

## **Executive Summary**

In 1997, Dominica became a party to the 1996 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) - an international convention aimed at combating land degradation. This First National Report on the Implementation of the Convention was prepared by the Environmental Coordinating Unit (ECU) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Planning and the Environment. The Report will be submitted to the Convention's Secretariat by April 15, 2000 as obligated by decision 13.5 of the V Regional Meeting for Latin America and the Caribbean.

In preparing the Report, preliminary research, interviews and field visits to selected sites island wide were conducted. These activities were implemented within the framework of a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and participatory approach that embraced a great number of stakeholders including *inter alia*: relevant Government Ministries; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); community-based organizations (CBOs); farmers; the private sector; the media; regional and international organizations and academic institutions. The results indicate that land degradation in Dominica is a serious issue that needs to be proactively, systematically and comprehensively addressed. In keeping with the Convention's definition, desertification, or land degradation, here refers to any use of the land resource that results in a decrease in its biological or economic productivity.

As such, the issues surrounding land degradation are complex and multi-faceted and are at the core of concerns for sustainable development. This is particularly true for Dominica given its fragile natural environment and unique physiographic features. In this situation, attempts to exploit the limited natural resource base have created a diverse array of clearly visible land degradation

problems, for example, rapid expansion of the non indigenous Citronella (lemon grass) along the west coast due to the loss of forest cover.

Notwithstanding this, Dominica has a long and rich history in its effort to address these inherent land degradation problems, protect its land resource base and find sustainable solutions to the complex land degradation problems. This is evidenced by strict legislative and regulatory policies dating back to 1898 with the enactment of the Botanical Gardens Act, to the more recent establishment of a third National Park (Morne Diablotin) in 2000. Additionally, Dominica is widely reported as maintaining the greatest level of forest cover (66%) of all of the islands in the Caribbean.

Concerning the future, it is clear that the problems of land degradation and their solutions transcend the institutional and financial capacity of traditional institutions, agencies and stakeholders. In this regard, the report recommends: a) an assessment of existing legislative and institutional measures to determine their effectiveness in successfully combating land degradation in Dominica, and b) mechanisms for effective coordination of the implementation of the UNCCD through revitalisation of a Sustainable Development Council to advise the Government on strategic environmental management and sustainable development issues. Simultaneously, activities must occur to strengthen the Environmental Coordinating Unit to enable it to serve as the Secretariat of the Council.

In support of these initiatives and recommendations, this Report notes the inextricable linkage between the timely availability of technical and financial resources at the local, regional and international level. The successful implementation of the Convention in general and in particular the formulation and implementation of Dominica's National Action Plan are contingent upon available resources. In this

regard the Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Global Mechanism and the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica (GOCD) have been identified as major partners. Thus, a close working relationship will have to be fostered between these partners and many other concerned parties if Dominica is to adequately and comprehensively address the issues described in this Report and contained in the proposed National Action Plan. The Plan will identify several priority areas for consideration. These include the development of: a) supporting land-use data; b) climatological data and c) GIS mapping capabilities. All of which will support the creation of a comprehensive National Land-Use Database to facilitate zoning and land-use planning. These activities will be juxtaposed upon an essential mass public education program that focuses on, but is not limited to schools, farmers, land developers / managers, other natural resource users and policy makers.