

The OECS Secretariat Launches Project to Improve the Delivery of Government Services

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OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia: Ministers and Senior Government Officials from Participating Countries, the representatives from OECS Secretariat, private sector representatives and other key stakeholders participated in the Official Project Launch of the OECS Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project (EGRIP) on 24th September 2009 at the Bay Gardens Hotel in St. Lucia. EGRIP will promote the efficiency, quality and transparency of public services through the delivery of regionally integrated on-line applications thereby achieving greater economies of scale.

Government, Citizens, Businesses, Educational Institutions and Civil Society Groups are among those who will benefit tremendously from the implementation of OECS Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project (EGRIP). These benefits include (i) Faster and more convenient access to government services (ii) twenty-four hour service delivery (iii) improvement in the business environment (iv) improvement in the delivery of public sector services (v) promotion of economies of scale and related synergies at the regional level and (vi) contribution to public sector modernization. In addition EGRIP has tremendous potential to help to reduce corruption in the public and private sector because of the further automation of financial management, customs and tax processes and the linkage of key Financial Management functions such as budgeting, accounting and reporting.

Addressing Thursday's launch, Saint Lucia's Minister of Social Transformation and Public Service, Minister Leanoard Montute, endorsed EGRIP as an initiative which will help strengthen the region's human resources as well as the overall regional integration process: "Indeed the EGRIP gives us an opportunity to focus on our people, capital and ideas for the further development of ICT in the region. We look forward to continued work with the World Bank in ensuring that this project achieves its objectives and becomes a major success story. This formula of inclusion and participation is key as we integrate our processes and institutionalize collaboration between our government, citizens, private sector and experts with a common stake to realize our vision, our vision of OECS unity, our vision of one Caribbean, our vision of OECS Economic Union, our vision of CSME and our Vision of E-Government for Regional Integration. Today we take one more step in the path towards good governance as a region, looking specifically at harmonized policies and laws and how they facilitate and enable E-Government. I am happy to see the level of enthusiastic involvement and participation in this very important occasion in our history as a region." It is hoped that the OECS Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project or EGRIP will also result in the over all reduction in the cost of doing business with government in the participating OECS Member States.

Senior Director of the OECS Secretariat, Mr. Randy Cato, hailed EGRIP as the second phase of the reform of the OECS by using Information and Telecommunications Technology, the first phase was the implementation of the Project which led to the formation of ECTEL and the

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liberalization of the telecommunications sector in the region. Cato added that the EGRIP could further strengthen the capacity of the OECS to meet the demands of the global economy: "The EGRIP project has the potential of improving the overall efficiency of the economies of the OECS Economic Union and not only improving the efficiency of government services. This project is seeking to achieve big things. Why not? It's a way that we in the OECS are going to find that we can effectively integrate ourselves into the global environment, which we must do, because we cannot say to the rest of the world: "Hold on we would like to hop off and watch you go by." We can't do that. So we have to organize how we engage with the rest of the world and this project will be part of enabling that engagement."

Juan Navas Sabarter, of the World Bank, pledged the international institution's further support for the project and acknowledged the relevance of EGRIP in the movement by OECS member countries towards an Economic Union: "The World Bank is here for the long run. We want to help the OECS Countries develop and reach their objectives. We want you to see us as a partner for the future and to help you in achieving the results of the Economic Union."

Following Thursday's launch, Ministers of Government and other technical officers from across the region convened a series of meetings to discuss the OECS Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project (EGRIP). Dominica, Saint Lucia and Grenada are the OECS Member States to have so far signed on to the EGRIP project. The Regional E-government Unit based at the OECS Secretariat in Castries is responsible for managing and implementing the Project.