

Address
By
The Honourable Ignatius Jean, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
At the
Inaugural Bio Awards Ceremony

August 27, 2005 - Indies Conference Center

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to be among this distinguished gathering and for a very noble cause, that of Biodiversity Conservation. At the outset, I am grateful to Her Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy for distinguishing this activity by her presence, and Mrs. Joan Norville, the co-ordinator of this project and her entire team for their commitment and persistence in making this activity a reality.

I wish to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Saint Lucia to Biodiversity Conservation, sustainable utilization of our country's biological resources and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from the utilization of these resources. This activity is a small but significant way of acknowledging the contribution of public and private sector participation, particularly the participation of communities in our public awareness campaign. I wish to publicly applaud the participation of all of you who have supported our programme.

The government cannot on its own achieve the goals set out in our Biodiversity Strategy. A co-ordinated effort is required across management agencies at central government, the communities around Saint Lucia and the private sector.

Our record in biodiversity management will be determined by changes in the day-to-day practices of all Saint Lucians. I invite all Saint Lucians to support the Strategy and to recognize that this is our chance to shape our future.

Many of us go about our daily lives, our entrepreneurial ventures - agricultural, tourism, manufacturing, construction activities, without pausing for a moment to think what impact we are having on our environment, which our children, our future generations, will inherit.

Because nature provides so many of our natural resources free of charge, it is tempting to take them for granted - and perhaps we have.

The Biodiversity Public Awareness Campaign which we launched on August 10th, 2004, gave us a fresh start. This campaign was considered necessary in order to ensure that our citizens - those in our communities and our children - know about our plant and animal resources, their social and economic importance to our country, how our activities affect and are influenced by our environment and the biodiversity within, and ways that we as a nation can contribute to the management of our biodiversity.

Biodiversity, means simply **PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF THE**

ENVIRONMENT, of the vegetation, of the flowers, of the plants that give us not only visual pleasure but also feed the society, and in fact, means maintaining the ecological balance. This preservation is not cosmetic at all, it is for us and for our future generations to survive as a humanity.

Conservation of biodiversity on the one side protects our flora and fauna, while on the other hand makes good environmental sense. The air we breathe, the water we drink and the soil that supports crop production are all products of the complex interactions that occur among various living organisms of the earth. If these vital ecological services are damaged, humankind is at a loss. The physical conditions maintained by the world's species and ecosystems has become a challenge for us.

Conservation of biodiversity is crucial to the sustainability of sectors as diverse as energy, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, wildlife, industry, health, tourism, commerce, irrigation and power.

Our "*Saint Lucia - SIMPLY BEAUTIFUL*" is a major selling point of our Tourism product. The marketing of our agricultural produce is increasingly becoming dependent on that image.

The future development of Saint Lucia will continue to depend on the foundation provided by living resources, and conserving the nation's biodiversity will ensure that this foundation is strong.

The future of life on earth captured worldwide attention at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, when 155 nation states and the European Union signed the Convention on Biological Diversity. This occasion signaled their intention to form a global partnership to protect habitats, species and genes, to shift to sustainable modes of resource use, and to make the necessary policy, economic and managerial adjustments to guarantee that the benefits to be gained from the use of components of biodiversity are equitably shared across local, regional and global societies.

The Convention on Biodiversity was ratified by the Government of Saint Lucia July 28, 1993. Since then, Saint Lucia has embarked on a number of activities at the national level aimed at implementing the obligations of this Convention. We are also Party to several other Multilateral Environmental Agreements including the Climate Change Convention and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

Saint Lucia is also an active participant in a number of regional and international **environmental initiatives** co-coordinated by institutions such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (O.E.C.S), the Inter American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA), Organizations within the United Nations (FAO, CBD Secretariat, UNEP, UNDP) and more recently the European Union.

Saint Lucia possesses over one thousand three hundred (1300) plant species including medicinal, forest tree and agricultural or cultivated species as well as wild relatives. Twenty-

seven (27) species are endangered, nine (9) are endemic, that is found only in St. Lucia. We also possess five (5) endemic reptile and five (5) endemic bird species including our famous “Jacquot” – St. Lucia Parrot or *Amazona versicolor*. Given our small land mass we are considered biodiversity rich. We therefore must seek innovative ways of conserving this biodiversity while ensuring that we derive economic benefits from its use.

We have been receiving increasing requests for researchers to come and study our biological resources and ecosystems for potential cures or remedies for ailments and diseases. This brings into focus the issue of access and benefit sharing. We should not deny persons access to our resources. However, we must ensure that we, our country, our people, derive benefits from access to these resources. The aspect of intellectual property rights and related biodiversity legislation is one of the activities considered by this Government in the implementation of the **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan** approved by the Cabinet of Ministers in September, 2000.

In order to derive benefits from biodiversity conservation, we need to know what we have. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is completing a Plant Inventory of the Island as part of the first Phase of a Management of Biological Resources Project.

We are also implementing the second Biodiversity Enabling Activity project to assess the country’s capacity to manage its biodiversity and the Biosafety Project which seeks to regulate the movement of GMOs in order to protect biodiversity, human health and the environment. The various departments of the Ministry have engaged communities in the conservation of marine, coastal and terrestrial resources and have collaborated with a number of agencies in the management of our natural resources while ensuring the **sustainability of the livelihoods** of the communities. Again, I wish to commend the work of the SMMA, celebrating their 10th anniversary this year. This is a world class model on sustainable use of natural resources - co-operation among fishers, tourism, and the Soufriere community.

Other Initiatives :

The Fond d’Or area in the Mabouya Valley is a demonstration site under the Caribbean Regional Environment Project (CREP). This project seeks to show the link between Environmental Management and Sustainable Livelihoods.

The OPAAL Project funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States is a similar project in the Point Sables area.

The European Union through a financial agreement signed by both Parties has allocated eight (8) million Euros to St Lucia for Natural Resource Management under the Special Framework of Assistance programme.

This Bio Awards ceremony, though it may appear to be the culmination of the Public Awareness Campaign of the Biodiversity Project, is really the commencement of another phase in the management of our biological resources. The collaboration between various agencies - private and public sectors, non governmental and community based organizations as well as regional and international institutions in this initiative has been really

heartwarming and has reflected the commitment of all concerned to natural resources management and sustainable development.

The Ministry is proud to have spearheaded this collaboration and has committed its resources to ensure continued co-operation amongst agencies in the area of biodiversity conservation. We hope that all concerned will continue to demonstrate this spirit of co-operation as we continue to implement our programmes and plans for natural resource and environmental management, sustainable development of our communities, and for the livelihoods and well being of our citizens and the generations to come.

The individuals and organizations who have assisted and continue to aid my government's efforts at socio economic growth linked with effective environmental management are too numerous to mention at this time. However for this awards ceremony, I must single out the **Bank of St. Lucia, the Title sponsor** of this event, and Shell group of companies, Bryden's, Computer World, HERITAS for their contributions to this inaugural awards ceremony, **ACCELA Marketing** (Vincent "Small" Lewis for the extra effort they put in (more than what they were paid for) hosting this event. It is my wish that such private sector support to Biodiversity management would continue and will increase as we seek to make this an annual event.

I must also make special mention of the Ministry of Social Transformation for the dedication demonstrated by the **Community Development Officers**. As happens sometimes, there were initial setbacks but the officers embraced the programme and played a major role in the bio-community aspect of the awards.

To the communities, schools, businesses and individuals who were nominated for awards, we appreciate your efforts in the conservation, sustainable use and sharing of benefits derived from the use of our biodiversity. I encourage others, in particular those who derive economic benefits from our biological resources or whose activities affect our environment, including our biodiversity, to follow the example of the awardees as we all seek to manage our nation's resources wisely.

It is my pleasure to **LAUNCH SAINT LUCIA'S BIODIVERSITY RECOGNITION PROGRAMME (TO BE KNOWN AS THE BIO AWARDS PROGRAMME) AT THIS INAUGURAL BIO AWARDS CEREMONY, AUGUST 27TH 2005.**