

First OECS Climate Change Project launched

Written by Media

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(OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia, July 25th 2011,) The First OECS Climate Change Project was launched on Wednesday July 13th 2011 at a formal Ceremony in Saint Lucia.

The US\$ 14.5 million regional USAID-funded project, *“Reducing risk to human and natural assets resulting from climate change (RRACC)”*

, seeks to enhance the overall, long-term capacity of the OECS region to respond to climate change, while strengthening the near-term resilience of Member States to climate change impacts through concrete, on-the-ground actions.

Senior Director at the OECS Secretariat Randolph Cato says it's essential for constant stakeholder dialogue to help implement and sustain an effective adaptive approach towards reducing the impacts of climate change. He further regards consultation as extremely important to help increase public consciousness about the catastrophic effects of climate variability on the region: ***“OECS Member States have developed a profound appreciation of the need for adaptation strategies in coastal resource use; in agriculture and forestry; in tourism and manufacturing; in health and education; in land use; and most importantly in a governance structure and functionality that is fully responsive to the demands of adaptation. The literature, confirmed by experience, is replete with information on the impacts of climate change on small islands States such as those of the OECS, and while our technical personnel are perhaps familiar with the many issues facing us, we have not yet penetrated the consciousness of many of our vulnerable communities in the region.”***

□ In expressing profound gratitude to USAID for funding the OECS Climate Change Project Cato emphasized the critical need for continuous funding assistance to help ensure the success of the initiative: ***“The stark reality is that our chances of success are possible only if support such as that provided by the United States Government is available to us into the future.□□ This is absolutely critical, because as aptly put by the Honourable Minister of Environment in Grenada at the recently concluded national working session in that Member State, and I quote:- adaptation becomes not an end in itself but a long-term life strategy for our nations.”***

□ -Cato
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Saint Lucia's Minister for Sustainable Development Hon. Richard Frederick who also represented his Prime Minister Stephenson King, Caricom's lead Prime Minister on Sustainable

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Development, re-emphasized the magnitude of work associated with minimizing the impacts of climate change in the region. He also noted the peculiar type of resources indigenous to OECS Member States that need to be protected from the impacts of climate change: ***“Notwithstanding the emphasis placed on water and coastal resource management it is to be hoped that the partnership being established through the RRACC project is just a first step in a longer collaborative journey to meaningfully address climate change in the OECS and the sub-region. The adaptation needs of our islands are many and they certainly transcend water and coastal zone issues as climate change will affect other critical sectors and systems such as food production, human settlements, critical infrastructure, financial services, human health and terrestrial bio-diversity. Our islands may appear to be a fragile emerald necklace laid against the foil of the Azure Caribbean Sea but for us there are everything and possess the assets that exist nowhere else in the world. Our populations may be small in the scheme of things but they have given the world individuals that have proven to be giants in their chosen fields of endeavour. Immediately Sirs Dereck Walcott and Athur Lewis come to mind. Like all other people in the world we affirm a right to survival as well as a right to continue to contribute to the tapestry of human development. The RRACC project focuses on climate change adaptation and rightly so. The impacts of climate change are expected to persist for centuries and these must be address if our Caribbean civilization is to continue to flourish.”***

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Head of the OECS Environment and Sustainable Development Unit Keith Nichols says Tourism and Agriculture have been identified as the economic sectors that should be the primary focus of activities on this project. ***“Strategic interventions related to coastal and water resources management will aid in enhancing the resilience of these sectors to climate change impacts.. In light of this, the project will promote practices such as rainwater harvesting and improved drainage in selected areas that will enable effective adaptation in the Participating States. Initiatives related to sewage treatment and recycling, especially in hotels and commercial establishments will also be considered.”***

USAID Representative to the Eastern Caribbean & Barbados James Goggin has declared his Agency’s confidence in the ability of the OECS Secretariat to manage the OECS Climate change project: ***“We know from good experience that we work very successfully through the OECS Secretariat to get down to the Member States. We have had a very successful project over the last few years on biodiversity conservation and we are able to work through the Secretariat and at the Member States level simultaneously and it was very successful so I think we will continue to build on that good experience.”***

The OECS Climate Change Project will involve the six independent OECS Member States. It is

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anticipated that this will be achieved by: (1) reinforcing the policy, legislative and institutional framework that the region needs as a foundation for effective adaptation (2) direct, targeted actions that improve the management of freshwater and coastal resources (3) supporting the development of critical climate change information needs, and (4) developing and implementing a comprehensive education programme on Climate Change and Variability.

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