

ST. LUCIA PARTICIPATING IN ASSESSMENT OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT

It is increasingly becoming recognized by all and sundry that the existence of the natural environment or natural resources found all over planet earth are absolutely essential to maintaining an acceptable quality of life for the earth's inhabitants. Let's face it! Even though all the natural resources are destroyed and their locations turned into steel and concrete, it will soon become very apparent to everyone that we cannot eat steel nor drink concrete, no matter how much money is in our bank accounts!

As a result of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Agenda 21 was produced as a blue print for maintaining environmental conservation through to the 21st century. One of the objectives of Agenda 21 was that regular monitoring and evaluation of the world's environment would ensue so that checks and balances would be put in place to stem the tide of any runaway activities. Consequently, under a UNEP Governing Council decision of May 1995 which requested the production of a comprehensive global state of the environment report, the first such report was produced. The global environment is analysed periodically to keep policy makers up to date on the status of the world's environment and measures that are needed to keep actions in check and development proceeding in a sustainable manner (that is for development to keep on blossoming and not become destroyed or affected negatively in any way). The last assessment was done in 2002 and was called GEO-3, or the Global Environment Outlook -3. The global assessments tend to examine drivers of environmental degradation, pressures that they create, the state of the environment that exists, the impacts that result and the policy responses expected by governments to halt the degradation decline.

The environmental assessment is a United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) led initiative and since 1995, three such assessments have been completed and published. Have you ever heard of this assessment before? Have you ever read any of these publications? The entire process takes place in as collaborative fashion as possible with consultations being held with major stakeholders including governments worldwide. Experts are usually selected to lead the process representing different countries around the world in various areas of expertise that impact on the environment.

This time, St. Lucia is participating as experts in the areas of biodiversity and the water sector. The experts are expected to serve as contributing authors presenting data where necessary to support any observations made and also suggesting examples of case studies to prove the points. These authors are also expected to ensure that the Caribbean including St. Lucia is adequately represented in the aspects of the assessment that they are working on. These experts form part of a Latin American and Caribbean group that are working closely together to ensure that the needs and concerns of the region are addressed in the study.

The environment assessments occur at the global, regional, national and local levels. As a result, one GEO for Latin America and the Caribbean has already been produced,

national GEOs have also been produced for Bahamas, Barbados and some of the Latin American countries and in these cases, they, are called SOE, State of the Environment Reports. St. Lucia is currently working on completing its first State of the Environment Report. GEOs have also been produced for some Latin American cities such as Mexico and finally two GEO-Youth for Latin America and the Caribbean have been produced with St. Lucian youth collaborating in the last publication.

Now that we have a better understanding of what is at stake in this venture, it behoves all of us as inhabitants of this 'simply beautiful' country to take an interest in the development of both the current and future SOEs and the GEOs. We need to do our part in stemming environmental degradation locally and globally. Those interested in obtaining copies of the already published GEOs can contact the Sustainable Development and Environment Unit of the Ministry of Planning, Development, Environment and Housing at 468-4462/63 for further information.

Any person interested in learning more about the current GEO-4 process can contact Ms. Anita James of the Biodiversity office, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries at 468-41222/27 or e-mail at biodivproject@slubiodiv.org

