiscriminate resource extraction

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in St. Vincent alone, there are 26 endemics with 1 of these now extinct. In St. Lucia alone, this rich biological diversity is illustrated by its 1,300 known species of plants, 14 of which are endemic; over 150 birds (5 endemic); 21 species of herpetofauna (5 endemic), several invertebrates and a few mammals. Additionally, 250 reef fish species and 50 coral species have been recorded for the island. Grenada's dry forest is the primary habitat to the endemic Grenada Dove (*Leptotila wellsi*).

<sup>2</sup> Conservation International, 2003. State of the Hotspots (Conservation International, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>3</sup> Sullivan, K., et. al., 1999 Setting Geographic Priorities for Marine Conservation in Latin America and the Caribbean (The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, Virginia).

<sup>4</sup> CCA, IRF. 1991. Environmental Agenda for the 1990s. A Synthesis of the Eastern Caribbean Country Environmental Profile Series. CCA, IRF.

is still not clearly understood, far less the determination of what needs to be done to address the situation. For now the establishment of protected areas (PAs) remains the primary tool for resource conservation in the Eastern Caribbean but that itself is characterized by a checkered history of implementation.

### **Institutional Framework**

In Dominica, a system of national parks was created as early as 1975 that has now been expanded to cover in excess of 20 % of the total land area. This system includes 2 national parks and 2 forest reserves. In St. Lucia, a national plan for a system of PAs was developed in 1992 but was never formally adopted. In St. Vincent & the Grenadines, an effort was recently launched which will result in the development of a national system plan. Despite being identified as priorities in the respective Participating Member States (PMS')<sup>5</sup> of the OPAAL project, national Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans or PA System Plans still do not exist in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, or St. Kitts and Nevis.

To date there are approximately 98 gazetted protected areas in the OECS and an additional 9 PAs that are in process of being created. Of these, 32 were created through two pieces of legislation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Of the total PAs, 8 and 15 are national parks and forest reserves, respectively. There are 45 marine protected areas divided among 4 designation categories.<sup>6</sup> The majority of these marine protected areas however are not demarcated and do not have management plans.

An analysis of the major ecosystems represented in existing and proposed protected areas in the region reveal that there are fewer terrestrial ecosystems represented relative to their coastal/marine counterparts, particularly dry tropical forest. In part, this is due to land scarcity and tenure issues characteristic of the Eastern Caribbean. Offshore cays appear to be the least represented "marine" ecosystem. St. Kitts/Nevis followed by Antigua/Barbuda are notable among the 6 PMSs for their relatively few protected areas and absence of ecosystem diversity in existing protected areas.

The existence and substance of PA-related legislation varies throughout the region. In all cases, protected areas have been created through Forestry and Fisheries enabling legislation (St. Kitts/Nevis is the exception where there is no Forestry Act). However, there appears to be an emerging trend to draft more comprehensive PA legislation. In Dominica, there is a specific Parks and Protected Areas Act (1975) which permits the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to set aside lands as protected areas and the creation of a National Park Services and National Park Advisory Council. In 2001, the National Parks, Beaches, and Rivers Authority Act of St. Vincent & the Grenadines made provision for the creation of a Unit to create and administer the management of national parks. More recently, changes in Antigua's National Parks Authority is likely to result in an expansion

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<sup>5</sup> Participating Member States (PMSs) of the OPAAL project are St. Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada. The other Member States of the OECS are Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and Montserrat.

<sup>6</sup> It appears that there is no uniformity between marine PA designation and management objectives in the region.

and diversification of its mandate to include natural PA to complement its existing historical - cultural areas.

Similarly, institutional responsibility for biodiversity management and conservation is dispersed among a number of institutions depending on the approach adopted by the PMSs. One approach uses existing sectoral legislation to declare areas of special concern ‘protected’. Responsibilities are typically divided between the Departments of Fisheries (marine protected areas) and Forestry (forest reserves and wildlife management), often housed in a single ministry (e.g., Agriculture).<sup>7</sup> Another model common in the region consists of national park units typically housed in mainline ministries such as Tourism, Health and Environment, or Agriculture (e.g., Dominica, and St. Vincent & the Grenadines). A third model is based on the establishment of statutory bodies (Trusts) with a mandate to create and/or administer one or more PAs, and to preserve the historical or natural heritage of the country. (e.g., Nevis Historical and Conservation Society, the St. Lucia National Trust). Typically, they are empowered to raise funds, acquire property and make regulations governing the use of the properties they hold in “trust” for the nation. In several cases, more than one model prevails in a country often resulting in overlapping mandates and institutional inefficiencies.

## The Project

The origins of the present project began with a Block B grant awarded to St. Lucia in late 2001 to assist in the preparation of the “St. Lucia Coastal/Wetland Ecosystem Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods Project.” A draft project brief was prepared by late May 2002. Following an internal Bank review of the project proposal, and further discussions with government officials and prospective co-financiers, consensus was reached on the need to adjust the project’s design toward an OECS-wide regional approach supporting national demonstration activities. This approach would better ensure the sustainable establishment and management of PAs in the OECS.

Factors that prompted this shift from a national to a regional approach included: (i) the need to demonstrate **strategic consistency** with the regional approaches embodied in the OECS Development Charter and the St. George’s Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS, the World Bank’s Country Assistance Strategy (CAS), and the other donors’ strategies; (ii) facilitating OECS countries’ efforts to mobilize needed resources to meet **GEF’s co-financing requirements**; (iii) **gains in efficiency and economies of scale** to enhance replicability and sustainability of the project’s objectives; and (iv) addressing the root causes of environmental degradation through **improved coordination**. Finally, a regional approach, channeled through an institution dedicated to the coordination of multi-national efforts, is more likely to ensure that PA project activities are better integrated, complemented and coordinated with other sustainable environmental initiatives in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> A recent FAO-assisted project resulted in the harmonization of fisheries legislation in the region, which provides for the creation of marine reserves.

The Project Development and Global Objective of OPAAL is to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity of global importance in the Participating Member States by removing barriers to the effective management of protected areas (PAs), and increasing the involvement of civil society and the private sector in the planning, management and sustainable use of these areas.

The project intends to achieve this objective firstly by strengthening national and regional capacities in the sound management of PAs. This first component will provide support for a regional and national policy, legal and institutional reform process that will serve as the foundation for PA management at the national level. Included also as critical elements will be the updating of existing or preparation of new national PA system plans, and the support for studies that will provide solutions to the barriers of financial sustainability of PAs. OPAAL will also provide the necessary technical and financial support for the creation of new or strengthening of existing protected areas.<sup>8</sup> The project will also support a regional umbrella programme as well as national elements on education, training and awareness as it relates to the importance of biodiversity and the management of protected areas.

OPAAL is actually geared towards providing global benefits through the conservation of globally significant biodiversity. As a consequence pre-selected sites in each PMS consisting of dry and humid tropical forests, wetlands and tidal flats, sandy and rocky beaches, coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangroves, and offshore islets will be elevated to protected area status. Nesting sites for several endemic species, as well as sea turtles will also be protected. Most importantly these global benefits will be closely linked to demonstrable benefits for local populations including generally improved environmental integrity and natural amenity values such as watershed protection, and protection of the resource base, one of the region's most important source of foreign exchange – tourism. Perhaps the most important benefit will be the newly developed constituencies for biodiversity conservation who will act to promote conservation and sustainable development due to the tangible economic benefits and improved economic opportunities.

The project is also geared to providing benefits to those target groups associated with project-supported PAs, particularly where that association implies a dependency on the resources for livelihood support or where there is a displacement of the livelihoods because of the legal declaration of protection. Where the nature of that dependency is not compliant with the goals of protection for the area, the project will provide for the identification of alternative sources of livelihoods that will ensure equal or greater socio-economic benefits than previously obtained. The empowerment of target groups/persons will be effected through appropriate capacity building initiatives undertaken by the project, which will be geared towards securing the sustainability of these alternative livelihoods. In the process of providing for the enhancement of existing livelihoods, (where compatible with protection objectives), and/or the provision of alternatives, the project will foster partnerships with appropriate national, regional and community development agencies and organizations.

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<sup>8</sup> All PMSs have already selected project sites, some of which are already designated protected.

OPAAL will also support marketing research, consultations and interviews with key governmental and NGO agencies, and on-site visits with local entrepreneurs and businesses where needed. In all cases, the project would address livelihood issues of affected populations in a manner which is fair, just, and in accordance with local laws, as well as consistent with the World Bank's Safeguard Policies on Involuntary Resettlement (OP 4.12) and Natural Habitats (OP 4.04).

## **Administration**

In order to facilitate implementation at the national level, ESDU will implement the project, in close collaboration with the national implementing entities (see below) for project activities at national and local levels. ESDU's main tasks will be to: (i) administer and manage the project; (ii) ensure coordination of project activities with participating countries, relevant regional and international institutions (such as the CCA, CEHI, CARICOM, UNEP and UNDP, etc.) and other stakeholder (civil society, communities, NGOs and private sector); (iii) work with the participating countries for the implementation of country-level activities; (iv) procure goods, works and services; (v) monitor and evaluate project progress, (vi) ensure proper project accounting and financial management, (vii) contract annual external auditing of project accounts, and (viii) represent the project before the Project Steering Committee (PSC).

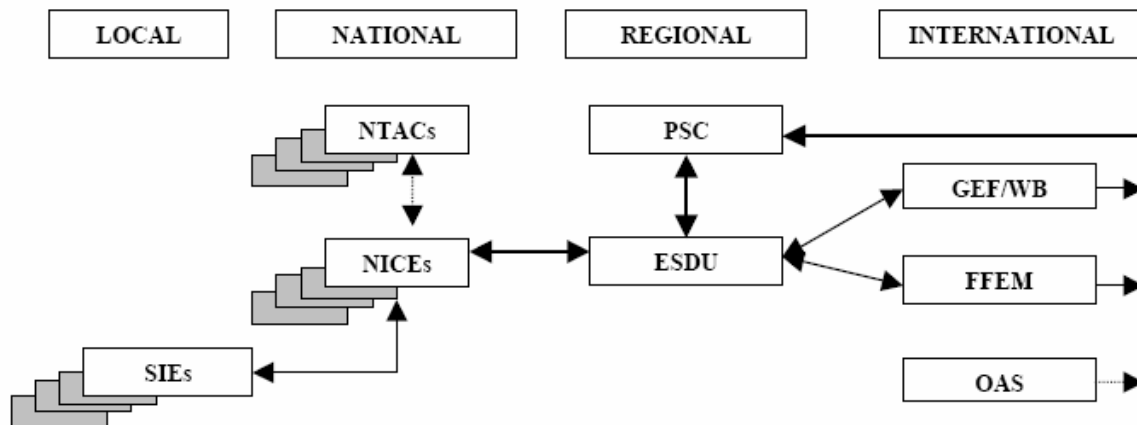
To carry out its responsibilities under the project, ESDU will hire, with grant funds, a protected areas specialist who will also serve as field officer, a communications officer, and an administrative assistant all of whom will be housed at the offices of ESDU. The Project Coordinator who is the Programme Officer responsible for the Biodiversity and Protected Areas functional area will report directly to the Head of ESDU who will serve as Project Director. All ESDU staff and other function managers (Sustainable Livelihoods, Environmental Planning and Management, and Education Training & Awareness) are assigned specific project responsibilities and will assist the Project Coordinator as necessary and appropriate. Figure 1 outlines the proposed organizational structure of the project.

At the national level, each participating country will identify a National Implementation Coordinating Entity (NICE) that will have the responsibility for: (i) preparing national annual work plans and budgets, (ii) day-to-day implementation of project activities at the national level, (iii) managing/supervising the implementation of local site activities in collaboration with the Site Implementing Entities (SIEs) and beneficiaries of livelihoods subprojects, and (iv) liaise directly with the ESDU on matters relating to project implementation. Whenever possible, the PMS intend to use already existing institutional structures (government agencies, NGOs, etc) to serve as NICEs.. The NICE will also participate in the PSC on a rotating basis (discussed under PSC below). All NICE will designate a National Coordinator who will be directly responsible for project coordination and implementation at that level. The activities of the National Coordinator will also be supported by other government agencies with relevant mandates.

At the sites of project-supported PAs, Site Implementing Entities (SIEs) will be set up with a PA Manager assisted by relevant staff (including rangers and others) to undertake the day-to-day management of the PA and related site-specific project activities. Community groups living in and around the PAs, appropriate public and private agencies and relevant local stakeholders will also have representation in the SIE in an advisory capacity to assist the PA Manager. The SIE will participate actively in the implementation of component 2 and 3 of the project. SIEs will also participate in the National Technical Advisory Committees (NTACs) and will advise and/or collaborate closely with the NICEs on the implementation of site activities.

Regional oversight will be provided by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) which will (i) approve the annual work plans and associated budgets, (ii) monitor project progress; (iii) review, analyze and provide guidance to the ESDU on project issues during the course of project implementation in accordance with a project operational manual acceptable to the Bank. The PSC will consist of 2 representatives from 2 PMS, the latter, which will be rotated annually. The representation from each PMS will comprise: (i) the Head of the national agency responsible for parks and protected areas and/or a representative of the NICE where appropriate; and (ii) the ESDU National Technical Focal Point who is also the most senior technical officer in the Ministry of Environment of the relevant PMS. The OECS Secretariat will chair the PSC; ESDU staff will be ex-officio members. The PSC will meet twice a year in the first year and annually thereafter.

**Figure 1. Project Implementation**



At the national level, the project will be monitored and guided through a **National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC)**, an inter-sectoral, inter-agency body that will include representatives from relevant government agencies and public and private institutions, including NGOs, involved in environmental management in general and biodiversity management, in particular. The NTACs will: (i) provide broad technical and policy advice to the National Implementation Coordinating Entities or NICEs and (ii)

review national strategies/workplans and associated livelihood subprojects. Participating Member States will be encouraged to use existing National Biodiversity Committees as NTACs for the project.

The OECS OPAAL project is co-financed under parallel funding arrangements by the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Government of France through its Fonds Francais de L'Environnement Mondial (FFEM) with US\$0.35 million and Euro 1.32 million respectively. The Global Environment Facility will provide US \$3.7 million through the World Bank, with the PMSs and the OECS Secretariat US \$ 1.88 in in-kind contributions bringing the total project cost to approximately US \$7.57 million. This five year project which was launched in December 2004 is envisaged as the initial stage of a 15 year programme for the management of Protected Areas in the OECS. This essentially means that post project activities will aim to secure the sustainability of the protected areas management and hopefully securing the long-term inclusion of the natural environment in general into the sustainable development portfolio of OECS Member States.