

# United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) 16/17

## AOSIS statement on Rural Development

Wednesday May 6, 2008

### Distinguished Chair

The Government of Barbados has the honour once again to speak on behalf of the member states of the Alliance of Small Island States.

For the SIDS, rural development poses special and unique challenges. The various states which comprise this group are very diverse in terms of level of geographical features, infrastructural development, and environmental vulnerabilities. As such, it is important to note that some states have difficulty in defining the demarcation between the rural and urban spaces and in some cases these entities impact negatively by each other.

Most of these states are heavily and regularly impacted by climactic phenomena such as hurricanes and are prone to flooding and soil degradation especially in territories with thin coralline soils.

In archipelagos, such as the Bahamas and Seychelles, the smaller family islands are often remote and difficult to access and may be devoid of potable water which makes infrastructural development difficult to sustain. The lack of job creation, subsistence on marginal lands and the high fuel cost have all been documented in your Economic Council Report of 21 February 2008 as the additional rural development challenges facing SIDS.

**Development programmes for rural people in SIDS** although costly, are essential for sustained and balanced national development by providing for employment generation, reduction of poverty, modernising agricultural practices, maintaining the environmental management and aesthetic appeal of the countryside especially as it relates to enhancing the infrastructure for tourism, reducing urban migration and social displacement, reducing drug cultivation and improving the self esteem of rural people.

Mining is also an important aspect of rural development in many SIDS. Gold, silver, copper, oil, clay, sand and stone are commonly extracted. While these activities contribute to rural and indeed national incomes you will of course recognise that mining causes serious degradation of soil and can destroy the rural landscape. Mining also has the potential to create health issues in adjoining rural areas.

**In order to combat the above threats** SIDS have struggled to develop methodologies to provide rural folk with the resources to which their urban dwelling counterparts have become accustomed as well as to assist them to make the best use of the districts in which they live while at the same time providing the vital role of ensuring food security.

These methodologies include the enactment of specific legislation and establishment of dedicated institutions which support rural development. Legislation must ensure that residents are able to legally secure lands on which their ancestors have traditionally lived and that lands are also made available to new entrants into agriculture for landless farmers.

For agriculture to be sustainable, water must be supplied for irrigation and finance must be provided for rural projects, farmers' organisations and for womens' organisations. Further, the construction and repair of rural fishing ports and markets is one of the most rapid ways of stimulating commerce in rural spaces.

In addition governments must be involved in upgrading of rural roads, engineering works to reduce land slippage and soil erosion, installation of utilities and services, renovation of homes and installation of sanitary facilities and provision of educational and health facilities.

**Despite these challenges,** a number of SIDS have demonstrated success in a certain areas. For example:

- Barbados, Guyana and Jamaica have established land administration programs which transfer plantation land to the tenants hence giving them legal ownership which confers not only security of tenure but also provides collateral so that persons can approach financial institutions for loans for both agricultural and non-agricultural development.

This approach empowers rural people, gives them a sense of self esteem and self worth and reduces the need for governments to provide more inputs.

- Jamaica and Guyana have used legislation to mandate that international mining companies follow best practices for chemical use, restore mined lands to their former productive capacity and financially support rural agriculture on these lands after mining is complete.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Barbados has established a Rural Development Commission which provides extension services and loans. The government also provides irrigation services in 21 districts and soil engineering in vulnerable areas.
- The export of Virgin Coconut Oil to the UK by Samoan women is an example of niche product development and Fiji has also been successful in the export of dried fruit through high temperature air treatment.

**Despite the many efforts at the national level however, SIDS are concerned that the promises by the international community which emanated from the Mauritius Strategy are yet unfulfilled. 2010 marks the five-year review of the MSI. Are we to continue annually at the CSD to make this point? Or will we position the CSD to report on practical, country-driven, workable partnerships within its umbrella?**

Many SIDS require technical assistance in building institutions and drafting legislation to provide for development in marginalised areas. There is also need for the Global Environment Facility, bilateral donors and regional development banks to get actively involved in financing integrated rural development programs.

**Let 2010 mark a year of reporting successes within the international community in not only standing by their promises but also having committed the necessary investment in SIDS to advance their sustainable development agendas.**