

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St. Lucia is an independent small island developing state situated in the Eastern Caribbean with an area of 616 sq. km. and a population of 147,180 (1996 Census). St. Lucia became independent in 1979. It is situated between latitudes, thirteen degrees (13°) and fourteen degrees (14°) north and longitudes, sixty degrees (60°) and sixty-one degrees (61°) west. It is located on the submerged ancient volcanic ridge connecting Martinique in the north to St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the south. The island is monolithic, comprising one (1) main island with only a few nearshore satellite islets. The island is mountainous with a very narrow coastal strip. Most of the important towns and villages are located on the coast.

There are two (2) climatic seasons based on rainfall: a wet season that extends from June to November and a dry season occurring between December and May. In recent times, this distinction in season has not been clear-cut. Average annual rainfall ranges from 1,500mm in the northern and southern extremities to 3,500mm in the wet mountainous regions.

More than fifty percent (50%) of the population lives in the two (2) northern districts of Castries and Gros Islet. With a population density of nearly 700 persons per sq. km. in the north, there is cause for concern. Already problems of land degradation are evident.

Nearly fifty percent (50%) of the population is illiterate (1990 Literacy Survey). Of that percentage, 18.7 percent was discovered to be functionally literate. The percentage of females receiving an education remains higher up to pre-university and then falls off sharply at the university level.

In 1997, the per capita income stood at US\$2626.7. Over the last five (5) years, the economy showed signs of slowing down. This can be contributed to the difficulties that the banana industry is encountering with regards to the adjustments being made in the light of trade liberalization. The decline in the banana industry would have had greater negative impact on the economy were it not for the increase in growth in the tourism sector. The Government of St. Lucia's (GOSL) policy is to transform St. Lucia into a service economy. If this is to happen, the natural resources of St. Lucia, that is a major component of the product to be marketed, must be preserved.

In 1996, the GOSL officially reported that the unemployment rate was shown to be 16.7%. A breakdown of the unemployment statistics was not available, but it can be safe to assume that the majority of the unemployed is young people below the age of thirty-four (34) years. There are short term programmes to address this malaise. Notable among them are the Short-Term Employment Programme (STEP) and the Greening Project run by the National Conservation Authority (NCA).

St. Lucia's major environmental issues include:

- Deforestation
- Solid and liquid waste management
- Unplanned development
- Natural disasters
- Squatting (for housing and agriculture)

To understand these issues, one must examine the underlying causes. These can be grouped as: Physical, Socio-Economic, Cultural and Educational. For instance, deforestation can be induced by man or can be natural. The mountainous nature of the island and the characteristic of the sub-soil in some regions induce landslides that cause severe damage to the environment.

There is also no legal framework for the management of agricultural lands in St. Lucia. This is an area of great concern for the protection of the physical and agricultural environments. The situation is complicated by the fact that a significant percentage of the agricultural lands in St. Lucia is family owned. St. Lucia still uses the Napoleonic code in which all family members can lay claim to the land. Family lands are, therefore, greatly fragmented. In cases where a single member of the family farms the entire farm, the type

of farming does not always reflect what the farmer thinks is best for the management of the farm. In most cases, he or she opts for short-term crops and livestock that may not be appropriate for the area.

However, some Legislative Instruments are currently in place to address the issue of land degradation; some of which need strengthening while others need to be put in place. In 1991, a review of the Environmental Laws of the Commonwealth Caribbean conducted by the Caribbean Law Institute (CLI) noted that “the legislative infrastructure in St. Lucia for environmental management is, for the most part, outdated and inadequate to cope with current problems, especially those associated with conflicting demands for land use and development”. However, the Caribbean Law Institute report did mention that “commendable efforts have been made to protect and preserve national biodiversity by acceding to relevant international conventions and implementing their provisions by domestic legislation”. What remains is the enforcement of these laws and regulations.

Agriculture and construction (roads and housing development) are the main causes of land degradation in St. Lucia. Areas that are most affected are those where intensive agriculture is practised. Land degradation occurs in agricultural areas mainly due to indiscriminate deforestation, shifting cultivation and inappropriate soil and water conservation.

On July 2, 1997, St. Lucia signed the Convention to Combat Desertification. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Lands acting as a legal authority for the Government of St. Lucia assigned the responsibility for implementing the obligations of the Convention to the Department of Forestry. Although the Focal Point for the Convention was established, there was neither staff nor a budget to perform its obligations under the Convention. In March, 2000, a National Coordinating Committee (NCC) was formed and soon after, a national consultation was held to provide guidance to the NCC for the formation of a National Action Plan (NAP).

At the national consultation, participants came up with a road map for the development of the NAP. The following were the areas addressed:

- Methodology and Process for Preparation of the National Action Plan
- Participation and the Participatory Process
- Funding Mechanisms and Resource Management
- Legislative Framework and Mechanisms for Coordination of Implementation of the Convention
- Strategies towards the development of a National Action Plan

They also came up with several planned activities for the NAP. These included:

- Integrated Development Planning
- Draft Land Use Planning Act
- Environmental Impact Assessment Act
- Building code and guidelines
- Development of policy for national land use
- River bank stabilization project
- Soufriere area action plan
- Nature Heritage tourism – Soufriere Management Plan
- St. Lucia Rural Enterprise Project
- Programme for the Regularization of Unplanned Development
- Development of management plans for protected areas

Although the Focal Point was not operational until recently, work in protecting the environment was being conducted by several agencies, albeit, uncoordinated. For Instance, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) conducted routine soil and water conservation programmes; the Forestry Department carried out major watershed restoration projects – post Tropical Storm Debbie. There are also activities being conducted by other agencies of governmental and non-governmental organizations. St. Lucia is part of a regional project to put in place a National Environment Strategy. This initiative is coordinated by the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). There is also the Au Picon co-management project that is coordinated by the Caribbean Natural Resource Institute (CANARI). St. Lucia has participated in

four (4) regional activities related to the Convention. Emanating out of those meetings was the formation of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC). The Group has been instrumental in putting in place a network to exchange information. St. Lucia has participated in this exchange. As to the other groupings, for instance, DESFLAC, St. Lucia has not participated. Neither has St. Lucia made any contributions to the budget of the Regional Coordinating Unit in Mexico.

Finally, the GOSL wishes to place on record the tremendous support given to it by the secretariat of the UNCCD in assisting it to meet its obligations under the Convention. It is in this light that the work of UN Consultant, Philbert Brown's work, in assisting in the preparation of the National Consultation, can be viewed as invaluable.