

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For the purpose of this convention, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will focus on land degradation as oppose to the extreme case of desertification. Because of its equatorial location and its legal/political history, some indigenous forest cover still remains. How long this forest would be able to supply the needs of Vincentians will depend on the extent to which the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought is implemented. Loss of the forest translates into loss of water, biological diversity and sustainable livelihood. For this reason, much of this first report is centered on deforestation. The report is not exhaustive or conclusive but rather instructive for life in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Both new and existing economic developmental activities have severely impacted forest cover in St. Vincent in a negative way. Unemployment, poverty and the desire for extravagant life styles have compromise the integrity of the forest and threaten Vincentian existence.

The smaller islands of the Grenadines are less fertile and semi-arid. These islands are therefore prone to desertification. Traditional life style practices have not been kind to these islands and although they boast of white sand beaches, an asset to the tourism industry, their development remains an uncertainty. Lack of surface water limits development to the extent that life on these islands revolves around the fragile coastal resources.

The experimental approach to environmental resource management sets the National Environmental Advisory Board at the center of management. The body monitors environmental activities and recommend policy direction and alternative approaches. There are several practical applications to this approach. Most important, it brings a holistic approach to environmental management rather than the piece-wise approach characteristic of sectoral management. This management strategy is supportive of synergies and helps to strengthen overarching themes.

The various forest management and restoration projects shared around the Caribbean is evidence of an awakening of consciousness in the region. The departments of the various government ministries in the Eastern Caribbean charged with the management of the forest are concerned with the loss of biodiversity and the degradation associated with improper use and inappropriate agricultural technologies employed in the watershed. Wanton destruction of forest is manifested in the many sediment plumes extending for miles offshore. The land slides which occur with disastrous effects such as the Gibson Corner (southwestern St. Vincent) experience speaks of unsound human interactions with the environment.

Public awareness must be encouraged at all levels of the society through consultative dialogue and discussion of the issues. The awareness must stretch beyond knowledge to an active sharing of the regulatory function of management.

Any national action plan must strive to address the critical issues of:

- Soil conservation
- Improved Agricultural Technology
- Land tenure

- Reforestation
- Support for NGOs and
- Land Use Planning.

Such an effort would not be devoid of challenges and must therefore be underpinned by a commitment to reduce and mitigate land degradation. The approach does not necessarily ensure sustainability but reflects considerable optimism and the belief that land degradation can be traded for a productive lifestyle.