



ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

Environment and Sustainable Development Unit

Morne Fortuné, P.O. Box 1383, Castries, St. Lucia

Phone: (758) 453-6208; (758) 452-2537; Fax: (758) 452-2194; URL: www.oecs.org/esdu; Email: oeccnr@candw.lc

NEWS RELEASE

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OECS Director General calls on Member States to Make Better Planning and Investment Decisions in order to the Reduce the Risk of Future Natural Disasters

(OECS Secretariat, Castries, St Lucia) Director General of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean (OECS), Dr. Len Ishmael has called on Members States to make better planning and investment decisions in order to reduce the risk of future natural disasters. The Director General was speaking at the launch of the Vulnerability Benchmarking Tool (BTool) and the opening of the regional training of trainers' workshop at the Royal St. Lucian Hotel in St. Lucia on Tuesday March 4, 2008.

In addressing the opening, Dr. Ishmael asserted *"The consequences of natural disasters on economic activity, property, human welfare, and natural resources are devastating. All of these events have greatly affected the productive sectors of the economy, not to mention the impact on the social infrastructure and communities, particularly the poor. These images are etched in our minds and serve as hard lessons for all of us. Are they to be repeated time and time again before we take note and address the inherent issues?"*

Referring to today's competitive global realities and its impact on the economic development of the OECS, the Director General further stressed, *"With increasing frequency, Member States are facing situations in which scarce resources that were earmarked for development projects have to be diverted to relief and reconstruction following disasters, thus setting back economic growth. Experiences in the Eastern Caribbean clearly show that disasters associated with natural events are fundamentally an issue of development. Each natural disaster leaves in its wake overwhelming evidence of how poor planning and investment decisions contribute to vulnerability and increase the risk of future disasters. Sectoral planning, resource allocation and land use decisions must therefore give special attention to the risk profile of our Member States."*

The BTool which has been developed for the OECS with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through its Caribbean Open Trade Support (COTS) programme, seeks to improve the ability of public and private sectors and civil society to plan and implement effective actions that would reduce their vulnerability to natural disasters and improve their economic resilience. It is an objective instrument which can be used by countries to a) assess their vulnerability to natural and man made hazards, b) evaluate the adequacy of existing institutions and policies to address the current disaster situation facing the country and c) guide the prioritization of resources to address critical needs at the developmental level.

In commenting on the BTool, Ms. Elizabeth Riley, Programme Manager at CDERA indicated that the BTool is *"one of a suite of instruments which will allow us to attain a better understanding of where we currently sit on the resilience continuum"*.



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The BTool covers the six areas of disaster management as identified in the Inter-American Development Bank Action Plan: Risk Identification, Risk Mitigation, Risk Transfer, Disaster Preparedness, Emergency Response and Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. The BTool is consistent with the Comprehensive Disaster Management framework and is supported by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA).

Mr. Michael Taylor, Programme Management Specialist at USAID, noted that the B- Tool provides *“planners and disaster managers with an objective means of assessing the overall vulnerability of the country and communities by highlighting where improvements are necessary.”*

Senator, the Honourable, Tessa Mangal, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia indicated that her Government intends to *“lead by example, the national implementation of the BTool by integrating the instrument into the work plans and programmes of key public sector agencies”*. Minister Mangal further encouraged the private sector *“to also support the integration of the BTool into their programmes.”*

The BTool publication which was jointly unveiled and distributed at the Launch by the OECS Secretariat and USAID, describes the development of the instrument, outlines the procedures for the vulnerability assessment and illustrates the scoring mechanisms in addition to providing useful information and references for disaster risk management.

Following the launch, a three day training workshop will continue at the Palm Haven Hotel, Rodney Bay and will expose National Technical Focal Points and representatives of Ministries of Economic Planning and Physical Development the BTool and its application at the national level and provide them with the necessary skills and information they will need to spearhead the adoption and implementation of the tool in their respective countries, at both the public and private sector level. One of the outcomes of the workshop will be the development of a regional plan for integrating the BTool into risk management strategies.

Media Contacts:

Ms Tecla Fontenard
Communications Specialist, OECS-ESDU
758-455-6366
E-mail: tfontenard@oecs.org
Jeannelle Blanchard
Outreach and Communications Specialist,
USAID-COTS
Tel: Dominica office 767-440-4884
Tax: Dominica office 767-440-4887
Email: jblanchard@usaid-cots.com

Subject Contacts

Mr David Popo
Programme Officer, OECS-ESDU
E-mail: dpopo@oecs.org

Mrs Joan John-Norville
B-Tool Specialist, OECS-ESDU
Tel. 758-455-6393 (office) or 758-285-8104 (cell)
Email jnorville@oecs.org

Photos attached



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Mr. Michael Taylor of USAID and Dr. Len Ishmael of OECS jointly unveil the BTool publication



Dr. Len Ishmael of OECS presents a copy of the BTool publication to Senator Tessa Mangal, Minister in the Prime Minister of St. Lucia's office.