



# ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

## Environment and Sustainable Development Unit

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

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### Opening Remarks

By

**Michael Taylor, Program Management Specialist  
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)**

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Mr. Chairman

Senator the Honorable, Tessa Mangal, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister;

Dr. Len Ishmael, Director. General, OECS Secretariat;

Ms. Elizabeth Riley, Program Manager, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency,

Distinguished Guests, Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, 'Good Morning'

It is a pleasure for me this morning, on behalf of the United States Government through the its Agency for International Development, to welcome you to this regional training workshop for National Technical Focal Points on what is commonly referred to as the Benchmarking Tool or B-Tool.

The aim of the workshop, which is jointly sponsored by USAID's Caribbean Open Trade Support (COTS) program and the OECS Secretariat, seeks to develop a composite group or Trainer – of –Trainers by exposing the participants to the applications of the B-tool so as to enable you to effectively implement the fundamental principles of the B-tool in your respective countries within the public and private sectors. Your role therefore as Resource Personnel will be key to the overall success of the B-Tool as we move the process forward.

In 2005 when USAID commenced its current program to support the region's development strategy the primary thrust was to design a program of activities that would facilitate the transition of the economies of OECS countries to open trade and increased competitiveness.

We are all aware that the Caribbean Region, because of its location, is particularly susceptible to a range of natural disasters including hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and flooding all of which have negatively impacted on the economic, social and environmental strata of the region severely affecting the development. We were vividly reminded of our vulnerabilities especially during the recent 2004 and 2005 period which saw the passage of several severe hurricanes – Ivan and Emily in Grenada; Frances and Jeanne in the Bahamas; and, to add to the injury, earthquake activity in Dominica all of which wrought untold damage to the landscape of the affected countries resulting in the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars. It was therefore clear, that in order to counter these vulnerabilities and to ensure sustained economic growth in the region, a holistic approach was critical to our support to the region.



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It was against this background that the B-tool was established. Through collaboration with the key national disaster agencies, the private sector and the Secretariat of the OECS, USAID-COTS has been able to design a tool for Disaster Risk Management which we believe can significantly improve the ability of national governments, civil society and the private sector to proactively plan and implement actions to reduce the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and, in the process, create a blue print for greater economic resilience if and when such phenomena occur.

However, USAID recognizes and appreciates that there are other instruments in the market which address various areas related to risk reduction and risk assessment. For this reason USAID-COTS has determined that implementation of the B-tool must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the OECS Disaster Response and Risk Reduction program as well as the Comprehensive Disaster Management strategy being implemented by CARICOM's Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA).

As we look to the future what specific area of focus is required? We believe the time has come where Governments ought to assume a greater leadership role in the process of reducing risk to disasters.

Reducing the region's vulnerability to natural hazards must be seen as a proactive rather than a reactive process. For this reason, the Benchmarking Tool offers a new concept in mitigating risks to natural disasters since it seeks to synthesize the often ignored relationship that exists between development planning and disaster management. The familiar cry often heard throughout the region is that disaster management is anti-development since it seeks to impose stringent regulations or standards on development projects which are often costly to implement. The concern here can no longer be simply one of cost and profit maximization without also ensuring that the requisite concern for safety and the general welfare of investors, both local and foreign, are not placed at risk.

The B- Tool helps to bridge this gap by providing planners and disaster managers with an objective means of assessing the overall vulnerability of the country and its communities by highlighting where improvements are necessary. This holistic approach negates the argument that risk reduction measures are punitive and directed at specific project activities.

This emphasis on economic resilience is, in USAID's assessment, the critical aspect of the B- Tool having regard to the fact that its core function is the protection of economic gains made by countries

In this regard, we have already seen evidence of this in Dominica where the USAID-COTS' staff was consulted to identify appropriate disaster risk management tools and



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prepare the Scope of Works for two development plans currently being executed. Application of the tool has also highlighted problems in the housing sector in Antigua and Barbuda and led to the implementation of a nine months training course for local contractors and a short course for Building Inspectors. Far from being anti-development these interventions have actually enhanced the development process.

However, despite its potential, the B- Tool can be a functional for planning purposes or can simply be another shelved document unless it is incorporated fully into the development process. To this effect the OECS and USAID-COTS have been working assiduously with countries in the OECS to produce White and Green Papers which will facilitate the adoption of the tool within the development planning process. I can also state that an alternative path currently being pursued by Antigua and Barbuda is to have the tool incorporated within the existing Town and Country Planning and Disaster Management Acts. This is a positive step and one which we encourage other countries to emulate.

Today as we take yet another step in the roll-out process for the B-tool we are aware of the fact that the job is not yet complete and will not be until it is accepted and fully adopted within the sub-region.

We have high expectations of each of you who are participating in this course:- that you will be able to effectively champion the adoption of the B-tool in your individual countries.

Before closing, I would wish publicly commend Dr. Jacob Opadeyi, Dr. Balfour Spence and the rest of their team for the extensive work and research which they have contributed to the design and promotion of the benchmarking tool and championing the process.

USAID is happy to have played a part in what we believe will be truly beneficial instrument for the entire region.

Thank you.