

Written by Media

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**(OECS Secretariat, Castries, Saint Lucia)** The OECS Secretariat has secured US\$ 400,000 from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and US\$90,000 from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to begin a new project focused on mainstreaming disaster risk management in OECS Member States. The new project was launched on Thursday May 6<sup>th</sup>

at the headquarters of the OECS Secretariat at Morne Fortune, Castries.

During the brief ceremony to launch the project, Mr Norman Cameron, Division Chief, Project Services Division of the CDB noted that the Bank had since the 1970s, provided more than US\$5.0 million in grants for direct emergency relief activities related to disasters in the Caribbean region. In addition, “the bank had also provided well over US\$200 million in immediate response and rehabilitation loans from its concessionary resources” he said.

More recently, the CDB began to focus its support on both post and pre-disaster assistance, in particular emphasizing the need to build community resilience to risk reduction. In this regard, Mr Cameron remarked that the CDB is particularly sensitive to the susceptibility level of the Eastern Caribbean islands, particularly given that the islands had been identified as among the most vulnerable in the world to natural disasters. Such vulnerability, he emphasized, was compounded by high population growth, poverty, improper land use planning and limited capacities of the countries to generally cope with disaster events. “The challenges faced by these states are to integrate risk reduction measures into every sector of their economies so as to build resilience at all levels of society thereby increasing their ability to cope with disasters when they occur.”

Dr Cassandra Rogers, Disaster Risk Management Lead Specialist of the IDB stressed the importance of having a collective and proactive response to reducing the region’s risk to disasters. Referring to the magnitude of the challenges facing the region in relation to disasters, including climate change impacts, Dr. Rogers spoke of the need for improved development

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planning that considers disaster risk at the national and local level. The IDB she said sees disaster risk management as an investment in sustainable development and as a result promotes the mainstreaming of disaster risk management into national planning and economic development. In this regard, the IDB has financed the development of risk indicators and country risk evaluations for five countries in the region.

The US 400,000 being made available to the OECS through the CDB is non-reimbursable Dr Rogers revealed, and the IDB anticipates that at the end of the project, the low cost methods for risk reduction that are introduced to targeted communities in the OECS could be used as a model for the wider Caribbean.



Dr James Fletcher, Director, Social and Sustainable Development Division, OECS Secretariat reminded the audience that the 2004 hurricane season had forced OECS governments to develop a new programme in disaster risk reduction. Since then, he said, the OECS had partnered with several development agencies including USAID, UNDP, CIDA, DFID and now the CDB. In acknowledging and thanking the CDB and the IDB, Dr Fletcher said that “the governments of the OECS region lack the required organizational, financial and human resources, and legislative capabilities to achieve the desired results associated with disaster risk management.”

He also noted that the OECS is cognizant of the ever increasing poverty of our populations especially the youth, which worsens our vulnerability to disasters. As such the OECS Secretariat has had to consider how best to facilitate provisioning of low cost, affordable, but high impact mitigation measures, especially for low-income communities.

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Dr Fletcher encouraged the project team to ensure that in developing the community benchmarking tool that impacts of hazards on vulnerable groups such as children are addressed.

The new OECS project will be focused mainly on strengthening institutional capacity in community-based risk management in Member States and in the OECS Secretariat and by enhancing community resilience to disasters.

The project is expected to be completed within two years. Some of the major activities to be undertaken over the life of the project include:

1. *Conduct of an assessment of community-based disaster risk management in the OECS;*
2. *Development and implementation of a methodology for multi-hazard risk reduction in low income communities;*
3. *Development of Community Benchmarking Tool (Community B Tool); and*
4. *Preparation of a Toolkit to assist target communities to build community resilience to disasters*

The project is part of the wider thrust of the OECS on Disaster Management and will seek to contribute to the broad vision on Disaster Response and Risk Reduction of the OECS Secretariat to build the Secretariat's ability to place emphasis on developing existing core competencies and in assisting Member States in building national and community level resilience to disasters.

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