

■ **Castries Thursday December 6th, 2012**, Key players in the OECS construction sector have been urged to think beyond their



individual Member State and move towards the more meaningful and cost effective approach of accessing wider markets outside their respective countries and even beyond the region, through collaboration with other OECS Member States.

Senior Director at the OECS Secretariat Randy Cato made the suggestion as he engaged representatives from Ministries of Public Works and Physical Planning Departments along with participants from select construction sector associations, some private contractors, and other public and private sector entities involved in providing construction-related services in the OECS: ***“We have tended by and large to neglect if not to recognize that in neighbouring and sister islands and countries there are opportunities if we could find the way to access those opportunities. This is a message particularly for the private sector; We have got to stop thinking that the limits of what we can do rest at the shores of individual Member States. The OECS Economic Union is an opportunity to move beyond that. Take advantage of it.”***



Mr Cato told Wednesday’s regional consultation on a Draft Strategy for Development of the OECS Construction Sector about the advantages the construction sector can gain through joint

action as is facilitated by the OECS Economic Union: “ ***Our deeper economic integration affords construction sector firms the opportunity to combine capacities in order to respond to emerging market opportunities in a manner that would hopefully result in a larger share of public and private sector contracts being awarded to pan-OECS Alliances between our contractors and service providers. The creation of the single economic space afforded by the OECS Economic Union can hold particular benefits for our construction sector enterprises; whether these be architects, engineers, contractors, even providers of building supplies.***”

Cato noted several benefits the industry can achieve at the macro and micro levels through a strategic regional public/private sector partnership. He reminded the stakeholders in the OECS Construction sector that the private sector in partnership with the public sector will enable a greater mobilization of financial and other resources. He added that the supply side capacity of the OECS’ construction sector firms and the economies as a whole, to respond in a timely and cost effective manner in delivering construction goods and services, impacts significantly on the overall quality of infrastructure investment, economic competitiveness of Member States and the quality of life of the OECS Citizen.

During the meeting Saint Lucia’s Minister for Infrastructure, Port Services and Transport, Philip J. Pierre commended the priority the OECS has placed on the construction sector: “***We must ensure that the sector is given adequate support as the other***

productive sectors of tourism, agriculture and manufacturing. We must provide sustained emphasis for the development of the construction sector. Our arrangements must have the necessary thoughtfulness and pragmatism required to drive a modern, efficient, and affordable construction industry.”

The Saint Lucia Deputy Prime Minister who also participated in the plenary session of the meeting further proposed a Council of OECS Ministers for Infrastructure: “

The establishment of an OECS Council of Infrastructure Ministers will be a progressive step. By giving issues related to construction a higher profile, we will lead the foundation for a renewed more powerful and more integrated process of infrastructure developments. In

this regard there must be no impediments to the movement of skilled labour in the OECS.”

The objective of the consultation was to review a Draft OECS Construction Sector Strategy, in particular to discuss recommendations for adoption of a regional approach to development of the construction sector in the OECS, based on a submitted draft report of a consultancy commissioned by the OECS Secretariat, and supported with grant funding from the World Bank. The participation of overseas participants was funded by the UNDP. The strategy will also include policies and measures geared towards enhancing the quality of goods and services offered by OECS construction sector firms, service providers and skilled and semi-skilled workers, across the single economic and financial space. This will be enabled by the foundation that has already been laid for the freedom of movement of OECS citizens across the Economic Union.

It is therefore expected that the successful implementation of the OECS construction sector strategy will have a positive cross-cutting impact on other productive and social sectors in the regional economy, and will enhance the prospects for boosting the economic growth and competitiveness of OECS Member States.