



## **Forests & Livelihoods Action Learning Group Concept Note**

*Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)*

### **1. Context**

The focus of the development community in Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) currently revolves primarily around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the need for adaptation to climate change, yet paradoxically little attention is being paid to the critical role of forests in contributing to these objectives. National Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) rarely reflect the contribution of forests to human well-being, either in terms of environmental services or the goods on which many people depend for food, medicine and revenue generation. Similarly, while practice on the ground is changing, formal forest policy in most countries has not been reviewed or revised to reflect the actual or potential role of forests in ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG7) or contributing to livelihoods.

However, the need to explore and optimise the linkages between forests and livelihoods is evident. Rural poverty has increased in many Caribbean SIDS as a result of the decline of the banana and sugar industries. While tourism is being advanced as the main economic alternative, it also contributes to an increased demand for the services provided by forests, notably water. Predicted climate change trends in the region, such as sea level rise and, in the Greater Antilles, drier rainy seasons, make it all the more pressing to develop interlinked sustainable forest management and rural livelihood strategies.

Implementation of strategies to manage forest goods and services for development of sustainable rural livelihoods must take place in an institutional context that facilitates integrated and cross-sectoral policy making, planning and management. However, forest management institutions in Caribbean SIDS remain for the most part both highly centralised and isolated. Links to policy and decision-makers in cross-cutting areas such as rural development, entrepreneurial development and poverty alleviation remain weak and there are few examples of integrated planning to address the increasing and competing demands on the forest resources, for example for tourism and residential development.

There is also a need for more systematic evaluation and documentation of the socio-economic impacts of various forest management strategies. For example, most participatory forest management schemes are premised on the assumption that this will provide benefits for the communities and community members involved, yet few quantify their socio-economic objectives so there is little other than anecdotal evidence to support this.

## 2. Forests and Livelihoods Programme

CANARI's **Forests and Livelihoods** programme focuses on research and capacity building activities designed to maximise the contribution of forests to improving the quality of life of poor people in rural communities in Caribbean islands. The programme looks at the contribution of forests in terms of both 'forest goods' (e.g. timber, craft materials, medicinal plants) and 'ecological services' (e.g. preventing soil erosion, contributing to improved water quantity and quality, providing landscape beauty). The programme's definition of livelihoods also goes beyond just the ability for people to earn money from forest resources (although this is important) to include other aspects of quality of life including individual's and community's access to a range of other important assets – natural, social, human and physical (for example a clean environment, basic social services and infrastructure, opportunities for recreation and relaxation).

There are currently two main projects under this programme to which others may be added as research gaps or opportunities are identified:

- A regional project on ***“Practices and policies that improve forest management and the livelihoods of the rural poor in the insular Caribbean”*** funded by the European Commission's Programme on Tropical Forests and other Forests in Developing Countries [2007-2009]. The project is being conducted in the following countries: Barbados, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Christopher (St. Kitts) & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago.
- A regional project entitled ***“Participatory Forest Management: Improving policy and institutional capacity for development”*** [2006-2008]. This project is being implemented in partnership with the forestry departments of the project countries, with funding support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) through its National Forest Programme Facility (NFPF). The project is being conducted in the following countries: Barbados, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Saint Christopher (St. Kitts) & Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago. Jamaica, which has its own NFPF project, is participating in and contributing to regional activities.

## 3. Role of the Action Learning Group

The Regional Action Learning Group on Forests and Livelihoods is a mechanism established under the EC-funded project on ***“Practices and policies that improve forest management and the livelihoods of the rural poor in the insular Caribbean”*** for analysing and disseminating learning over the three-year project period. It will also consider the findings of the FAO project and any other relevant projects in the region, whether implemented by CANARI or other members of the ALG.

The multi-sectoral Action Learning Group, which will meet twice per year over the life of the project, will comprise individuals from key national and regional institutions who can contribute skills, knowledge or experience to research and capacity building on forests and livelihoods and who are in a position to serve as “change agents” by sharing learning on project findings within their countries, institutions and sectors. It is intended that the group should contain representation from technical and financial support agencies, forest management agencies, forest users, and agencies involved in poverty reduction and rural livelihoods.

The terms of reference for the Action Learning Group and the way in which it should operate will be validated and finalised at the first Action Learning Group meeting in June 2007. However, it is anticipated that the strength of the group will lie in its independence, range of experience, non-bureaucratic and participatory approach, and the participation of motivated people who can disseminate learning and shape opinion. Action Learning Group members are therefore invited primarily in their individual capacity and are expected to make themselves available for all meetings.

Action Learning Group meetings will take place twice a year until the end of the December 2009. Meeting arrangements and communication between meetings will be co-ordinated by CANARI, with the format (e.g. emails, dedicated web page, discussion forums) to be determined by members at the first ALG meeting.