Introduction
The International Day for Combatting Degradation and Drought was celebrated on Saturday, June 17th 2017. The day was instituted to increase understanding and awareness of land degradation and drought issues and the importance of conserving our scarce land resources.

The theme for Land Degradation Day 2017 is ‘Our Land, Our Home, Our Future’. The theme focused on examining the linkages between land degradation and productive landscapes. Productive landscapes ensure food security, preservation of fertile top soil, generate local employment and the contribution of the sustainability and stability of our society and economy.

Activities
In the spirit of the theme for the year, activities were chosen to highlight the importance of sustainable land management and conservation. Due to the severe weather conditions, only the adopted schools, St. Bartholomew’s Primary and Wesley Hall Infants participated in a tour of the Soil Conservation Unit as part of the Ministry of Environment and Drainage public awareness activities.

The Soil Conservation Unit was established in 1957. Its main function of the Unit is the conserving and stabilizing problems occurring in the Scotland District of Barbados. The tours took place at the headquarters of the Soil Conservation Unit within the plant nursery. The plant nursery has the capacity to hold approximately 100,000 potted plants. One of the key responsibilities of the nursery is to assist in maintaining biodiversity through multiplication of endangered plants and rare species. The tours were conducted on 15th and 16th June 2017.
During the first half of the tour the students were invited to view a demo on erosion and how gabions which are structures made of stone and metal are used hold the soil in place. To reduce the rate of erosion and increase organic matter, the students were also shown the various plant species within the nursery that their roots are used to hold the soil in place. Some of these plants include *Swietenia mahagoni* (mahogany), *Coccoloba uvifera* (sea grapes) and *Azardica indica* (neem).
In the second half of the tour, the students visited the Fruit Propagation Section. This section propagates orchard trees for the fruit tree planting programme, sale to farmers and the general public. The propagation techniques used in the Fruit Propagation Section include budding, grafting, seeding, cutting and suckers.
Upon completion of the tours, students were then taken to Farley Hill National Park to enjoy lunch catered by Paradise Pizza.