



ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

Environment and Sustainable Development Unit

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ADDRESS BY SENATOR THE HON. TESSA MANGAL, MINISTER IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

AT THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON, AND LAUNCH OF THE VULNERABILITY BENCHMARKING TOOL (BTOOL) TUESDAY, MARCH 4, 2008, ROYAL ST. LUCIAN HOTEL

SALUTATIONS

A range of natural disasters has impacted Saint Lucia over the years, some of which may have been exacerbated by unsustainable practices and poor developments. Since Hurricane Allen in 1980, Saint Lucia has been affected by:

- at least six (6) hurricanes and tropical storms, three of them occurring during the 2002 – 2007 period;
- about eight (8) major land slippages, which have resulted in the destruction of homes, dislocation of approximately 145 families, loss of biodiversity particularly from landslide at La Sorciere and costs totaling over two million Eastern Caribbean Dollars (EC\$2M);
- Tropical storm Debbie which caused major flooding, landslides and damage to bridges, homes and road infrastructure in 1994; and
- a series of earthquakes in 1990 and just recently in November 2007, an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale, followed by a number of aftershocks. An assessment of damage inflicted by the earthquake in November is still ongoing.

Hurricane Dean impacted Saint Lucia in August 2007 with total damages estimated in excess of fifty million Eastern Caribbean Dollars (EC\$50 Million), which is considered moderate, compared to damages amounting to EC\$250 Million from Hurricane Allen and EC\$230 Million from Tropical Storm Debbie. In spite of the loss of property and life suffered by Saint Lucia, we count our blessings and consider ourselves more fortunate so far - compared to our neighbours - given the extensive damages suffered by Grenada and the Commonwealth of Dominica in recent times. However, we remain conscious that we are vulnerable to many hazards.

We can, as a nation, and by extension, a region, state that natural disasters affect our economic well being, in particular our agricultural and service sectors, our social well



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being - through injury and loss of life, loss of possessions, incomes and in some cases loss of health service, and thus our ability to recover from the impact of such disasters.

In many instances, government had to bear the majority of the rehabilitation costs, since most persons affected did not have insurance coverage or adequate financial means to undertake restoration works and recovery of livelihoods. Our donor partners, some of which are present here, are frequently called upon to assist, and we are grateful for their response. We do, however, realize that resources are limited and that other events may take priority and associated funding.

The Government of Saint Lucia (GOSL) is cognizant that much of the adverse effects of natural disasters could have been reduced if appropriate mitigation measures had been implemented. The Honourable Prime Minister, in his address to the nation on our 29th anniversary of Independence outlined a vision for national development which I believe is shared by other heads of Government around the Caribbean region. This vision for Saint Lucia is consistent with the well known Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and includes poverty alleviation (MDG #1) and environmental stability (MDG #7).

The Cabinet of Ministers recently approved the revised National Emergency Management Plan in 2007. The National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO), which is chaired by our Honourable Prime Minister, has responsibility for ensuring that this country is in a state of readiness to respond to emergencies and for coordinating responses in the aftermath of a hurricane or other natural disaster. The Government of Saint Lucia has embarked on a number of disaster management initiatives, the most recent being the Second Disaster Management Project, a follow up to the recently completed OECS Emergency Recovery and Disaster Management Project. The project is intended to support Government's efforts at reducing the country's vulnerability to the devastating effects of natural disasters. The project budgeted at EC\$24 million includes physical prevention and mitigation works, strengthening emergency preparedness and response, and institutional strengthening activities. Most of the have commenced, some have been completed and this five-year project is expected to be completed in 2009.

The results of the country vulnerability assessment for Saint Lucia which was conducted in 2006 using the Benchmarking Tool methodology has indicated to us the areas on which we need to concentrate. Such assessments are useful to us as policy and decision makers. Though Saint Lucia is in third (3rd) place position out of the six countries assessed, we recognise that there is a lot of room for improvement if we are to reduce our disaster risks, increase our ability to respond to disasters and enhance our economic resilience and recovery periods in the aftermath of such events. The Government has embraced the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) approach earlier outlined by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) and



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the disaster response and risk reduction programmes in support of the St. George's Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS (SGD), as articulated by the OECS Director General. The Government of Saint Lucia is therefore committed to the adoption and implementation of the Benchmarking Tool.

NEMO has developed and updated a number of disaster management policies, national response plans and hazard management plans to support the National Emergency Management Plan. The Cabinet of Ministers on the advice of the Hazard Mitigation Council is reviewing the hazard mitigation policy and associated action plan. The Council's terms of reference include the following:

- co-ordination of government programmes for vulnerability reduction;
- fostering scientific and engineering endeavours aimed at closing gaps in knowledge, in order to reduce loss of life and property;
- developing measures for the assessment, prediction, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters.

The Council intends to appoint a Technical Working Group (TWG) for risk assessment, which will also have responsibility for advancing the adoption of the BTool. This Technical Working Group will be established by the Hazard Mitigation Council when the Council convenes later this month, and will be given the green light to review the BTool.

Following review by the Risk Assessment technical working group, recommendations will be forwarded to the Hazard Mitigation Council for approval and submission to the National Emergency Advisory Committee (NEMAC), and then to the Cabinet of Ministers for their consideration and adoption.

The Government intends to lead by example, the national implementation of the BTool by integrating this instrument into the work plans and programmes of key public sector agencies. We encourage the private sector to also support the integration of the BTool into their programmes, and anticipate that the Vulnerability Benchmarking Tool for disaster management would contribute to national development by assisting the public and private sectors to identify and assess disaster risks and to take measures to reduce these risks. We recognise that this will be a dynamic process and will strive to ensure that each vulnerability assessment undertaken will reflect our efforts at increasing our resilience to natural disasters should they occur, but most importantly, at mitigating against these risks.

Saint Lucia would like to be seen as a role model for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in the region and we will work with the OECS Secretariat, CDERA and our development partners towards implementing the Comprehensive Disaster Management framework.



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I take this opportunity to thank the OECS Secretariat for their efforts in advancing the disaster management programme for the region. Saint Lucia – and since we are host, I also speak on behalf of the other participating Member States – thanks the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for its assistance – financial and otherwise - in the development of this important vulnerability assessment instrument.

Congratulations to the persons who were given the task to develop the BTool - Drs. Jacob Opadeyi and Balfour Spence of the University of the West Indies - for an excellent job.

Our development partners have pledged their continued support and assistance to disaster management, and we are appreciative of this. We are aware of initiatives being undertaken by these agencies in support of this goal.

To the participants of the BTool regional training Workshop, we wish you a successful meeting and trust that you will feel empowered to go back to your respective countries to advance the adoption and mainstreaming of the BTool into your national strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I Thank You.